

## 50th anniversary St. Therese Little Flower Grade School

When we were in grade school, the parish used to offer a novena leading up to the feast of St. Therese in early October. My parents took me to some of it. St. Therese lived from 1873 to 1897. Her superiors made her write about her life. The priest giving our novena one year had read her book, and quoted from it. I got interested in the words that St. Therese had written. I thought I should read her book, but I didn't know how to find it. So one night when the novena had ended, I asked the visiting priest, "What is the title of the autobiography of St. Therese?" He said, "It's called *The Autobiography of St. Therese.*" Which isn't quite correct. It's called *The Story of a Soul.* I hate to admit this to you, especially inside this church, but I still haven't read her autobiography.

This much I know. When Therese was four, her mother died. When her older sister joined the convent, Therese decided to do the same. She was only 14, the age we were at graduation from this school. Her bishop agreed, and she took the religious name Therese of the Infant Jesus. She believed that anyone could achieve holiness. A child trusts in God, feels God's love, and responds by loving others. Therese called this "The Little Way." When one of her sisters got engaged, she wrote, "We have both said good-bye to carefree childhood days. Now we have to face the responsibilities of life.... You and I must have a single aim: to grow in holiness while following the way that God in his goodness has laid down for us." Therese wanted to become a missionary in Hanoi, but she got very sick. She wrote, "I will spend my heaven doing good upon earth," and she promised to let fall from heaven a shower of roses. She suffered from tuberculosis for a year and a half. At one point she prayed to Mary, "Holy Virgin, you know how I am suffocating! I can't get any earthly air, when will the Lord give me that of heaven?" She wrote 200 letters, 62 poems, prayers, and plays to be performed in the convent. She died at the age of 24. The pope canonized her rather quickly, in 1925, and Bishop Lillis asked Father Maurice Coates to open this parish that same year. This is one of the oldest parishes in the world named for St. Therese.

Perhaps her shower of roses helped each of us, especially when we were children here. Jesus said, "whoever humbles yourself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven." In some ways our years here were our greatest, the times when people loved us, cared for us, guided us, taught us, inspired us, and prayed that we would become good adults. Whoever we are today we owe in great part to the people of St. Therese Parish.

A few years ago I sat at a meeting with people reviewing the names of saints as they appeared in the Roman Missal that the priest uses at mass. When they got to October 1, one of the participants wanted to add French accent marks over the saint's name, so people would pronounce it *Thérèse of Lisieux.* Others agreed, and that's how her name appears in the prayers I'm using today. All I could think that day was, "Well, that's not how we pronounced it on 58th Street. We were a blue collar neighborhood. We understood 'The Little Way,' and she will always be St. Therese to us." She still is. She is a bride of Christ, the Savior who makes all things new. Even after 50 years Therese spends her heaven doing good upon earth for us. We are grateful to the people who formed us in this school that carries her name. Let us live as we have learned, according to the Little Way.

**FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2017**