

# Therese of lisieux



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for My sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live. ----- The Gospel According to Mark, 8-35 Except for human beings all other creations of God know the secret of the harmony of life by their inner instincts. Man fails to comprehend this secret as he gets engaged in stiff competition with each other for material “ success” and those who fail, get depressed with inferiority complex. None of the other living creatures have such complexes. One holy soul who taught the world that little humans too can do great sacrifices was Saint Therese of Lisieux (1873 -1897). She almost shares this trait with another woman mystic, Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). As Carol L. Flinters point out “ Over and over in the lives of these women, perhaps most explicitly in Teresa and Therese, we come to see the incredible strength that comes of starting with “ the little things” (Enduring Grace, Introduction, PP12). These saints gave away their lives for the sake of God and for others. Saint Therese was born in France in 1873 with a strange background of parenthood. Her father wanted to be a monk and her mother a saint. Thus after marriage they decided to go for celibacy. It was a priest who convinced them otherwise and they had nine children. Five children who survived were all girls. Therese lost her mother when she was just four. Her sixteen year old elder sister, Pauline was her second mother. But she lost this mother too as Pauline joined the Carmelite convent with in five years. Later after a few months when she fell ill and when every one thought that she was dying, she prayed at the statue of Mary in her room and found that Mary was smiling at her. She got cured. Carole L. Flinters points out that, such periods of illness and solitary sufferings are seen in the lives of most of these women mystics including

Saint Teresa of Avila. Perhaps it was then that they got purged off their worldly desires. “ In Teresa’s case and in Therese’s one has the feeling the experience had a different significance, that a kind of war was taking place with in the will itself , the body and the mind being the battlefield, and the truce, when it came , an uneasy one .” (Enduring Grace, PP 222) May be that she got purged off her worldly desires; she started to practice mental prayer at the age of eleven. Here again she resembles Saint Teresa of Avila who was almost the inventor of mental prayer. Later two other sisters of hers joined religious orders, one among them Marie in the Carmelite order, which increased Therese’s urge for religious life. Therese was a weak girl emotionally. She will burst into tears when some one criticized her or some one else did not appreciate her. Still the at most desire of this weak emotional girl was to join the Carmelite order. But she was too young to be admitted. Her father and sister took her for a pilgrimage to Rome to get this crazy idea off her head. There, during a public audience with the Pope, she flung herself into his feet and begged him to allow her into the Carmelite order. The Pope simply said “ Well child, do what the superiors decide.” But shortly after this the order came from above to admit her into the Carmelite order. Thus in April 1888 at the age of fifteen years and three months Therese became a nun. The life in the convent for a fifteen year old was very tough. Just after her entry into the convent her father got mentally derailed and was send to an asylum. Therese was helplessly grief stricken. She would fall into sleep while in prayers. When every one made fun of her, she consoled herself thinking that a child in sleep is the most loved and so God will love her more when she fell asleep in prayers. She was a little child incapable of great deeds. So she chose the path of little sacrifices. She

smiled at the nuns who hated or made fun of her. She ate anything that was given to her without complaints and she was often supplied with left over food. Once she was accused of breaking a vessel. Though she knew that the mistake was not hers, she did not argue; she fell on her knees and begged pardon. None appreciated these little sacrifices. When her own sister Pauline was elected as prioress, she asked her to give the ultimate sacrifice. To avoid the scandal of the family rule in the convent, Pauline asked Therese to remain a novice. It means that she has to get prior permission for every thing she does. She did not complain again. She was working beyond her age without complaining and in 1896 she had tuberculosis; one day she coughed up blood. She did not let any one know it too and continued her works. She kept smiling when others accused her of pretending illness. She died on September 30, 1897 at the age of 24. Saint Therese is best known for her “Little Way”. Little way is a spiritual childhood where one trusts God and surrenders everything without any complaint. One need not go for big sacrifices or heroic deeds to express ones love for God. Through little sacrifices also one can attain holiness. She was always described as the “little flower” and she believed in shattering flowers as offering to God. Maybe her perpetual smiles were her flowers of offering. In her autobiography titled “Story of a Soul” she describes souls as flowers of different types. Some are roses, some lilies and some are like orchids. All these flowers are equally dear to God and each one has a place and role. Like wise there are no big people or big sacrifices. Little people and little sacrifices are equally important and equally dear to God. Through such little sacrifices she says, “I have found my place in the church. In the heart of the Church I shall be love. Thus I shall be every thing, and thus my dream will be realized.” (Story of a

Soul, PP 194) According to Flinders these were her final words before she breathed her last —“ Oh I love Him... my God I love you.” (Enduring Grace, PP 212). She was canonized after 28 years of her death. -----

Sources Referred: 1) Flinders Carol Lee, The Enduring Grace, Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics, Harperone, 18th Edition, June 11, 1993. 2) Martin Therese (of Lisieux) and T. N. Tyler, (Ed), The Story of a Soul, The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, Echo Library, 2006. 3) The living New Testament, Tyndale House Foundation, Wheaton, Illinois, 1967.