

St. Therese
10/1/2023

THREE ABSOLUTES

At 7:20 PM on September 30, 1897, in a provincial French town, a twenty-four year old Carmelite nun died after an excruciating bout with tuberculosis. Outside of her family and convent she was rather unknown to the world. In less than 30 years she would be canonized a saint and become one of the most popular saints in the history of the Church. Her name was Therese Martin or in religious life, Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

Our heavenly patroness lived her life with two absolutes and a third. The first was an absolute trust in the mercy of God. She said hers was the way of confidence, of childlike trust that we hear about in the gospel. This wasn't presumption but a strong trust in God's mercy. By her vocation she wanted to lead all to God's loving mercy. But in order to understand mercy we also have to understand human weakness and sin. When we realize our own poverty and neediness, we are able to receive the love and mercy of God that is greater than our sins. Without understanding our need for mercy, mercy itself loses its value. This absolute trust in God's mercy didn't mean doing nothing.

The second absolute was a complete and total determination to everything for the love of God and the salvation of souls. She was determined to do this whether it meant dying an agonizing death or picking a pin up off the floor. This is known as the little way. It sounds simple and while it is simple; it's not necessarily easy. St. Therese lived with twenty some other women who, like her, were trying to grow in holiness but were also capable of getting on each others' nerves and even at times treating each other poorly. She described some of those challenges and don't think that the little way is always the easy—sometimes it is not.

And then there is a third absolute and that is the Eucharist, Jesus who gives himself to us at Mass and remains present under the form of bread and wine. She movingly recalled the joy of her First Communion when she was eleven years old. She described that as the first kiss of Jesus and was so happy that she wept. People thought she might have been upset or missing her mother who died years earlier but those were tears of joy.

She said, *How could my mother's absence hurt me on the day of my first Communion? Heaven dwelt in my soul and Mummy had been there for a long time, and when Jesus visited me so did my beloved mother.*

She understood something about the Communion of Saints. She realized that in Christ, particularly in the Eucharist, she was still connected to her mother.

In the Eucharist, Jesus unites himself to us in a very intimate way but we share a communion, a common unity with all those united to him. That includes our beloved faithful departed who already share in the life and love of God in heaven. The Eucharist unites us to Christ but also with believers throughout the world today and throughout time, including those in purgatory and those in heaven.

One of her assignments in the monastery was to be a sacristan making preparations for Mass. She took great delight in this work and wrote one of her many poems about it as she talked about Jesus' goal in coming to us in the Sacrament. She said, *We too are hosts and he desires to change us into him as well.* In other words, bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ so that in turn, we too can become transformed in Christ.

She also knew that the final resting place of the Eucharist is to be the human heart. She said, *It is not to remain in a golden ciborium that He comes down each day from Heaven. He comes to find another Heaven, the Heaven of our souls, created in His image, the living temples of the adorable Trinity!"*

St. Therese lived a life of very intentional faith. As we celebrate her feast we pray that as individuals and as a parish we may always move forward together with absolute trust in God mercy, with an absolute determination to do everything large or small, difficult or easy, sad or joyful for the love of God and salvation of souls. And may we do so with an absolute and growing love of the great gift that Jesus makes of himself to us in the Eucharist.

May we always remember the Communion of Saints and the connection between the Communion of the Eucharist and the Communion of Saints. May we be hosts that Jesus transforms into Himself. In each of us may Jesus find another heaven in our souls ready to receive him. May we reverently, worthily and frequently receive him with great joy.

And may St. Therese of the Child Jesus and Holy Face, Doctor of the Church, instruct us with her wisdom, inspire us through her example and assist us with her prayers so that we too may share in the loving eternal Communion she now shares with our God