

Between Friends

A publication for the Friends of the Society of the Little Flower, Darien, Illinois, and Canada



*Grace
in the
Everyday*



Liabor Kepitakaya/Gettyimages

Spreading hope, trust, *and* spiritual friendship

Dear Friends of St. Thérèse,

This issue of *Between Friends* invites us to explore “**Grace in the Everyday**,” a theme that St. Thérèse of Lisieux knew well. She saw the sacred not only in grand gestures or extraordinary accomplishments, but in the quiet, ordinary moments of life — the smiles we offer, the patience we practice, the small acts of love that often go unnoticed. Through her “Little Way,” she teaches us that these simple moments, when done with honesty and devotion, carry profound meaning and touch hearts in ways we may never fully see.

As Director of the Society of the Little Flower, I am continually inspired by how many of you embody her spirit. Your prayers, support, and acts of kindness allow the message of St. Thérèse to reach people around the world, spreading hope, trust, and spiritual friendship. Through your generosity, you help transform ordinary lives into moments of grace, just as she envisioned.

May this issue encourage you to slow down, notice the sacred in everyday life, and embrace the “Little Way” in your own journey. Let us remember that even the smallest gestures, offered with love, have the power to shine brightly and bring God’s presence to those around us.

With gratitude and blessing, 🌹



Father Thomas Schrader, O. Carm.

Director, Society of the Little Flower

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God's light within you and around you

We reflect on our theme, “**Grace in the Everyday,**” as a reminder that God is closer to us than we often dare to believe. Our faith is rooted in the truth that God loved us so deeply that He chose to become one of us in Jesus. By entering fully into our humanity — our joys, struggles, hopes, and ordinary routines — Jesus made every part of life holy. Nothing in our daily experience is too small, too simple, or too complicated for His grace to dwell within it.

Few saints understood the sacredness of ordinary life as deeply as St. Thérèse did. She teaches us that holiness is not found in grand gestures, but in the small, hidden acts of love — smiles offered when we are weary, kindness shared when no one is watching, patience practiced in the routines that test us. She reminds us that everyday life is the very place where the heart can grow.

So often we look for God only in the extraordinary, but Jesus promised, “I am always with you.” His presence fills our friendships, our work, our disappointments, our generosity, and every moment in between. God understands our potential for communion and love, as well as the times we falter. Yet grace continues to meet us — quietly, tenderly — in the midst of the real lives we live.

As we enter this season of renewal, may you discover anew the gentle presence of God in the everyday rhythms of your life. And as you read, please know that **your support of the Society of the Little Flower matters more than you can imagine.** Your generosity sustains a mission rooted in love, compassion, and the sacred dignity of every person. It allows grace to be made visible — in service, in community, and in lives quietly touched by kindness.

May this issue inspire you to see God's light within you and around you, in every ordinary and grace-filled moment. 🌹



Mary Therese Lambert
Editor of *Between Friends*

Someone You Should Know:

MOIRA DEL VECCHIO

It's so nice to see all the pilgrims that come to visit - individuals, families, young and old.

I was born to Gary and Anne Herman in Oakville, Ontario, Canada. I was the youngest of three, with an older brother and sister. When I was 3, my father got a new job that brought us all to Niagara Falls, where I've lived ever since. I remember our early years being full of family, church at St. Patrick's, a Carmelite parish, on Sundays, and lots of love.

When I was 8, my parents were in a car accident. My mother passed away. My father had some significant injuries and it took him many months to fully recover. While it was difficult, the accident led to our having stronger bonds with some of our extended family and friends. My Aunt Ellen and Uncle Jim often had us over to visit, and their six children, our cousins, became more like siblings. My mother's friend, and our neighbor, Barbara became like a second mother to me. I was welcome for dinner every single day and invited to spend my summer at their family cottage each year. Looking back now, God's grace was present in many ordinary moments of great generosity and service after our parents' accident.

Thirty-six years ago, I married my husband, Brian, in St. Patrick's Church, the same church I grew up attending with my family. We have three daughters, Alexandra, Olivia, and Hannah, who were all baptized at St. Patrick's. Both my brother and I have continued to attend St. Patrick's with our respective families, and when my girls were younger, they were members of the choir and altar servers alongside their cousins. Brian and I now have three grandsons, who all have been baptized at St. Patrick's. Our family



continues to attend the same Mass as my brother's family, where our respective grandchildren enjoy sitting together. St. Patrick's has been a constant throughout my life, a parish that nurtured my faith and allowed us to enjoy sacred time as an extended family.

Twenty years ago, I received a call from Virginia Parisi, a good friend of my mother-in-law. Virginia knew I was looking to get back into the workforce, after spending several years as a stay-at-home mom. Virginia let me know of an opportunity to apply for a position with the Society of the Little Flower's Canadian office. I took a chance and applied. Soon after, I began working for the Society of the Little Flower. My main responsibilities are helping in the accounting area; however, I also assist with donor relations, fielding calls, and fulfilling orders, inputting member records, and filling in and supporting other departments when needed. I love

the beautiful setting of our office, as it looks out over the Shrine to St. Thérèse. It's so nice to see all the pilgrims who come to visit: individuals, families, young and old. I first learned about St. Thérèse when I came to work at the Society, and I came to realize there has been a statue of St. Thérèse in the corner of our church for many years. I am always in awe of the great devotion, to St. Thérèse, the Carmelites, and to the faith, shown by the members of the Society. Our annual Feast Day celebrations really showcase their devotion to St. Thérèse

and provide a wonderful opportunity to meet the members we typically hear from by phone or mail. I particularly appreciate when members take the time to share stories about the roses they receive from St. Thérèse. It is always very moving to hear.

Seeing the devotion of our members, and hearing about the roses they receive, have inspired me to pay more attention to the roses I receive and moments of God's grace I experience in my own life. I consider my family my greatest achievement and fortune. Even though our girls are now adults, I am fortunate to spend most of my free time with our family: going on long walks with my husband, hosting family dinners, and attending my grandchildren's activities. These activities and interactions are all ordinary things, and ones I cherish and do so with great love and appreciation for God's favour. 🌹



Year after year after year ... I have listened to those who praised her and loved her and consequently also grew to love her.

VIRGINIA MARIE PARISI

St. Thérèse helped me discover the importance of simplicity, patience and peace.

My name is Virginia Marie Parisi. I was born and raised and have lived in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada my entire life.

I married my best friend and husband John Parisi and from that union we are parents to two handsome sons, Michael Anthony and Paul Francis. The other loves of my life are my grandsons, Jaden and Kole and their mother, Michela and their family pet, Chloe, the cockapoo. John and I were baptized, made our First Communion, confirmed and married and continue to this day to be adherents of St. Ann Parish, Niagara Falls where I spent 10 years as church organist while working for the Monastery of Mount Carmel, Society of the Little Flower. I was also

President of the Catholic Women's League, Lector, Eucharistic Minister and Sacristan loving every minute of it.

I am a proud graduate of Loretto Academy, a high school run by the sisters of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary located above the falls and adjacent to the Mount Carmel College at the time now known as Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre and Hamilton Teacher's College.

My vocation in life was to be an elementary classroom teacher and I qualified and taught for many years followed by becoming a substitute teacher to spend more time with my children. When substituting got to the point that I was doing it almost daily, I decided to resign and begin to enjoy life.

At that time enjoying life meant more family time, more home and craft times

and attending daily Mass enjoying the remainder of the day as it presented itself.

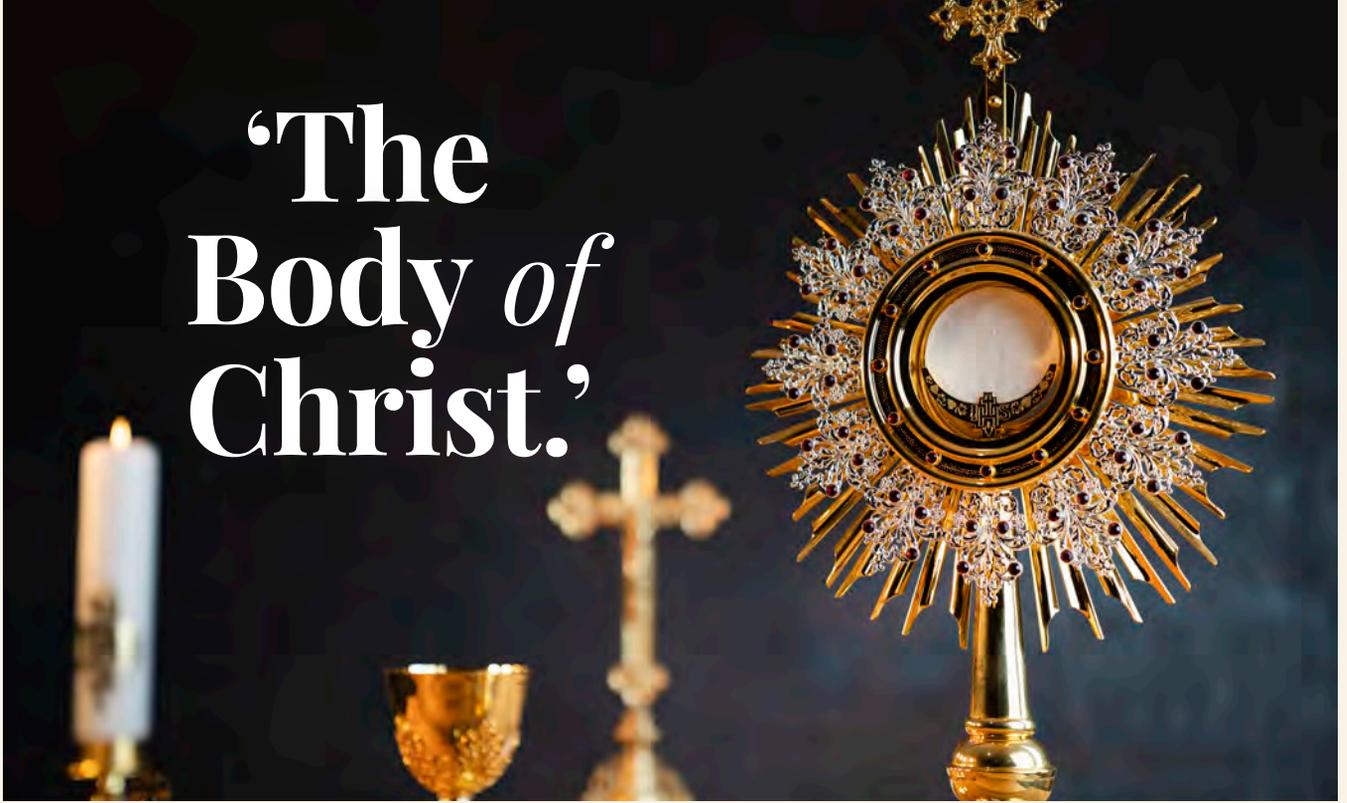
That did not last long as I was called by my sister-in-law, Carmel Moccio, who managed the tiny gift shop at the Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre to help out for a day. One day became two and three weekly. On one of those days Fr. Malachy Smith, O. Carm., Spiritual Centre Director, approached me and asked if I wanted to work in the Society of the Little Flower on the other side. I looked at my sister-in-law, Carmen, and said: "who does he want me to work for and what is it that he wants me to do?" Her response was: "Oh, just go with the flow" and I did.

What an awesome, amazing wonderful flow this has been for the past 42 years. The Canadian office of the Society of the Little Flower was in a growing stage when I accepted the position of 'caging.' One other lady and myself were the staff, with Fr. Malachy. He explained that my job was to open envelopes that contained offerings from the devotees of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. He showed me a picture of St. Thérèse and I said, "I know her, my grandmother has pictures of her in her bedroom."

Needless to say I really didn't know her but began to learn and love her very quickly. My relationship with St. Thérèse began very slowly by answering the phones, documenting donor's devotion and hearing thanksgiving praise from the lives of the faithful donors she touched. Year after year, I have been with the Society for 42 years, and I have listened to those who praised her, loved her, and consequently also grew to love her.

St. Thérèse helped me discover the importance of simplicity, patience and peace. No matter how chaotic life becomes, trusting in God and St. Thérèse was my way out of everything. To this hour 'all in the hands of God' and 'St. Thérèse, Little Flower, show your power in this hour' is my response to everything. 🌹

‘The Body of Christ.’



Zolnerek/Getty Images

from the special gifts office

How many times have we heard those words? And how many times have we responded with little more than the usual, “Amen”?

Some years ago, at the end of his General Audience, the late Pope Francis offered us another way to respond to encountering the body of Christ. In the crowd, he saw a man afflicted with a severe skin condition — so advanced that many would instinctively recoil. Yet the pope went to him, embraced him, and held him with a heart that knew he was beholding “the body of Christ.”

Jesus lives in each of us, but too often we are blind to Him, even when we look within ourselves. Indeed, that may be the best place to begin beholding the body of Christ. Each day we should seek Him and listen to the Christ who became one with us. If only we did ... how different our lives would be! To that, I believe Jesus would say, “Amen.”

But the revelation of God’s presence doesn’t stop within us. Our daily encounter with Jesus asks something more, prompting the question: “What’s next?” St. Thérèse had an answer. “Holiness consists in being just what God wants us to be.”

What does God want you to be at this moment? How are you responding to the circumstances of your life? These questions reveal where we are on life’s journey. Thérèse’s words seem simple,

yet the path to holiness is rarely easy.

One of the reasons the Society of the Little Flower exists is to help smooth that path. In the National Shrine of St. Thérèse, we house relics, artifacts, and artwork that recall her life and her “Little Way.” They are beautiful — but they are also meant to inspire.

Anyone who visits the Shrine can attest that they do inspire. There is a peace here that only heaven can offer. On the faces of pilgrims, you can see a visible connection with someone who consoles, heals, and makes all things new. Such is our mission, and it is a mission we are called to nurture for generations to come.

As we look toward that future, I invite you to consider remembering the Society of the Little Flower in your estate plans. Planned gifts — whether through a will, trust, or beneficiary designation — help ensure St. Thérèse’s message of love, simplicity, and confidence in God continues to reach hearts for years to come. These gifts have a profound and lasting impact: they sustain the Shrine as a place of peace, support the Carmelites in their ministry, and allow us to accompany countless people along their “Little

Way.” By including the Society in your future plans, you join St. Thérèse in her mission to “spend heaven doing good on earth.”

Thanks to the support of friends across the country and around the world, we work diligently to ensure that the Society remains strong and vibrant. We must reach out to future generations, while providing experiences that allow people of every age to encounter the One who consoles, heals, and makes all things new. We strive to do this in a way that helps them experience the unconditional love of God — a God who invites us to see Him through the eyes of a child. This is the heart of the Little Flower’s message.

Should you wish to explore your options as to how to include the Society of the Little Flower in your estate plans, please call our Special Gifts office at 888-996-1212 and ask to speak with Dan Pritchard. I would be happy to provide you with options to consider that are tailored to your situation. 🌹



Dan Pritchard
Special Gifts Officer

Testimonies of Grace

What a true and beautiful theme this issue of *Between Friends* embraces: “Grace is Everything.”

When I reflect on the many years spent talking with and visiting St. Thérèse’s friends, I am overwhelmed by the countless graced moments I’ve witnessed — testimonies of grace, experiences of grace, and lives transformed by grace. What a gift it is to be a witness to the works of God and His grace revealed through conversations and face-to-face encounters.

When Father Tom and I visit Len and Laura in California, I see God’s grace in the tender, steadfast care Laura offers Len.

When visiting Thérèse and Ted, we rejoiced with them over the blessing of twins — an answer to Thérèse’s heartfelt prayers to St. Thérèse and God’s gracious response. I have prayed with couples who shared how God has sustained their marriage for 64 years. Once I spoke with someone who called



from jail to say they had been spiritually rescued by the grace of God. Others have shared how even their trials and hardships became unexpected graces — understood only later with time and faith.

Many years ago, I served as the receptionist, answering calls from donors and friends of St. Thérèse. I could truly write a book about the stories I heard — graces of healing, transformation, forgiveness, and profound love. People entrusted me with the deepest parts of their souls, sharing how God, through the intercession of St. Thérèse, sustained them and saved them with His grace.

As our dear friend and intercessor St. Thérèse said, **“Everything is grace.”** Her own faith and love for Jesus are, themselves, a grace to us all.

His grace also protects us. How often I have said in my own life, *“There but for the grace of God go I.”* How true those words remain.

It is not hard to see God’s grace — simply look around you, at your life, and into your soul. Every moment, every thing, and every person is, truly, a grace from God. 🌹

BY MARY ZACHARIAS

Escaping the Hands of Probate

We have all heard stories about the probate process, and many of those stories have caused fear for those who are planning their final affairs. However, for many, the probate process is not something to avoid at all costs. It provides supervision so that your final wishes are carried out as you intended and that your final bills, taxes and other expenses are appropriately tended to.

That being said, there are certain assets that are controlled outside of someone’s will or trust; that is done by beneficiary designation (a “beneficiary designation” is a gift that is paid at the end of your lifetime). Often, naming a beneficiary is as simple as filling out a form.

For example, when you own a savings or checking account jointly, and one of the owners passes away, that account becomes the property of the survivor. However, as convenient as that might seem, be wary, as such an arrangement might have unintended consequences: there could be tax implications, and

joint owners are generally not bound to abide by your spoken wishes as to how those assets should be distributed.

Life Insurance, Individual Retirement Accounts and commercial Annuities offer the ability to name beneficiaries, with the benefits typically passed along outside of probate. Beneficiary designations can be for the full amount of the asset, a percentage of the asset, or can be made contingent on other circumstances.

Donor Advised Funds are becoming quite popular, as they provide a means to support one’s favorite charities in a tax-advantaged way, while also offering flexibility as to how the funds will be dispersed. These funds also offer an opportunity to name charitable beneficiaries, if there are assets remaining when one passes away.

Ultimately, escaping the hands of probate doesn’t mean avoiding responsibility — it means taking thoughtful steps to ensure your wishes

are honored efficiently and with minimal stress for your loved ones. By understanding the power of beneficiary designations, joint ownership, and tools like Donor Advised Funds, you can make sure your assets are distributed exactly as you intend.

Including the Society of the Little Flower in your estate plan not only supports a cause that is close to your heart, it also creates a lasting legacy that reflects your values. Whether through life insurance, retirement accounts, or other designated assets, careful planning allows you to leave a meaningful impact while simplifying the process for those you leave behind.

In the end, proactive estate planning is about more than avoiding probate — it’s about peace of mind, clarity, and the opportunity to make a difference long after your lifetime.

Want to learn more? Please call our Special Gifts office at 888-996-1212 to request your free copy of our booklet, *“Estate Planning Guide, What You Need to Know.”* It is our most popular asset organizer and resource guide. 🌹

BY DAN PRITCHARD



Grace
in the
Everyday

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

“Everything is grace”

OUR CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN FAITH is rooted in God’s greatest act of love and friendship: that God so loved us that He became one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. By wholeheartedly experiencing every aspect of our human journey, our life and death, Jesus sanctified it — making it holy. Ordinary human living is a spiritual journey to Love. God’s mercy understands why we live our powerful potential of connectedness and communion and why we sometimes fall short and detour on the way. God experienced in the humanity of His Son Jesus how complex they are, how it is filled with such promise, goodness, innocence, and hope, and also the strange paradoxes of insecurity, frustration, individualism, and fear that divide and separate us.

Jesus’ promise that “I am always with you,” empowers us to live the fullness of our dignity as God’s beloved sons and daughters — to be one family in Christ — and to respect the divinely inspired dignity of every other human person who shares this planet with us. God trusts us and empowers us to create God’s reign here on earth with love, justice, compassion, and generosity. Instead of just looking for Jesus in churches, let us look into the ordinary activities and experiences of our lives as the place God comes to us and dwells in us.

The mission of this *Between Friends* is to connect hearts through shared faith. We truly are friends of God, one another, and ourselves. As a Carmelite priest, I continue to be amazed by how many people seem to be afraid of God — somehow God has been used as a judgmental weapon to control people. We don’t allow intimacy or closeness to people or anyone we are afraid of — including God. I often wonder what God is thinking when we allow fear, guilt, or shame to distance us — when Jesus told us just the opposite: “I call you friends ... I love you ... I dwell in you.” Haven’t we all experienced the frustration of unrequited or rejected love?

Our beloved St. Thérèse embraced the message of Jesus. She taught us by her life and writings about the friendly

loving God and universe we live in, amid a world of rigorous Jansenism, which imaged God as angry, upset, never to be pleased, and highly judgmental. Mercy, compassion, and love were not the focus, as religion became focused on our sinfulness. Guilt, shame, scrupulosity, and fear were supposed to drive us to God. Getting close to God seemed like an obstacle course to work through. With the emphasis on fear, who would want to respond to a distant God we are afraid of?

St. Thérèse was prophetic as she stressed the graced universe of God’s loving presence. Her Little Way spirituality of confidence and trust is about doing simple ordinary things with extraordinary love. Her greatest teaching, **“Everything is Grace,”** seemed heretical to some whose focus was on the demonic and the presence of evil and the devil. Yet she is the youngest Doctor of the Church and a canonized saint because she captured the teachings of Jesus. As a Carmelite she learned that “Carmel” means the “garden of God.” We live where we are planted. We need to reflect on the goodness of life despite some of the setbacks and disappointments we experience.

Spring reminds us that the winters and barrenness of the world, although they seem lifeless, awaken us again



to new life, blooming with beauty and promise. Lent is the season of “come back to me with all your heart!” The seasons of life open us to transformation and a life-giving presence — the Presence of Jesus, who clearly stated: “I am always with you!” We are never truly alone, abandoned, or unloved. This is what grace is all about.

Grace is God’s presence. It is not something, but rather someone! Grace is God’s name — Who God is. It’s almost God’s official job description of how the Divine relates to us and all creation. Grace is what God does to keep alive all things that God has created in love. God is the center of our life and the source of all goodness and love. Grace is not earned, deserved, collected, or gathered. Grace is God’s love, life, and presence freely and unconditionally given.

Recall the Little Flower’s Christmas conversion, when her childlike innocence asked the Baby Jesus for the gift of being wholehearted in her love for Him. Shortly after returning home from Midnight Mass, she experienced Jesus challenging her: “*Thérèse, get over yourself, it is not about you!*” This is the invitation and call we all receive from God. In an age of entitlement, we can become so self-referential and self-

serving — looking only for what I am getting out of this.

Sometimes, we forget the scriptural truth that we are all created in the image and likeness of God. (Gn 1:26-27) The Book of Deuteronomy teaches us that each person is precious because God created each of us in love. Our biblical faith doesn’t hesitate to identify that each human being is special. The Book of Proverbs states; “*The human soul is the Divine spark ... it searches through our inmost being.*” Jesus confirms this when He proclaims most clearly in the Gospel of John: “*Anyone who loves Me will be true to My word, and My Father will love them and come to them and make our dwelling place with them.*” (Jn 14:23)

The Apostle Paul wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians (3:16-17): *Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple, which you are, is holy.*”

Carmelites are called to share the charism of mysticism, which is basically awakening to God’s presence everywhere, especially within us. As friends of the Carmelites and St. Thérèse, this attraction is the invitation to this mystical life — an awakening

to the incredible way God dwells within and among us. We awaken to a deepening sense of God as imminent, present, here, now, and even within me. In St. Augustine’s words, “*God is more intimate to me than I am to myself.*”

Other Catholic mystics picked up this truth of the Divine Indwelling and intimacy, as Julian of Norwich wrote: “*Greatly ought we to rejoice that God dwells in our soul; and more greatly ought we to rejoice that our soul dwells in God. Our soul is created to be God’s dwelling place, and*

the dwelling of our soul is God ... And I saw no difference between God and our substance, but, as it were, all God; and still my understanding accepted that our substance is in God.”

Our beloved St. Thérèse came to the same conviction: that God is close to us, even the sanctuary within us. “*Jesus, who fashions people’s souls skillfully, does not want us to stand about admiring the facade — He wants us to make our way in, till we reach the inner sanctuary which is His chosen dwelling and admire the beauty there.*”

Why don’t we hunger and thirst for this closeness and intimacy offered to us? Sometimes, I think it is easier to sleepwalk through life than awaken to the powerful Presence making us bigger than we might want to be.

Another Carmelite mystic, St. Teresa of Avila, whom the Little Flower was named after, wrote in her *Interior Castle*: “*Consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely of a single diamond or a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places ... the soul of a just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord finds His delight ... in the center and middle is the main dwelling place, where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place.*”

All spiritual traditions, especially our own Roman Catholic faith, speaks of that secret place within — that sanctuary untouched by the world, where the Divine spark makes us God's temple and the body of the Risen Lord. Did not Jesus teach us regarding prayer: *"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in synagogues and on street corners in order to be noticed. Whenever you pray, go to your inner room and pray to your Father in private ... do not rattle on like the pagans who think they will win a hearing by the sheer multiplication of words."* (Mt 6:5-7)

Grace is the Presence of God. Our *catechism* explains: Sanctifying grace is a Divine gift that makes a person holy by infusing our soul with God's life. It is a permanent, supernatural state of being that perfects and completes the soul, enables us to live in union with God, and allows it to be transformed by His love. This grace is received in many ways, including the sacraments and enables us to grow in virtue and communion.

When we mindfully and consciously pray and listen to the silent presence deep within us, it transforms the way we live our lives. Instead of word prayers, in silent listening we become more aware of the Divine spark within and around everyone — the family and people we live, work, and gather with; when getting out of bed, doing dishes, or house chores; when working, studying, shopping, relaxing; we sense the gentle fire and enthusiasm of God's presence in continual acts of love, reverence, contrition, trust, gratitude, justice, forgiveness, giving, asking for help, and all the best ways we can be light, hope, and hope for others, even just spending

time with another person.

God is the source of all love and goodness, but because God gives us free will, it requires our human cooperation: such as living God's commands, and awakening to the Divine Presence within us and as St. Thérèse teaches us: *"When charity is deeply rooted in the soul it shows itself on the outside."* Grace is not given for us to feel consoled, saved, and special, but rather to empower us to be the light of the world — to share the "good news" of God's eternal and always present love defining every human being. It is a blessing and a challenge to make a difference in the world and the structures that create divisions. Jesus trusts us to be His body here on earth. "Love one another as I have loved you," He said so often and very clearly.

St. Teresa of Avila captured this blessing and challenge of being grace in the everyday when she wrote: *Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks, compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body. Christ has no body now but yours; no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks compassion on this world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.* This is quite a statement of trust, love, and intimacy.

Recently, I endured a challenging time. I wasn't in a good mood, darkness seemed to inhabit me and my attitude. I was asked to celebrate the Baptism of a baby boy, Thomas, son of some

friends. At 2 months old, the baby seemed quiet, but curious about what was happening to him. Pouring the holy water awakened him a bit. But when I continued the Baptism ritual and anointed him with sacred chrism, he lit up. His eyes and face opened wide and his piercing eyes stared and looked deep into my soul. His family noticed this awakening. It affected us all. Grace was happening. The baby remembered where he came from and knew he was God's beloved son, confirmed in the sacrament. Baby Tom radiated it. My soul was touched and the inner darkness of spirit within me lifted. My soul was smiling. Jesus was smiling on and within Thomas and us. The ordinary, innocent look of the curious baby.

So this spring and Lent, let us be awakened to how **Grace is in the Everyday** — in every breath, person, and experience, the most natural or ordinary interactions of our lives. When we are happy, satisfied, joyful, generous, longing, and hopeful, and when we are disappointed, abandoned, lonely, disconnected, despairing, failing, unappreciated, unloved, or inadequate. **God is with us and understands, inviting us to rise above it and be embraced by Grace**, not revenge, anger, or self-pity. Without deep faith, we can become black holes, which science now knows are stars that collapse upon themselves so intensely that they cannot emit light. Jesus challenges and empowers us to be the light of the world. But we must cooperate by trusting the Light within — which is God — is grace permeating every day and experience of our lives. **We are more than who we think we are: Grace is God's dwelling with us and all around us in the real, ordinary world of our lives.**

Let us awaken to how God is present to each and every one of us. Gratitude creates generosity. Let us be the light of the world, and practice what Jesus and St. Thérèse teach us. Yes, "Everything is Grace," despite how ordinary it may seem. Let us be the light of our world, because the Light of the World radiates in and through us. 🌹

**"When charity is deeply rooted in the soul
it shows itself on the outside."**

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX



An hour in the life of 'your friendly neighborhood Carmelite'

Allow me to introduce myself: I am Father Christopher Kulig, “your friendly neighborhood Carmelite.” I used the aforementioned moniker during the COVID-19 years in my virtual ministry at our Canadian Shrine to St. Thérèse. It is my joy to now bring my friendly hospitality to our Shrine of St. Thérèse in Darien.

It has been a blessing for me to continue shrine ministry here in my native United States after a decade of ministry in Canada. Part of my joy in shrine ministry comes from the variety of people and experiences that can come each day, or even within an hour. I was blessed with one such “holy hour” of God’s graces one ordinary afternoon here on the National Shrine and Museum Campus.

I had just finished my sixth taco at the annual summer picnic lunch for all our employees when I was asked if I could come meet some visitors. I soon discovered what I came to call the “Two Marys” — two women, both named Mary, who were clearly upset and looking for help. My picnic was over; time to get back to work.

When I greeted them, I simply asked how I could assist. The more vocal Mary exclaimed, “Nobody knows where the Holy Doors are!” Smiling gently, I asked if she and her friend were here to receive the indulgence for visiting our Shrine in the Jubilee Year. When she said, “Yes!” I replied, “I will be happy to show you.”

Now, there is no specific “Holy Door” at our Shrine, but I knew what they

needed to do. As I walked with them over to the Shrine, I engaged them with stories of Thérèse; Mary was fascinated by the Little Flower, and I realized that she really was not a threat to anyone. She just was frustrated that no one could give her a clear answer. At the Shrine, I pointed out the side alcove with our beautiful statue of Thérèse, instructed her and the less vocal Mary in the traditional prayers for a jubilee visit to the Shrine, and left them to complete their pilgrimage.

A half hour later, Mary and Mary took the time to say goodbye and seemingly could not be happier. By now, I needed to return to my office. As I left with the two Marys, I spotted a bishop and three priests coming to the Shrine. Recognizing that we priests are often seen as representing Jesus to the faithful, I quipped, “Well, I just met you two Marys, now four priests are visiting. What’s next? Six Josephs?” The bishop was Bishop John Barres, the ordinary of Rockville Center in New York; he and the priests had been in Chicago for a meeting and were drawn to visit our Shrine and Museum. I explained that

they were coming to the Shrine Chapel, but that the museum, which holds the lion share of Thérèse’s relics, was across the parking lot. They thanked me for the direction, and after a brief visit in the Shrine, they left for the Museum.

My office work was calling, but I felt the need to point out one of the many details of the museum — Celine’s painting. What I thought would be a simple message of a few minutes morphed into a constant flood of stories of devotion and miracles from Thérèse shared by my fellow priests, the bishop, and myself. Bishop Barres intentionally came to our Shrine and Museum as part of his spiritual preparation for presenting on St. Thérèse the following month. After promising to pray for the Bishop and the success of his talk, I returned to my office. I would be greeted by an affirming, heartfelt “thank you” letter for my impromptu hospitality from the Bishop a few days later.

To find God in the ordinary times of our lives, we simply need to look deeply at the people that God brings into our lives. In the span of an hour, I found that presence in the fellowship of my new fellow staff; in the practice of Thérèse’s “Little Way” with some frustrated pilgrims; and in the hospitality to my brother clergy who shared my deep devotion to St. Thérèse. Yes, I revel in the many and varied ways that God makes His love known through the people who come to our Shrine. All are part of the spiritual family that is Carmel.

Oh, and if you were wondering if the six Josephs ever arrived, they did not, at least in the flesh. Rather, they were present in the spirit of my family, where I have six relatives — a grandfather, uncle, brother, nephew, and two cousins — all named Joseph. As Thérèse’s family was integral to her personal and faith development, so my family has made me “your friendly neighborhood Carmelite,” joyfully serving in my new neighborhood in Darien since this past May. 🌹



Father Christopher Kulig, O. Carm.
National Shrine
of St. Thérèse

GRACE *in the* EVERYDAY



St. Thérèse taught that all is grace, tout est grâce. “Everything is a grace because everything is God’s gift.” I believe every aspect of life is a grace, whether we feel it or not. The joyful times, the sad times, the challenges, our weaknesses, our sufferings. The surprises. There is grace in everything ... because our experiences can lead us to being a new person; can lead us closer to God. Grace meets us where we are, and never leaves us the same.

Graced moments happen every day. And isn't that where St. Thérèse told us where God is found? In the ordinariness of everyday life. You bet. Grace is the same. Grace happens.

As a priest, I encounter a lot of people. Some at their best, and some at their worst. And I know that people have encountered me at my best and, yes, at my worst. That's the way life is, and God is present in every encounter. Those who know me know I have a big heart for the poor. I look for every opportunity to help others. That's what the Gospel calls us to do. St. Thérèse knew that! That's why she wrote, “Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.”

Last June, I had an encounter which stirred me to the core. It was truly one of those graced moments. When I find it hard to explain something, I like to write it in poetic form. I called this particular experience, “The Needy and the Greedy.”

Sacred Moment

Today a young man came by the priory with a black garbage bag filled with 5 pairs of boots. He didn't know what to do with them. But he knew I would know. I said, leave them here... we'll find a home. No problem to find owners downtown, I said. So he laid them in the porch. Nice man. He brings clothes and toys often. He has a big heart. After he left, I opened the bag to examine the boots. Out of the 5 pairs there were 3 pairs that would be good for homeless men to wear. So I decided to put them on our little wall in front of the priory. Next to the sidewalk. For two hours, no one came by. Getting ready for a funeral, I was dressed in my Carmelite habit, having a coffee, strolling around the property. Breathing in some peace and fresh air. I saw a young man coming from LCBO (the local liquor store across the street) in a white SUV. He saw the boots on the wall. They caught his attention right away. He pulled in our driveway and stopped.



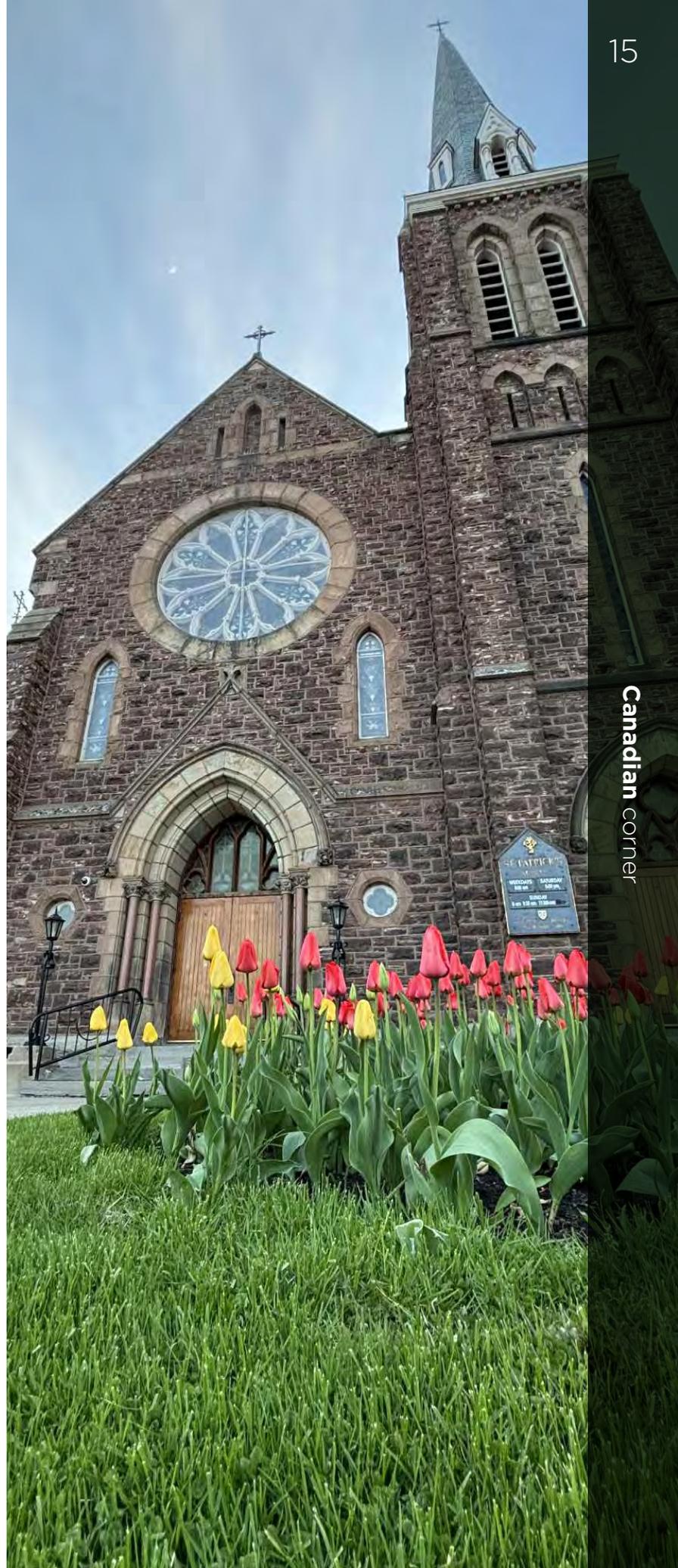
He got out and examined the boots.
 Held them up to have a closer look.
 Bingo! He hit the jackpot.
 He didn't see me strolling around,
 in my habit, having a coffee,
 and breathing in peace and fresh air.
 I was standing in the driveway
 watching quite intently.
 The young man
 with his weekend spirits in his SUV,
 put a pair of boots under one arm,
 a pair under his other arm,
 and a pair in his left hand.
 And headed for his shiny white SUV.
 Until ...
 he was interrupted by a voice
 that came from the driveway:
Hey, they're for the homeless.
 Well, I'm needy, he said.
 Three pairs? Really? I asked.
 I would call that greedy.
 Well I'll put two pairs back.
 That would be wise, I said.
 We have to think of others too, I added.
 So he sheepishly

placed two pairs back on the wall.
 With his tail between his legs,
 he left with one pair of boots.
 Got in his nice white Ford SUV
 and drove away.
 I shook my head.
 It wasn't 4 minutes later I saw him.
 A disheveled man in his 70's.
 Pulling a little cart
 down Victoria Avenue
 in front of the church.
 He looked worn out.
 Exhausted.
 When he came near the 2 pairs of boots,
 he sat down.
 Caught his breath.
 And held each boot up.
 Sizing them up very carefully.
 Being nearby, I walked down
 and greeted the old man.
 Must be in his 70's.
 Long curly white hair,
 coloured by age and tobacco.
 Yellowed moustache.
 His boots were well worn.
 No laces. Tongues hanging out.
 I hope they fit! I said, as I greeted him.
 They look real good, he said.
 I reckon they'll fit. They look comfortable.
 Yes sir, I said.
 And they're waterproof too.
 And I can have 'em?
 Yes sir, they're yours.
 His white shirt carried a nasty odour,
 and was coloured and tarnished
 from age and wear and sweat.
 He reached into his little cart
 and pulled out a reusable shopping bag,
 and put the two pairs in.
 I thank you sir, he said.
 But let me do something for you.
 No need sir, I said.
 But he was having none of it.
 He sifted through a bag,
 For what seemed like forever
 and finally came up
 with an old Cross on a chain,
 repaired a few times.
 Tattered and well-worn.
 I want you to have this, he said.
 There's no need sir.
 You can wear that.
 You should keep that for yourself.
 No, I want you to have it, sir.
 And let's say,
 you can give it back to me
 when we get to Heaven.

Wow.
I smiled.
And he placed the tattered Cross in my hands,
as the breeze blew his foul odour over me.
I was touched. And blessed.
Brought to tears.
The greedy and the needy.
I experienced both in a few minutes.
The blessed and the not-so blessed.
Three for me. None for you.
Not so. Not so.
And in the end I was blessed.
Truly blessed.
By the prayers and kindness
of a homeless man.
He asked for a hug.
And in the heat of a June day,
I hugged him...
And carried his scent
for the rest of the afternoon.
until I returned from a funeral.

Graced moments happen when we least expect. Yes, *tout est grace*. His cross still sits on the table in the entrance of our parish office. On this table, we keep religious items, photos, little statues, and now this tattered chain with a cross. A very sacred item. A reminder of grace. "Never get tired of doing little things for others. Sometimes, those little things occupy the biggest part of their hearts." These are wise words from St. Thérèse.

Sometimes, it's hard to explain grace! We are so limited by words. It reminds me of something I wrote on a silent retreat preparing for my first vows as a Carmelite. There was a little prayer shack on the property, next to a lake. Many retreatants etched words and sentiments on the walls of this shack. I wrote, "I cannot see God, nor can I see the breeze. But I do see the trees dance." That pretty well sums up grace for me. That energy, that gift, that divine love. It sustained St. Thérèse in her short life. May that grace sustain each of us. *Tout est grâce.* 🌹



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