

The STORY
of a SOUL

*The Autobiography
of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

with THOUGHTS OF
SAINT THÉRÈSE



This special edition of
The Story of a Soul
is part of the *Cor Amoris Collection*—a deluxe leather
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The collection has been selected by the
Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration in
the Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina, and
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The STORY
of a SOUL

*The Autobiography
of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*

Edited by

MOTHER AGNES OF JESUS

Translated by

MICHAEL DAY, CONG., ORAT.

with THOUGHTS OF
SAINT THÉRÈSE

*“A grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die,
but if it dies, then it yields rich fruit.”*

—John 12:25

Nihil Obstat: George Smith, S.T.D., Ph.D.
Censor Deputatus

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THOUGHTS OF SAINT THÉRÈSE

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October 22, 1915

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Feast of St. John of God
March 8, 2012

Dear Reader,

When Conor Gallagher, Vice President of Saint Benedict Press, first came to me and shared that the Lord had put it on his heart to assist the Poor Clares in the building of their new monastery, we had a heart-to-heart discussion. In my rather straightforward manner, I told him that I knew there were people whom the Lord had called to be a part of this work—this building up of His Church in the South by laying a foundation for a life of adoration and thanksgiving. I also told him that there were those whom God had not chosen, and that I was perfectly capable of returning donations to people who had their own agenda in mind. I think he might have been a little shocked at that point. However, there is a restlessness of the spirit when God is commanding a soul to engage in His work—and that spirit was actively working in the soul of our dear friend.

In our discussions on what would be an appropriate means to use to raise funds for the building of a monastery, the guiding light was that it would be of benefit to souls. With this in mind, we narrowed it down to a selection of time-tested classics that have been written by the saints and read by the saints. In other words: saint-makers.

In our world today, we are pulled in so many directions and we have become people of ceaseless activity. It seems we have forgotten

that the Gospel mandate is to *pray* without ceasing, not to work without ceasing.

These books are a call from the Lord to our weary souls to “come away with Me for a while”; to step aside from the hectic pace of our daily routine, and to ponder the purpose of possessing immortal souls: that we may spend *eternity* in the embrace of God.

Each soul is called to holiness. We all have different paths, but the same goal. These books are a compelling force that will direct our sight to the “one thing necessary.”

May each page enkindle in the hearts of those who read them, a love for God and a desire for heaven that will give them the strength to fight the good fight and to gain the joy of heaven.

—MOTHER DOLORES MARIE OF THE
WOUNDED HEART OF MARY, PCPA
Abbess
Saint Joseph Adoration Monastery

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PREFACE

A GIRL who left her intimate family circle to enter a strictly cloistered Carmelite Monastery for a few short years before her death at the age of twenty-four would hardly be considered influential by any worldly standard. Only a handful of people knew Thérèse Martin in this life; only a very small group personally witnessed her life of holiness.

Yet more than a century after her death, St. Thérèse of Lisieux is a Doctor of the Church, Patroness of France, Patroness of the Missions, and one of the most beloved saints of all time. Pope St. Pius X called her the “greatest saint of modern times.” Pope John Paul II said of her, “Although a cloistered and hidden nun, her life possesses a mysterious fruitfulness for spreading the Gospel that fills the Church and the world with the sweet odor of Christ.”

All this came about primarily through the publication of the volume you now hold in your hands. *The Story of a Soul*, a compilation of St. Thérèse’s autobiography and spiritual writings, was an instant classic. Written with a charming and open simplicity, originally intended only for her own sisters, *Story of a Soul* has inspired people from every walk of life to follow St. Thérèse’s “Little Way,” to holiness.

What shines out from these pages is a refreshing confidence in God’s merciful love for each one of us, and a clear understanding that a seemingly ordinary life may be quite extraordinary.

St. Thérèse is so very approachable. Her life story lacks the towering experiences of the mystics surrounded by supernatural phenomena, or the incredible endurance of horrible tortures found in the accounts of the martyrs. Rather, St. Thérèse had a beautiful conviction that “everything is a grace.” Cooperating in childlike trust with God’s promptings in her soul, she took each ordinary moment of her life and transformed it into a powerful tool of grace with which she could bring many souls closer to Christ.

Her burning love brought her above the clouds of scrupulosity and Jansenistic views of God as a demanding Judge, so prevalent in her time, to the path of spiritual childhood, looking to God as a most loving and tender Father.

In our own day, the Church has been bathed anew in the radiance of Divine Mercy and a renewed sense of the deep relationship of trustful love which should bind the soul to God. The “Little Flower,” as St. Thérèse is often called, has unlocked the door for us to a flowering spring-time.

But we should not be deceived by all the roses and sentiment that can shroud St. Thérèse if we give her just a cursory glance. This “Little Flower,” when looked at closely, has petals of steel. Undergoing a trial of faith that she herself says is “impossible to understand unless one has walked that dark tunnel,” she never wavered in her faith and hope in God’s Mercy. For the last years of her life, continuing until her death, which itself was agonizing, she endured the suffering of the very existence of Heaven being hidden from her “as in a deep fog.”

The Sisters who lived with her had no idea—there seemed to be no shadow on her joyful exterior. She heroically offered everything for souls, especially for those who denied the existence of God and worked to destroy the faith of others.

St. Thérèse held nothing back for herself. Her life shows petal after petal being plucked and cast at her Divine Bridegroom’s feet, to be used in whatever way He saw fit. She even desired that when she reached the

Heavenly Kingdom, she could spend it doing good on earth.

It seems that Our Lord has granted her request. When people speak of their devotion to St. Thérèse, it is not in reverent awe of an inimitable icon who can only be admired and venerated. They speak of her with a loving familiarity, as a friend who walks beside them, encouraging them on the road to Heaven.

Within the pages of this book one will find that St. Thérèse never attempts to hide her weakness; rather, she delights in it, as it clearly demonstrates her reliance on her Heavenly Father at every step.

If one feels like a spiritual midget, with empty hands before God, then take up this book and be assured that St. Thérèse will lead you to a “Little Way” and to a loving Father Who waits to carry you.

—SR. MARIE THERESE OF THE
DIVINE CHILD JESUS, PCPA
Feast of St. John of God
March 8, 2012

FOREWORD

THE STORY OF A SOUL, better known to the English public as *The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, was first published in 1899. Today it ranks with the greatest of the Church's spiritual classics, has been translated into practically every well-known language, and has had a worldwide influence. The reading of this book has brought innumerable people into the Church or back to the practice of their religion.

A wide experience over many years of the effect of this book upon souls shows quite clearly that *The Story of a Soul* possesses in some degree a characteristic common both to the Gospels and *The Imitation of Christ*. Men and women open the book, often quite casually, and are caught by the vivid clarity or simple profundity of some sentence in such a way that their lives are completely changed.

Clearly, the moment has come for *The Story of a Soul* to be published by itself, apart from other documents, so that it may speak for itself. This has been admirably achieved in the presentation of this new translation, which should bring home the message of St. Thérèse of Lisieux to many by whom it is not yet appreciated or understood.

VERNON JOHNSON

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE following translation is made from the French edition of *L'Histoire d'une Ame* published from the Carmel of Lisieux for the fiftieth anniversary of the death of St. Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus.

The manuscript is presented in its three original parts, while retaining the chapter divisions of the French edition. St. Thérèse's quotations from Scripture are closely interwoven with her text, and after great consideration the Douay translation was chosen as more easily reflecting the French she used.*

Italics, other than for Scripture quotations, are her own; diminutives and interjections, natural enough in the French but rarely used in English, have been omitted.

In the French, her style is extremely simple and spontaneous, having a charm which it is hard to capture, especially when she rises to poetic heights;† it alters slightly in the three parts: the first eight chapters for Pauline are written without reserve; the two chapters for Mother Marie de Gonzague are more doctrinal and show a certain restraint; while the final chapter, for her eldest sister Marie, is simply a childlike outpouring of her heart to Jesus Himself.

I wish to express my gratitude to a religious of the Retreat of the

* Scriptural references have been added to the text and enclosed in parentheses. —*Publisher*, 1996.

† We have supplied chapter titles to make the text more readable. —*Publisher*, 1996.

Sacred Heart and to Miss Margaret Bacon for their generous help and advice and to all those whose co-operation has made this translation possible.

MICHAEL DAY
The Oratory, Edgbaston
Feast of the
Immaculate Conception, 1950

PROLOGUE

LOUIS Joseph Stanislaus Martin was born on the 22nd of August, 1823, at Bordeaux, the son of the captain of the Garrison there. At the age of twenty, he sought admission to the Hospice of Mount Joux, the Great St. Bernard Hermitage in the Pennine Alps, but his entry was postponed.

At about the same time, Zélie Guérin, a lace-maker of Alençon in Normandy, attempted to join the Sisters of Charity, but she too returned home. When her sister entered the Visitation Convent at Le Mans she resolved on marriage, and prayed for many children, all of whom might be consecrated to God. On the 12th of July, 1858, she married Louis Martin, in the Church of Notre Dame at Alençon, and together they lived an exemplary Catholic life. Zélie's prayers were answered, for they had nine children. Four died at an early age, but of the rest, one entered the Visitation Convent at Caen, and the remaining four the Carmel at Lisieux.

Marie-Françoise Thérèse, their ninth child, was born at Alençon on the 2nd of January, 1873, after a series of prayers for a son. She was baptized two days later in the Church of Notre Dame, her eldest sister, Marie, being her godmother.

Four years later, her mother died, and the whole family moved to Lisieux. It was there that she passed her childhood. At fifteen she became "Soeur Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus" in the Carmel there, where

she remained until her death at the age of twenty-four. She was canonized on May 17, 1925.

Her Autobiography was written under obedience, and it was only after her death that it was decided to let it pass beyond the walls of the Carmel.

It is interesting to note her views on the undesirability of a nun writing her memoirs. To one who expressed a wish to do so, she replied, "Mind you do nothing of the sort. You cannot do it without permission, and I advise you not to ask. For myself, I should not like to write anything about my life without an express order, and one which I had not solicited. It is more humble not to write anything about oneself. The great graces of one's life, such as one's vocation, cannot be forgotten. The memory of those graces will avail you more if you confine yourself to going over them in your mind, than if you write them down."* She used to tell her novices, "To have beautiful and holy thoughts and to write books or lives of the saints do not count so much as answering as soon as you are called."†

She showed reluctance when, in 1894, her second sister, Mother Agnes of Jesus, then Prioress, asked her to write down memories of her childhood. She began, however, at once, using a cheap exercise book, writing without plan or division, and only during the scanty free time allowed to Carmelites by their Rule. This first part of her Autobiography, begun towards the end of 1894, was completed on January 21, 1896, the Feast of St. Agnes.

Mother Marie de Gonzague, Prioress at the time of her entry, was re-elected that year, the year in which Sister Thérèse began to show signs of her fatal disease. At the request of Mother Agnes, she was told to complete her story; this time she wrote more slowly and very large, at times scarcely able to hold her pen, but still without method or revision. The last lines of this second part had to be written in pencil when

* *St. Teresa of Lisieux*, Henry Petitot, O.P., p. 134.

† *Ibid.*, p. 119.

she became too exhausted even to dip her pen in the inkpot. This was in June and July of 1897.

Her eldest sister Marie, Marie of the Sacred Heart, had asked her the previous year to write something concerning her spirituality, and it was for her, again only under obedience, that she wrote the third part, a vindication of the value of supernatural love. This was in September of 1896.

The whole work was quite spontaneous; we may say that she did not so much write a book as live it, and then it wrote itself. Since its first publication, the appeal of the *Autobiography* has been universal, and the demand for it prodigious.

“The new St. Thérèse,” said Pope Pius XI in the Homily of the Mass of Canonization, “was penetrated with the Gospel teaching, and put it into practice in her daily life. Yet more, she taught the way of spiritual childhood by her words and example to the novices of her Monastery, and she has revealed it to all by her writings, which have been spread all over the world and which none can read without returning and re-reading them with great profit.”

The Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1921 stated that “in the *Autobiography* which Sister Thérèse wrote by order of her Superiors we find a fact as wonderful as it is universal, that is to say, the abundant fruit which is derived from the reading of this attractive and fascinating biography—effects which far exceed the narrow limits of the merely human.

“In fact this reading moves the hearts of men, inclines their wills, amends their lives, kindles charity and produces other salutary results which absolutely transcend human power, and can find no adequate explanation except in the action of Divine Grace itself.”[‡]

Of the rest, to the time of her death, she may speak for herself.

[‡] The proclamation of the Heroic Virtue of Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus by the Congregation of Rites, 14th August, 1921.

FOR
MOTHER AGNES
OF JESUS

CHAPTER ONE



Early Childhood

MY DEAREST Mother, it is to you, to you who are in fact a mother twice over to me, that I now confide the Story of my Soul. The day you asked me to do it, I thought it might be a distraction to me, but afterwards, Jesus made me realize that simple obedience would please Him best. So I am going to begin singing what I shall sing forever, “*the mercies of the Lord.*” (*Ps.* 88:1).

Before taking up my pen, I knelt before the statue of Mary, the one which has given us so many proofs that the Queen of Heaven watches over us as a mother. I begged her to guide my hand so that I should write only what would please her; then, opening the Gospels, my eyes fell on these words: “*Jesus, going up into a mountain, called unto Him whom He would Himself.*” (*Mark* 3:13).

The mystery of my vocation, of my entire life, and above all, of the special graces Jesus has given me, stood revealed. He does not call those who are worthy, but those He chooses to call. As St. Paul says: “*God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy; so then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.*” (*Cf. Rom.* 9:15-16).

For a long time I had wondered why God had preferences, why He did not give the same degree of grace to everyone. I was rather surprised

that He should pour out such extraordinary graces on great sinners like St. Paul, St. Augustine and so many others, forcing His grace on them, so to speak. I was rather surprised, too, when reading the lives of the Saints, to find Our Lord treating certain privileged souls with the greatest tenderness from the cradle to the grave, removing all obstacles from their upward path to Him, and preserving the radiance of their baptismal robe from the stains of sin. Also, I wondered why so many poor savages die without even hearing Our Lord's name. Jesus chose to enlighten me on this mystery. He opened the book of nature before me, and I saw that every flower He has created has a beauty of its own, that the splendor of the rose and the lily's whiteness do not deprive the violet of its scent nor make less ravishing the daisy's charm. I saw that if every little flower wished to be a rose, Nature would lose her spring adornments, and the fields would be no longer enameled with their varied flowers.

So it is in the world of souls, the living garden of the Lord. It pleases Him to create great Saints, who may be compared with the lilies or the rose; but He has also created little ones, who must be content to be daisies or violets, nestling at His feet to delight His eyes when He should choose to look at them. The happier they are to be as He wills, the more perfect they are.

I saw something further: that Our Lord's love shines out just as much through a little soul who yields completely to His Grace as it does through the greatest. True love is shown in self-abasement, and if everyone were like the saintly doctors who adorn the Church, it would seem that God had not far enough to stoop when He came to them. But He has, in fact, created the child, who knows nothing and can only make feeble cries, and the poor savage, with only the Natural Law to guide him; and it is to hearts such as these that He stoops. What delights Him is the simplicity of these flowers of the field, and by stooping so low to them, He shows how infinitely great He is. Just as the sun shines equally on the cedar and the little flower, so the Divine Sun shines equally on everyone, great and small. Everything is ordered

for their good, just as in nature the seasons are so ordered that the smallest daisy comes to bloom at its appointed time.

I expect you will be wondering, Mother, where all this is supposed to be leading, for so far I have not given you anything that looks much like my life story—but you did tell me to write quite freely whatever came into my head! So you will not find my actual life in these pages so much as my thoughts on the graces Our Lord has given me.

I have reached the stage now where I can afford to look back; in the crucible of trials from within and without, my soul has been refined, and I can raise my head like a flower after a storm and see how the words of the Psalm have been fulfilled in my case: “*The Lord is my Shepherd and I shall want nothing. He hath made me to lie in pastures green and pleasant; He hath led me gently beside the waters; He hath led my soul without fatigue . . . Yea, though I should go down into the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, O Lord, art with me.*” (Cf. *Ps.* 22:1, 4).

Yes, “*the Lord hath always been compassionate and gentle with me, slow to punish and full of mercy.*” (Cf. *Ps.* 102:8). I feel really happy just to be able to tell you, Mother, of all the wonderful things He has done for me. Remember, I am writing for you alone the story of the *little flower* gathered by Jesus, and so I can speak unreservedly, not bothering about the style, nor about the digressions I shall make; a mother’s heart always understands, even when her child can do no more than lisp, so I am quite sure that you, who prepared my heart and offered it to Jesus, will certainly do so.

If a little flower could talk, it seems to me it would say what God has done for it quite simply and without concealment. It would not try to be humble by saying it was unattractive and without scent, that the sun had destroyed its freshness or the wind its stem, when all the time it knew it was quite the opposite.

This flower, in telling her story, is happy to make known all the gifts that Jesus has given her. She knows quite well that He could not have been attracted by anything she had of her own. Purely out of mercy He

gave these gifts. It was He who caused her to be born on soil which had been abundantly blessed, where eight radiant lilies already bloomed, and where the fragrance of purity was ever about her. In His love, He wished to preserve her from the world's foul breath, and her petals were scarcely open when He transplanted her to the mountain of Carmel, to Mary's garden of delight.

Having told you so briefly what God has done for me, I will tell you in detail of my childhood. It may seem rather a dull story here and there, I know; but as you shared it all as I grew up at your side, as we shared the same saintly parents and together enjoyed their tenderness and care, I am sure it will not be without charm to your maternal heart.

I only hope they will bless their youngest child now and help her to sing the divine mercies.

The story of my soul before I entered Carmel can be divided into three definite periods. The first, though a short one, is rich in memories and extends from the dawn of reason to Mother's death—or in other words, until I was four years and eight months old. God graced me with intelligence at a very early age, and He so engraved the events of my childhood on my memory that it seems they happened only yesterday. Jesus wished, no doubt, that I should know and appreciate what a wonderful mother He had given to me, but sad to say, it was not long before His divine hand took her from me to be with Him in Heaven. He has surrounded me with love all my life; the first things I can remember are tender smiles and caresses, and while surrounding me with all this love, He gave me a warm and sensitive heart to respond to it. No one can imagine how I loved Father and Mother; I showed my affection for them in thousands of ways, for I was very demonstrative, and I can't help smiling, even now, when I think of some of the means which I used.

You let me keep the letters which Mother sent you when you were a boarder at the Visitation Convent of Le Mans. I remember quite clearly the incidents they referred to, but it is much easier just to quote certain passages of these charming letters. Dictated by a mother's love, they are

often far too flattering to me. As an example of the way I used to show my affection for my parents, take this letter of Mother's:

"Baby is such a little imp. In the midst of caressing me, she wishes I were dead! 'Poor darling Mamma, I do wish you were dead!' She is quite astonished when I scold her, and excuses herself by saying, 'It's only because then you will go to Heaven; you told me that you have to die to go there!' In the same way, she wishes her Father were dead, when her love gets the better of her.

"The little darling never wants to leave me. She always keeps close by me and loves to follow me about, especially when I go out into the garden. She refuses to stay when I am not there and cries so much that she has to be brought in. Similarly, she will not go upstairs by herself without calling to me at each step, 'Mother! Mother!' As many 'Mothers' as there are steps! And if by chance I forget to answer even once, 'Yes, darling,' she stops just where she is and won't go up or down."

I was almost three when she wrote:

"Little Thérèse asked me the other day if she is going to Heaven. 'Yes, if you're good, Darling,' I replied. 'If I am not,' she said, 'I suppose I shall go to Hell. If so, I know what I will do. I will fly away to you, because you will be in Heaven—then you will hold me tight in your arms. God could not take me away then!' I could see by her face that she was quite sure God could not do anything to her if she were hidden in her mother's arms.

"Marie loves her little sister dearly. She is such a joy to all of us and so utterly sincere. It is charming to see her running after me to confess: 'Mother, I pushed Céline once, and smacked her once, but I won't do it again.'

"As soon as she has done the least thing wrong, everyone has to know about it. Yesterday, by accident, she tore a little corner off the wallpaper and got into a pitiful state. She wanted to tell her father about it as soon as possible. By the time he came home four hours later, everyone else had forgotten all about it, but she ran to Marie saying, 'Quick! Tell Father that I tore the paper.' She stood like a criminal awaiting

sentence, but she had gotten the idea into her little head that he would forgive her more easily if she accused herself.”

Father’s name naturally brings back certain very happy memories. When he came home, I always used to run up to him and seat myself on one of his boots; he would then walk about with me like this wherever I wished, about the house and out in the garden. Mother used to laugh and say he would do whatever I wanted. “That is as it should be,” he replied. “She is the queen.” Then he used to take me in his arms, lift me up high to sit on his shoulder and make a tremendous fuss over me.

But I can’t say he spoiled me. I remember one day very well. I was playing on the swing when he happened to be going by, and he called out to me: “Come and give me a kiss, my little queen.” I did not want to move and—what was quite unlike me—answered mischievously, “You will have to come over here for it, Father!” He was wise enough to take no notice. Marie was there. “You naughty little thing,” she said, “how can you be so rude to your father! Get off at once.” I did get off my swing at once; I had really learned my lesson, and the whole house echoed with my cries of contrition. I ran upstairs and this time I did not call Mother at every step. I thought only of finding Father and making everything up, and that did not take very long.

I couldn’t bear to think I had hurt my darling parents and used to admit my faults at once. The following account of Mother’s will show how true this was: “One morning I wanted to kiss little Thérèse before going downstairs, but she seemed to be sound asleep, and I did not want to wake her up, until Marie said: ‘Mother, I’m sure she is only pretending to be asleep.’ I stooped down close to kiss her, but she hid herself under the sheet and said with the air of a spoiled child: ‘I don’t want anyone to see me.’ I was far from being pleased, and let her know it. Not two minutes had gone by before I heard crying, and soon, to my surprise, there she was by me. She had gotten out of her bed by herself and stumbled all the way downstairs in her bare feet, wearing a nightgown far too long for her. Her little face was covered with tears, and burying her head in my lap, she cried: ‘O Mother, I’ve been very

bad; please forgive me.’ She was forgiven at once. I took my little angel into my arms, held her to my heart and showered kisses on her.”

I remember how very fond I was of my Godmother, who had just finished at the Visitation. Without showing it, I took in everything that was going on around me and all that was said; and I think I passed the same sort of judgment on things as I do now. I listened very carefully to everything she taught Céline and used to do whatever she told me, if only she would let me stay in the room while lessons were going on. In her turn, she was always giving me presents, and though they were not of much value, they gave me immense pleasure.

I was very proud of my two big sisters, but you seemed far away, so I used to dream of you from morning till night. When I was just beginning to talk, Mother used to ask me: “What are you thinking about?” and my answer was always the same, “Pauline.” Sometimes I heard it said that you were going to be a nun, and without quite knowing what that meant, I said to myself. “I shall be a nun too.” That is one of the first things I can remember, and I have never changed my mind since. So it was your example which drew me to the Spouse of Virgins when I was only two! I could tell you so much of what you have meant to me, Mother, only I am afraid I should never stop.

Darling Léonie had a big place in my heart too, and she loved me. When she came home from school in the evening, she used to take care of me while everyone else went for a walk. Even now I can almost hear the little songs she used to sing so sweetly to lull me to sleep. I can remember her First Communion very clearly, and I can remember her companion too; she was poor, and following the custom of the well-to-do families of Alençon, Mother had dressed her. This child did not leave Léonie’s side for a moment that wonderful day, and at the grand dinner in the evening she was given the place of honor. I was too young to stay up, unfortunately, but I was not left out of the feast altogether, for Father, out of the goodness of his heart, came up to me during the dessert to bring his *little queen* a piece of the First Communion cake.

Last of all, I must tell you about Céline, who shared my childhood.

I have so many memories of her that I do not know which to choose first. We both understood each other perfectly, but I was more lively and much less naïve than she was. Here is a letter which will remind you how good Céline was. It was when I was about three and Céline six and a half.

“Céline seems to be quite naturally good, but as for the other little monkey, I don’t know what is to become of her, she is such a little madcap. She is intelligent enough, but not nearly so docile as her sister. When she says ‘no,’ nothing can make her change, and she can be terribly obstinate. You could keep her down in the cellar all day without getting a ‘yes’ out of her; she would rather sleep there.”

I had one fault Mother does not mention in her letters. I was very proud, and here are only two examples of it:

One day, wishing to see just how far my pride would take me, she said to me laughingly: “If you will kiss the ground, Thérèse, I will give you a halfpenny.” A halfpenny was a fortune to me in those days, and I did not have to stoop far to get it; I was so small that the ground was quite near. All the same, my pride was up in arms, and drawing myself up to my full height, I replied: “No, Mother! I’d rather go without the halfpenny.” The other time was when we were going to visit some friends in the country. Mother told Marie to put on my nicest dress, but not to let me have my arms bare. I did not say a word and tried to seem as indifferent about it as I should have been at that age, but inwardly I was saying to myself: “Why? I should look so much prettier if I had my arms bare.”

With tendencies like these, had I not been brought up by such wonderful parents, I am quite sure I should have gone from bad to worse and probably ended up by losing my soul. But Jesus was watching over His little bride and drew good even out of her faults, for as they were corrected very early, they helped her to grow more and more perfect.

I had a love for virtue, but I was proud too, so I only had to be told once: “You mustn’t do that,” and I never wanted to do it again. I am glad to see from Mother’s letters that I became more of a consolation

to her as I grew older. With only good example about me, it was only natural that I should tend to follow it. This is how she wrote in 1876: “Even Thérèse wants to start making sacrifices now. Marie has given each of the little ones a chaplet on which they can keep count of their good deeds. They have real spiritual conferences together. It is most amusing. Céline asked the other day: ‘How can God get into such a little Host?’ Thérèse answered her: ‘It’s not surprising, since Our Lord is almighty.’ ‘What does almighty mean?’ ‘It means He can do whatever He wants.’ But the most charming thing of all is to see Thérèse slip her hand into her pocket time and time again and move a bead along as she makes some sacrifice.

“These two children are inseparable and quite happy to be alone together. Not so long ago, their nurse gave Thérèse a small bantam cock and hen. She gave the cock to her sister at once. After dinner every evening Céline goes and catches the two birds, and then they sit together in the corner of the fireplace and play for hours. One morning, Thérèse decided to climb out of her own little bed and go and sleep in Céline’s. When the maid, who was looking for her to dress her, found her there, she put her arms around her sister, and hugging her tight, said, ‘Let me stay here, Louise—can’t you see we are just like the little white chickens; we must always be together.’”

It was quite true; I could not bear to be parted from Céline and would rather leave the table before I had finished my dessert than let her go without me. I would fidget about in my high chair, wanting to get down at once, so that we could go and play together.

Because I was still too little to go to Sunday Mass, Mother used to stay and look after me. I was very good and quiet as a mouse, until I heard the door open; then, simply bursting with joy, I rushed over to my darling sister, saying, “Quickly, Céline! Give me the blessed bread!” One day she had not brought any—what could be done? I could not go without it, for this little feast was my “Mass.” I had a wonderful idea: “You haven’t any blessed bread? Very well, then, make some!” She took the bread out of the cupboard and cut off a little piece;

then having solemnly recited a Hail Mary over it, she presented it to me triumphantly. Making the Sign of the Cross, I ate it with great devotion and was quite sure it tasted like the real blessed bread. Another day, Léonie, who thought she had outgrown playing with dolls, came to look for us both, carrying a basketful of their dresses, little bits of material and other curiosities, with her doll laid on top. "Here, my dears," she said to us, "choose what you want." Céline examined them all and took a ball of silk braid. After a moment's thought, I put out my hand saying: "I choose everything," and carried off the basket, doll and all, without more ado.

I think this trait of my childhood characterizes the whole of my life; and when I began to think seriously of perfection, I knew that to become a Saint, one had to suffer much, always aim at perfection and forget oneself. I saw that one could be a Saint in varying degrees, for we are free to respond to Our Lord's invitation by doing much or little in our love for Him; to choose, that is, among the sacrifices He asks. Then, just as before, I cried: I choose everything; my God, I do not want to be a Saint by halves. I am not afraid to suffer for Your sake; I only fear doing my own will, so I give it to You and choose everything You will."

But I am forgetting, Mother! I am supposed to be only three or four, and here I am talking about my adolescence!

I remember a dream I had at that age, which left a very deep impression: I was walking alone in the garden when suddenly I saw two horrible little devils near the arbor, dancing on a barrel of lime with amazing agility, in spite of having heavy irons on their feet. They looked at me with flaming eyes, then, as if overcome by fear, threw themselves in the twinkling of an eye to the bottom of the barrel. They escaped in some mysterious way and ran off to hide in the linen room, which opens onto the garden. When I saw how cowardly they were, I put my fears aside and went over to the window to see what they were up to. There the little wretches were, running round and round the table, and not knowing how to escape my gaze. From time to time they came

nearer, still very agitated, to peep through the window; then, when they saw I was still there, they began racing about again in abject misery.

I do not suppose this dream was very extraordinary, but I do think God made use of it to show me that a soul in the state of grace need never be afraid of the devil, who is such a coward that even the gaze of a child will frighten him away.

I was so happy at this age, Mother, not only because I was beginning to enjoy life, but also because virtue had begun to appeal to me. I think my dispositions were the same then as they are now. I had acquired considerable self-control already, for I never complained when any of my things were taken away from me, and if ever I were unjustly accused, I would keep silent rather than excuse myself. There was no real virtue in this on my part, for it came naturally.

How swiftly these sunny years of childhood passed, yet what delightful memories they left behind! I love to think of the days Father used to take us to the pavilion, and most of all those Sunday walks, when Mother came with us. I can still feel the deep and poetic impression which the wheat fields made on me when I saw them all studded with poppies and cornflowers and daisies. Even then I loved far distances, wide spaces and the trees. The whole of nature, in fact, enchanted me and raised my soul toward Heaven. During these long walks we often met poor people, and much to her delight, it was always little Thérèse who was sent to give them alms. On the other hand, much to her disgust, she was often taken home when Father thought the walk too long for his “little queen.” However, Céline used to fill her little basket with daisies and bring them home to console her.

The whole world smiled on me; wherever I went my path was strewn with flowers, and my own happy nature helped to make life all the more delightful, but a new period was soon to begin. Since I was to become the Spouse of Jesus so young, I had to suffer from childhood. Spring flowers begin to grow beneath the snow before they open to the sun, and the little flower I am writing about had to pass through the winter of trial, and have her fragile calix watered with the dew of tears.