

“Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46). The hometown of Jesus was small and insignificant. Does this not describe two of the great mysteries of our Catholic faith?

- The Almighty Son of God, became human, born of the Virgin, small and insignificant. He who always was eternal, becomes mortal, subject to sin and death. He did not sin, and yet he allowed the sins of others to condemn him to death.
- In Holy Communion, a small piece of bread is changed by the words of Jesus, first voiced at the Lord’s Supper, and by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. A small and insignificant sliver of baked wheat becomes the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Risen Lord and Savior.

Yes indeed, something good and gracious can come from Nazareth ... although we might easily miss it ... for in outward appearances it seems so small and insignificant.

Saint Therese of Lisieux lived a hidden life. To outward appearances she was small and insignificant. To Jesus, she was a beloved soul mate. She loved God with all of her heart, mind and soul and she sought out the hidden face of Jesus in others. An incident that she recounts in her spiritual autobiography provides insight for how we to might search for Jesus in the small and insignificant.

The Carmelite Nun lived in a small cloistered community where she chose a life of social isolation in order to focus on a life of prayer and devotion to Jesus. Isolated and in daily contact with a little over a dozen other religious sisters, it had all of the ingredients we might find very difficult to live with amidst the pandemic when travel can be severely restricted and we can be so easily annoyed by those we live with and see on a daily basis.

Therese writes: “There was ... a certain nun who managed to irritate me in everything she did. The devil had a part in it, for it was certainly he who made me see all her bad points. Not wishing to give way to natural antipathy, I reminded myself that sentiments of charity were not enough; they must find expression, and I set myself to treat her as if I loved her best of all. I prayed for her whenever we met and offered all her virtues and merits to God.”<sup>i</sup>

Therese’s prayer was silent and known but to God ... one might call it small and insignificant. Recognizing that she saw the flaws in this other sister, she tried to see the other person through the eyes of God. She looked past the exterior to try to understand what “the Divine Artist of souls” finds pleasing. Therese wanted to see the hidden face of Jesus in this other sister and to “penetrate the inner sanctuary where He dwells, to admire its beauty.”

Therese prayed for the other sister, but also prayed to calm her own inner struggle. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Therese recognized the need to practice virtue to combat her vice, her aversion to the other sister. Prayer alone was not enough.

Therese went out of her way to do whatever she could to help the other sister. She intentionally placed herself in the presence of the sister who annoyed her and tried to imitate Christ by reflecting God’s love to her. Instead of responding with a sharp word, she would respond with a smile. If she felt she might slip into some burst of anger, she retreated.

The other sister noticed the undue attention and asked Therese directly, “What do you find so attractive in me? Whenever we meet, you give me such a gracious smile.” In her autobiography Therese explains, “What attracted me? It was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus who makes attractive even what is most bitter.”

“Can anything good come from Nazareth?” That which we might at first perceive as small and insignificant may indeed be anything but. Let us fix our gaze on Jesus that we might see the divine in others.

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<sup>i</sup> Excerpted from *The Story of a Soul* by Thérèse of Lisieux