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DAY 11

Do Three Things

As we learned yesterday, the Little Way is all about the heart of the Gospel: Divine Mercy. It's all about remaining little and then arriving at the heights of holiness through the descending mercy of Jesus.

Alright, so we simply remain "little" and then wait for the Lord to stoop down, take us into his arms, and raise us to the heights, right? Well, lest we mistakenly think we just need to kick back, eat ice cream, and wait for our canonizations, St.

Therese shares with us an illuminating metaphor of a little child at the bottom of a staircase (probably the "rough stairway of perfection").

Now, the child, who is all of us little souls, cannot even climb the first step of that big staircase — we're too little. But Therese tells us to try. She says, "Raise your little foot to scale the stairway of holiness." Of course, we won't be successful, but Therese then adds, "God requires you only to demonstrate your good will." In other words, we just need to give it a try. And as we do, Therese tells us that God will be "conquered by [our] futile efforts" and will then descend the stairway, gather us into his arms, and take us to the heights.

So, Therese's point seems to be that our efforts in the spiritual life are absolutely necessary but also absolutely useless. What? I mean that in the sense that Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta meant when she'd often say, "God does not call us to be successful but to be faithful." In other words, applied to our spiritual lives, the Lord doesn't demand that we attain all the virtues (success) but that we simply keep trying (faithfulness). For those on the Little Way, the success part isn't what's most important. In fact, in a sense, it's sometimes better that little souls aren't successful.

Here's what I mean: Jesus likes to keep little souls little. After all, if they were suddenly to see themselves bounding up the rough stairway of perfection with great strides, it might go to their heads, and they'd be too "big" for Jesus to lift. And so, the Lord sometimes permits that little souls remain in the darkness of certain vices or sins so they won't fall into worse ones, like the sin of pride. But don't just take my word for it. Listen to what Therese herself said to one of her novices who often failed in the practice of virtue: "And if the good God wants you weak and helpless like a child ... do you believe that you will have less merit? ... Agree to stumble at every step therefore, even to fall, to carry your cross weakly, to

love your helplessness. Your soul will draw more profit from it than if, carried by grace, you would accomplish with enthusiasm heroic actions that would fill your soul with personal satisfaction and pride.”

In sum, then, the Little Way is often a little way of darkness. It’s about accepting that we are to put up with ourselves — with all the darkness of our weakness, brokenness, and sin — without getting discouraged. It’s recognizing, without giving up, that some struggles are chronic. It’s realizing, without despairing, that they may be with us till our dying day. But it’s also about realizing that this does not prevent us from becoming saints.

So, even if we have to go to Confession over and over for the same sins, we shouldn’t get discouraged. And we should listen to Pope Francis, who said, “The Lord never tires of forgiving, never! It is we who tire of asking his forgiveness.” Of course, we need to be sorry for our sins and make a firm purpose of amendment. But if we do that, if we keep trying, then there’s no end to the Lord’s mercy, and we can believe that he can and will satisfy our desires for holiness. Tomorrow, we’ll learn more about how God can and will bring little souls to the heights of holiness. For now, let’s just consider that if we want to live the Little Way, we must do three things: (1) Recognize the darkness: Recognize the darkness of our littleness and brokenness. (2) Keep trying: Keep trying to grow in holiness and do little things with great love. (3) Keep trusting: Keep trusting and believing that God will satisfy our desires for holiness, even if we don’t yet fully understand how.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Help me to do three things: (1) recognize the darkness of my littleness, (2) keep trying to grow in holiness, and (3) keep trusting in your mercy.

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Jesus: “My daughter, the soul contains in her will all that I contain in my Power. That is why I look at all the good that the soul really wants to do, as if she had really done it. I have Will and Power: if I want, I can. On the other hand, the soul cannot do many things, but her will makes up for her weakness. In this way, she becomes like Me, and I keep enriching her with all the merits contained in her good will—so long as she wants to do them.”

Then He added: “My daughter, when the soul gives herself completely to Me, I set

up my dwelling place within her. Many times I like to close everything down and rest in the shade; at other times I like to sleep and place the soul as a sentry, so that she may not allow anybody to bother Me and interrupt my sleep—and, if necessary, she has to face the nuisance calls and answer for Me. At other times, I like to open her up to everything—to let in the winds, the coldness of creatures, and the shafts of sin that they fire at Me, and many other things. The soul must be content with everything—she has to let Me do whatever I want—even more, she must make my things her own. If I were not free to do whatever I want, how unhappy I would be in her heart. If I had to be careful to make her feel only my joys, and against my will to hide from her how much I suffer—where would my freedom be? Ah, everything lies in my Will. If the soul takes hold of my Will, she takes all the substance of my Being, and encloses everything within herself. In this way, as she does good, she keeps within herself the substance of my Life, and she makes that good flow out from Me. Flowing out from Me, it spreads like a ray of light for the good of all creatures.