

Life

St Thérèse was born in France in 1873 into a pious family. Both her parents had considered consecrated lives. She was the youngest. She was bright since she was a child, and her whole family doted on her. When she was four years old, her mother died and her family moved to Lisieux. Later, her three elder sisters entered the convent one after another. Thérèse was also interested in religious life. She had already developed the habit of mental pray by the age of 11. At Christmas when she was 14 years old, she felt that baby Jesus had come into her heart. When she applied to enter the convent, the superior rejected her because she was under age. Thérèse met the Pope during her pilgrimage and asked him for a special favour. At the age of 15, she was granted special permission to enter the Carmelite convent, but she was tested when her father was seriously ill for several years, and being in the convent, she was unable to visit him. In addition, because her two sisters were in the same convent, other nuns were worried that their family had too much power, so Thérèse agreed to be a perpetual novice, that is, she could not become a nun in her life. Thérèse longed for sanctification and created the "little way" (also known as "A little way of spiritual childhood") by humbly trusting and surrendering to the Lord completely like a child. In 1896, Thérèse began to cough up blood and died at the age of twenty-four. After her death, a book based on her diary was circulated, allowing people who longed to become saints in ordinary life to find a way, and she became famous within two years. Thérèse supported missionary work during her lifetime, and the church made her one of the patron of the missions. In 1997, Pope John Paul II declared St. Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church.

Reflection

St. Thérèse the Little Flower explained her "little way" like this: "God would not make me wish for something impossible and so, in spite of my littleness, I can aim at being a saint... But I will look for some means of going to heaven by a little way which is very short and very straight, a little way that is quite new." "And I was determined to find a lift to carry me to Jesus, for I was far too small to climb the steep stairs of perfection. So I sought in holy Scripture some idea of what this life I wanted to be, and I read these words: 'Whosoever is a little one, come to me.' It is your arms, Jesus, that are the lift to carry me to heaven." (The Story of a Soul, IX). If we can learn from Thérèse to humbly emphasize on our own insignificance, we will not rely on our own abilities and will be more likely to trust and entrust the Lord like a child.

St. Thérèse also instructs us to regard sufferings and self-denials in life as an offering of love: "My vocation is Love...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 and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love." (The Story of a Soul, XI). She put this to practice and took every opportunity to make sacrifices and endure sufferings, no matter how big or small. For example, she took the initiative to take care of a grumpy old nun, ate food she didn't like, did not defend herself when wrongly accused but instead asked for forgiveness, and endured illness with a smile without complaining. May we, when we encounter similar situations in our lives, learn from St. Thérèse to endure them silently out of charity and dedicate them to the Lord. St. Thérèse believed that as long as it was for love, small sacrifices and small acts of self-denial were very important. She pointed out in a letter to her sister: "To pick up a pin for love of God can save souls."

Prayer

Little Thérèse focused on prayers from her heart. The Catechism of the Catholic Church quotes her when explaining what prayer is: "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy." (#2558)

May we learn from St. Thérèse's "little way" of spiritual practice, trusting and entrusting ourselves to the Lord like little children,

And always practise self-denial and make sacrifices out of love in our daily lives.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us.