



Nine months after St. Thérèse discovered her Little Way, something happened that catapulted her far along its path. It was June 9, 1895 — Trinity Sunday. During Mass, the young nun received the inspiration and burning desire to offer herself to Merciful Love. Immediately afterward, she went to her sister Pauline (Mother Agnes), who was prioress at the time, and asked permission to make the Offering. Mother Agnes recalled the occasion during an interview: “When she asked me this, her face was all lit up, as if she were on fire with love. I let her do it.” Next, when asked if Thérèse had made the Offering just once and forgotten about it, Mother Agnes replied, “Oh, no, never; she constantly repeated it, and her whole life revolved around it. On her deathbed she said to me one day: ‘I often repeat my act of consecration.’”

What is this Offering to Merciful Love, this “consecration” to Divine Mercy around which Therese’s “whole life revolved”? That’s what we’re going to explore this week.

DAY 15

What It’s Not

Probably the best way to begin to understand the Offering to Merciful Love is to contrast it with what it’s not.

Recall that in the France of Therese’s day, the heresy of Jansenism had a deep influence on Catholic spirituality. Well, Therese’s own Lisieux convent certainly felt its effects. That’s largely because of a popular and terribly rigorist book on Carmelite spirituality called *The Treasure of Carmel*. Among other things, the book asserts that every Carmelite should offer herself as a victim soul to God’s justice, and several nuns from the Lisieux convent did just that. Alright, so what did that offering mean? Let me begin to answer by introducing you to Sr. Marie of Jesus, a Carmelite from Luçon, France.

Sister Marie died in the spring of 1895, and her obituary arrived at the Lisieux convent on June 8, where it was read aloud in the refectory, probably that same day. The next day, June 9, Therese received the inspiration to make her Offering to Merciful Love. Did Sr. Marie’s obituary have an influence on Therese? It seems that it did, and the reason should become clear as we proceed.

First, according to the obituary, Sr. Marie “very often offered herself as a victim to divine Justice.” (Therese would have duly noted those last words.) Second, it’s clear from the obituary that Sr. Marie had fallen under the influence of Jansenism, as we can tell from some of her anxious last words: “I don’t have enough merits, I must acquire more of them.” (Those words would have made an impression on the saint of the Little Way, who did not want to lay up merits for heaven but wanted to work for love alone.) Finally, the obituary also includes the following statement from Sr. Marie, which she uttered in the midst of her mortal agony: “I am bearing the harshness of divine Justice ... divine Justice! ... Divine Justice!”

So, what’s going on here? Well, basically, to offer oneself as a victim soul to God’s justice, as Sr. Marie did, is to make a sort of deal with the Lord, a deal that would go something like this: “Lord, please give to me all the punishment that’s due to sinners, and then give to sinners the blessings I would normally receive as a faithful religious.”

Perhaps surprisingly, the Lord would take people up on such an offer. Specifically, like Sr. Marie of Jesus, they would often come down with some illness that would cause terrible suffering and an agonizing death.

Thérèse had often heard of such victim souls to God's justice, and she was deeply impressed with their generosity. Now, of course, the "little bird" with the "eyes and heart of an eagle" also wanted to be generous with the Lord. Nevertheless, probably with Sr. Marie in mind, she wrote the following: "I was thinking about the souls who offer themselves as victims of God's Justice in order to turn away the punishments reserved to sinners, drawing them upon themselves. This offering seemed great and very generous to me, but I was far from feeling attracted to making it."

After reading these lines, one can almost hear the sighs of relief from all little souls. Thankfully, Therese was very much attracted to another kind of offering: the Offering to Merciful Love. We'll look at what that is tomorrow. For now, we can reflect on the refreshing perspective from which the saint of Lisieux approached the idea of offering herself as a spiritual victim: "How GOOD is the Lord, his MERCY endures forever! It seems to me that if all creatures had received the same graces I received, God would be feared by none but would be loved to the point of folly; and through love, not through fear, no one would ever consent to cause Him any pain. I understand, however, that all souls cannot be the same, that it is necessary there be different types in order to honor each of God's perfections in a particular way. To me He has granted His infinite Mercy, and through it I contemplate and adore the other divine perfections! All of these perfections appear to be resplendent with love; even His Justice (and perhaps this even more so than the others) seems to me clothed in love. What a 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?" Clearly, Therese's path is one of mercy and not justice. In fact, she even sees God's justice through the lens of mercy, a lens that transforms the "harshness of divine Justice," as Sr. Marie of Jesus had put it, into a justice that's "clothed in love." Moved by this merciful perspective, Therese comes up with a spiritual victimhood that's based on mercy not justice, on love and not fear, on tenderness and not severity. Indeed, her Offering is well suited for the little souls who long to attain the heights of holiness but who are too little to climb the rough stairway of perfection, too little to take the path of fear and harsh justice.

Thank God for St. Therese. Thank God that she discovered a way of spiritual victimhood that not only allows even little souls to be generous but also sets them on fire with love. We'll learn more about that tomorrow.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Fill me with Merciful Love so that, through it,

I may see all of God's perfections, including his justice, as clothed in love.

Volume 14

June 9, 1922

Jesus wants to rest in the soul. Everything in Him is merciful love.

As I was in my usual state, my always lovable Jesus would come very often; and sometimes He would lean His head upon mine, telling me: "My daughter, I need rest. The uncreated intelligence wants to rest in the created intelligence. But in order to find true rest, I should find in your intelligence all the glory and the contentment that all other intelligences should give Me. Therefore my Will wants to expand your capacity to be able to find this rest. No, I am not content if my Will does not place in you everything that others should give Me."

So, He seemed to breathe over my intelligence, and it remained as though chained by many threads of light, for as many created minds as came out of the hands of our Creator. And each thread of light said: "Glory, gratitude, honor... to my God, trice Holy." And Jesus said: "Ah! Yes, now I can rest. I find the requital of the intelligence of Creation; the created mind is fused with the uncreated mind."

Afterwards, He leaned His head upon my heart, and it seemed that He could not find complete rest; so He placed His mouth upon my heart, and breathed into it. At each breath my heart became larger. Then He added: "Daughter, I am determined to rest; therefore I want to breathe into your heart so much as to place in it all the love which all the rest of Creation should give Me. My rest cannot be perfect if I do not find the requital of the love that came out of Me. Therefore I want to find in this heart the love that all should give Me. My Volition will make this prodigy in you, and your heart will have a note for everyone, which says to Me: 'Love'." Then, He leaned His head upon my heart again, and rested. How beautiful it was to see Jesus resting! Then He would disappear and come back; and now He wanted to rest on my hands, now on my shoulder. It seemed that He wanted to see whether my whole person was fit to let Him rest.

Afterwards He told me: "My beloved, how much love I feel toward you. All the love that I should give to others, and that they refuse, I centralize in you. In you I hear the echo of my creative word: 'Let Us make man in Our image and likeness', and I see the fulfillment of it. Ah! Our Will alone will make man return to his first origin. Our Will will cast all the divine impressions into the human will, and overwhelming one will within the Other, It will carry him on Its wings into the arms of his Creator - not ugly, as sin rendered him, but pure and beautiful, and similar to his Creator. Therefore, I want you to receive all the impressions of my Will into yours, so that Heaven and earth may recognize nothing but Divine Will alone acting in you, by which they will feel as though overwhelmed; and all will receive the good of the divine operating in the creature. Therefore, be ready in everything, and be faithful to Me."

After this He came back again, but all afflicted; and He told me: "I feel sad when they think that I am severe, and that I make more use of Justice than of Mercy. They act with Me as if I were to strike them at each circumstance. Oh! how dishonored I feel by these. In fact, this leads them to remain at due distance from Me, and one who is distant cannot receive all the fusion of my love. And while they are the ones who do not love Me, they think that I am severe and almost a Being that strikes fear; while by just taking a look at my life, they will notice that I did only one act of Justice – when, in order to defend the house of my Father, I took the ropes and snapped them to the right and to the left, to drive out the profaners. Everything else, then, was all Mercy: Mercy my

conception, my birth, my words, my works, my steps, the Blood I shed, my pains - everything in Me was merciful love. Yet, they fear Me, while they should fear themselves more than Me.”