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**DAY 9**

**Discovery of the Little Way**

Yesterday, we learned that Thérèse Martin was a little soul, indeed. Still, from the time of her youth, she had bold desires: She wanted to become a saint, and not just any saint, but a great saint. A story from her childhood helps us understand this — a story she calls “a summary of my whole life.”

One day, Thérèse’s older sister, Leonie, had decided she’d outgrown some of her playthings. So, she offered to her little sisters, Céline and Thérèse, a basket full of such items. Céline chose one item that pleased her. But when it came to Thérèse’s turn, the future saint suddenly exclaimed, “I choose all!” and proceeded to take the entire basket.

That story expresses well how Thérèse approached the spiritual life and the path to sanctity in particular. She understood that “there were many degrees of perfection” and she wanted the highest degree, saying to the Lord, “My God, I choose all! ... ‘I choose all’ that You will!”

Later, Thérèse would express her bold desires for holiness in an even more audacious way, saying that she wanted to love God even more than Teresa of Avila, the great Carmelite Doctor of the Church! However, she also realized her weakness and littleness. And so, for Thérèse, saints like the great Teresa of Avila were like eagles, soaring on the heights of holiness; whereas, she simply saw herself as a weak little bird without strength and unable to fly. In fact, she readily admitted, “I am not an eagle.”

Nevertheless, she went on to explain, “But I have ... an eagle’s EYES AND HEART.” Then, she continued, “[So,] in spite of my extreme littleness I still dare to gaze upon [the Lord], and my heart feels within it all the aspirations of an Eagle.” Such is the boldness that led Thérèse to discover the Little Way. Rather, it’s more accurate to say that the Lord couldn’t help but reveal it to her: “Because I was little and weak, He lowered Himself to me, and He instructed me secretly in the things of His love.” In the following passage, she sets up this joyful revelation of “the things of His love”: I have always wanted to be a saint. Alas! I have always noticed that when I compared myself to the saints, there is between them and me the same difference that exists between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and the obscure grain of sand trampled underfoot by passers-by. Instead of becoming discouraged, I said to myself: God cannot inspire unrealizable desires. I

can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness. It is impossible for me to grow up, and so I must bear with myself such as I am with all my imperfections. But I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new.

So, the little bird with the heart of the eagle, the little bird who is well aware of her weaknesses, is also totally confident that God could not have given her the heart of an eagle without also providing her the means of realizing her desires. Therefore, there must be such a path! There must be a path for little souls like her: a “straight,” “short,” and “totally new” way.

Well, Thérèse is a great Doctor of the Church because she discovered such a way — rather, she rediscovered it. Yes, she rediscovered the very heart of the Gospel, the Good News that God lifts up the lowly: We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection. I searched, then, in the Scriptures for some sign of this elevator, the object of my desires, and I read these words coming from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom: “Whoever is a LITTLE ONE, let him come to me.” And so, I succeeded. I felt I had found what I was looking for. The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more.

Question: When you read the lives of the saints, do they seem like eagles soaring on the heights while you’re just a little bird that can’t fly? In other words, do they seem like towering mountains while you’re just a small grain of sand? If so, then you’re a little one. You’re one who recognizes your poverty, weakness, brokenness, and sin. And now, Thérèse has just announced to you the good news that there’s a new invention, a “spiritual elevator,” that provides a way to the heights for little souls. It’s a way that’s “very ‘straight’ because it’s entirely vertical, very ‘short’ because it avoids the spirals of the staircase,” and “totally new”— or at least it feels that way because it rediscovered the heart of the Gospel, namely, God’s mercy for the little and the lowly. We’ll learn more about that part tomorrow.

**Today’s Prayer:**

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Give me the heart of an eagle,

a burning longing to choose all that you will for me.

**Volume 6, March 4, 1904**

The soul must live on high. One who lives in the heights cannot be harmed. As I was deeply tormented and suffering greatly because of the absence of my good Jesus, I saw Him briefly and He said to me: "My daughter, your soul must try to fly like an eagle – that is, to dwell up high, above all the low things of this earth—so high that no enemy may harm you. Indeed, one who lives on the heights can harm her enemies, but she cannot be harmed. And she must not only live on the heights. She must try to have the purity and sharp vision of an eagle. Though living up high, through the sharpness of her sight, she penetrates divine things—not in passing, but by chewing them to the point of making of them her favorite foods and despising everything else. She also penetrates the needs of her neighbors, nor is she afraid to descend into their midst to do good to them; and if need be she lays down her life for them. Through the purity of her sight, she joins the love of God to the love of neighbor and makes everything right with God. So must the soul be if she wants to please Me.