

The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time October 25, 2020

One of the most popular saints over the last two hundred years has been Saint Therese of Lisieux. Her great passion was her love of Jesus and her desire to make Him loved by others. When she was just 16 years old, she entered the convent because she wanted to give herself totally to the Lord. At the same time, she wondered how she could spread the love of Jesus to others by living in a convent. So, when she looked around at the other nuns in her convent, she saw women with many different talents. Some had a gift for music, others had a gift for teaching, everyone seemed to have a gift of some kind. She wondered what her special gift was that she could use to serve Jesus and others.

One day, while praying about this, she opened up her Bible to see if she could find an answer. She began reading the twelfth and thirteen chapters of St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where St Paul talks about love. It is one of the best known passages in the New Testament because it is one that is read at most weddings.

She read through the chapter, turning over in her mind such words as "If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13: 1-3). It became clear to her that love is what mattered more than anything else. It was love that made the apostles great in their proclamation of the gospel. It was love that drove the martyrs to give their lives for the faith. Without love, there would be no great saints and there would be no great acts of faith. She realized that what she needed more than anything to serve Jesus was not to learn new talents but to have a heart full of love.

This is how she described this experience in her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*:

"Then, nearly ecstatic with the supreme joy in my soul, I proclaimed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is love. Certainly I have found my proper place in the Church, and you gave me that very place, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction."

Realizing that it is love that makes any thought, word, or action great, St Therese resolved that she would do everything with love - not only great acts but even the smallest, seemingly most insignificant things. If she did them with love, she knew they would be pleasing to God. She resolved to make sacrifices and to accept all her suffering with love and give them to Jesus for the salvation of souls and the conversion

The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time October 25, 2020

of sinners. She came to call this her “Little Way” - to do all things with love and offer them up to Jesus.

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells us that all the commandments can be summed up in love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” And, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It is loving God and our neighbor that identifies us as Christians. It is what sets us apart as followers of Jesus. It is love that causes us to lift our minds and hearts to God in prayer. It is love that strengthens us to live good lives and to serve the neediest among us. And so, the Christian life is not so much marked by great deeds but by loving hearts. This is what St Therese of Lisieux discovered and this is what Jesus teaches us in today’s gospel.

To understand what Jesus is calling us to, we have to explain what we mean by the word “love.” Love is more than a feeling that we experience toward someone we’re attracted to. It is more than the spark that ignites in our heart when we see someone we have affection for. For the Christian, love is the desire for another person’s good. When I love others, I want what’s good for them. That desire may be accompanied by warm, affectionate feelings. Or it may be accompanied by no emotions at all.

Love is not primarily an emotion. Rather, it is a decision. It is a decision to want and to do what is best for myself and for the people around me. I might not particularly like those people. I might even find those people offensive or annoying. Still, I will commit myself to doing what is best for them in my thoughts, in my words, and in my actions. That is love.

So, St Therese of Lisieux has much to teach us here. It is not always clear to us how we can show love to others. St Theresa teaches us that even the smallest gestures done with love can have great effects. What would it mean for you to simply smile at someone at the store? Perhaps that person has had a bad day, or has been hurt, and just needs someone to notice them. What a world of good that small gesture could make. Now, it could also happen that the person we smile at become suspicious of us and wonder what we’re doing smiling at them. If our intention was to show love, even though they take offense at it, it will be pleasing to God.

We are all called to love - no matter what our talents are, no matter what our level of education is, no matter how wealthy or poor we are. Love is what makes us great, nothing else. When we stand before Jesus after death, He will look into our hearts not into our resumes. So, like St Therese of Lisieux, let’s start small, with whatever good we can do for whichever people God places in our path. God loved us

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October 25, 2020

by sending Jesus to die for us and save us. That is the love that we celebrate at every Mass. We show our love for Him in return by sharing that love with others.