

# 37 Poems of Thérèse, The Little Flower

S.L. Emory



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Edited by Austin L. Lambert

Translated by S.L. Emory (1907)

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# Introduction

MARIE FRANCOISE-THERESE MARTIN, daughter of Louis-Joseph-Stanislaus and Zelig (Guerin) Martin, was born in Alençon, France, January 2, 1873. She was the youngest of nine children, four of whom died in infancy, and of the five others, four became Carmelite nuns. Therese, a singularly precocious, charming and beautiful child set her heart upon entering the convent at the age of fifteen. Her wish was granted nearly to the letter, or on April 9, 1888, when only a little more than three months past her fifteenth birthday, she was received into the Carmelite monastery of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Conception, at Lisieux, France. There she lived for nine years a life of remarkably joyous and childlike or angelic holiness and there September 30, 1897, she died. Her name in religion was Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face. In her character she so exemplified the loveliness and the sanctity of the Child Jesus Himself, and to such a singular degree throughout her whole short life did she love and serve her Lord, that the Mother Prioress bade her write her memories, which, with entire openness and simple obedience, she did. After her death this exquisite memoir, at first intended only for the edification of her sister nuns, was published in French, together with a valuable appendix of her letters, notes of retreat, counsels, and certain loving remembrances of her life by those who had watched her daily. Following upon these, come one hundred and fifty pages that contain

her poems, which she wrote in many instances to certain French airs. It has been said of these simple verses that: "The rules of prosody are not always exactly observed in their construction; and that on the other hand, they suggest an extraordinary degree of inspiration." Lifted up by an angelic presence, the soul shakes off the dust of earth, and rises gently towards the true ideal God, the eternal Love. In reading this charming history, containing verses that breathe exquisite purity, we fancy ourselves before a fresco of Fra Angelico; or, to use a graceful expression of St. Therese herself, we imagine that we hear a "melody from heaven."

It is a curious fact that Sister Teresa seems never to have written verses outside the cloister; though within its walls she succeeded, and to an extent by no means slight. She narrates her experience as follows to the prioress:

"O my Mother! how many reasons I have for thanking God! I am going to tell you in all simplicity, that the Lord showed to me the same mercy as to King Solomon. All my wishes have been fulfilled not only my wishes for perfection, but even those, the vanity of which I understood without having experienced it. Seeing one of my sisters paint charming pictures and compose verses, I thought how happy I should be if I could paint also, could express my thoughts in verse, and could do much good to others. Yet I would not have liked to ask for these natural gifts, and my wishes remained hidden in the depths of my heart. But Jesus, hidden likewise in that poor little heart, deigned to show it once more the nothingness of what passes away. To the great surprise of the community I composed poetry, I painted; it was permitted me to do good to some souls. And even as Solomon (Ecclesiastes 2: 11), turning himself to all the works which his hands had wrought, and

to the labors wherein he had labored in vain, saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind, and that nothing was lasting under the sun, so I saw by experience, that the only joy on earth consists in hiding one's self, in remaining in complete ignorance of all created things. I understood that without love all works are but nothingness, even the most brilliant. Instead of doing me harm, and wounding my soul, the gifts the Lord lavished on me led me to Him. I perceive that He is the only thing that cannot change, the only thing capable of satisfying my immense desires."

One turns from these simple and holy songs with a conviction which is well expressed by P. N., "To the reader" in the beginning of the French edition of the Memoirs and which I have translated thus:

Would you live, one happy moment,  
lifted between earth and heaven;  
Feel an atmosphere supernal  
all about you gently rise;  
See the world beneath your feet and  
walk 'mid radiant Pleiads seven;  
And believe an angel walks beside you,  
from more radiant skies ?  
Read these songs of love with reverence;  
let no idle glance profane  
These sublimely simple pages,  
seek their mystic sense to know;  
But learn humbly that in convents  
Love Divine as King doth reign,  
And, within their deep seclusion,  
hearts with joy are all aglow.

Lovely flower, soul celestial!  
fifteen years at home you grew;  
Then you gave your heart to Jesus,  
fresh with its baptismal dew;  
And the Sovereign Pontiff blessed this  
lovely lily, that we know  
As a nun whose wondrous sweetness,  
heavenly, angelic ways,  
Lyric songs of rapturous music,--  
everything about her -- says  
That an angel passed through Carmel,  
just a few short years ago.

One remarkable thing about Sister Teresa's simple and sweet verses is the mortification she practiced in regard to them, a severe self-discipline which those will appreciate, who have tried to keep in mind thoughts which they could not at once write down. To quote her own words: "The good God never let our Mother tell me how to write my verses as fast as I composed them, and I would not have been willing to ask this permission for fear of committing a fault against holy poverty. So I waited for the hour of free time, and it was not without extreme difficulty, that I recalled at eight o'clock in the evening what I had composed in the morning. These little nothings are a martyrdom, it is true; but we must take great care not to make our martyrdom less meritorious, by allowing ourselves a thousand things that would make our religious life an easy one." Her verses have for their motto: "Vous avez été seul l'objet de mes chants dans le lieu de mon pèlerinage," ("You alone are the object of my song in the place of my pilgrimage"), and are divided into five sections. The first consists of hymns and canticles relating more exclusively to her Lord, the Divine Spouse of



her soul; the second part contains hymns in relation to the Blessed Virgin; and the remaining sections contain other hymns and poems and pious recreations, in honor of St. Mary Magdalen, St. Agnes, and St. Cecelia.

The religious spirit of the French people is surely not wholly dead if we may judge them from the fact, that twenty-nine thousand copies of the life of a young Carmelite nun of Lisieux have been sold in that land, within a few years. A translation under the title of *The Little Flower of Jesus*, is known in English, but the entire French life appears in two forms: one, a large edition with the poems of the gifted young soul; the other without the poems except one under the title--which also forms the title of that edition--*Une Rose Effeillée*.

Moreover, the life has been translated into Polish, German, Dutch, Italian and Portuguese. The Spanish and Flemish editions are nearing completion. The Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon has granted an indulgence to those who read "this admirable Life," and all the Prelates of Portugal have followed his example. Truly the last desires of Sister Teresa have been realized in a touching and most wonderful manner: "I wish to pass my Heaven in doing good on earth," and again, "After my death I will let fall a shower of roses."

The Carmelites of Lisieux receive from all parts of the world, most precious testimonies of the truth of these words. At one time it is the account of the remarkable cure of some pitiful malady; more frequently it is to tell of the relief and consolation of a soul in distress. Persons come from long distances and foreign lands to kneel at the tomb of this elect of God. Priests and young missionaries departing for the Foreign Missions respectfully kiss the blessed earth and carry

away flowers as veritable relics. The Nuns are constantly pressed to give some souvenir of the "little queen," "the little St. Teresa," the "little great Saint" or "the Little Flower", for so are her titles varied by the devotion of those who love her, the world over.

The Seminaries have addressed touching petitions covered with signatures earnestly pleading for the introduction of her Cause. Venerable Priests and eminent Religious have said:--

"Sister Teresa of the Infant Jesus is a providential soul. Her divine mission is evident."

"This dear 'little saint' is a remarkable Missionary whose word is powerful and irresistible."

"The Life of this soul written by herself has a lasting charm, and souls who yield to its powerful influence will be drawn from tepidity and sin."

"I assure you that the Lord works beautiful and great things by means of your 'little Saint.' In our Seminary she transforms souls."

"The heart of Sister Teresa is a pure flame of Paradise which has enkindled and will enkindle many hearts."

"Happy Victim, not only consumed by the flame of Divine Love but who has received the gift of communicating it powerfully to others."

"Many lives tell of the fire of Love. The Life of Sister Teresa makes it felt. Many give us the desire to love God; she puts the fire in our souls."

O Thou who hast so loved Jesus and souls, who didst say when dying, "I have given my God only love, and he will return my love." --thy word was a prophecy. Thousands of hearts to whom thou wast hitherto unknown, love and venerate thee now, and by their prayers and desires long to hasten the day when the Church will enshrine thy memory on Her Altars.

Meanwhile, dear Little Flower, console the heart of the Sovereign Pontiff in this moment of supreme trial, and from the gardens of Paradise let fall upon Him and each of His children thy shower of roses.



## MY SONG OF TO-DAY

O h! how I love Thee, Jesus! my soul aspires to Thee--  
And yet for one day only my simple prayer I pray!  
Come reign within my heart, smile tenderly on me,  
To-day, dear Lord, to-day.

But if I dare take thought of what the morrow brings--  
That fills my fickle heart with dreary, dull dismay;  
I crave, indeed, my God, trials and sufferings,  
But only for to-day!

O sweetest Star of heaven! O Virgin, spotless, blest,  
Shining with Jesus' light, guiding to Him my way!  
O Mother! 'neath thy veil let my tired spirit rest,  
For this brief passing day!

Soon shall I fly afar among the holy choirs,  
Then shall be mine the joy that never knows decay;  
And then my lips shall sing, to heaven's angelic lyres,  
The eternal, glad To-day!

June, 1894.

## TO LIVE OF LOVE

*"If any man love Me, he will keep My word and  
My Father will love him and We will come  
to him and make Our abode with him.  
My peace I give unto you. Abide  
in My love."  
(St. John 14, 23,27,-15:9)*

The eve His life of love drew near its end,  
Thus Jesus spoke: "Whoever loveth Me,  
And keeps My word as Mine own faithful friend,  
My Father, then and I his guests will be;  
Within his heart will make Our dwelling above.  
Our palace home, true type of heaven above.  
There, filled with peace, We will that he shall rest,  
With us, in love.

Incarnate Word! Thou Word of God alone!  
To live of love, 'tis to abide with Thee.  
Thou knowest I love Thee, Jesus Christ, my Own!  
Thy Spirit's fire of love enkindleth me.  
By loving Thee, I draw the Father here  
Down to my heart, to stay with me always.

Blest Trinity! Thou art my prisoner dear,  
Of love, to-day.

To live of love, 'tis by Thy life to live,  
O glorious King, my chosen, sole Delight!  
Hid in the Host, how often Thou dost give  
Thyself to those who seek Thy radiant light.  
Then hid shall be my life, unmarked, unknown,  
That I may have Thee heart to heart with me;  
For loving souls desire to be alone,  
With love, and Thee!

To live of love, 'tis not to fix one's tent  
On Tabor's height and there with Thee remain.  
'Tis to climb Calvary with strength nigh spent,  
And count Thy heavy cross our truest gain.  
In heaven, my life a life of joy shall be,  
The heavy cross shall then be gone for aye.  
Here upon earth, in suffering with Thee,  
Love! let me stay.

To live of love, 'tis without stint to give,  
An never count the cost, nor ask reward;  
So, counting not the cost, I long to live  
And show my dauntless love for Thee, dear Lord!  
O Heart Divine, o'erflowing with tenderness,  
How swift I run, who all to Thee has given!  
Naught but Thy love I need, my life to bless.  
That love is heaven!

To live of love, it is to know no fear;  
No memory of past faults can I recall;  
No imprint of my sins remaineth here;  
The fire of Love divine effaces all.  
O sacred flames! O furnace of delight!  
I sing my safe sweet happiness to prove.  
In these mild fires I dwell by day, by night.  
I live of love!

To live of love, 'tis in my heart to guard  
A mighty treasure in a fragile vase.  
Weak, weak, am I, O well-beloved Lord!  
Nor have I yet an angel's perfect grace.  
But, if I fall each hour that hurries by,  
Thou com'st to me from Thy bright home above,  
And, raising me, dost give me strength to cry:  
I live of love!

To live of love it is to sail afar  
And bring both peace and joy where'er I be.  
O Pilot blest! love is my guiding star;  
In every soul I meet, Thyself I see.  
Safe sail I on, through wind or rain or ice;  
Love urges me, love conquers every gale.  
High on my mast behold is my device:  
"By love I sail!"

To live of love, it is when Jesus sleeps  
To sleep near Him, though stormy waves beat nigh.  
Deem not I shall awake Him! On these deeps



Peace reigns, like that the Blessed know on high.  
To Hope, the voyage seems one little day;  
Faith's hand shall soon the veil between remove;  
'Tis Charity that swells my sail away.

I live of love!

To live of love, O Master dearest, best!  
It is to beg Thee light Thy holiest fires  
Within the soul of each anointed priest,  
Till he shall feel the Seraphim's desires;  
It is to beg Thee guard Thy Church, O Christ!  
For this I plead with Thee by night, by day;  
And give myself, in sacrifice unpriced,  
With love away!

To live of love, it is to dry Thy tears,  
To seek for pardon for each sinful soul,  
To strive to save all men from doubts and fears,  
And bring them home to Thy benign control.  
Comes to my ear sin's wild and blasphemous roar;  
So, to efface each day, that burning shame,  
I cry: " O Jesus Christ! I Thee adore.

I love Thy Name!"

To live of love, 'tis Mary's part to share,  
To bathe with tears and odorous perfume  
Thy holy feet, to wipe them with my hair,  
To kiss them; then still loftier lot assume,  
To rise, and by Thy side to take my place,  
And pour my ointments on Thy holy head.

But with no balsams I embalm Thy Face!

'Tis love, instead!

"To live of love, what foolishness she sings!"

So cries the world. "Renounce such idle joy!

Waste not thy perfumes on such trivial things.

In useful arts thy talents now employ!"

To love Thee, Jesus! Ah, this loss is gain;

For all my perfumes no reward seek I.

Quitting the world, I sing in death's sweet pain:

Of love I die!

To die of love, O martyrdom most blest!

For this I long, this is my heart's desire;

My exile ends; I soon will be at rest.

Ye Cherubim, lend, lend to me your lyre!

O dart of Seraphim, O flame of love,

Consume me wholly; hear my ardent cry!

Jesu, make real my dream! Come Holy Dove!

Of love I die!

To die of love, behold my life's long hope!

God is my one exceeding great reward.

He of my wishes forms the end and scope;

Him only do I seek; my dearest Lord.

With passionate love for Him my heart is riven.

O may He quickly come! He draweth nigh!

Behold my destiny, behold my heaven,--

OF LOVE TO DIE.

February 25, 1895

## CANTICLE TO THE HOLY FACE

Dear Jesus! 'tis Thy Holy Face  
Is here the start that guides my way;  
They countenance, so full of grace,  
Is heaven on earth, for me, to-day.  
And love finds holy charms for me  
In Thy sweet eyes with tear-drops wet;  
Through mine own tears I smile at Thee,  
And in Thy griefs my pains forget.

How gladly would I live unknown,  
Thus to console Thy aching heart.  
Thy veiled beauty, it is shown  
To those who live from earth apart.  
I long to fly to Thee alone!

Thy Face is now my fatherland,--  
The radiant sunshine of my days,--  
My realm of love, my sunlit land,  
Where, all life long, I sing Thy praise;  
It is the lily of the vale,  
Whose mystic perfume, freely given,  
Brings comfort, when I faint and fail,

And makes me taste the peace of heaven.

Thy face, in its unearthly grace,  
Is like the divinest myrrh to me,  
That on my heart I gladly place;  
It is my lyre of melody;  
My rest -- my comfort-- is Thy Face.

My only wealth, Lord! is thy Face;  
I ask naught else than this from Thee; Hid in the secret of that Face,  
The more I shall resemble Thee!  
Oh, leave on me some impress faint  
Of Thy sweet, humble, patient Face,  
And soon I shall become a saint,  
And draw men to Thy saving grace.

So, in the secret of Thy Face,  
Oh! hide me, hide me, Jesus blest!  
Ther let me find its hidden grace,  
Its holy fires, and, in heaven's rest,  
Its rapturous kiss, in Thy embrace!

August 12, 1895.

# THOU HAST BROKEN MY BONDS, O LORD

( Psalm CXV.7.)  
For a Postulant, on her entrance-day into Carmel.

Thou, Jesu! on this day my earthly bonds hast broken.  
In Mary's Order old, my soul true goods shall find;  
And if to-day: "farewell" my quivering lips have spoken  
To those who loved me best, so dear, so true, so kind,  
Thou, Lord, wilt be to them far more than I could be;  
And Thou wilt deign to win some sinful souls through me.

Jesu! on Carmel I shall dwell--  
Thy love has called Thy child to that oasis fair;  
There I desire to serve Thee well,  
To love Thee there, and then to die,  
There! yes, my Jesu, there!

O Jesu! on this day, Thy love my prayer has granted;  
Before Thy altar throne hereafter 'tis my part  
Calmly to wait for heaven,-- all pain to bear undaunted,--  
And, lifting to the rays of Thy white Host my heart,  
Within that fire of love all self to burn away,  
And, like a seraph blest, to serve Thee night and day.

Ah, Jesu! 'twill be mine to dwell,  
One day, with Thee on high, in heaven's bright  
mansions fair  
There evermore to love Thee well,  
To love Thee, and no more to die,  
There! yes, my Jesu, there!

August 15, 1895.