

JOY IN SUFFERING

ACCORDING TO
ST. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS

*“Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the **love** with which we do them.”*

—St. Therese (See p. 18)



Office Central de Lisieux

St. Therese of the Child Jesus
and the Holy Face

JOY IN SUFFERING

ACCORDING TO
ST. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS

A NOVENA:
9 DAYS OF INSTRUCTIONS AND PRAYERS

By

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*“It is such a joy to think that for each
little pain borne with joy we shall love God
more throughout eternity!”*

—St. Therese (See p. 16)

TAN Books
An Imprint of Saint Benedict Press, LLC
Charlotte, North Carolina

Nihil Obstat: P. L. Biermann
Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: † George Cardinal Mundelein, D.D.
Archbishop of Chicago

Originally published by Divine Word Missionary Publications, Techny, Illinois in approximately 1953. The seventh printing took place in 1955. (Republished as “Peace in Suffering” by the Carmelite Nuns of Allentown, Pennsylvania in 1986.)

Retypeset and republished in 2006 by TAN Books, an Imprint of Saint Benedict Press, LLC, Charlotte, North Carolina, with permission of the Society of the Divine Word.

ISBN: 978-0-89555-843-5

Cover and frontispiece illustration: Photo © Office Central de Lisieux.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

TAN Books
An Imprint of Saint Benedict Press, LLC
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2011

“Yes, all that I have written about my thirst for suffering is really true. I do not regret having surrendered myself to Love. . . . Oh! . . . I love Him! . . . My God, I . . . love Thee!”

—St. Therese at the end of her life

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My Joy and My Peace

By St. Therese

My joy I find in pain and loss,
I love the thorns that guard the rose,
With joy I kiss each heavy cross,
And smile with every tear that flows.

When clouds the sunny skies o'ercast
And weary grows my heart the while,
My joy it is *that joy is past*,
And gone my Lord's consoling smile.

My peace is hid in Jesus' breast:
May His sweet will alone be done!
What fear can mar my perfect rest,
Who loves the shadow as the sun?

Whene'er *He stealeth from my side*,
With many a fond and sweet caress,
I then to Him my love confide
With *double warmth and tenderness*.

'Tis all for Thee, dear Jesus mine,
Yea, *suffering is my gladsome choice*;

My joy on earth—my bliss divine—
Ah, 'tis to make Thy Heart rejoice!

Since love's divine, celestial breath
Is all I need my heart to bless,
What matters *life*, what matters *death*?
Love is my peace, my happiness!

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“There are trifles which please Our Lord more than the conquest of the world: a smile or a kindly word, for instance, when I feel inclined to say nothing or to appear bored.”

—St. Therese (See p. 18)

~ Introduction ~

St. Therese and Suffering

“A Little Child Shall Lead Them”

SUFFERING is the common lot of man. Many people spend their lives in an unbroken effort to plan ways of escaping it. All through the ages philosophers have racked their brains in an attempt to find a solution of the mystery of pain. Nineteen hundred years ago the Son of God came down from Heaven and chose to be a “Man of Sorrows,” that He might be the Way and Model for suffering mankind. But men either rejected or neglected His wholesome doctrine; so God, who is ever rich in mercy and compassion, in order to recall these priceless lessons, has placed before the eyes of the world today a tender maiden to teach them in a most attractive manner, both by word and example. This maiden was solicitous not

about avoiding suffering, but about embracing it joyously with all her heart. The words of the prophet, "A little child shall lead them," are fully verified in St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

Did St. Therese Suffer Much?

This question naturally suggests itself as one looks upon the cheerful, almost smiling countenance of the "Little Flower" pressing her rose-covered crucifix to her heart. Even those with whom she lived for nearly nine years openly voiced their belief that she had not. She herself, however, gave a different answer as her last days drew near. Pointing to a glass containing medicine of a bright-red color, she said, "You see this little glass? One would suppose that it contained a most delicious draught, whereas, in reality, it is more bitter than anything else that I take. It is the image of my life. To others it has been all rose colored; they have thought that I continually drank of a most precious wine; yet to me it has been *full of bitterness*. I say *bitterness*, yet my life has not been a bitter one, for *I have learned to find joy and sweet-*

ness in all that is bitter." A slow and thoughtful reading of St. Therese's autobiography, letters and poems will fully convince one of the truth of these words—yes, even of that seemingly incredible and exaggerated cry of her anguished soul: "I could never have *believed it was possible* to suffer so intensely!"

"You Must Tell People This . . ."

Toward the end of her life, knowing that people might be deceived by her perpetual aspect of happiness, St. Therese insisted on having it made known that she had suffered much. "Deep down in my soul," she said, "there are, I admit, joy and transports of delight. . . . But that would not encourage others if they thought that I had not suffered much. . . . Oh, if they only knew how much I suffer. . . ! *I have had much to suffer on earth. You must tell people this. . . . !*"

In these pages we propose to give an outline of the teaching of St. Therese on "Joy in Suffering." The readings and prayers are arranged in the convenient form of a novena with three main thoughts for reflection for each day. It is hardly possible to

give more than the barest sketch in such a short book, but this little study is offered as a tribute of gratitude and love to the Saint, and in the hope that it may be of service to her devoted clients whose devotion to her is not of the purely emotional and sentimental type, but who are her true clients and who, like St. Therese herself, are ready to be generous even to heroism and immolation in their love of God, to be among her “legion of little victims of Divine Love” who will follow her in triumph by joy in suffering. St. Therese, be our guide!

Note: We include here, for the light that it may shed, a footnote which appears on p. 133 of *Thoughts of St. Therese*: “No reader should be discouraged by this chapter on Suffering. What St. Therese says is very consoling for those who are nailed to the Cross; and others must remember that God had given to His humble Servant a *sensible* attraction for suffering, which is a rare grace and reserved to very few souls, though many imagine they possess it and mistake their road, choosing to follow this supposed attraction. Without the sensible desire and even though experiencing an invincible repugnance to suffering, souls can be sanctified. What pleases God is that the suffering be borne with love.” —*Publisher*, 2006.

Preparatory Prayer

(To be recited daily during the Novena)

DEAR ST. THERESE of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, I thank the Most Holy Trinity for all the graces lavished upon you, and through you upon the world. I have great confidence in your intercession, both because of your power in Heaven, since you yourself said that “God would refuse you nothing,” and because of your goodness and your promise that “no one would invoke you without receiving an answer,” since you would “spend your Heaven in doing good upon earth” and “let fall from Heaven a shower of roses.” Intercede for me with the loving Hearts of Jesus and Mary, that the Holy Spirit may assist me to understand your teaching on “Joy in Suffering” and may grant me the gift of fortitude, that fired with a burning love of God and souls, I may eagerly follow you in joyous suffering and

one day share in your glorious triumph. I promise to show my heartfelt gratitude by doing whatever I can to promote your honor and to make you ever more widely known and loved throughout the world, for the greater glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.

≈ *First Day* ≈

St. Therese's Attitude Toward Suffering

(Recite the Preparatory Prayer, p. 5.)

1. Her Views on God and Suffering

THE VIEW which St. Therese took of God when He sent her suffering was exquisitely delicate and charming as well as true and consoling. God is not some cruel and heartless being who takes a malicious delight in torturing his helpless victim, but He is the tenderest of fathers. All comes from His *boundless love*. "Far from complaining to Our Lord of the cross which He sends us," she wrote, "I cannot fathom the *infinite love* which has led Him to treat us this way." And again: "This trouble is a *tender considerateness* on the part of Jesus . . . What a *favor* from Jesus, and how He must *love* us to send us so great a sorrow! Eternity will not be long enough to bless

Him for it." What a beautiful thought!

But she was human, and so she also asked, "How can the good God, who loves us so much, be happy when we suffer?" There is a touching tenderness and refinement in her playful answer: "Never does our suffering make Him happy, but it is necessary for us; and so He sends it to us while, as it were, *turning away His face*. . . . I assure you that *it costs Him dearly* to fill us with bitterness." From this her sensitive heart draws the loving conclusion: "The good God, who so loves us, has pain enough in being obliged to leave us on earth to fulfill our time of trial, without our constantly telling Him of our discomfort; *we must appear not to notice it*." It was the same delicate feeling that made her reprove a weeping novice who said to her: "Henceforward my tears will be for God alone. I shall confide my worries to One who will understand and console me." To which St. Therese replied: "Tears for God! That must not be. Far less to Him than to creatures ought you to show a mournful face. . . . Our Divine Master comes to us in search of rest—to forget the unceasing complaints of His friends in the world, who, instead of

appreciating the value of the Cross, receive it far more often with groans and tears. Would you be as the mediocre souls? Frankly, this is not disinterested love. . . . *It is for us to console Our Lord, not for Him to console us.* His Heart is so tender that if you cry, He will dry your tears; but thereafter He will go away sad, since you did not allow Him to repose tranquilly within you. *Our Lord loves the glad of heart, the children who greet Him with a smile. When will you learn to hide your troubles from Him, or tell Him gaily that you are happy to suffer for Him?"*

When will I . . . ?

2. Her Esteem for Suffering

St. Therese was not content to know that suffering comes from God's love; she also wanted to know what He desired to effect by it in order that she might the more effectively enter into His loving designs. She found three things:

a) *The proof of her love of God.* She recognized in suffering the highest proof of pure and genuine love, for "there can be no love without suffering." Hence:

Under the pressure of pain
I prove my love by test divine!

In proportion to our willingness to suffer for anyone is the measure of our love for him. This, then, is the first thing that God desires to effect in sending us suffering—"that our souls may turn to Him alone"; "His thorns, as they wound us, spread abroad the perfume of our love."

b) *Oneness with God*. But God sends us suffering also because "He longs to give us a magnificent reward." What is this reward? "He knows that suffering is the only means of preparing us to know Him as He knows Himself, and *to become ourselves divine*" through Sanctifying Grace. What does this imply? "O my God, what shall we then see? What will be this life which will have no end? Our Lord will be the soul of our souls. O unsearchable mystery! 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.'" How do sufferings effect this? By conforming us to Christ Crucified, for "they greatly help to detach us from this earth, they make us look higher

than this world." Besides, life and pain are short; "tomorrow, in a brief hour, we shall be at rest"; nay, even now "God already sees us in glory and rejoices in our everlasting bliss. I understand now why He lets us suffer."

c) There is yet a third effect of suffering—the ransom of souls. "Jesus has for us a love so incomprehensible that He does not wish to do anything without making us His cooperators. He wills that we should have a part with Him in the salvation of souls." How? "From the day He raised His standard of the Cross, all must fight and win in its shadow. Far more by suffering and persecution than by eloquent discourses does Jesus wish to build up His Kingdom." Clearly perceiving this triple value of suffering, St. Therese esteemed every cross as a "mine of gold for us to turn to account"; and being overwhelmed with crosses, she cried out: "*Jesus heaps His favors upon us as upon the greatest Saints. . . . Ours is an enviable lot, and the Seraphim in Heaven are jealous of our happiness.*"

Do I realize this?

3. Her Insatiable Thirst for Suffering

St. Therese was logical and she was not a coward. She saw the immense value of suffering and had the courage to embrace it with her whole heart. "I can truly say," she wrote, "that Suffering opened her arms to me from the first, and I took her to my heart." In her thanksgivings at Holy Communion, while still quite young, she often prayed: "O my God, Who are unspeakable sweetness, turn into bitterness for me all the consolations of earth." On the day of her religious profession she asked: "Give me martyrdom of soul or body. Or rather, *give me both the one and the other.*" Later she said, "When the way of perfection was opened out before me, I realized that in order to become a Saint one must suffer much, . . . always seek the most perfect path, and forget oneself. I also understood that there are many degrees of holiness, that each soul is free to respond to the calls of Our Lord, to do much or little for His love—in a word, to choose among the sacrifices He asks. And then . . . I cried out: *'My God, I choose everything. I will not be a Saint by halves. I am not afraid of suffering for*

Thee. I fear only one thing, and that is to do my own will. Accept the offering of my will, *for I choose all that Thou wilt.*'” The reason was that her Love was crucified:

No other joy my heart would know
Save immolation like to Thine!

Souls strong and pure, in life's
dark night of sorrow,
Claim but one glory here—the
cross to bear.

In her zeal for souls she sang:

*I love the Cross, I sigh for anguish,
Suffering for God is my desire:
If but one soul in fetters languish,
With thousand lives I would expire!*

This thirst became “more vast than the universe” and developed into a “veritable martyrdom,” so that, thinking of the fearful torments of the martyrs, she exclaimed: “I do not sigh for one torment; I need them all to slake my thirst. My heart thrills at the thought of the frightful tortures Christians are to suffer at the time of Antichrist, and *I long to suffer them all*. Open, O Jesus, the Book of Life, in which are written the deeds

of Thy Saints; *all the deeds recorded in that book I long to have accomplished for Thee!*" Nor did she ever repent of her desire; for only a few hours before her death she said: "Yes, all that I have written about my thirst for suffering is really true. *I do not regret having surrendered myself to Love.*"

Nor will I if I do so . . . !

NOVENA PRAYER

DEAR ST. THERESE, how beautiful and true is the view you took of God when He sent you suffering! What tenderness of feeling there was in your love for Him! How blind I have been in the past! How often I have complained and murmured against God just when He was bestowing His choicest favors—crosses and trials—upon me! I have looked upon Him as "a hard and austere man" or as a father without feeling and sympathy, who regarded not the pains and tears of his child; and all the while in His love He was cutting most gently and tenderly, and that but to heal, "turning away His face meanwhile lest He should be overcome by grief at my pain"—as the most loving of mothers, though her tears flow fast and her heart is rent with

grief, is yet driven by her very love to cause pain to her child, that its life may be saved. O St. Therese, help me to view suffering as you did, to realize that God never loves me so much as when He gives me the Cross as my portion, and obtain for me a delicate and refined love like yours. Pray for me, that God may give me the light to see the immense value of suffering for His own glory, for my eternal reward, and for the salvation of souls. May I, too, be wholly consumed by an insatiable thirst for suffering. I also recommend to you my special intentions in this Novena. (*Specify your intentions.*) God will refuse you nothing.

Our Father . . . Hail Mary . . . Glory Be . . .
(See p. 98.)

Other Novena Prayers (See p. 92.)