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DAY 10

Discovery of Divine Mercy

Therese's discovery of the Little Way — a “straight,” “short,” and “totally new” way to the heights of holiness for little souls — is really a discovery of Divine Mercy. In other words, it's a rediscovery of the very heart of the Gospel. And what's the heart of the Gospel? The Catechism says it's “the revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners.” Now, in Therese's day, which was during the terrible time of Jansenism, this truly would have seemed like a “totally new” and joyful revelation. Indeed, amid the foul and stuffy Jansenist atmosphere, Therese's discovery of the Little Way came as a breath of fresh air, leading her to pray, “O my God, You surpassed all my expectation. I want only to sing of Your mercies.” Yes, singing is in order — for in rediscovering the Gospel, Therese had also rediscovered the joy of the Gospel.

And what is the Gospel? Again, it's the Good News of God's mercy for sinners. It's the Good News that Jesus didn't come for the righteous but for sinners. It's the Good News that Jesus has the Heart of the Good Shepherd who will even leave behind the 99 to go in search of the one lost sheep. It's the Good News that God doesn't love us because we're so good but because he's so good; that he loves us not because we deserve it but because we desperately need it. It's the Good News that God's love is like water, which always goes to the lowest place. It's the Good News that God's ways are not our ways, that God isn't attracted to our gifts, virtues, and talents, but rather, to our weakness, brokenness, and sin. And this is the very definition of mercy, which the parable of the Good Samaritan seems to reveal most clearly:

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back” (Lk 10:30-35).

The Good Samaritan, as it says later, is “the one who showed mercy” (v. 37). So, what is mercy? More specifically, what is Divine Mercy? Well, it’s when God doesn’t pass us like the priest and Levite but, rather, like the Samaritan, comes to us where we are, sees our weakness, brokenness, and misery, and then acts to heal us and bring us to a place of comfort and rest. In other words, mercy involves two things: the heart and the arms. It is God’s being moved to compassion at seeing our suffering (heart) and then taking action to help alleviate it (arms). And that’s really what’s going on with the Little Way and its famous elevator.

The Little Way is about the compassion of Jesus (heart), who sees the suffering of little souls who long to attain the heights of holiness but who are too little to climb the “rough stairway of perfection.” It’s about the action of Jesus (arms), who reaches down out of pity and picks up trusting little souls to place them on the heights.

So, the elevator is the mercy of Jesus. It’s the mercy of Jesus in action, the compassion of Jesus reaching out to lift up the lowly. And all this, again, gets back to the heart of Sacred Scripture, which is saturated with mercy. Saint Therese herself points this out in a remarkable passage at the end of her autobiography, a passage that weaves together her favorite truths of the Gospel — the truths that she has rediscovered:

I have only to cast a glance in the Gospels and immediately I breathe in the perfumes of Jesus’ life, and I know on which side to run. I don’t hasten to the first place but to the last; rather than advance like the Pharisee, I repeat, filled with confidence, the publican’s humble prayer. Most of all I imitate the conduct of Magdalene; her astonishing or rather her loving audacity which charms the Heart of Jesus also attracts my own. Yes, I feel it; even though I had on my conscience all the sins that can 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.

Are you beginning to “breathe in the perfume” of Jesus’ mercy, which is the very heart of the Gospel? Are you beginning to love Therese’s way of humble confidence in Divine Mercy? If you still haven’t begun to savor its sweetness, ponder Therese’s advice to her sister Céline, which brings us back to the Heart of the Good Shepherd: “[D]o not fear, the poorer you are the more Jesus will love you. He will go far, very far, in search of you, if at times you wander off a

little.” Or, as Jesus, himself, put it to St. Faustina: “The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy.”

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Unveil for me the mystery at the heart of the Gospel,

the mystery of the Heart of Christ:

his tender mercy for sinners.

Volume 2, May 7, 1899

Jesus: “I want your will to be completely surrendered to Mine in perfect detachment from all things—so that you regard all earthly things as rubbish and dung. Even if you are not attached to earthly things, the mere thought and spectacle of them obscures the thought of heavenly things...”

“You can see that my Heart is very large. But the door is very narrow. No one can fill the void of this Heart but souls who are detached, simple, and poor in spirit. Indeed, you can see that the door is so small that any hindrance—even the slightest shadow of an attachment, an impure intention, or action done without the purpose of pleasing Me — prevents souls from entering into my Heart’s delight. Love of neighbor reaches deep into my Heart. But it must be so joined to my love as to form one single love—so that the one cannot be distinguished from the other.

Volume 3, June 18, 1900

As Jesus did not come for a long time, I tried to mediate on the mystery of the scourging. As I did this, I caught a brief glimpse of blessed Jesus, all wounded and dripping with Blood, who said to me: “My daughter, the heavens and all Creation reveal the love of God; and my wounded Body reveals the love of neighbor. Indeed, with my Humanity united to my Divinity, I rendered my two natures one and inseparable, because I not only satisfied divine Justice, but accomplished the salvation of mankind.

Volume 4, September 18, 1900

This morning, my adorable Jesus transported me outside of my body and showed

me the many sins committed against love of neighbor. What suffering this caused my most patient Jesus! It seemed as if He himself received them all. Then, intensely afflicted, He said to me: “My daughter, he who harms his neighbor harms himself and, in killing his neighbor, he kills his own soul. And, since charity predisposes the soul to all the virtues, when it is absent, the soul is predisposed to commit every kind of vice.”

Volume 6, November 8, 1903

As I was in my usual state, I was praying for certain needs of other people, and blessed Jesus stirred in my interior and asked me: “Why are you praying for these people?” And I answered: “And You, Lord, for what purpose do You love us?” And He said: “I love you because you are my own possession, and when an object is one’s own, one feels compelled to love it – it is almost a necessity. And I said: “Lord, I am praying for these people because they are your own possession, otherwise I would not have taken their part.” And, placing his hand on my forehead and almost pressing it, He added: “Ah, it is because they belong to Me! In that case, your love of neighbor is sound.”