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DAY 14

No More 'Thieves of Hope'

Yesterday, we learned that St. Therese of Lisieux is a prophet. Specifically, we learned that she's a prophet of mercy who announces God's desire in the present time of mercy to work the amazing miracle of mercy of forming us into great saints through the Little Way. But for him to work this miracle, we need to give him our trust: "Jesus, I trust in you." But maybe there's something holding us back. Maybe we can't yet fully give him our trust — I know I couldn't.

I shared in the introduction that when I first learned about the Little Way, it filled me with hope that maybe even someone like me could become a saint. But I also shared that I'd then run into "thieves of hope." Remember them? They're the people who would say things like, "That St. Therese wasn't so little. She was actually quite big." And then they'd go on about Therese's impressive virtues, desires, sacrifices, and sufferings such that I'd think to myself: "Well, maybe the Little Way is too big for me. Maybe it's just the big way wrapped in a sugar-coated crust and a flowery rhetoric." And with that, I'd get discouraged. But then, eventually, I'd read something in Therese's writings that would give me hope. And then, it wouldn't take long before the thieves of hope were getting me discouraged again. (This went on and on.)

Tired of being on such a roller coaster of spiritual ups and downs, I decided to read just about everything St. Therese ever wrote, trying to find out if the Little Way really could help someone like me to become a saint. Well, my research was not in vain. I found what I was looking for. Rather anticlimactically, it's called "Letter 197" in Therese's collected letters, and it offers some of the most consoling words I've ever read. It destroys all the arguments of the thieves of hope and set me "full sail upon the waves of confidence and love." But before I share it, I should first give a bit of background.

Letter 197 is St. Therese's response to a letter from her sister Marie (Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart), which itself was a response to one of Therese's teachings that we read earlier: the little bird that could not fly. Remember that image? (We covered it in the reading for Day 9.) Well, that story of the pitiful little bird with the heart of an eagle was actually Therese's attempt to explain her Little Way to her sister Marie.

Problem is, Marie didn't like the story. She felt it was inaccurate. After all, she lived in the same convent as Therese. So, every day, she saw her sister's impressive desires, sacrifices, and sufferings right up close, and she concluded that the future saint was no little bird at all. Instead, she was an eagle! Moreover, Marie felt that she herself was the little bird and that there was no hope for her to love God as Therese loved him.

Even though she writes like one of the thieves of hope, I thank God for Marie. I mean, I couldn't have put the objection better myself. (Actually, I did put it myself because I just paraphrased her thoughts, but you get the idea.) Anyway, Therese responds to Marie with her glorious Letter 197. The letter speaks for itself, so let it speak to you. Please read it slowly and prayerfully:

Dear Sister, ... How can you ask me if it is possible for you to love God as I love Him? If you had understood the story of my little bird, you would not have asked me this

question. My [\_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank: virtues, talents, many gifts, etc.) are nothing; they are not what give me the unlimited confidence that I feel in my heart. They are, to tell the truth, the spiritual riches that render one unjust, when one rests in them with complacency and when one believes they are something great ... Ah! I really feel that it is not this at all that pleases God in my little soul; what pleases Him is that He sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in His mercy ... That is my only treasure ... why would this treasure not be yours?]

Oh, dear Sister, I beg you, understand your little girl, understand that to love Jesus, to be His victim of love, the weaker one is, without desires or virtues, the more suited one is for the workings of this consuming and transforming Love ... [B]ut we must consent to remain always poor and without strength, and this is the difficulty ... Ah! let us remain then very far from all that sparkles, let us love our littleness, let us love to feel nothing, then we shall be poor in spirit, and Jesus will come to look for us [and] He will transform us in flames of love. ... Oh! how I would like to be able to make you understand what I feel! ... It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love.

**Today's Prayer:**

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Help me to embrace the Little Way with all my heart.

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**Volume 12**

October 8, 1919

Effects of confidence in Jesus.

As I continue in my usual state of pains and privations, I have been spending it with Jesus almost in silence, completely abandoned in Him like a little child. Then, making Himself visible in my interior, my sweet Jesus told me: "My daughter, confidence in Me is the little cloud of light in which the soul remains so enclosed that all fears, doubts, and weaknesses depart from her. Indeed, not only does confidence in Me form this cloud of light which enfolds her completely, but it feeds her with contrary foods, which have the virtue of dispelling all fears, doubts and weaknesses.

Indeed, confidence in Me dispels fear and nourishes the soul with pure love. It removes doubts, and gives her certainty; it takes away weakness, and gives her fortitude. Moreover, it makes her so daring with Me, that she attaches herself to my breast—and she suckles and suckles, and feeds herself; nor does she want any other food. And if she sees that nothing comes out when she suckles—and that I permit this to excite her to the highest confidence—she does not grow weary, nor does she detach herself from my breast. On the contrary, she suckles more vigorously and bangs her head against my chest, while I laugh to Myself, and let her do it.

The trusting soul delights Me and makes Me smile. One who has confidence in Me, loves Me, esteems Me, and believes I am immense, powerful, and rich. On the other hand, one who has no confidence, does not really love Me — she dishonors Me, and believes I am poor, powerless, and small...

What an affront to my Goodness!

## Volume 30

November 4, 1931

Confidence forms the hands and feet of the soul. God continues the Work of Creation in the soul who does His Will. The Divine Will is the Cement of the human will.

“My Jesus, Center and Life of my little soul, I am so small that I feel my extreme need for You, my Love, to hold me tightly in Your arms and to be moved to pity at my great weakness. I am tiny, and You know that little ones need swaddling clothes to strengthen their limbs, and their Mama’s milk to be nourished and grow. And I feel the intense need for You to swaddle me with the swaddling clothes of love and for you to clasp me to Your Divine Breast, and to give me the milk of Your Divine Will for food, to nourish me and to make me grow. Hear, O Jesus, I feel the need of Your life so that I can live. I want to live by You; and then You will be writing, not I, and You will be able to write what You want and the way that You want it. In that way, the task is Yours, not mine; I will only lend You my hand, and You will do all the rest. Let us agree on this, O Jesus.”

Then, abandoning myself in the arms of Jesus, I heard His Most Sweet Voice whispering in my ear and saying to me: “My little daughter, the more you remain abandoned in Me, the more you will feel My Life in you, and I will take the first place in animating your soul. Know that true confidence in Me forms the arms and feet of the soul so that she can climb up to Me and clasp Me so tightly that I cannot unbind Myself from her. So, one who has no confidence has no arms, nor feet—she is a poor cripple. Indeed, your confidence will be your victory over Me, and I will hold you tightly in My arms, attached to My breast, to give you the continuous milk of My Divine Will. Now, you must know that each time the soul does My Will, I recognize Myself in her, I recognize My works, My steps, My words, and My love. Then the Creator recognizes Himself and His works in the soul; and as the soul acts, she projects herself in the Creator and recognizes herself in Him. This mutual recognition between God and the soul calls forth the First Act of Creation, and God goes out of His rest and continues the Work of Creation with this creature who lives and acts in My Will.

Indeed, Our work did not end—there was only a pause for rest; and the soul, by doing Our Will, calls Us to work. But it is a sweet call, because for Us work means new happiness, new joys and marvelous victories. Indeed, we do nothing but continue Our outpourings of love, power, goodness and unreachable wisdom, that gave Creation its beginning. And the soul feels that her God does not rest for her, but continues the labor of His creative work. And as she acts in Our Will, she feels the rain of the active love of God beginning to fall upon her soul, His power and wisdom that do not remain idle, but work in her soul. O if you knew the pleasure and delight We feel when the soul calls Us to work. By calling Us, she recognizes Us; by calling Us, she opens the doors to Us, she gives Us dominion, and she gives Us all the freedom to do what We want in her soul—that is why We will do a work worthy of Our creative hands.

Indeed, never let Our Divine Will elude you if you want Our Work to be continuous; It will be your voice-bearer and Ours. In It, you will raise your voice to call Us, and We will hear the sweet whispering in Our ear and We will immediately descend into Our own Will within your soul to continue Our Work. Indeed, you must know that continuous acts

produce fulfilled lives and works. What is not continuous can be called effects of My Will, not life that is produced in the soul—and the effects little by little vanish away, leaving one with an empty stomach. So have courage and confidence and keep going forward, crossing the sea of the Divine Will.”

After this, I was following the Acts that my Supreme Good One, Jesus, had done in His Humanity when He was on earth. And, making Himself heard, He added: “My daughter, My human will had no living act of its own; rather, it was in the act of receiving the continuous Act of My Divine Will—the Act that I possessed, as the Word of the Heavenly Father. That is why all of My acts—the prayers, sufferings, breaths and heartbeats that I did as My human will received the Life of the Divine Will—forged many bonds, to rebind the human wills to Mine. And since these human wills were like houses, some collapsing, others damaged, and others reduced to ruin, My Divine Will working within My Humanity prepared with My Acts the necessary helps to support the collapsing ones, to repair the damaged ones and to raise again, upon their very ruins, the houses that had been destroyed. I did nothing for Myself — I did not have any need—I did everything to redo and to restore men’s wills. All that I needed was to love—and I desired to be loved in return.

Now, to receive all My helps, pains, and works as active works, speaking voices and helping messengers, the soul must unite her will to Mine—and immediately she will feel herself reunited with Mine, and all My Acts will offer themselves around man’s will—to do his works, to sustain, repair and resurrect the human will. As soon as the soul unites herself to My Divine Will and decides to do It—like a fierce army, all of My acts array themselves in her defense and form a life-boat for her in life’s stormy sea. But for one who does not do My Will, I could say that she receives nothing, nor can she receive anything—because My Will alone is the Giver of everything that I did for love of men. Fiat!!!