

“Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ, amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward” (Mk 9:41). But what about the soul that does not belong to Christ? What about the hardened sinner who shows no remorse? Didn’t Jesus die for the sake of the worst of sinners?

October 1<sup>st</sup> we celebrate the Feast Day of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the patroness of our missionary diocese. She aspired to greatness by tending to the little things. With her childlike trust in God, she loved God with all her heart. That love of God extended to the lost and forsaken, one might say to offering a drink of water to a soul everyone had forsaken.

March 17, 1887, the newspapers in France were all abuzz about a terrible crime. A woman of ill repute was murdered, and a thief had absconded with jewelry worth hundreds of thousands of francs. Henri Pranzini was brought in for questioning as a person of interest. Police later searched his room, found bloodstained clothing, and began to build an airtight case against him. Pranzini maintained his innocence while he languished in jail. In due time he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. The execution date was set for August.

In the public’s eye, he was irredeemable and deserved having a huge millstone tied around his neck and being thrown into the sea. Saint Thérèse viewed the situation quite differently. Struck by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, she recognized that Jesus died for the most hardened of sinners. With childlike trust, she wanted to save the soul of Pranzini out of concern for the killer and out of love for God. Thérèse placed herself at the foot of the Cross, and prayed for the conversion of lost souls, especially desiring to “snatch sinners from the everlasting flames of Hell.”<sup>i</sup>

Thérèse was particularly concerned because the convicted killer showed no remorse. Thérèse began to offer the “infinite merits of Our Savior and the treasures of the Holy Church” for his salvation. On the day of execution, Thérèse’s prayers were particularly intense. “My God, I am quite sure that You will pardon this unhappy Pranzini. I should still think so if he did not confess his sins or give any sign of sorrow, because I have such confidence in Your unbounded Mercy; but this is my first sinner, and therefore I beg for just one sign of repentance to reassure me.”<sup>ii</sup>

As he walked to the gallows, the hardened criminal turned to the chaplain and asked for a crucifix. Thérèse learned of the miraculous change of heart when she read the paper the following day. “I hastily opened the paper...and what did I see? Tears betrayed my emotion; ... [he] ...turned round, seized the crucifix which the Priest was offering to him, and kissed Our Lord’s Sacred Wounds three times.”<sup>iii</sup> Thérèse thanked Jesus profusely, her prayer was granted to the letter.

Thérèse entered the convent the following year still a child at the age of 15. She chose an austere life of prayer cut off from the world but ever present to God. In the convent, her love for Jesus blossomed. She only had a third-grade education, but Jesus instructed her soul and she advanced greatly in spiritual knowledge. Today we know her as a Doctor of the Church.

To those sisters around her in the convent, she was the least and insignificant. No one but God knew her interior disposition, her joy of being a little flower in God’s Garden. While she admired the heroic life of the saints, she wanted to help the ordinary person attain the lofty heights of heaven. “It pleases God to create great Saints, who may be compared with the lilies or the rose; but He has also created little ones, who must be content to be daisies or violets, nestling at His feet to delight His eyes when He should choose to look at them. The happier they are to be as He wills, the more perfect they are.”<sup>iv</sup>

It is not the great things that matter, it is the little things. With God's inspiration, Saint Thérèse developed her Little Way as a means to make sainthood accessible for everyone. Like a child, we place our trust in God. What are his desires? How can I please him? Love of God becomes the motivation for everything in life, especially the littlest things. "When we make ourselves small and humble, we let go of trying to control our lives – even our spiritual life. We become a blank canvas for God to work through us, rather than despite us. On a practical level, we should not leave out the small and meaningful tasks of our everyday lives."<sup>v</sup>

Whatever we do, the littlest and mundane things are done with a love of God. "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."<sup>vi</sup> In this Little Way, "All things in our life become avenues to God. Everything becomes grace."<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> catholicworldreport.com/2020/09/30/the-killer-and-the-saint-pranzini-and-therese/

<sup>ii</sup> Story of a Soul.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> dowym.com/voices/inspiring-quotes-from-st-therese-of-lisieux/

<sup>v</sup> wedaretosay.com/what-is-the-little-way-of-st-therese-of-lisieux/

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid, Quotes.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid, The Little Way.