



**THERESIAN
ANNIVERSARIES
2023-2025**

**Reading of the writings of Theresse of the Child Jesus
Theresian anniversaries 2023-2025
2023: Manuscript A**



Study guide 2:
The smile of the Virgin
(Ms A, 29v-31v)

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Proposal for the Community meeting:

1. Reading of the text.
2. One of the participants, who has already prepared his contribution, presents the text with the help of the reading schedule (and other supports, if necessary).
3. Community dialogue on the text.

It would be good if the community meeting was preceded by a personal reading and meditation on the text of Therese.

MANUSCRIPT A, 29v-31v

(ICS English translation pp 64 - 71)

My greatest consolation when I was sick was to receive a letter from *Pauline*. I read and reread it until I knew it by heart. Once, dear Mother, you sent me an hourglass and one of my dolls dressed as a Carmelite; it was impossible for me to express my joy. Uncle wasn't too happy, and said that instead of making me think of Carmel, it would be better to remove it from my mind. I am quite convinced, on the contrary, that the thought of one day becoming a Carmelite made me live.

I enjoyed working for Pauline. I made her little things out of cardboard and my greatest occupation was to make crowns for the Blessed Virgin out of daisies and forget-me-nots. We were at the time in the beautiful month of May, and nature was adorned with flowers and was bursting out with joy. The "*little flower*" alone was languishing and seemed forever withered.

However, she had a Sun near her, and this Sun was the *miraculous statue* of the Blessed Virgin that had spoken to Mama twice, and the little flower often, very often, turned her petals toward this blessed Star. One day I saw Papa enter Marie's room where I was in bed. He gave her several pieces of gold with an expression of great sadness and told her to write to Paris and have some Masses said at Our Lady of Victories so that she would cure his poor little girl. Ah! how touched I was to see my dear King's faith and love! [30r°] I would have loved to be able to tell him I was cured; but I had already given him enough false joys, and it wasn't my

desires that could work a miracle, and a *miracle* was necessary for my cure.

A miracle was necessary and it was our Lady of Victories who worked it. One Sunday during the Novena of Masses, Marie went into the garden, leaving me with Léonie who was reading near the window. After a few moments I began calling in a low tone: "Mama, Mama." Léonie, accustomed to hearing me always calling out like this, didn't pay any attention. This lasted a long time, and then I called her much louder. Marie finally returned. I saw her enter, but I cannot say I recognized her and continued to call her in a louder tone: "Mama." *I was suffering very much* from this forced and inexplicable struggle and Marie was suffering perhaps even more than I. After some futile attempts to show me she was by my side,⁵⁹ Marie knelt down near my bed with Léonie and Céline. Turning to the Blessed Virgin and praying with the fervor of a mother begging for the life of her child, *Marie* obtained what she wanted.

Finding no help on earth, poor little Thérèse had also turned toward the Mother of heaven, and prayed with all her heart that she take pity on her. All of a sudden the Blessed Virgin appeared *beautiful* to me, so *beautiful* that never had I seen anything so attractive; her face was suffused with an ineffable benevolence and tenderness, but what penetrated to the very depths of my soul was the *«ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin.»* At that instant, all my pain disappeared, and two large tears glistened on my eyelashes, and flowed down my cheeks silently, but they were tears of unmixed joy. Ah! I thought, the Blessed

Virgin smiled at me, how happy I am, [30v^o] but never will I tell anyone for my *happiness would then disappear*. Without any effort I lowered my eyes, and I saw Marie who was looking down at me lovingly; she seemed moved and appeared to surmise the favor the Blessed Virgin had given me. Ah! it was really to her, to her touching prayers that I owed the grace of the Queen of heaven's *smile*. Seeing my gaze fixed on the Blessed Virgin, she cried out: «Thérèse is cured!» Yes, the little flower was going to be born again to life, and the luminous *Ray* that had warmed her again was not to stop its favors; the Ray did not act all at once, but sweetly and gently it raised the little flower and strengthened her in such a way that five years later she was expanding on the fertile mountain of Carmel.

As I said, Marie had guessed that the Blessed Virgin had given me some hidden grace. When I was alone with her and she asked me what I had seen, I was unable to resist her very tender and pressing questions; astonished at seeing my secret discovered without my having revealed it, I confided it entirely to my dear Marie. Alas! just as I had felt, my happiness was going to disappear and change into bitterness. The memory of the ineffable grace I had received was a real *spiritual trial* for me for the next four years, and I was not to find my happiness again until I was kneeling at the feet of Our Lady of Victories. At this time, my happiness was restored to me *in all its fullness*. I shall talk later on about this second grace of the Blessed Virgin. At present I shall explain, my dear Mother, how my joy was changed into sadness.

Marie, after having heard the simple and sincere recital of “my grace,” asked me for permission to tell it at Carmel, and I could not say no. On my first visit to this dear Carmel, I was filled with joy when seeing my *Pauline* with the habit of the Blessed Virgin. [31r^o] It was a sweet moment for both of us. There were so many things to say that I couldn’t say anything at all, my heart was too full. Good Mother Marie de Gonzague was there also, giving me a thousand signs of affection; I saw the other Sisters, and in their presence I was questioned about the grace I had received. They asked me if the Blessed Virgin was carrying the Child Jesus, or if there was much light, etc. All these questions troubled me and caused me much pain, and I was able to say only one thing: «The Blessed Virgin had appeared *very beautiful*, and I had seen her *smile at me*.» It was her *countenance alone* that had struck me, and seeing that the Carmelites had imagined something else entirely (my spiritual trials beginning already with regard to my sickness), I thought I *had lied*. Without any doubt, if I had kept my secret I would also have kept my happiness, but the Blessed Virgin permitted this torment for my soul’s good, as perhaps without it I would have had some thought of vanity, whereas *humiliation* becoming my lot, I was unable to look upon myself without a feeling of *profound horror*. Ah! what I suffered I shall not be able to say except in heaven!

While speaking about the visit to the Carmelites, I am reminded of the first visit which took place shortly after *Pauline’s* entrance. I forgot to speak about it, but there is a detail that should not be omitted. The morning of the day I was to visit, I was thinking things over in

my *bed* (for it was there I made my profound meditations, and, contrary to the bride in the Canticles, I always found my Beloved there), I wondered what name I would be given in Carmel. I knew there was a Sister Thérèse of Jesus; however, my beautiful name of Thérèse could not be taken away from me. All of a sudden, I thought [31v^o] of *Little Jesus* whom I loved so much, and I said: «Oh! how happy I would be if they called me Thérèse of the Child Jesus!» I *said nothing* during the visit about the *dream* I had while wide awake. But to good *Mother Marie de Gonzague*, who was asking the Sisters what name I should be given, came the idea of calling me by the name I had *dreamed* about. My joy was great and this happy meeting of minds seemed to be a singular favor from my beloved Child Jesus.

Introduction to the text:

Let us repeat what we already said in the first work sheet about the «miraculous statue of the Blessed Virgin»: it is the «Virgin of the Smile» which is now above the tomb of the Saint. The Martin-Guérin spouses had a particular devotion to this image, which plays an essential role in Therese's life, curing her of her serious childhood nervous disease (Ms A, 29v-31r) and accompanying her in her agony in the infirmary (from July 8, 1897). In January 1895, it was in the antechamber of Therese's cell.

This statue had been offered to the young Louis Martin by a very pious old woman from Alençon who was confident that she had found in him a person worthy of receiving such a gift. As a bachelor, Louis placed her in his gazebo, where he used

to retire to read and pray. After their marriage, the statue became the center of family prayer. During Mary's month she was surrounded by flowers. Often, Zèlie Martin, Luis's wife, turned to the Blessed Virgin, and confessed that she had received «favours that only I know.» In Les Buissonnets (name of the Martins' house in Lisieux after Zèlie's death), the statue continued to occupy a prominent place.

Therese also prayed to Our Lady under the title of our Lady of Victories: a devotion and sanctuary much loved by the Martins. A novena of Masses was celebrated in Paris for the healing of Therese as a child. On her journey to Rome, Therese visited this church on November 4, 1887, with her father and Celine, and received a calming grace (Ms A, 30v; 56v-57r).

«Marie obtained what she wanted» (Ms A, 30r): this is how Marie of the Sacred Heart (her sister Marie) recalled this scene: «The most terrible crisis was the one that counted in her Life. I thought she was going to succumb. Seeing her exhausted in this painful struggle, I wanted to give her a drink, but she screamed in terror, «They want to poison me.» It was then that I threw myself with my sisters at the feet of the Blessed Virgin. Three times I repeated the same prayer. The third time, I saw Teresa staring fixedly at the statue of the Blessed Virgin...» (Declaration in the ordinary Process).

«The Ray did not act all at once, but sweetly and gently it raised the little flower and strengthened her....» (Ms A, 30v): Therese's sisters have confirmed that this serious nervous disease left no after-effects, apart from two small alerts, reported by Leonie.

«My happiness was going to disappear and change into bitterness» (Ms A, 30v): a strong word in Therese, who uses it thirty-two times in the Manuscripts and letters. It evokes as in transparency the bitterness of Christ's chalice.

«Humiliation becoming my lot» (Ms A, 31r): Therese's particularly strong expression shows that humiliation here is experienced without compensation, perhaps more harshly than at other times in her life, and at a tender age, ten years.

For the community dialogue:

1. *What does the text say?* Understanding the content and primary meaning of Therese's text.
2. *What does the text say to us today?* Grasping the relevance (social, ecclesial, spiritual...) of the text.
3. *What does the text say to me / us?* Making relevant and applying the text to personal and community life.

The purpose of doing things in this manner is to allow Therese to speak to us, to question us, to encourage us, and to welcome her to shed light upon and confirm our personal and community journey. The questions proposed are therefore only indicative and can possibly accompany personal meditation and community sharing.

Questions:

1. This episode of the grace of Our Lady's smile Therese lived through in a context of separation and difficulty in mourning for her mother and for the one who now represented her, Pauline, who had just entered Carmel. What meaning does Therese give to her illness? How does she encourage us to bear our suffering? How to present Therese so that she can help people in the suffering they are going through?
2. Teresa frequently established links between Carmel, the Virgin Mary and Pauline representing her mother. What is the profound spirit of our relationship with the Virgin Mary in our Carmelite vocation? What does it mean for us to have entered a Marian Order?
3. We can also read and meditate on her poem 54, written a few months before «entering life.» Let us especially read the stanzas dedicated to suffering (of Mary and Therese with Mary). Let us observe the evolution between the text of Manuscript A above and the poetry of May 1897.



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