

My dear sisters

On October 1st we celebrate the Feast of one of the leading saints of not so ancient times but rather modern –the feast of the one known as the ‘Little’ saint, Therese of the Child Jesus. I am sure you have had an opportunity to read her life or biography either during your novitiate or later. If not, I would recommend it to you, for I assure you that it is worth reading. For those of you who have read her life or have heard about her, is there something that you still remember?

It is indeed apt that our young sisters take her as our patroness and I suggest that sisters in communities celebrate this day as a special day for our Junior sisters. I know that all our sisters, regardless of age, love St. Therese of the Child Jesus and feel close to her because of her simplicity and her ‘little’ ways. In the context of our times, where everything moves so fast and where communication has become instant with computers and mobile phones, we may not find that she did big and great things. Come to think of it, even in her time and place, where she lived and died a young person, she did not really do great things. It is her little ways filled with passion and love for God and the desire to save souls that won her the title, ‘Little Flower of Jesus’ or ‘ Little Therese’.



Let us take a peep into the life of this great saint and look at what the hidden treasures are, which Our Divine Master reveals to us through His chosen little servant.

It is the story of ‘simplicity’ in God's service, of the perfect accomplishment of small duties done, over and over again and of trustful confidence in Him who created us, redeemed and sanctified us. What one finds reading her biography are humility, self-effacement, obedience, hiddenness, unfaltering charity and self-control written on every page. And the one constant lesson we come across, is that there is no surer nor safer way of pleasing Our Father Who is in Heaven, than by remaining ever as a little child in His sight. And do we not find the same thing in the gospels when Jesus says, “Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”?

Undoubtedly, for many of her admirers whose hearts are kindled as they read her life story, Saint Therese will certainly obtain, as she has done so often in the past, wonderful gifts of health of soul and body. While she may do that for us, let us pray with a deep conviction, of the powerful truth, that we have to become like little children (not childish of course), remembering again the words of Jesus: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".

St. Therese in her autobiography speaks of her calling to religious life. In this special "Year of Consecrated Life", we too are reflecting (I hope all of you are) on our own calling to be true Carmelites in the Apostolic Carmel Congregation. Let us take a few points from the life of St. Therese of Child Jesus:

"Then opening the Gospels, my eyes fell on these words: 'He went up the mountain and called to Him those whom He wanted' (Mark 3:13). They threw a clear light upon the mystery of my vocation and of my entire life, and above all upon the favors which Our Lord has granted to my soul. He does not call those who are worthy, but those whom He will. As St. Paul says: "God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy."

She knew that as a Carmelite nun she would never be able to perform great deeds. "Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers (not real flowers) and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least (smallest) actions for love."

She took every chance to sacrifice, no matter how small it would seem. She smiled at the sisters she didn't like. She ate everything she was given without complaining -- so that she was often given the worst leftovers. On one occasion, she was accused of breaking a vase when she was not at fault. Instead of excusing herself, she sank to her knees and begged for forgiveness.

For sure we have much to learn from this 'Little' saint. As we, and more so our young sisters, grow in our own vocation, there will be daily struggles of community living and challenges at our work place. May be as you prepare yourself for this great feast you could pause and reflect on the following questions too:

- 1) Do I spend quality time in my prayer reflecting on the person of Jesus?
- 2) Do I carry out even the smallest tasks with commitment and sincerity?
- 3) How have I tried to build my relationships within my community?
- 4) Have I been generous enough to reach out to the families around us?

Probably you already know but it is worth reflecting on that fact, that St. Therese of the Child Jesus is also one of the patron saints of the 'Missions', not because she was ever assigned to mission stations and did great work there but simply because of her special love for the missions, and the prayers and letters she wrote in support of missionaries. This is a reminder to all of us who feel we cannot do great things in or for the Missions, that, as our friend Therese's life teaches us, it is the 'little things' that keep God's kingdom growing. Remember that Jesus chose simple fishermen and not great or rich people to spread his message and Kingdom!

Wishing you all a very Happy Feast and may you, especially our dear Junior sisters, strive to imitate your patroness, St. Therese, whose love and thirst for God and for all God's people, especially the last and the least, ultimately helped her in becoming a saint. Let us not shy away from making efforts, 'little as they may be', to become saintly, nay saints.

Sr. M. Nirmalini A.C.
Provincial Superior