



After making her Offering to Merciful Love, St. Therese was filled with consolation. She describes the feeling: “Ah! Since the happy day, it seems to me that Love penetrates and surrounds me, that at each moment this Merciful Love renews me ... Oh! How sweet is the way of Love!”

In fact, the year she made her offering truly was her “year of mercy.” We can call it that not only because she offered herself to Merciful Love and experienced its powerful effects but also because she spent the whole year writing the first installment of her autobiography (called Manuscript “A”). That work, which she began in obedience to her superior, Mother Agnes, helped her to see more clearly than ever God’s tender mercies enveloping her whole life. In fact, it made her so filled with confidence in God’s love for her that she concluded the manuscript as follows: “How will this ‘story of a little white flower’ come to an end? ... I don’t know, but what I am certain about is that God’s mercy will accompany her always.”

We now know how Therese’s story came to an end. From Good Friday 1896 until her death on September 30, 1897, she was immersed in darkness. Nevertheless, her trust in God’s mercy during that time, and God’s faithfulness to her, became the confirmation of her Little Way. This week, we’ll explore the role that darkness plays in living it out.

DAY 22

The Darkness of Sin

One difficulty people often have with embracing the Little Way is that Therese wasn’t much of a sinner. For instance, they say, “How can I relate to a nun who died at the age of 24 and whose confessor solemnly declared that she never committed a mortal sin? Sure, she describes herself as full of weakness, imperfections, and faults, but those don’t seem to include deliberate venial sins and certainly not mortal sins. So, she doesn’t really know the darkness of sin. I can’t relate to her.”

There’s some truth to this objection. Although Therese certainly felt capable of committing grave sin, she believed that God’s mercy had preserved her from it. Also, one could easily conclude that her venial sins were not deliberate. For instance, let’s hear some of the sins of she who sees herself as “weakness itself.” They included impatience with a sister, a missed opportunity to make a sacrifice, aversion to a medicinal drink, an interior movement of curiosity toward a magazine.

Surely these aren't the kinds of "sins" that thrust most people into discouragement! The average Christian in our day struggles with attachments, addictions, deliberate venial sins, and even potentially grave sins. It's these kinds of sinners who often find themselves slipping into discouragement and even despair. It's these kinds of "ordinary" sinners who often have to fight the temptation to doubt God's tender love for them — and these are the fortunate ones! These are the ones who at least recognize their sins. But then there's the whole category of sinners who hardly see any sin in themselves. And because of this blindness to their own sins, such people, even more than others, hear about Therese and say, "I don't get her." Now, regarding this latter, more serious kind of darkness, the "blindness to one's sins," we'll cover it tomorrow. For today, though, let's look at those who feel they can't relate to Therese or her teaching because they actually struggle with deliberate venial sins, and maybe even grave sins.

Thankfully, Therese anticipated their difficulty. She did so at the end of her autobiography with words we already read on Day 10, words that are worth repeating:

"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."

"All the sins that can be committed." Think about that: That's a lot of sin. It includes my sins and your sins. But then, to make her point even clearer, Therese goes on, "It is not because God, in His anticipating Mercy, has preserved my soul from mortal sin that I go to Him with confidence and love." And with that, her journal ends. The sickness that would take the young nun's life left her too weak to even write. But those last words are extremely telling. Therese is saying to us, "Yes! God kept me from committing mortal sin, but that's not why I feel such confidence in going to him. Even if I were the biggest sinner in the world, I would still go to him with a contrite heart and receive his mercy! And so should you."

Therese so strongly wanted to make this point about God's great mercy that, even after she'd lost the strength to write, she basically pleaded with Mother Agnes to conclude the thought for her. In fact, several times, she urged her superior with words such as these:

"One could think that it is because I haven't sinned that I have such great confidence in God. Really tell them, Mother, that if I had committed all possible crimes, I would always have the same confidence. I feel that this whole multitude

of offenses would be like a drop of water thrown into a fiery furnace. You will then tell the story about the converted sinner who died of love.”

In response to Therese’s requests, here’s what Mother Agnes later added to the manuscript, an addition that includes the “story about the converted sinner who died of love”:

“No, there is no one who could frighten me, for I know too well what to believe concerning His Mercy and His Love. I know that this whole multitude of sins would be lost in the twinkling of an eye like a drop of water cast into a burning furnace. In the lives of the desert fathers, it is told how one of them converted a public sinner whose evil deeds were the scandal of the whole country. by grace, the sinful woman followed the Saint into the desert to perform a rigorous penance. the first night of the journey, before even reaching the place of her retreat, the vehemence of her love and sorrow broke the ties binding her to earth, and at the same moment the holy man saw her soul carried by angels to God’s bosom. This is a striking illustration of what I want to say, but the reality itself is beyond the power of words to express.”

We’ll now let these last words of Therese’s autobiography be the last words of this day’s meditation. May they show us that in the light of God’s Merciful Love, the darkness of sin (repented sin) is not so dark after all.

Today’s Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, fire of mercy.

Let the light of God’s Merciful Love shine into the darkness of my sin.

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The hideousness of man in the state of sin; the beauty of man in the state of grace. I was praying and adoring the wounds of my Crucified Jesus, and I thought to myself: “How ugly sin is for reducing my Highest Good to such a heart-breaking state!” And my ever beloved Jesus, leaning His Most Holy Head upon my shoulder and sighing, said to me: “My daughter, sin is not just ugly, but horrible. It is man’s black mark! As he sins, he undergoes a brutal transformation: All the beauty I gave him is covered with an ugliness horrible to behold—and it is not only the senses which sin, but the whole of man that runs into this peril. So, sin is his thought, his heartbeat, his breath, his movement, and his step. His will has dragged man to a single point, and from his whole being he puts forth a thick

darkness that blinds him, and a noxious air that poisons him. Everything is blackness around him—everything is deadly. And whoever approaches him puts himself in a state of danger. Horrible and frightening—such is man in the state of sin.”

This left me terrified, and Jesus continued: “If man is horrible in the state of guilt, he is also beautiful in the state of grace while doing good. The Good—be it even the smallest—is man’s bright point. As he does good he undergoes a celestial, angelic and divine transformation. His goodwill draws his whole being to a single point; that is why his thought, his word, his heartbeat, his motion, and his step are good—and everything is light, within him and outside of him. The atmosphere around him is calm and invigorating; and whoever approaches him finds security. How beautiful, gracious, attractive, lovable, and striking is the soul in grace, in doing good; so much so that she even keeps Me enamored of her! Each good thing that she does forms one more shade of beauty--a greater degree of likeness to her Creator, which distinguishes her as His child. It is a Divine Power that she sets in motion. All the good things that she does are messengers between Heaven and earth: They are the couriers, the electric wires, which maintain communication with God.”

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The Creation: an act of profound adoration on the part of the Divine Trinity. I abandoned myself completely in the Divine Fiat; Its light overwhelmed my littleness and carried me away up there, even into the bosom of the Eternal One, where nothing but Light, Sanctity, and Beauty could be seen. And this moved me to such profound adoration, that I felt my little self being changed into one single act of adoration for that God who loved me and loves me so much. Then, while my mind was losing itself in the light of the Divine Will, my beloved Jesus stirred within me and said to me: “My daughter, the Sanctity of Our Divine Being—the one Power of Our Will with which We are filled (in such a way that Our Will acts in Us although We are distinct as Persons), which acts in Us, reigns, and rules—is always one. Our equal, reciprocal, and unceasing love produces in Us the most profound adoration among the Divine Persons, so that everything that comes forth from Us is simply a series of acts of profound adoration on the part of Our whole Divine Being.

That is why, when Our Divine Fiat wanted to bring the whole Creation forth into play with Its creating, acting, and animating Power, as Our Fiat was being pronounced, We kept bringing forth acts of profound adoration from within Ourselves. Indeed, the heavens are nothing but an act of profound adoration of the immensity of Our Divine Being. And that is why one can see the heavens everywhere, by night and by day. From Our womb, the immensity of Our Being brought forth the immensity of Our adoration, and stretched out the starry heavens over the universe, to call all those who would inhabit the earth in Our one Will, so as to unify them within the immensity of Our adoration, so that, by the power of Our Fiat, man was to stretch himself out within the immensity of his Creator, to form a heaven of profound adoration for the One who had created him. The sun is an act of adoration of Our endless light, and Its adoration is so ardent and so great that it is not content with letting itself be seen on high, under the vault of the heavens, but from the center of its sphere it lets its rays fall down to the level of the earth. Molding and touching everything with its hands of light, it fills everything and everyone with its adoration of light, and it calls plants, flowers, trees, birds and men to produce one single act of adoration in the Will of the One who created them. The sea, the air, the wind and all created things, are nothing but acts of profound adoration of Our Divine Being. And some from afar, some from nearby, call the soul into the unity of Our Fiat, to repeat the profound acts of Our adoration. And, as she makes what is Ours her own, she can give Us the sun, the wind, the sea, the flowery earth, as profound adorations which Our one Will knows how to, make—and can make—in souls. What can Our Fiat not do? With Its unique strength It can do anything, It unites everything, It keeps everything in act, and It joins Heaven and earth, Creator and creature, making them one. Having said this, He withdrew into the depths of His light, and He kept silent; and I remained there, continuing my round in Creation, to trace that profound adoration of My Creator in all created things. O how one could feel the fragrance of the divine adoration in each created thing. One could touch their adorable breath with one's own hand; one could feel in the wind the piercing, ruling adoration of Our Creator, which covers the whole earth, now with soft gusts, now with mighty waves, now with caressing breaths, filling us so much and calling us to join the wind in its adoration of its Creator. Who can describe the strength of the wind? In a few minutes, it goes around the entire world, and now with might, now with moans, now with a feeble voice, and now screaming, it fills us and calls us to join

ourselves to that divine adoration which it gives to its Creator. Then, as I continued my round, I could see the sea. In those crystal-clear waters, in that continuous murmuring, and in its towering waves, Jesus was saying that that sea was nothing but an act of deep adoration of the divine purity, adoration of Their love which murmurs continuously, and, in the waves, adoration of the divine power which moves everything and everyone like bits of straw. O if the Divine Fiat were reigning in souls, It would let everyone read, in each created thing, the distinct adoration of Our Creator that each thing holds. And, as It would unite us with all Creation, one would be our adoration, love, and glory for the Supreme Being. O Divine Will, come to reign, and make the Will of all things one....

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I continued to feel oppressed because of Jesus' absence, and I was thinking to myself: "How much His love for me has died down, compared to the love that He had for me before. It seems to me that Jesus has only left me with the shadows of His Love." But while I was thinking this, He stirred within me, and said to me: "My daughter, each act done in My Divine Will doubles My Love for you. Indeed, after you have been in My Will for so many years, I can say that My Love has grown so much, that I have to expand your capacity to let you receive My growing Love—a Love that arises in Me in each act that you do in My Divine Will. This is why My Love is more intense, and has increased a hundredfold compared to what it was before. So, you can be sure that My Love will never be lacking to you—never.