**The Carmelite Tradition – Week 1**

**St. Thérèse of Lisieux** (1873-1897) teaches us about the prayer of the Carmelite Tradition through her “Little Way”.  Thérèse was the youngest of nine (five surviving) children.  She lost her mother when she was four and a half, which affected her greatly.  She describes the years following her mother’s death as the saddest period of her life; one in which she became very self-absorbed and emotionally sensitive.  She later writes about that period of her life as one that she deeply desired to get out of, but as much as she tried, she simply didn’t know how.  Thérèse wrote about a simple occurrence where she suddenly was able to change. “God was able in a very short time to extricate me from the very narrow circle in which I was turning without knowing how to come out.” (The Story of the Soul, 101)

Thérèse joined the Carmelite Order as a postulant in 1888 when she was 15 years old. She has wanted to join sooner but was told she was too young.  She and her father travelled to Rome.  During her audience with the pope, Thérèse asked if he would advocate for her.  He said that she would be allowed to enter “if it is the Will of God”.  Carmel in Lisieux was very strict, and Thérèse was not given any concessions because of her age.  She made a point of relating to all of the sisters there much to the chagrin of her three biological sisters who also lived at Carmel and who expected more of her attention.  She first took on the name Thérèse of the Child Jesus during her postulancy, but when she began her novitiate in 1889, she added “and the Holy Face” to her name.  Thérèse of the Child of Jesus and the Holy Face reminded her both of her childlike abandonment to the Father and of Christ’s love for humanity.  The two names also linked the nativity to the cross. Thérèse wrote, “The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, Jesus.  And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more.” (The Story of a Soul, 208)

After her father’s death Thérèse’s final sister joined the Order.  She brought with her some scripture verses which Thérèse spent much time with in meditation. Prayer with scripture was so essential to Thérèse’s spiritual life that her autobiography includes around 1,000 scripture references: 400 from the Old Testament, and 600 from the New Testament.  Her spirituality became known as the “Little Way”.  She said that God did not look for people to punish, but for people who were willing to live a life filled with his transforming love.  Bishop Patrick Ahern explains, “The Little Way finds joy in the present moment, in being pleased to be the person you are.  It is a school of self-acceptance which goes beyond accepting who you are to wanting to be who you are.”

**Reading assignments for next time: Chapter 14 and Chapter 30**

**Prayer Activity: Praying with the Psalms**

*“Prayer is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends.” -Teresa of Avila*

Praying with the Psalms

1. Choose one of the Psalms.  You may either choose one of the Psalms listed below, or another of your choosing.
2. Read or chant/sing the Psalm you chose slowly and aloud, savoring the words as you speak them as well as the breath between your words.
3. Wait in silence for 5-10 minutes.  Be still and be aware that you are in God’s presence.
4. Read or chant/sing the Psalm again slowly.  Notice as you are reading if there are any words or phrases that “stick out” to you.  Sometimes I feel like I word or phrase “sparkles” or ignites some sort of a response within me.  As these words and phrases strike you, notice them, but continue reading.
5. Take some time to return to the words that spoke to you as you were reading.  Let them settle more deeply within you.  Notice any responses that arise within you as you savor these words.
6. Talk to God about your response.  Share any feeling that may have arisen in you, even if they are feeling that you might judge as “unsavory”.  There is no need to try to protect God from yourself. Allow your raw emotions to come out just as they are.
7. Allow yourself to quietly rest in God’s presence.

Below are some quotes of St. Thérèse of Lisieux each paired with a Psalm. You may choose one of these Psalms if you’d like, or any other that draws you.

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| *For me, prayer is a burst from my heart, it is a simple glance thrown toward Heaven, a cry of thanksgiving and love in times of trial as well as in times of joy.* | *O come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. -Psalm 95* |
| *I (pray) like children who do not know how to read, I say very simply to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me.* | [*Surely*](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/518.htm)*I have calmed*[*and quieted*](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1826.htm)[*my soul;*](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/5315.htm)[*like a weaned child*](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1580.htm)[*with his mother,*](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/517.htm)*my soul is like the* [*like the weaned child*](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1580.htm)*that is with me -Psalm 131* |
| *The nearer one gets to God, the simpler one becomes.* | *For God alone my soul waits in silence for my hope is from Him. - Psalm 62* |
| *Don’t drag yourself any longer to His feet, follow that first impulse that draws you into His arms.  That is where your place is.* | *Even if my father and my mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close. – Psalm 27* |
| *Joy isn’t found in the material objects surrounding us, but in the inner recesses of the soul.  One can possess joy in a prison cell as well as in a palace.* | *You have put gladness in my heart, more than when grain and wine abound. - Psalm 4* |
| *He guides and inspires me every moment of the day.  Just when I need it, a new light shines on my problems.* | *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. – Psalm 23* |
| *For me, prayer means launching out from the heart toward God; a cry of grateful love from the crest of joy or through the trough of despair.  It is a vast supernatural force that opens out my heart and binds me close to Jesus.* | *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry by day but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. - Psalm 22* |