

†
DAY 19

Three Objections

At this point, we've learned what the Offering to Merciful Love is not (an offering to Divine Justice), what it is (an act of mercy toward Jesus), what it costs (our hardness of heart), and what it frees us from (the fires of purgatory). Now, before we begin looking at the text of the Offering itself (tomorrow), I'd like to cover three potential objections to it.

The first objection has to do with yesterday's reflection on purgatory. Now, some of us may have read it and thought that perhaps Therese is encouraging the sin of presumption by telling us to believe that we can bypass purgatory. Well, she actually would be if she were telling us we can expect to go straight to heaven without sorrow for our sins and without making a firm purpose of amendment. But that's not what she teaches. In fact, her emphasis on trying includes fostering a sorrow for one's sins and making a firm resolution not to sin again.

So, if we object, then maybe we're simply looking for justice. Maybe we think Thérèse is being too indulgent. Maybe we want people to have to pay more for their sins. Well, in that case, we'd just be disagreeing with Thérèse and siding with Sr. Fébronie.

Sister Marie Fébronie, the 67-year-old sub-prioress at Therese's convent, had heard about the 19-year-old novice mistress' teaching on purgatory. She didn't like it because she thought it was presumptuous and too lenient — so, she confronted Therese about it. In response, with love and kindness, the young nun calmly tried to explain the matter, but Sr. Fébronie would have none of it. Finally, Therese ended the discussion by rather boldly stating, "My sister, if you look for the justice of God you will get it. The soul will receive from God exactly what she desires." Before the year was out, Sr. Fébronie caught the flu and died. Then, three months later, she appeared to St. Therese in a dream. Convinced that this was no ordinary dream, Thérèse reported it to the prioress, who documented it. Now follows that documented report in the saint's own words:

"O my Mother, my Sr. M. Fébronie came to me last night and asked that we should pray for her. She is in purgatory, surely because she had trusted too little in the mercy of the good Lord. Through her imploring behavior and her profound looks, it seemed she wanted to say, "You were right. I am now delivered up to the full justice of God but it is my fault. If I had listened to you I would not be here now."

So, the moral of the story is that we can choose the path of justice or that of mercy. Yes, we really are free to choose — but also realize that the measure with which we measure will be measured back to us (see Lk 6:38). In other words, if we choose to treat others with strict justice, then God will be strict with us. If we choose to be merciful to others, then God will be merciful with us. Hear that. To choose the path of mercy means being merciful to others. This is one of the main efforts under the “keep trying” category for living the Little Way. So, let me repeat: To live the Little Way, we must be merciful to others. We must strive to show mercy. We must strive to forgive. Otherwise, we cannot hope for mercy (see Mt 5:7, 18:21-35).

The second potential objection to making the Offering to Merciful Love has to do with those who have begun to feel that they’re in a bit too deep with this Offering stuff. In other words, they may be saying, Look, I like the Divine Mercy message and devotion and everything, and I thought I’d do a nice little consecration. But I didn’t know about “the catch” and all this talk about an “increased longing for God” and all that. Although this may not seem scary to others, it’s making me nervous. I mean, what am I getting myself into?

In answer to that difficulty, let me say this: Yes, the Offering to Merciful Love is a powerful spiritual act, one that should be approached with a certain seriousness. However, keep in mind that the whole focus of the Offering is mercy and the God “who is all gentleness.” Having said that, I do have one suggestion if you’re feeling a bit anxious about making it: Say the prayer, “Yes, Lord, I do want to be a saint, but please be gentle.” Frankly, that’s a prayer I myself often pray, and I can assure you that the Lord has, indeed, been very gentle with me. But if that’s not enough, then please consider Therese’s own words about making the Offering to Merciful Love as a little soul: “I am only a child, powerless and weak, and yet it is my weakness that gives me the boldness of offering myself as VICTIM of Your Love, O Jesus! In times past, victims, pure and spotless, were the only ones accepted by the Strong and Powerful God. To satisfy Divine Justice, perfect victims were necessary, but the law of Love has succeeded to the law of fear, and Love has chosen me as a holocaust, me, a weak and imperfect creature.”

Again, it’s Thérèse’s weakness that gave her the boldness to offer herself to Merciful Love. So, if you’re feeling maybe too weak to make the Offering, that’s a good thing. Also, recall that Thérèse’s words here are similar to something else she said, which we read on Day 15: “What sweet joy it is to think that God is Just,

i.e., that He takes into account our weakness, that He is perfectly aware of our fragile nature. What should I fear then?” Good question. What should we fear? God is Love and Mercy itself, and the heart of the Little Way and the Offering is to trust in God. It’s true that we’re not going to fully understand the whole path. It’s true that I cannot tell you exactly how it will all play out. But it will be wonderful. And if there’s one thing that Therese wants to say to us, it’s this: trust. Trust in God, who is Love and Mercy itself.

The third and final objection is one that may have arisen in response to the idea that the Offering to Merciful Love is a way of taking the rejected mercy that other people don’t want.

Now, perhaps that seems selfish. Perhaps it makes us say, “But what about all those poor people who aren’t getting the graces that I’m taking?” Well, first of all, keep in mind that the graces we’ll be receiving have already been rejected. In other words, people have already said through their words or actions that they don’t want them. So, these rejected graces are free for the taking. Also, keep in mind that the Offering is far from selfish when we aim to do it, above all, to console Jesus. That was St. Thérèse’s intention in making it, and it should be our intention as well. (More on this later.)

One more thing regarding the last objection: When we take the graces that others don’t want, we’re actually giving them a “second chance” to receive those graces. Why? Because, again, one of the effects of the Offering to Merciful Love is that it makes our hearts more compassionate. That means we’ll be moved to pray for the conversion of hardened sinners — the very same ones who rejected the graces of mercy that we’ll be receiving. And so, through our prayers and deeds of mercy that are the fruit of our Offering, they’ll get a second chance to receive God’s mercy.

Anyway, that covers three potential objections that may be coming to mind as we prepare to make the Offering.

Tomorrow, we’ll actually delve into Thérèse’s masterpiece, the crowning of her Little Way: the text of her Offering to Merciful Love.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Take away any fears or anxieties I may have about making the Offering.

Volume 11

April 10, 1912

The souls who have more trust will shine more brightly in the crown of Divine Mercy.

As I continued in my usual state, blessed Jesus came to me and told me: "My daughter, the souls who will shine the most brilliantly, like bright gems in the crown of my Divine Mercy, are the souls who have more trust, because the more trusting they are, the more they make room for the attribute of my Mercy to pour all the Graces they desire into them. On the other hand, the soul who does not have real trust shuts these graces within Me, remaining poor and ill-equipped, while my Love remains pent up within Me and suffers greatly.

In order not to suffer so much, and to be able to freely pour out my Love, I deal more with those souls who trust more than with other souls. With these souls I can pour out my Love, I can play, I can arrange loving tests, since I need not worry that they may feel ashamed or afraid; rather, they become even bolder and use everything I give them to love Me more. That is why trusting souls are the outpouring and delight of my Love—the most graceful and the richest of souls.

Volume 14

March 3, 1922

The Celestial Farmer Plants His Word.

While I continued in my usual state, my sweet Jesus came but without saying a word, taciturn and very grieved. I said to Him: "What troubles You, Jesus, that You don't speak to me? You are my Life; your word is my nourishment, and I can't fast so long. I am very weak, and I feel the need of continuous nourishment to grow and maintain my strength."

Jesus, all goodness, said to me: "My daughter, I also feel the need for nourishment; and, after nourishing you with my word, that same word, having been assimilated by you and having been converted into blood, generates my own nourishment. If you cannot fast, neither do I want to fast. I want a return for the nourishment I have given you. Afterwards, I will return to nourish you anew. Now I

am very hungry. Quickly, take away My hunger ...!"

I was confused and didn't know what to give Him, because I have never possessed anything. But Jesus, with both hands, took my heartbeat, my breathing, my thoughts, my affections, my desires, transformed into as many little globes of light; and He consumed them, saying: "All this is the fruit of My word. It is Mine, and it is only fair that I consume it.

"My daughter, it is best that I devote Myself anew to working the soil of your soul, so that I can plant the seed of My word for your nourishment. I do as a peasant when he wants to sow his field. He plows ruts and furrows, then plants the seed. Later he returns to cover the furrows and ruts where he planted the seed to protect it, give it time to germinate and—when it is multiplied a hundredfold—to harvest it. He is careful not to cover the seed with too much soil lest he suffocate it and kill it underground, for then he would run the risk of having nothing to eat. That is how I act. When I plow the ruts and form the furrows I open and enhance the soul's intellectual capacity, so that I can plant My divine word and form food for Me and for the soul. Then I cover the furrows and ruts with soil. This is the humility, the nothingness, the annihilation of the soul. I use any miser or weakness of the soul, for this also is soil; but it must come from the soul because I do not have this kind of soil. Thus I cover everything and joyfully await My harvest. But, do you want to know what happens when you place too much soil over the seed? When the soul feels its miseries, its weakness, its nothingness, it worries, and devotes so much thought to these that the enemy uses the situation to tempt the soul, to discourage it and to make it lose confidence. This is unnecessary soil over My seed. O how My seed feels itself dying, how difficult it is for it to germinate under so much soil. Many times these souls tire the heavenly farmer, and He withdraws. O how many of these souls there are!"

Volume 36

May 27, 1938

Jesus: "My desire for the soul to live in Our Will My anxieties, and My ardent sighs are so intense that I keep repeating to the ear of her heart: "Ah, content Me. Do not make Me sigh any more. If you live in My Fiat, the night will end for you, and you will enjoy the fullness of the day; or better still, every act done in It will be a new day, bringing new graces, new love and unexpected joys. All the virtues will celebrate you in their place of honor. Like many princesses they will pay court to

your Jesus and to your soul. Within yourself you will build a throne of brightest light where I will rule as a king. In total freedom I will rule over your whole being, even your breathing. I will court you with all My works, pains, steps, love, and strength—to be your defense, your help and your food. There is nothing I will not give you if you live in My Will.”