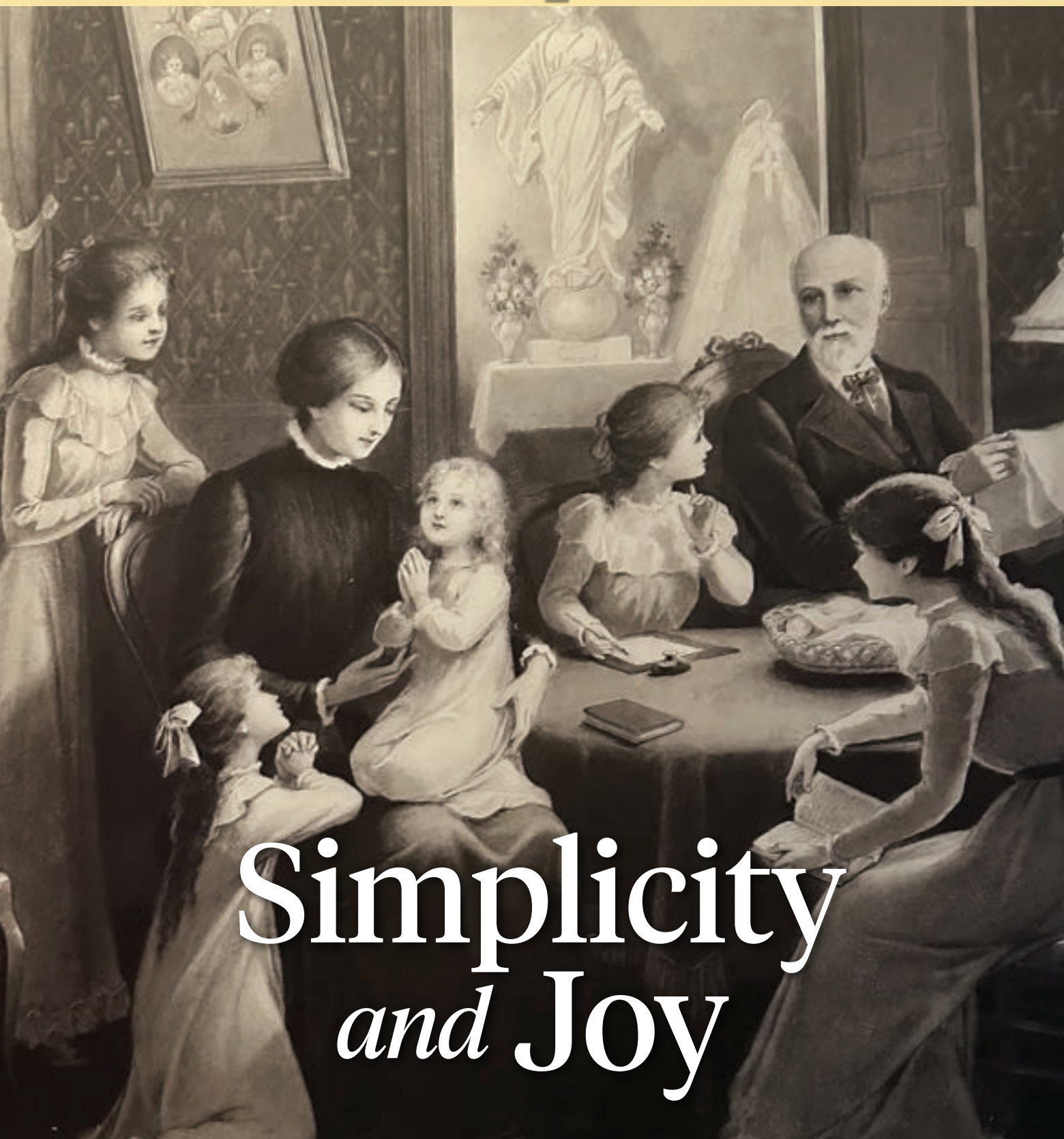


Between Friends

A publication for the Friends of the Society of

the Little Flower, Darien, Illinois, and Canada



Simplicity
and Joy

Embracing simplicity and joy

Dear Friends of St. Thérèse,

As we reflect on the life and legacy of our dear friend, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, I am deeply moved by how profoundly her “Little Way” continues to speak to our hearts. In a world that often celebrates complexity, speed, and achievement, Thérèse invites us on a different path — one marked by simplicity, trust, and joy.

This beautiful reflection reminds us that St. Thérèse’s path to holiness wasn’t paved with grandeur, but with ordinary moments infused with extraordinary love. She teaches us that joy is not something we wait for — it’s something we live, even amid suffering. It springs from a heart surrendered to God and a life rooted in gratitude.

What strikes me most is how relevant her wisdom is today. So many of us

carry burdens — stress, sorrow, fear, or the ache of unmet expectations — and yet Thérèse reminds us that we don’t need to carry them alone. Her trust in God’s loving presence gave her joy, not because her life was easy, but because she believed, with childlike confidence, that God was with her in every moment.

Thérèse’s life was not without pain, misunderstanding, or sacrifice. And yet, she chose joy — not a fleeting emotion, but a deep, abiding reality born of faith. She invites us to rediscover this kind of joy: the joy that flows from knowing we are loved by God and called to love in return, especially in the hidden corners of everyday life.

Her message is liberating. We don’t need to be extraordinary to please God. We need only to be faithful in the little

things — with love. St. Thérèse shows us that the path to holiness is not reserved for the few, but open to all who live with open hands, trusting hearts, and generous spirits.

As we honor her and strive to follow her “Little Way,” may we, too, embrace simplicity and joy. May we rediscover the sacred in the ordinary. May we become, like Thérèse, radiant signs of God’s merciful and ever-present love in our world.

With heartfelt gratitude for your continued friendship and support in the spirit of St. Thérèse,

Father Thomas Schrader, O. Carm. 



Father Thomas Schrader, O. Carm.

Director, Society of the Little Flower

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Between Friends

A publication for the friends of the Society of the Little Flower

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Peace in the smallest of things

Dear Friends,

As I sit to write this introduction, I'm reminded of the many times I've found peace in the smallest of things – a quiet morning, a kind word, the steady rhythm of breath. These simple moments have become sacred in a world that often rushes past them.

In this issue of *Between Friends*, we reflect on simplicity and joy through the life and legacy of our beloved St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Her "Little Way" continues to inspire us to live not from fear, but from love – not seeking greatness, but finding God in the ordinary. What a liberating thought: that holiness is not earned through grand acts, but discovered in daily love and quiet trust.

Personally, I find Thérèse's message more relevant than ever. We live in a time when complexity surrounds us – in our relationships, responsibilities, even in our spiritual lives. Her gentle wisdom reminds us that joy is not something we chase; it's something we choose. It grows in the soil of gratitude, simplicity, and trust in God's ever-present love.

May the reflections in these pages invite you to breathe deeply, live simply, and rediscover the joy that is already within and around you. May we, like Thérèse, learn to carry empty hands and open hearts.

As we continue on this journey together, I humbly ask for your continued prayers and support. Your presence, encouragement, and generosity sustain not only this publication, but the spirit of community that brings it to life. Thank you for walking with us – in faith, in friendship, and in love. 🌹

With peace and friendship,
Mary Therese Lambert



Mary Therese Lambert
Editor of *Between Friends*

Someone You Should Know

TILLIE CUARTO EDGETT

“This wasn’t just about accounting. It was about being part of something deeper, something sacred.”

When I was asked to be featured in the *Between Friends* newsletter, I was surprised and honored. But also, to be honest, I was a little nervous ... even intimidated. I really don’t like talking about myself. How could I possibly give St. Thérèse the justice she deserves? After a week of trying to calm my anxious thoughts and calling on friends and family for advice, I finally did what I know how to do best: I surrendered. I prayed, “God, help me. St. Thérèse, I need you.” In a nutshell, that’s what I’ve learned to do in times of uncertainty: let go, ask for help, and trust that intercession will carry me through.

My name is Tillie Edgett, and I’ve been a staff accountant here at the Society of the Little Flower in Darien, Illinois, for over 25 years. I work in a small department – just three of us – but it’s a close and supportive team. I still remember why I initially applied: truthfully, it was a practical decision. I lived nearby – less than a 2.5 miles from the campus – and at the time, the job seemed like a good fit for my life situation. My previous experience had been in health care and insurance, and joining a religious nonprofit like this was unfamiliar territory. I learned that the charity business can be just as demanding, with deadlines to meet, and financial goals to accomplish.

Even though my main job is all things accounting, my most popular role around campus is lending an ear to



random conversations and providing food support and logistics – giving advice on local cuisine and managing take-out orders!

In all seriousness, looking back now, I can see that this wasn’t just a job I chose. It was St. Thérèse who sought me out. She led me here, to a place

where I would grow, be challenged, and form friendships that have become some of the most meaningful relationships in my life.

This wasn’t just about accounting. It was about being part of something deeper, something sacred. It all started with a small and simple job ad in a

“

*Being part of the Society of the Little Flower
has become much more than just
a job – it has become a calling.”*

community newspaper I picked up at the grocery store. It was just a two- or three-line listing that caught my eye: “Accountant needed at the Society of the Little Flower.” I wasn’t even actively job hunting, but there was something about that little ad. It felt peculiar, sweet ... almost like a little rose St. Thérèse tossed my way.

Oddly, after all the setbacks in my life at that time, I noticed this advertisement just as I finished my accounting degree. My mother needed a liver transplant, and Conrad, my husband, had started to work as a Cook County officer in the gangs/narcotics unit deep in the city of Chicago. At the time, my life felt like a collection of scattered, unrelated events. Years earlier, I had dropped out of nursing school to care for my father, who was suffering from terminal lung cancer. Around the same time, I had to leave my bookkeeping job to care for my newborn daughter, Alexis, and help support my mother – newly widowed at age 53. I had recently married Conrad, who had a promising future as a Marine Corps officer, but an ankle injury turned our plans upside down. Then, not long after Alexis was born, Conrad’s sister passed away unexpectedly.

I was born here and raised Catholic by my Filipino immigrant parents, along with my three younger siblings. We were faithful in attending Mass, but I would not say we were particularly devout. It was through those hard years, full of loss and uncertainty, when our faith


deepened in a profound way. We leaned on each other, and we leaned on God. We drew closer to our loved ones that died by praying rosaries as a family for their souls. During that time, my mother developed a deep devotion to St. Padre Pio, and through him, I began to understand the powerful bond we share with the communion of saints. Padre Pio himself recognized St. Thérèse’s sanctity, even before she was canonized, and I felt drawn to learn more about her.

So when I saw that ad about the Society of the Little Flower, something in me stirred. I was curious about working somewhere whose mission was to honor this young saint’s message. I had a small, selfish thought, too: Wouldn’t it be nice to work somewhere where I could attend daily Mass or go to confession more often? I wasn’t chasing career advancement or a higher salary. I just wanted to be somewhere that fed my spirit – and maybe even get paid to be there.

Many people who work at the Society came with a deep devotion to St. Thérèse. I didn’t. In fact, I knew very little about her when I first started. But over the years, I’ve gotten to know her through the lives of those she’s touched. One of my favorite parts of my job is managing the donations from the daily Shrine Mass. Though I don’t work directly with the public, I feel so moved by the diversity of the visitors who come through the doors of the shrine. People of all cultures and backgrounds come

here to honor St. Thérèse, drawn to her simple message of love, trust, and doing little things with great love. She is loved by so many. It’s during events like the Feast Day of St. Thérèse that I hear the most beautiful stories – accounts of answered prayers, moments of unexpected grace, and quiet miracles. Her intercession is real. And it’s powerful.

St. Thérèse has found her way into my own heart as well. I turn to her throughout my day – when I need patience, or peace, or just a gentle reminder that small acts of love truly matter. She’s walked with me through so many ups and downs; and I’m incredibly thankful that I answered that tiny, easily overlooked job ad all those years ago. Through her example – and through the friendships I’ve built here, with the support of the beloved Carmelite Friars spreading the message of St. Thérèse – my own devotion has deepened over time. As a Little Flower Society staff member explains: “Tillie’s positive attitude radiates and lifts us all. She is like sunshine!”

Each year, my family and I renew our consecration to Merciful Love, praying her Offering to Merciful Love. That prayer continues to shape the way we live out our faith. Being part of the Society of the Little Flower has become much more than just a job – it has become a calling. I’m so grateful that St. Thérèse gently whispered me here ... one little rose petal at a time. 



My favorite St. Thérèse quote:

"I will spend my heaven doing good on earth."

MARCIA KOENIG

My name is Marcia Koenig, "a.k.a." Auntie Marcia to my wonderful nephew and niece, Jacob and Catherine, with a 2nd niece, Emma, on the way.

I was raised Catholic by my parents, Robert and Marlene, and have one brother Dennis. We have lived in Darien all my life, literally across the street from the National Shrine and Museum of St. Thérèse! I would pass by her shrine and museum often, never realizing I would one day work here.

My responsibilities here at the Society of the Little Flower began 25 years ago. I started working in data entry and

reception, answering the many phone calls and processing incredible amount of donations and correspondence. At present, I am the Data Entry and Donor Relationships Operational Fundraising Manager.

I have come to see and appreciate why St. Thérèse is one of the most popular saints. I have heard and read so many moving stories of how people are going through difficult times in

their lives and prayed to St. Thérèse to intercede on their behalf. Then they would call us or write a letter to let us know that through her intercession they received a rose or the scent of roses.

She even had a personal effect on me. One day my family and I were praying to St. Thérèse, and the next day in our back yard was a bunch of roses lying on the ground. That is when I knew and understood her profound effect on people.

I do have to admit that, despite living near her National Shrine, I really did not know much about St. Thérèse. I thought she was someone who lived the high life and got what she wanted. So when I started working here at the Society of the Little Flower, I began reading her autobiography, the *Story of a Soul*. What

fascinated me about St. Thérèse was how she lived a simple life. For example, she even named her dog Tom! She knew early on that she wanted to devote her whole life to God and to help others. It makes me sad

to think that she died so young at age 24 – what more could she have done.

My favorite quote of hers is: "I will spend my heaven doing good on earth." I feel that even though she left the earth too soon, she still makes a difference in people's lives every day! That give us all hope and joy.

After working at the Society of the Little Flower for the past 25 years, what continues to amaze me is the continued devotion to her. This devotion is especially manifested on her Feast Day, October 1. So many people come and you can feel the love they have of her and how much she continues to affect people everyday lives. She is truly the Saint of Modern Times!

A Society of the Little Flower person who has worked with Marcia for years explains: "She is so calm, faithful and professional. She does all the little details with special attention. She is clear in explaining, helpful and patient as we learn. Marcia lives St. Thérèse's "Little Way" in very concrete, human ways." 🌹



A White Rose and the Hound of Heaven

The “hound of heaven,” as the poet Francis Thompson refers to God, finds it very hard to take no for an answer. He pursues us relentlessly, in spite of our sometimes-stubborn selves.

Our beloved “hound” is clever in His pursuit. A hammer is rarely his tool – unless it is a velvet one. He is much more inclined to use the urging of the heart, or that of another’s. He is also the God of surprises.

To illustrate this, the following is a story that was shared with me by one of the Society of the Little Flower’s most faithful friends, who is not only a very dear friend of St. Thérèse, but also a priest. His devotion to her is deep and sincere, and I believe his open heart allows St. Thérèse to place him in some unexpected situations.

Recently, he received a call about a 47-year-old man who was dying from colon cancer. This man had struggled with the consequences of the disease for 5 years and he could sense that the end was near; he was spending his final days in hospice. Our priest friend didn’t

know this man at all. In fact, the hospice was far from his parish; it was unusual for them to call him when there were parishes that were much closer. But Father willingly made the trip to visit the dying man. He was happy to go, but wondered how this call came to him. He thought to himself, “Perhaps there is a reason.”

Upon entering the man’s room, Father could barely contain his emotions; the man, once a triathlete, was nothing more than skin and bones. He looked like a concentration camp victim. As they struck up a conversation, Father learned that the man had been away from the Church for quite some time and wanted to get his spiritual house in order. He was afraid of dying.

After talking for about an hour and a half, Father heard his confession, anointed him, and gave him Holy

Communion. He reassured him that Jesus in the Holy Eucharist would be with him. As Father prepared to leave, the man’s voice was weakening, so he wrote on a tablet, “Will I see you again?” He assured him that he would stop by the next day.

Father received a call from hospice the following morning, saying that the man was asking for him. Unfortunately, before Father could get there, the man passed away. When he arrived, the man’s mother confirmed that he had been asking for him; she was deeply grateful that he had prepared her son for his final journey. After spending some time with the mother and the rest of the family, Father got up to get a glass of water.

When Father got back to the man’s room, a picture of a white rose had been placed on the door frame. Given that he has such a close relationship with the Little Flower, he was startled to see the white rose and proceeded to tell the family about St. Thérèse. He related that the Little Flower once prayed for a man who was unrepentant, and how she knew her prayers were answered when she learned that before his death the man asked to see a priest. Father assured this family that the picture of the rose was the Little Flower’s way of saying that the man they loved was safe in the hands of Jesus.

Father was convinced that it was God’s providence that placed him in that situation when it should have been a priest who was stationed closer to the man’s home or to the hospice. Father related: “God works in mysterious ways; this encounter was a truly grace-filled experience, and few in my life have impacted me as much as this one.”

This story might serve as a reminder to all of us that both God and St. Thérèse never abandon us, and will use everyday moments to draw us closer. They often can use those moments as a means of grace for another. We just need to stay open to the hand of God and the urgings of the Little Flower. And through our openness, we should be ready for the many surprises that await us. 🌹

NOTE: The priest featured in this story requested that he remain anonymous.

BY DAN PRITCHARD



Simplicity *and* Joy

BY FATHER BOB COLARESI, O. CARM. | SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

AS THE NINTH CHILD BORN TO A VERY COMFORTABLE FAMILY, OUR BELOVED FRIEND, ST. THÉRÈSE, HAD EVERYTHING SHE WANTED. She was loved, received more attention as the youngest and was deeply immersed in holiness through her family's love and attention. In some ways, we could say she was a spoiled child. And yet her life was darkened by losses, disappointments, excessive expectations, and disease, all heightened by her hypersensitive spirit.

Her challenges would have burdened or depressed a lesser person. As we read her autobiography, while acknowledging her aches, pains and losses, she is like a smiling princess dressed beautifully in simplicity and joy. Despite the challenges of her life, a deep joy permeated her life and spirituality, because she trusted God's intimate presence and deep love within and around her.

Some of the Carmelite nuns she lived with in the Carmel thought she was way too simple, almost naïve. Some of them experienced their religious calling as primarily saving their souls and avoiding hell. It was a rather self-centered spirituality. They hoped and figured that Thérèse would wake up and realize what a cruel and cold world this is. The Divine Spark of Love had diminished in them.

In some ways, young Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus threatened them by responding to a Love that she allowed to fill her soul and life. Some of the nuns were living in fear and cynicism; she lived from Love freely given. The Jansenism that burdened her family and much of Catholicism in France did not allow for much joy. It was a tedious, overly serious and meticulous obedience to laws. Their images of God haunted them.

Some people were fascinated by Sister Thérèse with her joyful simplicity and found it contagious.

Even the nuns who thought she was too naïve or simple enjoyed her sense of humor – she was a great and engaging story teller and a mimic – as she would make them laugh at community recreation, a time the sisters could speak freely.

Many of us get wounded by life and become protective and overly serious. We no longer laugh at ourselves or our foibles. We criticize, project and judge our short comings in others.

Wouldn't our world be so much healthier and more peaceful if simplicity and joy were cherished? Life doesn't have to be as complicated as we make it. Living intentionally with gratitude enhances deep joy that brightens our world.

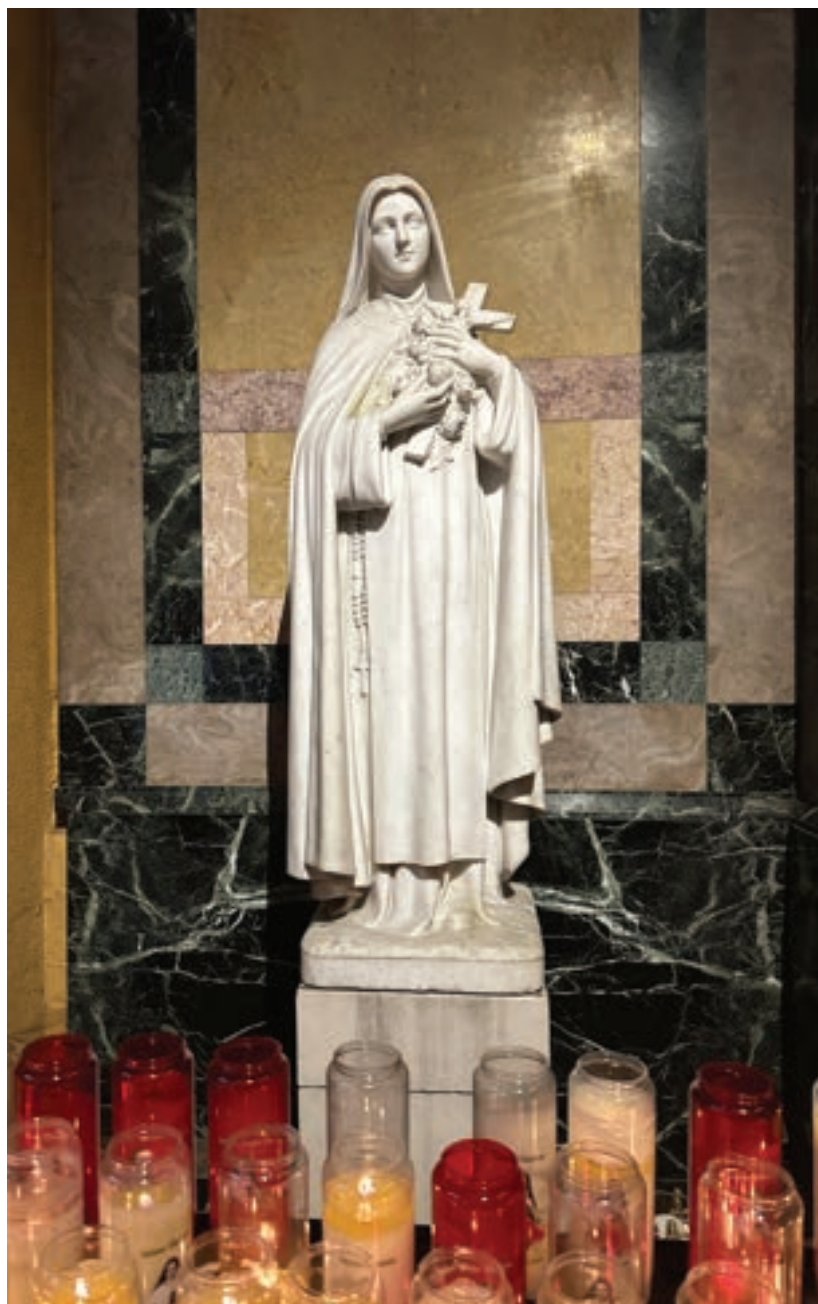
Sometimes, we confuse joy with happiness. Both are emotions, but they have different meanings and implications. Understanding the difference between joy and happiness is important, as it can help us prioritize what's most essential and appreciate life in a much deeper and more meaningful way. Happiness is a feeling of contentment or satisfaction in the present moment, based on what we do and how we behave. It can be fleeting, as it is based on external factors and is a reflection of something happening to you. Happiness can be triggered by situations, people, events, or even thoughts.

Joy is a deeper emotion than happiness that comes from within, from a sense of purpose and meaning, including finding meaning in suffering – and from relationships with others. Therefore, it lasts longer than its counterpart. It is also relatively independent from happiness. Joy is internal and connected to living a more authentic life. This is because to have joy, you must do inner work, identifying your values and strengths and aligning your life with them. Joy involves living attentively and being aware of what is happening and what you are deeply experiencing. Joy makes us bigger and requires us to make meaningful and deep connections with those we love. It is actually a state of mind, not based on external events, but from deep within. It is rooted in the Divine Presence within us, the Divine Spark of our DNA. Joy is a decision to accept life and reality, as God gifts us with life, breath by breath, even in difficult and challenging times.

The Little Flower's "Little Way" of confidence and trust is an amazing gift. She took Jesus seriously when he said: "Unless you become like a little child, you will not enter the kingdom of God." To many of us she is a relief – despite the challenging need to surrender, we are free to swim in the ocean of God's grace that is our enchanted world. Her "Little Way" involves performing small acts of love and service with great faith and trust in God, finding joy in the ordinary.

Thérèse powerfully and insightfully wrote and teaches us: "Jesus, help me to simplify my life by learning what You want me to be and becoming that person." Spirituality and faith are joyfully living life from our true center where God dwells – helped by sacraments, prayer, silent reflection and community of faith.

Joy comes from God's faithful, eternal presence within us and our world. We forget what Jesus taught us: "I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." (Jn 14:20) "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete." (Jn 15:11) "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you." (John 13:34)



Happiness is typically a more fleeting emotion, often sparked by a particular moment or event that brings a sense of excitement or exhilaration. Joy, on the other hand, is a more long-lasting state of being, characterized by contentment and satisfaction with life overall. As St. Thérèse had to learn, it is important for us to keep this distinction in mind when pursuing greater well-being and fulfillment. As she wrote: "What peace pours over the soul once it soars above natural feelings."

By understanding the unique contributions of joy and happiness, we can put happiness into proper perspective and prioritize joy. This mindset of faith will help us better navigate the ups and downs of life with greater resilience, which is especially helpful when dealing with stress. We will also have more appreciation for all life has to offer and what God is giving us.

Childlike joy makes us fruitful and generous – like a child who likes to explore and touch the world around

“The closer one approaches God, the simpler one becomes.”

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

them, our joy makes us generative and responsible because it is rooted in God's faithful and generative presence. It is never an issue of what am I getting out of this or showing how I merited heaven – Christian Catholic living is about what can I give and share with others. Did not Jesus, after teaching us the beatitudes, defining humanity as blessed and beloved daughters and sons of God, say: “Be light of the world and salt of the earth!”

Sometimes, we let the disappointments and wounds of life turn us into salty darkness!

Our beloved late Pope Francis, on this 100th anniversary of her canonization, wrote his papal letter “On Confidence in the Merciful Love of God” on St. Thérèse, explaining her significance: “In place of the notion of holiness that is individualistic and elitist, one more ascetic than mystical, that primarily emphasizes human effort, Thérèse always stresses the primacy of God's work, his gift of grace. ... Even in speaking of Eucharist, her desire to receive Communion took second place to the desire of Jesus to unite himself to us and to dwell in our hearts ... on Christ who loves, seeks, desires and dwells within.

“In the Body of Christ, she became love in the heart of the Church – not of a triumphalist Church, but of a loving and merciful Church. Thérèse never set herself above others but took the lowest place together with the Son of God ... rediscovering love as the heart of the Church can be a great source of light – it preserves us from being scandalized by the limitations and weaknesses of the ecclesiastical institution with its shadows

and sin, and enables us to enter into the Church's ‘heart burning with love’ which burst into flame at Pentecost. This was the radical option of Thérèse, her definitive synthesis and her deepest spiritual identity.”

One of St. Thérèse's great insights was when crossing over to God we come with empty hands – not showing all we did to merit heaven, but how much we allowed God to save and fills us. Joyful freedom comes from appreciating God's unconditional mercy and loving embrace. Her greatest teaching is: “Everything is grace!!” And grace is God's presence. She never lost the faith of living in an enchanted world, despite her Jansenistic upbringing and life's disappointments.

The Little Flower's great attraction is that she made spirituality and holiness possible – not for a special few, but for everyone. She saw joy in everyday life and the most ordinary situation. She wasn't about great or heroic actions, but found joy in assisting her Carmelite sisters, doing laundry, being patient with the older nun who was constantly complaining, and simply helping people. The most insignificant tasks done with love and offered to God, even if unnoticed by others, made a huge difference.


Her focus on God's love and simple acts of service to others helped the complexities and anxieties of life to fade. She trusted God and abandoned herself to God's will, so worry and striving for things were not her focus – because God was sovereign, in control and providing what we need and

bringing good out of everything.

Even her approach to God and prayer was simple – instead of an obstacle course to access God, she trusted and believed in the direct, simple and personal communication. And listening to God was the heart of her relationship with God. It was Presence – conscious and attentive presence to life within and around her, as a gift from God.

So many of us talk God to death with endless words in prayer. It is as if we want to tell God what he should be doing and who needs help, as if God does not know. In the best of our Carmelite contemplative spirituality, Thérèse teaches us silence and listening to God, whose heart is beating within us. Does the fact that we have two ears and one mouth tell us that if we are not listening twice as much as we speak, even in prayer, that something is out of balance?

St. Thérèse consciously focused on simplicity and trust in God, even amid suffering and darkness. Despite not liking hardship and suffering, she viewed it as a path to God's love. It is amazing to know that she saw joy not just as a suggestion, but as Divine command for those following Jesus. In fact, her joy was so deep and profound that it was contagious, especially during her illness and death. Despite the pain she was experiencing, she joked with her doctors – her spirit of joy overwhelmed the suffering.

Like all the mystics, she realized her life was rooted in trusting God's love and mercy. Despite experiencing some abandonments, as we all do, she trusted the hidden presence of God in everyone and everything. Her “everything is grace” teaching defined her and is something we all need to trust more deeply – so that simplicity and joy can permeate our lives. The wisdom of her Novice mistress is true: “The closer one approaches to God, the simpler one becomes.” Let us, as friends of St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, surrender our complexities, anxieties and worries that block God's faithful presence within and around us. 

6 LOVE IN THE HEART OF THE CHURCH 9



Every person throughout history knows all too well those joyless moments when stress is felt with every fiber of our being and written on every wrinkle of our faces. If you took a few moments right now to think about it, I bet you could rattle off a half dozen such moments without much thought. I'd also wager that if you looked to see how you made it through each of those moments, you would find that simplifying was part of the solution.

This is because there is an intimate connection between simplicity and joy. I know that when I go to look for something on my desk or in a drawer, it is always easier to find if there is less to dig through. And if I don't have the time to dig, there's no way I'm going to find it. It is the same for our spirits. When we look for true joy in our hearts, the type that is found only in and with God, the less we are holding onto, the easier it is to find.

For centuries, the Carmelite way of life has offered a way for each of us to learn what is truly valuable. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, "The Little Flower," used the Carmelite Way to make time to "dig through the drawer" of her inner life by being still and silent so that she could hear God's voice telling her what to hold on to and what to let go. This practice helped her to grow in her relationship with God, and with herself. She learned to let go of her sensitivity. She held on to her vocation to be "love in the heart of the Church." Thérèse learned that simplicity brings joy, and she taught us one of the simplest ways to live our lives: to do small things with great love.

In a world today that may feel anything but simple, it can be very difficult to find joy. After all, it is hard to remember that we are and will always be loved beyond measure when life is busy and the world appears to be burning. Let us take the time to pray for one another, to be still and silent and listen for God's voice, so that we may learn to simplify our hearts and find God's joy within ourselves and the world that surrounds us.

As we walk this path together, if you — or someone you know — have ever felt even the smallest stirring toward a vocation, we would love to hear from you. Whether that call is clear or just beginning to take shape, we invite you to reach out. Our Carmelite community is here to listen, to pray with you, and to support anyone discerning a life of love in the heart of the Church. 🌹

FATHER MICHAEL JOYCE, O.CARM.



SIMPLICITY *and* JOY

We don't need to look far to see that life can be complicated and complex. We know that the world has so much darkness, despair, sadness. It can be overwhelming. Yet, there's something we can all strive for. And that is simplicity and joy.

Although I'm in my 61st year, I still have many childlike qualities, which I hope I never lose. [Although I can excel at complicating things.] I remember this past summer, waiting and watching for the roses to bloom. First one, then two, and before long there were literally thousands around the church property in every conceivable color! I was in awe. I always think of St. Thérèse when the roses are in bloom.

I was filled with joy and awe in late June, watching the ants gleefully dance atop the peonies! Watching the baby rabbits running around the gardens and lawn in the evenings was so much fun. The joy and simplicity of nature. Then watching the scarlet runner beans climbing the trellis each day. Just amazing. How fast they can travel. And their bright orange flowers. These are simple things and joyful things. And in everything we see the creative work of God's hand! God is everywhere.

When I reflect on simplicity and joy, I think of St. Thérèse. Central to her spirituality is spiritual childhood, or her "Little Way". That is, a state of profound simplicity, trust, and a childlike faith. She teaches us to approach our relationship with God with the innocence and simplicity of a child, embracing the joy of our faith. Oh, that we could all do that!

Simplicity takes work to achieve. We can be burdened with material possessions, technological overload. We can have schedules that Houdini could never manage. This surely is the opposite of simplicity and can rob us of our joy.

St. Thérèse reminds us that we are always in the presence of God and the angels, no matter where we are, or what we're going through. Joy and simplicity are attainable.

We are into the heart of the fall season, and before long we will enter Advent and the great Feast of Christmas. No matter how hard we try, so many people complicate Christmas. It has turned into a commercial blitz. Crazy. Mayhem. It's hard to find joy and simplicity. It can be the same mad rush in our churches and parishes.

I had my eyes opened a couple of years ago, on Christmas Eve. I always like to hold a baby up and share with the people of God the words of St. Thérèse: "A God who became so small could only be mercy and love." She was, after all, called St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. Holding up a baby helps people see God in a different light. God came to us as an infant baby! Thérèse had great devotion to the Infant Jesus, and her spirituality was a childlike simplicity and trust in God's love. This approach to Christian life is the essence of her "Little Way."

Well, this particular Christmas Eve, with its usual mad rush, something spectacular happened. It was, at the 6 p.m. Mass. The only way I can describe it is in poetic form:



Sacred Moment

Christmas Eve always has little surprises
in the Church.
Things happen that catch your attention.
Make you smile.
A sound, a sneeze, a cough. A child's scream.
Someone's silly hat.
At the 6 p.m. Mass a young family wandered in
about 5 minutes late.
There was an extra pew, even if we broke
the COVID-19 restrictions.
So they were seated.
There was room at the Inn, God's Inn.
Not like Bethlehem.
No one knew God was coming that night!
During the opening prayer,
there were a few yells,
"St. Patrick's Church!" "Amen!"
Loud.
I wasn't sure where it came from.
But no alarm. No harm.
After I preached the homily,
during which I held up a little baby,
and was walking back to the presider's chair,
there was a loud, "Thank you!!!"
I shouted back with a smile, "You're welcome!"
A few smiles and snickers around the church. Fine.
I still wasn't sure of the source.
But it could have been from the family who came in late.
Who found room at the Inn.
Well, Communion time came.
The Body of Christ. Amen
The Body of Christ. Amen.

And the people of God moved along.
Being fed and nourished by Christ.
And about halfway through the line,
here was a mom,
leading her teenage son by the arm toward me.
He had on a wool cap with ear flaps. All bundled up.
And I smiled at him.
The Body of Christ, I said.
And he took the host
and began to nibble on Christ.
Eat it all, I said gently. That's Jesus.
Put it in your mouth. He did.
And I wasn't ready for what came next.
He finished consuming his host,
And he looked intently
at baby Jesus in the manger,
and said, "This is Jesus' birthday!
I want to sing 'Happy Birthday' to Jesus!"
Why not?, I said. Go ahead and start.
The Church paused, and heaven opened its gates
as this young man belted out
the "Happy Birthday" song to Jesus.
Yes, the Communion line came to a halt.
I joined in, and together,
we sang "Happy Birthday" To Jesus.
I was floored. He was beaming with joy.
He was thrilled. Beaming with light.
A light in our darkness.
What a sacred moment.
Let the little children come to me.
Do not hinder them.
I saw the eyes and faces of those in the line,
and those in the pews.
Just watching. And listening.
And smiling. Some had tears.
I was moved. Felt really Christmas-y!
A wow moment.
Yes, this teenage boy with a disability,
maybe high on the autism spectrum,
he knew where he was ...
and he certainly knew
what we were celebrating; what he was celebrating.
He wasn't caught up in commercialism,
Or pleasing everybody with gifts.
The Baby Jesus in the manger
reminded him what this holy night was all about!
He did wander up to the microphone,
but Mom got him back
and escorted him to the pew.
We are never ready for those wow moments.
For the unexpected. For the sudden teaching.
For the lesson. God does those things to test us.
To call our attention. To remind us
of the dignity of every person.
To remind us to stop complicating life.

This young man taught the whole church
why we were gathered.
It was Jesus' birthday,
and by golly,
Communion line or not,
staunch Catholic in the line or not,
waiting to be fed by Christ ...
we're gonna sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus.
He is, after all,
the reason for the season!
Thanks, young man, for calling us all back
to the simplicity of our faith.
Thanks for making us stop ... and be more aware.
Mountains and hills have been made low
because of you! Joy to the world! Amen.

In the chaos of that Advent and Christmas Eve, being tired and feeling somewhat overwhelmed, I was genuinely made aware of the presence of God in joy and simplicity. Even in her own life, St. Thérèse, kept a sense of joy, no matter how chaotic things were; no matter how much suffering she had to endure. She had a profound awareness of the presence of God. Despite her struggles and ailments, darkness and doubt, she still experienced profound joy and happiness in her relationship with God. Love and trust in God were key for her joy! With the gifts of simplicity and joy, we too can have that same awareness of God's presence.

In his apostolic exhortation in October 2023, Pope Francis wrote, "At a time of great complexity, [St. Thérèse] can help us rediscover the importance of simplicity, the absolute primacy of love, trust and abandonment, and thus move beyond a legalistic or moralistic mind-set that would fill the Christian life with rules and regulations and cause the joy of the Gospel to grow cold."

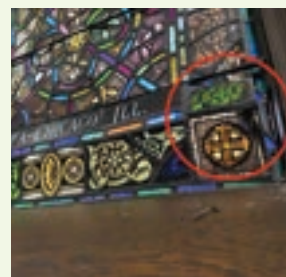
He closed his exhortation with a prayer, "Dear St. Thérèse, the church needs to radiate the brightness, the fragrance and the joy of the Gospel. Send us your roses! Help us to be, like yourself, ever confident in God's immense love for us, so that we may imitate each day your 'little way' of holiness."

With St. Thérèse's profound lessons on simplicity and joy, may we all find a deeper connection with our God, knowing, as St. Thérèse said, "The world promises us pleasure, but it is only in Jesus that we find joy." Joy to the world, and joy to everyone's heart. 🌹



Father Gerard Power,
O. Carm. *Director in*
Canada of the Society
of the Little Flower.

Request for Support: **Restoration of historic stained glass at Mount Carmel Chapel**



Mount Carmel Chapel in Niagara Falls, home to the Shrine of St. Thérèse, is in urgent need of stained-glass restoration. This sacred space features 20-foot stained-glass windows that will reach their 100th anniversary in 2026. Remarkably, these windows even survived the devastating Mount Carmel fire of 1967.

Crafted in England and stained in Toronto by McCausland Limited, the windows are arranged in eight double panels – 16 in total. The upper series beautifully depicts the life of Mary, while the lower series portrays the life of the prophet Elijah.

This past spring, one of the windows began to buckle at the base, prompting immediate action. That window has been carefully removed and is now being rebuilt, with plans to reinstall it within six months. However, all the windows require new protective glass with proper ventilation to prevent further deterioration of the leadwork.

The full restoration project is expected to cost approximately \$250,000.

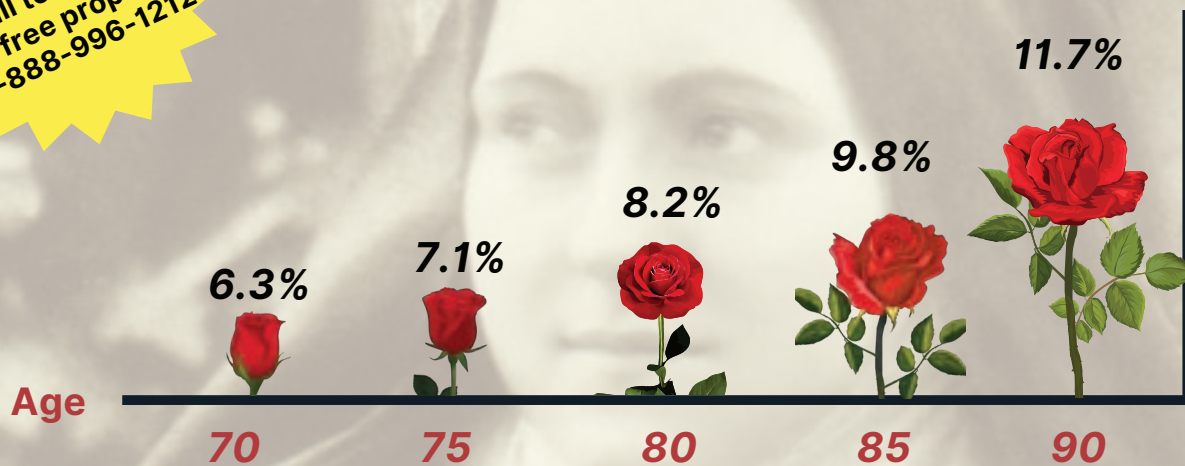
We humbly ask our generous donors to consider sending an additional gift to the Society of the Little Flower in support of this urgent restoration effort. Please ensure you tick the box and send your extra contribution to help preserve not only the physical beauty of our beloved Mount Carmel Chapel, but also the spiritual and historical legacy it holds for generations to come.

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