



# Between Friends

A publication for the Friends of the Society of

the Little Flower, Darien, Illinois and Canada

[www.littleflower.org](http://www.littleflower.org)

*Spring 2011*



## Precious Gifts from Lisieux

New Thérèse Memorabilia in the U.S. National Shrine

# Precious Gifts



>> **Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm.**, is director of the Society of the Little Flower.

**D**ear Friends of the Little Flower,

It is always good to be in your hands – among and between friends.

In moments of prayer and reflection we all experience how precious life is and how precious are the gifts that enrich our lives. It makes us grateful to God. On the feast of the Epiphany, I was reflecting on the gifts I have received throughout my life.

In this edition of *Between Friends*, we focus on *Precious Gifts* – which include our heavenly friend and her spirituality, two special people here at the U.S. Shrine and Society, some new sacred mementoes of St. Thérèse from the Lisieux Carmel, tributes from WWI soldiers of how Thérèse touched them, and the gift of miracles for our many donors.

Thank you for the precious gift you are. Your faith, devotion, and generosity are gifts to God, St. Thérèse, the Carmelites, and the thousands of people we serve. 🌹

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Spring, 2011

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# What fills your heart these days?



>> **Mary Therese Lambert** is editor of *Between Friends*.

**A**s Fr. Bob and I were discussing this issue of *Between Friends*, we both found our hearts filled with gratitude. Our discussion took place soon after the New Year dawned, and we were still basking a bit in the glow and grace of the Christmas celebrations.

We recalled some tangible gifts and material blessings received during the season, but our attention turned to what we called life's "precious gifts," blessings that are intangible, unforgettable, and, in so many cases, unearned.

I find myself overwhelmed before God with gratitude in light of such grace and blessings. The awareness of God's goodness to me carries me through the dark and down times that never fail to reappear in life.

Precious gifts help shape and define our lives. St. Thérèse understood "precious gifts" and lived her short earthly life in constant awe and gratitude. Although she lost her mother at a very young age – and that loss pained her all her days she recognized her mother as a precious gift from God.

Thérèse also recognized the "precious gifts" of spiritual life. The gifts of faith, confidence, hope, joy and love. Her faith was a gift that abided in her life and defined her life. But St. Thérèse never viewed "faith" as something she produced within herself. Rather St. Thérèse knew that faith too was a gift from God, freely given when the soul expands to receive it.

Family is a precious gift, even though family often appears more as a challenge or even a cross in our lives. But especially when I look into the eyes of my grand son, I see shining back upon me the love, joy, and wonder that are God's most precious gifts in my life.

Sometimes all we need is to open our eyes in a new



way to see all God's precious gifts around us. I hope this issue of *Between Friends* helps you open your eyes a bit wider to the blessing of God in your own life. And grateful for those

blessings, you respond with generosity and goodness to those less fortunate than yourself. That would be the Little Way of St. Thérèse, one of God's Precious Gifts to you and to me. 🌹

>> For your comments or questions, please write to Mary T. Lambert:  
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**Precious Gifts from Lisieux**  
Our Sacraments are built on this "Word become flesh" – as well as sacramentals and relics.

# 8



**Precious Gifts: Trust, an Angel, and the Energizer Bunny**

>> Remembering that all life is a gift. And yet so easy to take for granted, like breathing breath after breath.

– Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm.

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# St. Joseph

**O**ur Catholic tradition places so much emphasis on Mary, the Mother of God, as the symbol of our openness to God – allowing God to become enfleshed in humanity. But God also chose another person to be a guiding star in the life of Jesus, God’s Son. He is Joseph, the Carpenter/ Stone Mason of Nazareth in the Galilee. Even though our tradition does not celebrate him as the biological father of Jesus, our Gospels trace Jesus’ origin within the House of David through Joseph.

Joseph is incredibly important in the human development of Jesus. It is unfortunate that Joseph sort of gets written out of the Gospel stories because we place such an emphasis on the virginity of Mary. Joseph is most important, especially in the religious tradition that speaks of God primarily in the image of Father or “Abba.”

Sometimes pictures of Joseph make him look too meek and mild – holding a lily. Joseph had the unique combination of gentle strength. Our tradition proclaims Joseph as a strong, virile man, who took his responsibility as a man, husband, and father very seriously. Joseph is an important and powerful part



of the story of Jesus, and our story. A boy learns so much from his father, especially how to be a man – and a man of faith! A boy learns those things a father sets out to teach – like skills, carpentry, or working with his hands.

There are also many things that a boy learns which the dad did *not* deliberately set out to teach him. A boy watches his father’s moves very carefully and learns from how he acts, talks, and carries himself. He watches how his father talks to his mother, how he deals with women, with the neighbors, and in Joseph’s case, how he dealt with his customers. He learns respect, integrity, honesty, kindness, patience, loving-kindness, humility, and purity of heart just from watching dad.

We believe that Mary taught Jesus to trust the inner instincts, power, and voice, with listening sensitivity, so that he would know his identity and inner authority. But from Joseph, Jesus learns how to interact with and treat other people. In a Jewish household, the boy learns from his father reverence, which is awe of the Lord and wonder before the mystery. How amazingly ironic in this unique case that the boy should learn about his heavenly father from his earthly father! Jesus experienced “Abba” as His Father in the human fatherhood of Joseph, his “abba.” Surely Jesus learned Jewish reverence and awe of God from

praying with and watching Joseph all through the day.

What a unique man God chose to have such influence over his son, Jesus. In all human history, there was none like Mary, we all know. But do we consider the unique role of Joseph? Surely there was none like him in all the earth.

The bond between a boy and his father is a very special one. After Mary, Joseph must certainly have been the closest person to Jesus in his youth. When Jesus taught us to call God “Abba” with all the tenderness and intimacy of that word and image, which is more truly translated “Daddy,” we gain an insight into Joseph.

Our Church sees Joseph as Patron of the whole Church Family, as he was of the Holy Family – and patron/protector of our homes. He is the patron and model of workers, teaching us the dignity of human labor. He teaches us trust, even when we feel betrayed, as he did when he learned his espoused

Mary was pregnant. He is protector from danger as he took Jesus and Mary to Egypt to save their lives. He teaches us quiet humility and steady fidelity. In a world screaming of being victimized and trying to blame others for every hurt and frustration, Joseph is the model of trust and accepting what is a gift.

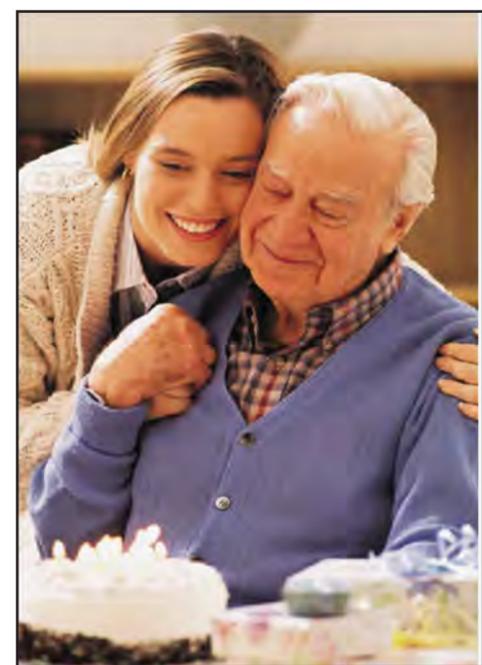
Just as Joseph taught Jesus to accept what is and not to be violent in treating others and getting what we want, the witness of Joseph’s life is an inspiration. I suspect that Joseph did not mind being written out of the Gospel story because he knew it was about Jesus, and God! In an age of entitlement, when we think we are the whole story, Joseph’s example is so necessary. Just as our beloved St. Thérèse lived a hidden life and learned “It’s not about you!” in her Christmas conversion experience, Joseph teaches us that same lesson of humility and truth. 🌹

– Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm.

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*"What matters in life, is not great deeds, but great love."*  
 Saint Therese of Lisieux

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# Revisiting the miracle



**T**here are miracles. And then there are *miracles*.

Our everyday lives are filled with God's gentle touch, and little miracles surround us: a surprise call from a childhood friend, an inexplicable return to good health, or the longed-for healing of a broken relationship.

But every once in a while God overwhelms us with His presence, letting us know that He is always at our side – especially when the chips are down.

Here's one of those stories.

Yvette turned 93 in September, 2004. Through life's joys and trials, her favorite saint, St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, was ever a source of consolation. On September 30, just a couple weeks after her birthday, she was rushed to the hospital in serious condition. It just happened to be the anniversary of the death of St. Thérèse.

The doctors gave Yvette 48 hours to live. Surgery was an option, but, given her age and medical condition, she had only a five-percent chance of surviving. Surrounded by her three loving children, she decided to go ahead with the surgery. As Yvette was wheeled into the operating room, her kids said their goodbyes.

She made it through the surgery that night. Exhausted, each of the children gave their mom a kiss and went home to get some sleep. One of the three, Jean, was so tired he just parked his car in the driveway.

Waking up early the next morning, he jumped into the car, anxious to get back to the hospital. But it was a cool New England morning and Jean had to run the defroster first. As the windshield cleared, he saw something sparkling on the hood of his car. Curiosity got the best of him and he got out of the car to see what was shining so brightly.

That's when he found it.

On his car was a small medal, in the shape of a heart, fashioned with a rose underneath, and a two-word inscription, "Special Mother." Jean was speechless; other than his brother and sister, no one knew of his mom's illness. Overcome with emotion, he kept staring at the medal, and he couldn't take his eyes off the rose.

It was then that he recalled the first sentence of the novena to St. Thérèse: "O Little Thérèse of the Child Jesus, please pick for me a rose from the heavenly gardens and send it to me as a message of love."

In an instant, Jean's tears gave way to a spirit of confidence that all would be well. His mother's saintly companion had made her presence known on, of all days, her feast day, Oc-

tober 1. And as it turned out for Yvette, she indeed did recover from this life-threatening illness.

She beat the odds. Or was it odds that she beat? Jean and Yvette knew with complete conviction that her survival was intimately connected to the intervention of the Little Flower.

This remarkable saint is always there for her friends, whether they are life-long or new. She is loving and generous to all who turn to her. Yvette's family will never forget. In Jean's own words: "I will cherish this confirmation till the day I die."

When Jean learned of the emergency work that needs to be done to save St. Thérèse's convent in France from ruin, he and his family made a generous donation as a way of saying thanks to the saint who was always there for them.

He was astounded to learn, as many are, that St. Thérèse now needs our help. Few know of the deteriorating condition of the old monastery in Lisieux, behind the cloister walls.

Bricks and mortar are crumbling due to dampness. Tiles are buckling in the cloister walk. Rain seeps into Thérèse's cell, where by oil lamp she wrote of her soul's story. Mold, mildew, and moisture are destroying the walls and ceiling where she taught her novices. Her life . . . her legacy . . . her "Little Way" . . . are intimately connected to this holy place.

There are many ways you can support this campaign. The needs are significant, and we're praying that there might be a person or two who could make a significant gift. But large or small, every gift matters, both to us and to St. Thérèse.

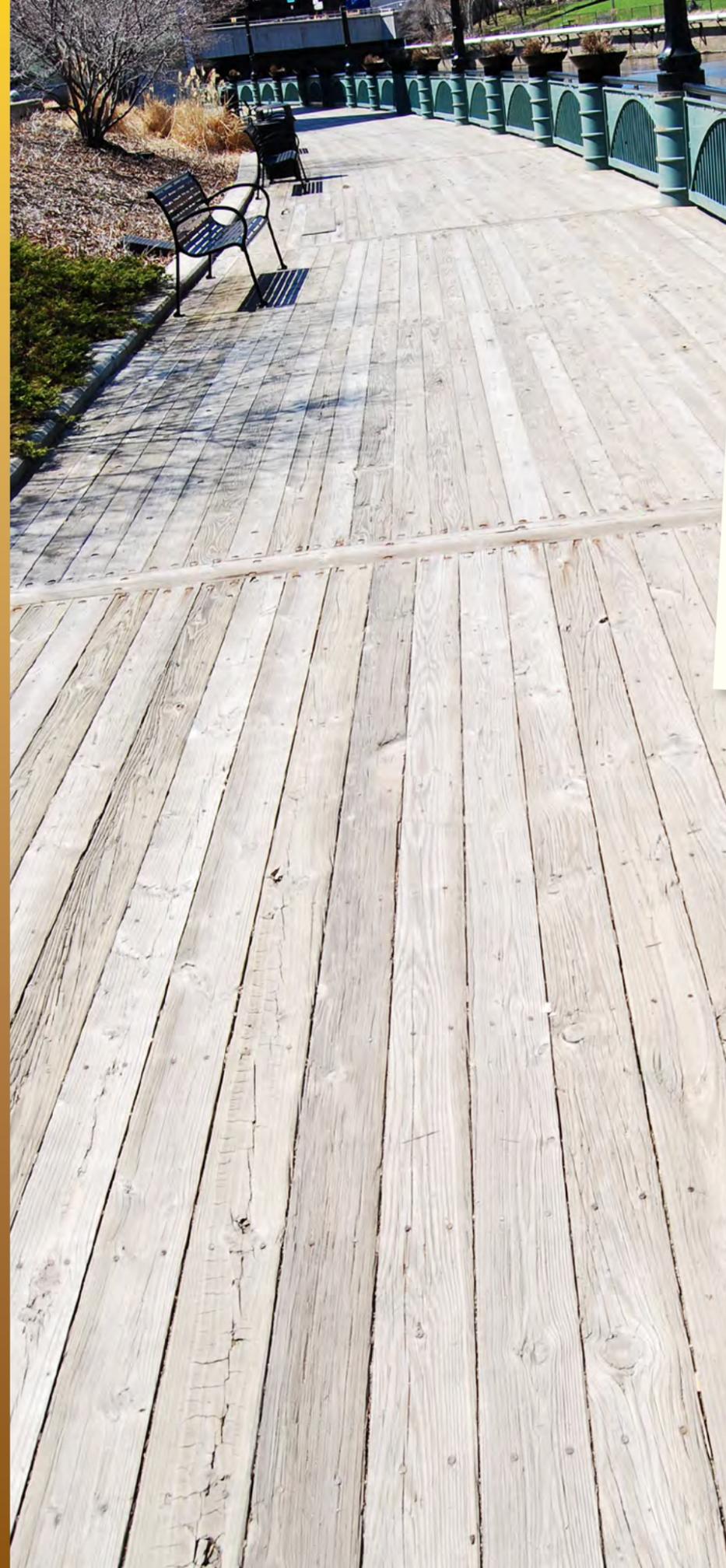
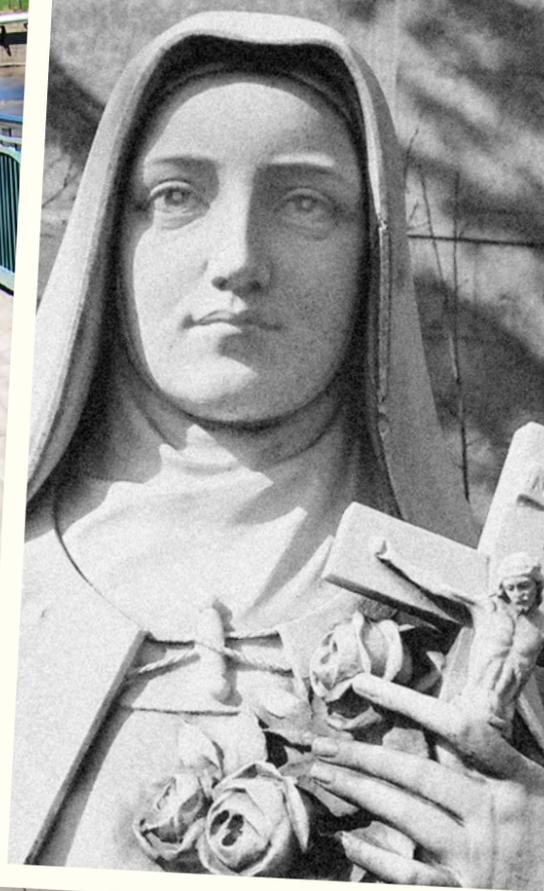
If you would like to join with Jean and the others who are banding together for this project, just use the envelope enclosed with this issue and send your gift today. Be assured your gift will be put to good use immediately to help with this important cause.

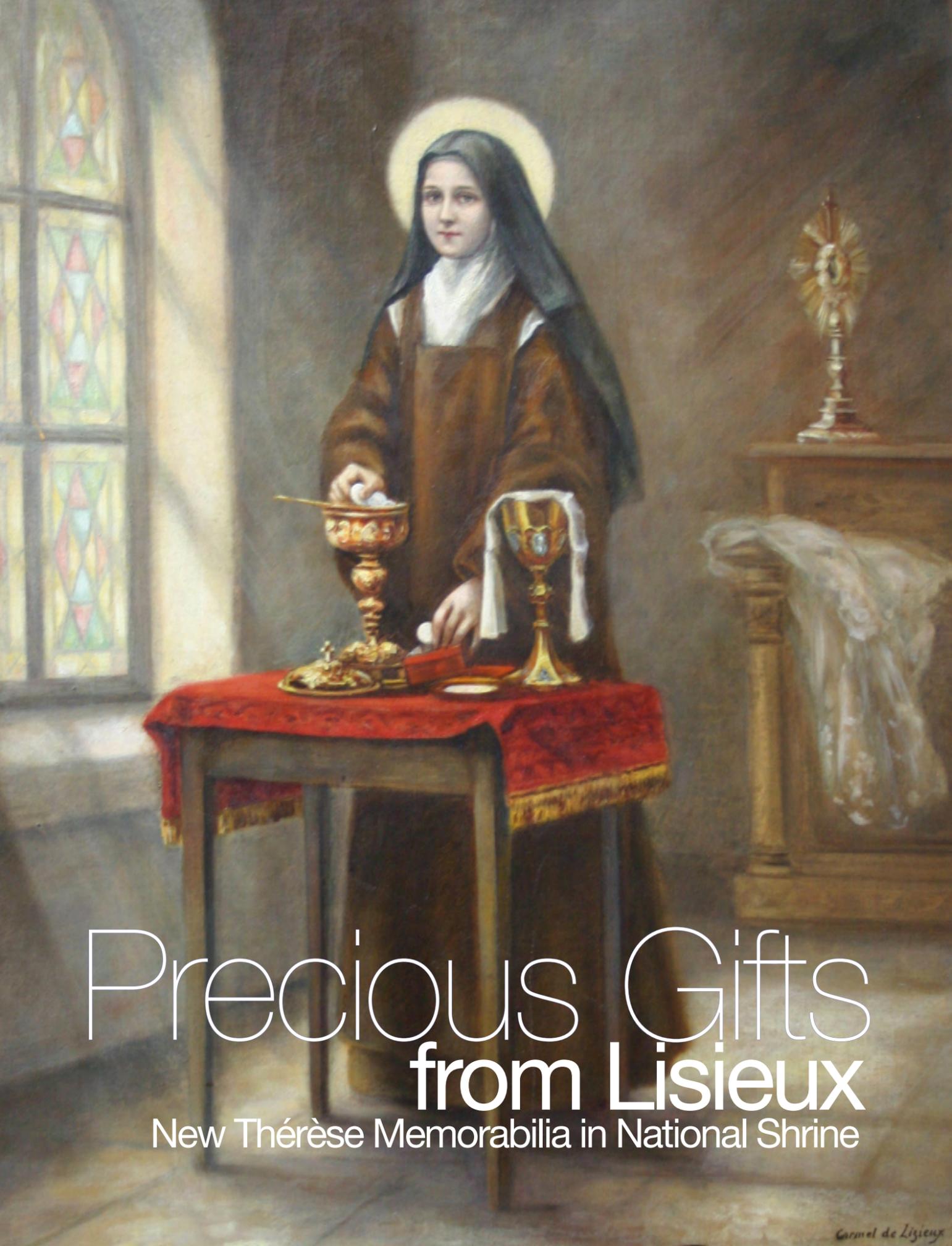
There are other options as well. You might consider including the Society of the Little Flower in your will or making it a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement account. Even the gift portion of charitable annuities, which pay you income for life, can be designated for this purpose. To learn more about these and other options, call 1-888-996-1212 to request your free copy of our booklet, *Planning Your Bequest*.

I look forward to hearing from you and I pray that our dear Little Flower continues to watch over you. 🌹

– Dan Pritchard is the director of planned and major gifts for the Society of the Little Flower. With almost 20 years of experience, he can help guide you as you consider how to help the mission of St. Thérèse – and perhaps yourself as well! Whether your gift is outright, or through a charitable gift annuity, a gift of stock or life insurance, or even through your will, Dan can assist you in making a sound decision.

>> If you would like to talk further about helping out, or if you would just like to relate your own story and how you came to know St. Thérèse, pick up the phone some time and call me. The call is on me: **1-888-996-1212**.





# Precious Gifts from Lisieux

New Thérèse Memorabilia in National Shrine

**E**ver since the “Word became Flesh,” Christians celebrate an incarnational God – a tangible, touchable God who touches us as well as human ways we can “touch” the Holy. Our Sacraments are built on this “Word become flesh” – as well as sacramentals and relics. They are human ways we commune with the Divine and the people and things of heaven. We like to see, hear, smell; and touch concrete and real things because they speak of the Beyond – the Holy! Our faith stresses how God comes to us in the earthly reality of our lives.

Many people have had the privilege of touching or holding relics of St. Thérèse – pieces of her body, her clothing, her sand dial, her lantern, and her prayer book. We feel like we are touching her! I remember holding the original map she drew of North America at age 12 and feeling the impressions of her pencil on the back side of the map – I really was in touch with young Thérèse and her youthful energy and worldwide curiosity. That map, on display at her National Shrine in Darien, has since been resealed permanently because of paper deterioration.

The Carmelite Nuns of Lisieux have shared with the Carmelites in Darien many of the relics and memorabilia of St. Thérèse we display at the shrine. Her sisters want people to be able to touch her without having to go to Lisieux. Because of their generosity, we have the largest collection of relics and

personal artifacts of the Little Flower outside of Lisieux at the National Shrine of St. Thérèse in Darien, IL. The Carmelites are proud to make her Relics available to be touched and experienced in this beautiful shrine and museum.

The Carmelites of our province, through the Society of the Little Flower, are committed to helping the nuns of Lisieux in the needed renovation and renewal of the Lisieux Carmel after years of deterioration. We are helping to preserve St. Thérèse’s physical legacy. In gratitude, the Carmelite Lisieux nuns want to deepen our longstanding relationship, which began in 1923.

The nuns have agreed to periodically lend us precious memorabilia of Thérèse from their rich museum and archives. I was so touched when I saw personal items of the Little Flower never before viewed.

I was able to carry back from the recent visit with the nuns in Lisieux the first of these many gifts. We all know that among her many jobs in the convent, Thérèse was the sacristan; she prepared everything

for the convent Mass. Many of us have seen the picture of her at the sacristy table, preparing the chalice, paten and ciborium. It is one of the 47 pictures taken of her during her life by Celine, her sister.

With the gracious permission of Sr. France-Marie, Prioress of the Carmel of Lisieux, we now have on display the actual Chalice, Ciborium and Paten she was preparing each day, along with the velvet tablecloth with the gold fringe she used each day. Some people may recall that she mentions this in her “Story of a Soul” autobiography, especially when she looked into the paten to see what she looked like (they had no mirrors in the convent) and then realized how proud she was being and put it down. People can today see, in the Darien, IL, National Shrine, these precious religious articles which she touched and used daily – and even look into the paten to see the vague image.

These articles have never left the Carmel of Lisieux since St. Thérèse’s time.

The new loaned gift on display is the original oil painting



by Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm.



# Precious Gifts: Trust, an Angel, and the Energizer Bunny

**A**ll life is a gift, and yet so easy to take for granted, like breathing breath after breath. Sometimes, it is only when someone or something is missing do we really appreciate how precious they are and were!

St. Thérèse is such a precious gift in so many of our lives. As many of you know, as a young Carmelite in formation I was not impressed with St. Thérèse and her seemingly too simple and overly sweet spirituality. So over the years, when speaking on Carmelite spirituality, I tended to ignore her and focus more on Carmelite Sts. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.

But the Little Flower was haunting my life. She was on the stained-glass window in the church where I grew up, right across from the window of St. Lucia, my Mom's name. My grandmother had a picture of St. Thérèse in their living room. When I was asked to become director of the Society of the Little Flower in 1991, I resisted with the argument that "I really did not like her!" My provincial looked at me and said: "Well, learn to!"

This challenge was to open me to a precious gift. In order to be her spokesperson, I had to revisit her spirituality and reread her "Story of a Soul" – and it was so different listening from the perspective of a 50 year old man than a 19 year old adolescent. I was amazed at her insight and wisdom which my childish first reading had missed, among the "heavenly florist of roses" approach I had seen.

I was always impressed and awed by the thousands of letters we received from friends of donors about how she was touching their lives and hearts. I wanted to have that relationship which seemed so precious and powerful to them. As time went on and I faced health issues, Thérèse drew closer. Aware that she struggled with both health and issues of darkness and disappointment, I turned to her when facing painful spinal issues. Fearful that I would not walk again, and frustrated during a long slow, recovery I asked for her help. "How did you get through your darkness?" I kept asking her as I re-read her writings again. All she would ever whisper was "Trust God!" While that angered impatient me, because I figured that it was easy for her to say from her favored vantage point in heaven, I also listened as she continued to whisper "Trust God!"

That whisper became the only hope that sustained me amid dark times of despair and powerlessness when I wanted to give up. What a precious gift her confidence and trust in God was to me! It was transforming to a man who wanted to take charge and make everything right, right now! St. Thérèse taught me that things happen on God's terms and in God's time.

Another area that the Little Flower has been a surprising and delightful gift to me was in dealing with the feminine. I am an oldest son of an Italian immigrant family. My Dad taught me to be a man, independent, to take care of myself, and provide for others. So I grew up thinking being a man was proving myself



of that picture, done by Sr. Marie du St-Espirit from the Lisieux Carmel under the direction of Celine, Thérèse's sister who became Sr. Genevieve.

As I hand-carried them from Lisieux to Darien, I felt the presence of these precious religious memorabilia– and knew Thérèse was with me. In fact, I believe she helped get me through U.S. Customs rather easily.

For security reasons, these items are under lock and key – and yet amid the large collections of relics and personal items of the Little Flower, it is no surprise that people come to spend time looking, praying, communing, through these sacramentals and holy items, with our heavenly friend who has touched so many of us.

First displayed in public on her recent Feast Day, October 1st, we will have this precious gift until October, 2011. I hope many people are able to come and visit – and be with her in this very real, tangible way. 🌹

cover story

– being strong – protecting my heart from hurt. This was reinforced during my Carmelite seminary formation years, in an all-male environment where competition and power were rampant. I lived with men, good religious men – and I worked in two all boys high schools with predominantly male faculties. Macho independence thrives in those environments, and enhanced by a commitment to celibacy that no one could claim my heart.

One of the great shocks of my life was when I came to the Society of the Little Flower, and almost all the employees were women. What a switch – delightful but confusing!

With Thérèse as my boss and friend, somehow I needed a change of heart. As I listened to her in prayer and spiritual reading, she started gently teaching me to get more in touch with my heart, and out of my head, especially in dealing with God and other people. Her spirituality challenged me to experience God as personal, and not just as a theological idea. She re-taught me to pray in listening silence and not to be afraid of love and relationship.

This young girl, and eternally young and highly feminine saint, challenged me to look at the feminine – in myself, in others, and in God. I think I had a fear of the feminine. She embraced me in love and helped me to relax, learn from, and enjoy the feminine in women I worked with and knew as friends, that feminine side of myself (aren't we all created male and female in the divine image?) that is gentle, can integrate, relate, and connect – that can be poetic and sensitive – that softer side of me that I'd become suspicious of and uncomfortable with. She continues to teach me to see the feminine face of God – that smiling mercy and all-embracing, unconditional love that I did not have to earn, but simply enjoy. I began to learn that "everything is grace" meant that I, like everyone else, am living in the womb of God – or as St. Paul said it: "God, in Whom we live and move and have our being!"

The precious gift of St. Thérèse is trust – trust in God, trust the Presence within, trust others with innocent aban-

don. It has made a tremendous difference in my life and spirituality as I try to commune with and respond "to the God who comes to us disguised as our life!" as Paula D'Arcy states it.

### Precious Gifts – our Angel, Elaine

Our lives are filled with precious angels – good people who are like the sun – they spread warmth and brighten life by radiating a quiet respect, attentive kindness, and loving sensitivity. They touch our souls, and brighten even the darkest of days.

Such was our Elaine, a wife, mother of three, grandmother, sister, and daughter, Elaine was the guardian angel of the Society of the Little Flower. For 35 years, she faithfully worked at the Society in every department, especially in data processing and donor relations the last 20 years. She was the friendly voice who called thousands of donors each year to thank them for their faith, devotion, and generosity, and answer their questions and concerns.

As a conscientious worker, she set the tone in the office of giving your best every moment and in every way. She lived the "Little Way" of the Little Flower who was her friend and patron all her life. Elaine was interested in every communication we receive by letter or phone call, as well as what was going on in the lives of fellow workers. Elaine was not flamboyant but a steady, quiet presence that spoke of presence and fidelity. When you were in her presence, she would make you feel special and like you were the only person in the world.

She was sensitive to the needs of donors and employees, and she always kept me informed of what was going on. I trusted her judgment about people and situations.

She had a deep wisdom, born of compassion and life experience. Her life was not always easy, but she lived it with grace.

A caretaker by nature, Elaine could be sensitive and caring, without being meddling. She radiated love and respect, and therefore was life-giving.

In September 2010, Elaine was called home to God and was warmly welcomed by St. Thérèse, after a struggle with cancer. She is sorely missed, not just for the work she did so well, but for the "tone" and "feel" of the office which she enriched and empowered.

Elaine Hooker was a precious gift – a true guardian angel. There is a hole in the office dynamics and relationships because she was the glue that held her family and our Society family together. Others will step up because we have wonderful people



working here, but the unique combination of precious gifts that Elaine was is hard to duplicate.

In October, her family and the Society celebrated her life and memorialized her memory by planting a flowering tree outside the window by her desk. It will continue to remind us all of the precious gift that was Elaine Hooker, who helped us all to blossom as people and peers working together.

"Elaine Hooker was not a comet who flashed occasionally in the night. Instead, she was like the sun that dawned gently every day and brightened every moment – almost unnoticed in its faithful, ennobling and precious presence until the light is gone. Isn't that what St. Thérèse was all about!"

### Precious Gifts: Father Energizer Bunny

Some people have an energy that is contagious. Enthusiasm means the "energy of God!" That was our Father John, Carmelite Priest. After years in ministry in three Carmelite high schools and vocation ministry, Father John came to the Shrine in 2008. The Carmelites had asked him to consider becoming Director of the Shrine. Father John explained that he was willing but did not feel totally comfortable with St. Thérèse, nor well versed in her spirituality.

So he joined me on the pilgrimage to France in the footsteps of the Little Flower. He was engaged with every detail of the experience and especially enamored of places graced by St. Thérèse's life. He took pictures, asked questions, spent quiet time listening to these holy places. He returned enthused and began his ministry at the Shrine. His enthusiasm was contagious and attracted people. He put up pictures of Lisieux and Alençon which he had taken, including pictures of the Martin family with Tom the dog.

More and more pilgrims came because Father John was so welcoming. His insights into Thérèse, her life and spirituality, attracted more pilgrimage groups. "His passion and love of both the Little Flower and her friends was such gifts," commented one shrine visitor. "He made her come alive!"

In an earlier edition of *Between Friends* we told you about the bells at the National Shrine not working for years. The original mechanism had worn out. Being an energizer bunny who was not easily inhibited, this did not stop Father John. During Lent of 2010, he challenged the pilgrims who came to the Shrine and especially the crowded 11:30 daily Eucharist, to sacrifice and contribute enough to get the \$5,600 that would be needed for a whole new bell system. People responded to his enthusiasm and trust. On the Wednesday after Easter, the fundraising exceeded its goal – and by mid-summer the bells were ringing – are still ringing several times a day. People who regularly attend the Shrine Mass say "Father John's bells" when they chime at Noon.

Father John had so many plans to expand the Shrine programs to attract more people to the spirituality of

“Her spirituality challenged me to experience God as personal, and not just as a theological idea. She re-taught me to pray in listening silence and not to be afraid of love and relationship.”

St. Thérèse. Everyone could taste his enthusiasm and hope. But God had other plans. On August 1st, Father John left with other Carmelite classmates to celebrate their 40th anniversary of ordination. The next day he suffered a seizure, and within days, a massive brain tumor was found. Brain

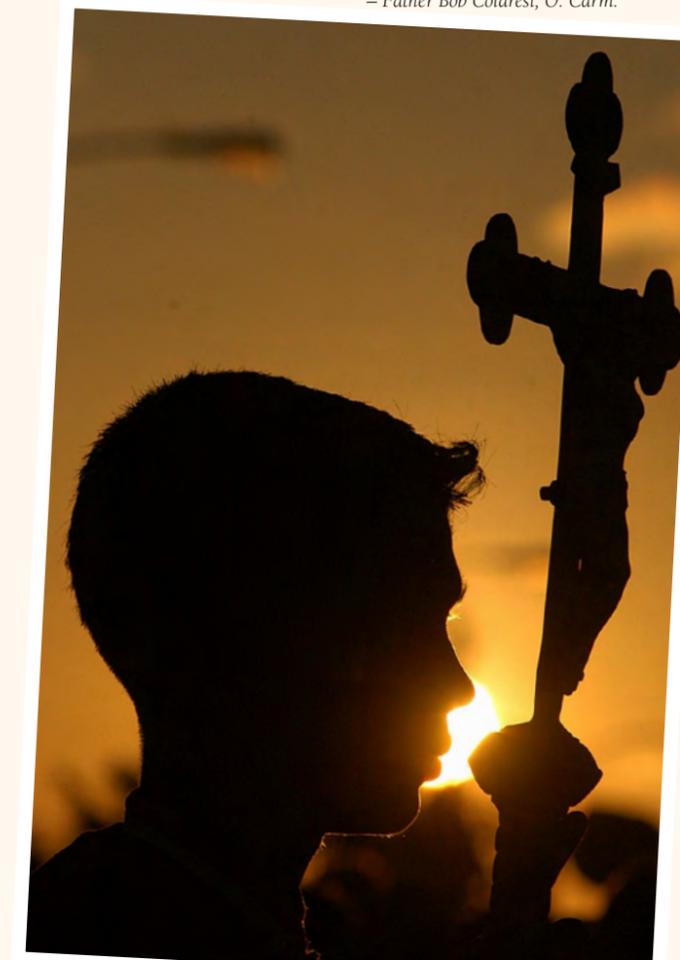
surgery followed quickly but Father John never recovered. On Nov. 14, 2010, the feast of all Carmelite saints, he joined the communion of saints. Funeral services at the National Shrine in Darien as well as in California, his ancestral home, were packed with people whose lives he had touched, especially young people he had taught. He was a man who made a difference in people's lives.

"Our hearts go out to Mary, Father John's mother, who like Mary, the Mother of Jesus, lost her son before his time," said Father John Welch, Carmelite Provincial.

"Something is missing at the Shrine these days," is a sentiment spoken often. It is John's energy and enthusiasm. But we know that St. Thérèse welcomed Father John home after his long struggle. Like her, John lived the "Little Way" – doing ordinary things with extraordinary love.

The Shrine bells ring several times again, and our hearts are lifted to God and our memory is of Father John. They toll of a precious gift. 🌹

– Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm.





# Thank you, Thérèse!

**R**ecently, I strolled through The Art Institute of Chicago Museum, paying particular attention to the gardens and flowers painted by Claude Monet at about the same time that Thérèse Martin was entering the Carmel of Lisieux. Their time, like ours was perceived as a period of accelerated change in technology, science, culture, politics, and economics.

Yet, in the paintings of Monet and in the written words of a young woman who would become a saint, there is sense of timelessness lived within the presence of today. Not surprisingly, this is what we would expect of a talented landscape painter and a particularly wise cloistered nun. What is exceptional in an era before mass media and social networking is that this 24-year old Carmelite - Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus - would within 15 years of her death come to be known worldwide. At the time of her death in 1897, she was known of by no more than an estimated 200 persons. In the May 25, 1925, issue of *Time* magazine, she was definitively called, "the greatest woman of our times."

How could this come to be? It is not explainable in merely human terms.

Mentioning that this Carmelite nun had written that upon her death she would spend her time in Heaven doing good things on earth by letting fall a shower of roses and blessings, the same *Time* magazine article explains:

"Soon letters began to descend upon the Carmelite Monastery of Lisieux. They came first, one at a time... then a thousand. They told of the good that the departed girl-nun was doing in her Heaven on earth. There were stories, attested by doctors, priests, and numerous

other witnesses, of miracles; deadly diseases cured, sinners converted, moral and material help rendered, etc., etc. Never was such a bed of roses prepared for mankind."

Had the reporter from *Time* read the testimony of Thérèse's fellow nuns during the diocesan process of examination of her life some years earlier, he would have known that these letters were prophesied. Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart testified, "She (Thérèse) spoke also about the numerous letters which would pour in on us on her account, after her death, and the joy which these letters would bring us."

That joy is still obvious today among the nuns of the Carmel of Lisieux. Father Bob, several members of the Society's staff, and I, had the privilege this year to spend an afternoon in the monastery's archives. Their priceless artifacts of Thérèse and the life of the Carmel are carefully catalogued and preserved, for today and for generations to come.

Still, there is a part of the history of this Shower of Roses that is not well known by American Catholics. It is the period particularly from 1914 to 1925. There in the archives we were shown thousands of military medals, handmade gifts, uniform decorations, flags, swords, and letters received by the Carmel particularly during World War I.

Letters and gifts came from the

battlefield, POW camps, aerodromes, military hospitals, parishes, and the home front. Many were from French soldiers and airmen, military chaplains, doctors and nurses, wives, mothers and fathers. Letters too came from British, Australian, Canadian, American, and Irish soldiers and officers.

The theme of these letters was that in the most desperate of circumstances, many were claiming the special care, protection, consolation, and intercession of the Little Flower. Some of these letters claimed situations of miraculous survival on the battlefield (or in the air and on the sea), unexplainable healings after appealing to Thérèse, dramatic conversions of hardened men, and even the appearances of a young Carmelite nun on the battlefield dispensing courage and care to men on either side of the battle line. After the war, hundreds traveled to Lisieux to personally present their military medals and swords to the Carmel in tribute and thanksgiving.

During the war, these reports came so frequently to the Carmel that in 1920 Bishop Thomas Lemonnier, of the Diocese of Bayeux and Lisieux in France, had a book published titled "*Pluie de Roses: Interventions de Sr. Thérèse de L'Enfant-Jesus Pendant la Guerre, 1914-1918.*" ("*The Shower of Roses: Interventions of Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and Holy Face During the War, 1914-1918.*")

The book (not known to ever have been translated into English) details reports from military personnel of seeming miraculous events, while also reminding the reader that publishing these letters was not an attempt to prejudge the process of the Church's examination of the cause for Thérèse. In 1923, Sister Thérèse was beatified. By the time of her canonization in 1925, over a million and half pilgrims had visited her tomb at the Carmel of Lisieux.

Now 86 years later, the Carmel of Lisieux is as alive today as ever. A vibrant community of 24 dedicated Carmelite nuns and young postulants live much of the same schedule as they always have since 1838, praying and working for the larger Church and the world. Pilgrims come, too, from around the world to pray at the Carmel of Lisieux and at the Basilica of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

This past year I had the opportunity

to speak with pilgrims at Lisieux from throughout Europe, Australia, the Philippines, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, and the United States. Listening to their personal stories from young and old, men and women, there can be little doubt that her worldwide Shower of Roses continues to this day. It is as if she understands that we each - like airmen and soldiers - find ourselves on various kinds of battlefields, fighting and struggling with fear, moral loneliness, pain, danger, and the desire for peace and a fullness of hope. And she is here as prophesied, to take our prayers, and to help see us through, as truly, the Little Flower is still busy in Heaven "doing good on Earth" and letting fall a Pluie de Roses. 🌹

- Matthew Brasmer is an Ambassador of the Society of the Little Flower, located in Darien, IL. A former naval aviator and commander, he has been a businessman and a diocesan lay manager. He has served Catholic elementary and secondary schools and public and private universities. His wife of 34 years, Mary Claire FitzGerald, is a registered nurse. Matt can be reached at: [matthew.brasmer@littleflower.org](mailto:matthew.brasmer@littleflower.org), or at (630) 968-9400, X1421.



*Marpiré - June 25, 1917*  
*My Reverend Mother:*

*It is with great humility that I write you this letter. During a recent battle I found myself in dire straits as bullets from a machine gun tore through my clothing, the pockets of my overcoat, my undershirt and my pants. Even my undergarments were pierced. Yet, there wasn't a single scratch on me. The very next day, while flipping through my notebook, I found this image of Saint Therese. I didn't remember even putting it there.*

*My own beliefs aside, a great number of my buddies who have already congratulated me on my amazing luck are not shy at all to mention the word 'miracle'. An astonishing thing. The night before the battle, I received this photo in a letter from a friend that ended with: "Trust in God and in our little Sister". This led me to pray to her.*

*Since this experience, I have kept this picture so as to show everyone. "You better hang on to this," people from all over have told me. To that I say, "You better believe it!" Furthermore, I have since put a new picture in its place.*

*Something similar happened to one of my friends, although his photo of the sister was not directly struck. Despite terrible injuries, the doctors were astonished to see that his wounds would not prove fatal.*

*Evidently, my Reverend Mother, these are but small accounts of faith, of many that you will undoubtedly hear. Even if there is no 'miracle' to be found in all of this, there is undoubtedly divine protection. We all have a deep devotion to the 'little Saint'. May God allow her to continue to do for our souls what she has done for our bodies.*

*Please accept, My Reverend Mother, my utmost devotion and deepest respect. (Signature of "Coché" with a cross symbol over the 'C')  
Mr. and Mrs. Coché  
Marpire par Vitre*

from the ambassador



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