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DAY 32

The Darkness

Three words summarize our week of going “into the darkness”: (1) Relate, (2) See, and (3) Smile.

Relate

Saint Therese doesn’t always make a good first impression. In fact, I’ve often heard that when people first meet her in her writings, they think, “I can’t relate to her.” They say, “What do I have in common with a girl who grew up in a sheltered home, lived in a cloistered convent, and died at just 24-years-old?” But then, as they get to know her more, they’ll often say, “I relate to her more than to any other saint.”

So, why do people relate so much to someone who, on the surface, seems difficult to relate to? I think it’s because, even though she apparently never committed a mortal sin, she was absolutely convinced that, had God not sheltered her from an early age, she would have been a big sinner. And we believe her. We believe her particularly when she tells us that even if she had been a bigger sinner than we are, even if she had committed all the sins that could be committed, “I would go, my heart broken with sorrow, and throw myself into Jesus’ arms, for I know how much he loves the prodigal child who returns to him.” Somehow, we relate to all that, or at least we want to. We relate to Therese because she’s real, because she’s not a plaster statue high on a pedestal. In fact, we get the sense that she’s right down here in the grittiness of ordinary life with the rest of us.

Speaking of ordinary life, we can also relate to Therese’s ordinariness. During her life, she wasn’t famous or well known. Indeed, her time in the convent truly was a “hidden life” full of the daily darkness we all experience. Yes, she’s a great saint, but her standout sanctity is that she did little things with great love. Yes, in the midst of an ordinary, mundane life, she had extraordinary faith, hope, and love that are accessible to us all. As she herself put it, “Why would this treasure not be yours?”

Finally, we relate to Therese’s double darkness. In other words, like most of us, she not only knew herself to be weak and imperfect (more on that in the next point), but she knew what it was like to live in an age of secularism and doubt. And she knew it not because she actually lived in that world — as a cloistered nun, she did not — but, rather, because the Lord allowed her to feel that God doesn’t exist and that there isn’t a heaven. That was her night of faith. Still, in the midst of such darkness, she clung to the Lord with faith, hope, and love and encourages us to do the same.

See

Therese solves the mystery as to why the great saints see themselves as great sinners. She also solves the mystery as to why so many sinners are often so blind to the fact that they’re sinners. It has to do with the reality of God’s love — his burning, passionate, infinite love. Because great saints clearly see this reality, they’re not blind to their sins. Because people who don’t think they’re sinners don’t clearly see the reality of God’s love, they’re blind to their sins. But if they did see the reality of his love, their eyes would be opened to their sinfulness.

To put it differently, Therese teaches us that when we clearly see the reality of God’s

passionate love for us, it makes us realize we can't compete! It reveals that when we compare God's infinite love for us with our own pitiful love for him, our love is really nothing. But Thérèse doesn't leave us hanging. She tells us that God's love for us is so great that he allows us to "borrow" his own love.

Now, according to Therese, we don't fully borrow the Lord's perfect love until we get to heaven — by heaven, I mean both "heaven-heaven" (where we go when we die) and "heaven-on-earth" (where we go on Sundays). Of course, regarding that latter heaven, I'm talking about the Mass, which is where we can love God the Father through, with, and in the Son's own perfect love (and even "see" that love in Sacrament).

Smile

Remember Therese's smile at her death. Let it be a sign for you. As Abraham had the stars and Mary had the words of Elizabeth, you have Therese's smile. So, in times of darkness, when you're tempted to discouragement because of your own weakness, poverty, and sin — remember that smile. In times of darkness, when you're tempted to think that God and heaven do not exist — remember that smile. In times of darkness, when you're tempted to think there's no way you can become a saint — remember that smile.

And, actually, Therese is smiling at you now. With her prayers, she's preparing your heart to accept the gift of the Offering to Merciful Love. She's telling you not to be afraid. She's saying, "I do not regret having offered myself to Love — and neither will you!" So get ready. The day of your offering is just around the corner! All that rejected mercy will soon be yours. So don't forget to smile.

Today's Prayer:

Spend the day pondering the Offering to Merciful Love as it is summarized in these three words: Relate, See, and Smile.

Relate:

Volume 1

No Date

Some pulled Him to one side, some to another. All panting, His face dripping with blood, He raised his eyes toward me to ask for my help. Who can express the sorrow I felt, or the impression that such a sorrowful scene made on my soul? I immediately went inside. I forgot where I was. I felt my heart burst with pain. Through my tears, I shouted and said to Him: "My Jesus, if only I could help You! If only I could free You from those ravenous wolves! Ah! I want to suffer those pains in your place—at least to relieve my sorrow. O please! My Good, give me suffering! It isn't fair that You suffer so much, while I, a sinner, remain without suffering."

Jesus: "My beloved, the cross allows one to distinguish the reprobates from the predestined. Just as on the Day of Judgment the good will rejoice upon seeing the cross—so even now the cross reveals who will be saved or lost. If, when the cross presents itself to a soul, she embraces it, bears it with resignation and patience, kissing and blessing the hand which sends it—this is a sure sign of her salvation. But if, on the

contrary, when the cross is presented to her, she becomes irritated, despises the cross, and even reaches the point of offending Me—that is a sure sign of a soul that is heading for hell. On the Day of Judgment, reprobates, seeing the cross, will wail and curse. Indeed, the cross reveals everything. It is a book that teaches plainly and without lies how to distinguish the saint from the sinner, the perfect from the imperfect, and the fervent from the lukewarm. The cross communicates so much light to the soul that, even now, it allows one to distinguish not only the good from the evil, but also those who are to be more or less glorious in Heaven—those who are to occupy a higher or a lower place. All other virtues remain humble and reverent before the virtue of the cross, and--grafting themselves onto it—they receive greater glory and splendor.”

See:

Volume 11

June 29, 1914

Jesus: “Now why be surprised if I said that when the will of the soul is one with Mine, and I place her within Me and make her inseparable from Me (so long as she doesn’t withdraw from my Will)—she takes part in our works “ad intra”? Besides, if they wanted to know the truth, they could have known very well the meaning of my “ad intra” works from my explanation, because the truth is Light to the mind, and Light reveals things as they really are. But if people don’t want to know the truth, their minds remain blinded and they cannot see things as they are; so they raise doubts and difficulties, and become even blinder than before. Moreover, my Being is always in one Act—it has no beginning and no end. I am old and new. Our works “ad intra” were, are and will always be in action. That is why the soul is already within Us through her intimate union with our Will. She admires, contemplates, loves and enjoys. She takes part in our Love, in our delights and in all that We do. So, why would it be inappropriate for Me to say that the soul who does my Will takes part in my actions “ad intra”?”

Volume 15

March 27, 1923

Jesus: “....it takes a little emptying of themselves, hatred of sin, and a desire to receive Me. These gifts do not descend into rottenness or filth. That is why without My gifts they do not have the right dispositions to receive Me, and when I go down into them, I do not find the space to communicate My Life. It is as though I am dead for them, and they are dead for Me. I burn, and they do not feel My flames. I am light, and they remain more blinded. Alas! How many sorrows I endure in My Sacramental Life! Many souls feel nothing good when they receive Me (because of their poor dispositions) and so they go so far as to make Me sick. And if they continue to receive Me, they subject Me to a continuous Calvary and themselves to eternal damnation. Indeed, if it is not love that moves them to receive Me, their communion becomes one more insult that they offer Me—one more sin that they heap upon their souls. So: Pray and make reparation for the many abuses and sacrileges that men commit when they receive Me in the Blessed Sacrament.”

Smile:

Volume 12

August 6, 1917

The Divine Will makes the soul happy.

As I continued in my usual state, my ever beloved Jesus came; and since I was suffering greatly from his absences and because of the constant threat of worse chastisements, He told me: "My daughter, cheer up, do not lose heart too much. My Will makes souls happy, even in the midst of the fiercest storms. Moreover, my Will lifts the soul so high that storms cannot touch her, although she sees them and hears them. Storms cannot enter the place where she dwells. It is always serene with a smiling sun, because her origin is in Heaven, her nobility is Divine, and her holiness is in God –and she is kept there by God Himself. I am jealous of the sanctity of this soul who lives in my Will, and I keep her in my inmost Heart, and I say: 'Nobody touch her.' My Will is intangible and sacred, and it must receive honor from every creature."

August 14, 1917

Jesus: "O how very different is the sanctity of the soul who lives in the Divine Will! These souls form the smile of Jesus. They live completely detached from everyone, even from their own directors. Jesus alone is everything for them; that is why nobody worries about them. The healing atmosphere that surrounds them benefits everyone; and they foster order and harmony among all creatures. In his jealousy toward these souls, Jesus becomes actor and spectator of whatever they do – reigning and ordering their every thought, breath, and heartbeat. Jesus keeps such a soul so absorbed in the Divine Will that she can scarcely remember that she lives in exile."