

CHRISTMAS 2023

WAY
OF
GRACE



WAY OF TRUST AND LOVE

Reflection and Prayer for Advent 2023 in the Jubilee Year in Honour of St Therese of Lisieux.

From The Readings

The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in the land of deep shadow a light has shone. You have made their gladness greater, you have made their joy increase ... For there is a child born for us, a son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace. Wide is his dominion in a peace that has no end, for the throne of David and for his royal power, which he establishes and makes secure in justice and integrity. *Isaiah 9:2-7*



In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.' And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours. Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.' So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds

said to them. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. *Luke 2:8-19*

From Pope Francis and Saint Therese of Lisieux

I have found my vocation at last: in the heart of my mother the Church I will be Love ... and so my dream will be fulfilled. ...your will is to love in me all those whom you command me to love! *(Therese of Lisieux, Way of Trust and Love, 109 & 59)*

But above all, I have understood that charity must not be kept shut in the bottom of our hearts. Jesus says: “We do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.” It seems to me that this flame represents the charity that should give light and joy not only to those who are dearest to me, but to all in the house, without exception.

(Therese of Lisieux, Way of Trust and Love, 108)

It is above all the Gospel that occupies me during my prayers. In it I find everything needful for my soul in its poverty and littleness. There I always discovered new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings.

(Therese of Lisieux, quoted in: The Way of Trust and Love, 25)

The act of love – repeating the words, “Jesus I love you” – which became as natural to Therese as breathing, is the key to her understanding of the Gospel. With that love, she immersed herself in all the mysteries of the life of Christ, making herself his contemporary and placing herself within the Gospel together with Mary and Joseph, Mary Magdalene and the apostles. Together with them, she penetrated to the depths of the love of the Heart of Jesus.

(Pope Francis, C'est La Confiance, 34)

And so, amid the suffering of her last days, Therese was able to say: “I count only on love”. In the end, only love counts. Trust makes roses blossom and pours them forth as an overflow of the superabundance of God's love. Let us ask, then, for such trust as a free and precious gift of grace, so that the paths of the Gospel may open up in our lives. *(Pope Francis, C'est La Confiance, 45)*

FOR THINKING AND TALKING

- **What words or phrases stand out for you in these readings and insights of Pope Francis and Saint Therese?**
- **What insights might you take with you on your own journey?**

PRAYER

from the words of Pope Francis

Loving God, God of All Ages,
From heaven to earth,
the timely witness of Saint Therese
of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face
endures in all the grandeur of her little way.

In an age that urges us to focus on our ourselves and our own interests,
may we learn from the beauty of making our lives a gift.
At a time when the most superficial needs and desires are glorified,
may we hear her testimony to the radicalism of the Gospel.

In an age of individualism,
may we discover the value of a love that becomes intercession for others.
**At a time when human beings are obsessed with grandeur
and new forms of power,**
may we follow when Therese points out to us the little way.
In an age that casts aside so many of our brothers and sisters,
may Therese teach us the beauty of concern
and responsibility for one another.

At a time of great complexity,
may she help us rediscover the importance of simplicity,
the absolute primacy of love, trust and abandonment.
Help us to move beyond a legalistic or moralistic mindset
that would fill our Christian life with rules and regulations,
and cause the joy of the Gospel to grow cold.

In an age of indifference and self-absorption,
may Therese inspire us to be missionary disciples,
captivated by the attractiveness of Jesus and the Gospel. Amen.

(Prayer based on words of Pope Francis at the conclusion of C'est La Confiance, 52)

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