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Lenten Night of Recollection — “Lenten Wisdom from the Four Great Holy Teresas”

St. Francis Xavier Parish, Acushnet, MA

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“St. Thérèse Lisieux and the Little Way of Conversion and Holiness”

- The theme of tonight’s recollection is “Lenten Wisdom from the four Great Holy Teresa’s.” The first Teresa we encounter tonight is the much-loved St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, known, as so many saints are, by the geographical places they’ve put on the map: Therese of the Lisieux Carmel.
- The first conference is entitled, “St. Therese Lisieux and the Little Way of Conversion and Holiness.”
 - Unlike the other famous Teresas who will help us tonight, Therese would not immediately be thought of as a saint with a great Lenten connection.
 - St. Teresa of Avila is one of the greatest teachers in the history of the Church about prayer and hence is a great guide for us to help us to act on our Lenten call to pray.
 - Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta is one of the most famous examples in the history of the Church of the love of neighbor, giving herself and all she had in the richness of spiritual poverty as a Missionary of Charity to the poorest of the poor. She is, therefore, a great witness to us of the true Christian spirit of almsgiving.
 - The great Jewish convert and Holocaust victim St. Edith Stein, known in her Carmelite religious life as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, entitled her most famous theological work “The Science of the Cross.” We’ve got few greater teachers about how we’re called to deny ourselves, pick up our Cross each day and follow Christ along the way of the Cross to glory than she.
 - But St. Therese? She’s famous for her “little way of spiritual childhood,” but many people do not regard that as a particularly Lenten way. Some might be tempted that she has been included tonight solely because she had the right first name! But this would be a failure to appreciate both her and the little way that is so central to the Christian life that it led Pope John Paul II, urged on by bishops throughout the world, to proclaim her a Doctor of the Church in 1997, to understanding it, living it and teaching it.
 - The principle point of Lent is conversion, turning away from sin and turning toward the Lord with faith, hope and love. St. Therese wants to help us tonight to recognize how to do this by joining her on the way of spiritual childhood, which is precisely not only “A” way but “the” fundamental way of conversion and holiness. John Paul II wrote in 1997: “Her message, often summarized in the so-called ‘little way,’ ... is nothing other than the Gospel way of holiness for all.
- Jesus said in the Gospel, “Unless you convert and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of God.”
 - The true conversion we need, Jesus tells us, the only way that we will stop serving ourselves and living in our own fiefdoms but entering into Christ’s kingdom in this world and forever, is to become like little children.
 - This doesn’t mean we need to become childISH. The Lord does call us, like Jesus according to his humanity, to “grow in wisdom and understanding” and to “come to full stature in Christ.” Often, however, when we grow up, we cease to relate to God the way we should, as his beloved children. We may not act quite as poorly as the prodigal son in the parable, who asked for his inheritance while his Father was still alive because to him the Father was already dead, and then proceeded to waste all that the Father had given him in a downward spiral of egocentric hedonism until he was living and behaving worse than pigs. No, for many of us, we know the Father is not dead. We don’t want to waste his gifts in a life of sin. We often just want to “grow up” and leave home, to do things on our own, to be less dependent on him than we were before and more self-reliant and self-sufficient. Just like so many of us who when we grow up can’t wait to be out on our own and, whereas once we used to live with our Father, talk to him

everyday, sacrifice for him and observe his sacrifices for us, we've basically moved out. Sure, we still love the Father, but less than we used to. We talk to him now once a week. We visit with him less than that. When we offers to do something for us, we say, "Thanks, Dad, but I've got it covered."

- To become like little children means to return to our true dependence on the Father and begin to allow him to continue to raise us to become perfected as he himself is perfect.
- The little way of spiritual childhood for St. Therese begins with grounding oneself in who the Father is, how much he loves us, and responding with love and trust as a child does to his or her parent.
 - "To remain little before God and to remain little is to recognize one's nothingness, expect all things from the good God just as a little child expects all things from its father; it is not to be troubled by anything, not to try to be on the lookout for favors. Even among poor people, a child is given all it needs, as long as it is very little, but as soon as it has grown up, the father does not want to support it any longer and says: 'Work, now you are able to take care of yourself.' Because I never want to hear these words I do not want to grow up, feeling that I can never earn my living, that is, eternal life in heaven. So I have stayed little, and have no other occupation than of gathering flowers of love and sacrifice and of offering them to the good God to please Him. Again, to stay little means not attributing the virtues we practice to ourselves, under the impression that we are capable of such things, but to recognize that the good God places this treasure of virtue in the hand of His little child for him to use as he needs it; and that it remains God's treasure."
 - Spiritual childhood "is to recognize our nothingness, to expect everything from God as a little child expects everything from its father; it is to be disquieted about nothing, and not to be set on earning our own living. ... To be little is not attributing to oneself the virtues that one practices. ... It is not to become discouraged over one's faults, for children fall often, but they are too little to hurt themselves very much."
 - She linked two passages of the Gospel together to arrive at an important truth. Both passages point to a condition to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The first is to convert and become childlike. The second is become poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Becoming childlike and becoming poor in spirit are basically synonymous.
 - As Theresa made spiritual childhood her own, so she made her own poverty of spirit. She aspired to be nothing more than "a poor little child" who looks to her Father for everything and who obtains everything from Him because of this same poverty. She cultivated this poverty and wants to keep nothing for herself, not even her merits and her good works.
- Once we grasp that we are poor little children, then we learn how to relate to God and particularly to his merciful love.
 - Talking about the mercy of God, she encouraged everyone to follow her lead and grasp God by the "heart." She said: "Consider a small child who has displeased his mother, by flying into a rage or perhaps disobeying her; if he sulks in a corner and screams in fear of punishment, his mother will certainly not forgive his fault; but if he comes to her with his little arms outstretched, smiling and saying: 'Kiss me, I won't do it again,' surely his mother will immediately press him tenderly to her heart, forgetting all that he has done... Of course she knows quite well that her dear little boy *will do it again* at the first opportunity, but that does not matter; if he takes her by the heart, he will never be punished..."
 - She drew a conclusion: "I have long believed that the Lord is more tender than a mother. I know that a mother is always ready to forgive trivial, involuntary misbehaviour on the part of her child. Children are always giving trouble, falling down, getting themselves dirty, breaking things - but all this does not shake their parents love for them." Nor do our faults shake God's love for us.

- She was able to have this child-like confidence in God’s love because she understood the whole meaning of the Incarnation, which we will celebrate tomorrow on the Solemnity of the Annunciation. She once wrote that she could not understand how anyone could be afraid of a God who became a child. God became small precisely so that we shouldn’t be intimidated by him, so that we wouldn’t be afraid.
- The way of spiritual childhood is a way of meeting, learning and imitating the child Jesus, who teaches us in a very concrete way to relate to God.
 - “Jesus condescends to show me the only way that leads to this divine furnace (of divine love). It is the surrender of a small child who sleeps without fear in its father’s arms.
 - Relating as a spiritual child to the Child Jesus was one of the characteristic parts of her spirituality. She could never be afraid of a God who became a little baby. Would he want to punish her for all eternity? Would he become enraged with a sense of exacting strict justice? She just couldn’t see it.
 - She once described the experience of the dark night — something that the great spiritual masters have described, many have undergone, and many more worry about, in simple terms that came from the “sleep” of the Child Jesus. That’s why when she experienced her own sense of abandonment, she never lost trust:
 - "Most people on earth are only willing to serve the King of Glory; if Jesus goes to sleep they stop serving Him or believing in Him. But the Child Jesus loves to go to sleep in safety, without fear of being wakened." Why not serve beside the crib? Since entering Carmel it had become normal for me to find Jesus sleeping. "As always, Jesus was asleep in my little skiff. Ah! how rarely I find souls prepared to let Him sleep there. Our good Master is so weary through making fresh approaches and advances that He gladly accepts the rest that I offer Him. Doubtless He will not wake up before my great retreat into eternity."
- In Therese’s day, this sense of relating to God as a trusting child was rare. The heresy of Jansenism was rampant. It was Catholic Calvinism, relating to God as a cold and distant figure full of laws and rules, how we could never be worthy of any of his graces and therefore should just do our duty and offer ourselves as victims to divine justice so that he doesn’t exact the punishment on us and others that we all deserve. She battled against this.
- Most people, therefore, lived paralyzed by a fear of God and of his judgment. This fear stifled their ability to live as children of God. This totally affects the whole way they relate to him and how they relate to his mercy.
- We can contrast between the way of conversion of spiritual childhood and the conversion Jesus calls us all to in the parable of the Prodigal Son.
 - In the parable of the Prodigal Son, neither son really knows the father. Even when the younger son hits rock bottom and decides to come home with his rehearsed speech about how he had sinned against heaven and against his father, begging to be treated and fed just as a slave, he has no real concept of the love of the Father, as if the Father could ever treat his son as a slave. Prior to his leaving, however, that’s what he obviously thought, that living in Father’s house was a type of servitude. We see the same attitude in the older brother who never left. Outraged that the Father had killed the fatted calf for the return of his younger brother, he complained, “All these years I have SERVED you and not once did I disobey your ORDERS and yet you never once gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends.” Just as he didn’t have a familial relationship with his Father, so he didn’t with his brother, saying instead, “When this son of yours returns...” No wonder why he couldn’t understand the Father’s joy that his lost Son had been

found, his dead son had come alive again. For him, his brother, like his father, was just a fellow slave, a fellow employee, a housemate. His coming home was like a broken tools' starting to work again, not a resurrection of a beloved family member.

- So many times we can relate to God the Father similarly, treating him as a distant God just waiting to punish us for every transgression, someone whom we're called to obey, someone whom we try to obey, but never someone we really let love us as madly as he wants to love us, someone whom we never truly love in return. And that leads to so many problems with others, whom we view, not as true spiritual siblings closer to us by baptism than our natural brothers and sisters are by blood, but as "this son of yours," "this daughter of yours," who has wronged us and doesn't deserve mercy not to mention a celebration.
- This is so different from St. Therese's understanding of God the Father and the whole process of forgiveness.
- Many oppose St. Therese's path of spiritual childhood precisely because they don't believe in the "naivete" that they assume it implies. Rather, they prefer to live under the delusion of their own self-made excellence – their expertise, their extraordinariness – thus giving free reign to ambition, arrogance, egotism, and apathy. Since the world doesn't live it, since the world doesn't live by the beatitudes, since the world doesn't live by the commandments, since the world lives as if God doesn't exist, they need to go the way of the world. Lent is the time for us to wake up from this type of thinking.
- Pope John Paul II declared in 1997:
 - Before the emptiness of so many words, Thérèse offers another solution, the one Word of salvation which, understood and lived in silence, becomes a source of renewed life. She counters a rational culture, so often overcome by practical materialism, with the disarming simplicity of the "little way" which, by returning to the essentials, leads to the secret of all life: the divine Love that surrounds and penetrates every human venture. In a time like ours, so frequently marked by an ephemeral and hedonistic culture, this new Doctor of the Church proves to be remarkably effective in enlightening the mind and heart of those who hunger and thirst for truth and love"
- But it wasn't always this way for Therese where she related to God and to others as God would want. She once had a false notion of childhood, one that hindered her spiritual growth.
 - It was just short of her 14th birthday, Christmas Eve 1886. She called it her "complete conversion." Years later she stated that on that night she overcame the pressures she had faced since the death of her mother and said that "God worked a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant." "*On that blessed night ... Jesus, who saw fit to make Himself a child out of love for me, saw fit to have me come forth from the swaddling clothes and imperfections of childhood.*"
 - On Christmas Eve 1886, Louis Martin and his daughters, Léonie, Céline and Thérèse, had attended the midnight mass at the cathedral in Lisieux - "but there was very little heart left in them. Back at *Les Buissonnets* as every year, Thérèse " as was the custom for French children, had left her shoes on the hearth, empty in anticipation of gifts, not from Santa Claus but from the Child Jesus, who was imagined to travel through the air bearing toys and cakes." While she was going up the stairs she heard her father , 'perhaps exhausted by the hour, or this reminder of the relentless emotional demands of his weepy youngest daughter', say to Céline, 'Well, fortunately this will be the last year!' Thérèse had begun to cry and Céline advised her not to go back downstairs immediately. Then, suddenly,

Thérèse pulled herself together and wiped her tears. She ran down the stairs, knelt by the fireplace and unwrapped her surprises as jubilantly as ever.

- In her account, nine years later, of 1895 : "In an instant Jesus, content with my good will, accomplished the work I had not been able to do in ten years." After nine sad years she had *recovered the strength of soul she had lost* when her mother died and, she said, *she was to retain it forever*. She discovered the joy in self-forgetfulness and added ; "I felt, in a word, charity enter my heart, the need to forget myself to make others happy - Since this blessed night I was not defeated in any battle, but instead I went from victory to victory and began, so to speak, *to run a giant's course*. (Psalms 19:5) "
- In summary up until now, we could say that St. Therese teaches us that the first two steps in her little way of spiritual childhood is first, that God shows love by mercy and forgiveness and (2) none of us is "perfect" in following the Lord. We need the Lord's mercy. We need to come to him to receive it. This is how the little way is a path to conversion and holiness.
 - Compared with God's mercy, our misery is nothing
 - In a poem, *Vivre d'Amour*, she writes: "To live by love, that's to banish all fear, all remembrance of past faults. I will no longer take note of my sins because it in instant love burned them all. Divine Flame, o Furnace most sweet. I have taken up my place within you. It's in your flames that I sing: "I live on love!"
 - In a poem to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, she writes: "Oh, I well know that all our justices have no value before your eyes. In order to gain anything from my sacrifices, I want to throw them on your Divine Heart."
 - She also understood that there should be no pretensions to perfection by her own efforts
 - God raised up St. Therese of Lisieux "to enable us to grasp and live the profound truth of divine Love with the same intensity as she lived it. Or to put it another way, the Church has proclaimed Saint Thérèse a Doctor of the Church in order to help God's people love the love that is mercy. Yet, the question remains: Why do we need a Doctor of the Church to teach us to love the love that is mercy? And the answer is that, over and over again in this regard, we falter and fail.
 - St. Therese was convinced about how much we need to love the love that is mercy – contrasted to a Jansenist notion of justice – that she made it the theme of a little Christmas play she wrote and performed for the community in 1894.
 - In the play, the Angel of Judgment approaches the infant Jesus in the manger and says this: "Have you forgotten, Jesus, O Beauty supreme, that the sinner must at last be punished? I will chastise the crime in judgment; I want to exterminate all the ungrateful. My sword is ready! Jesus, sweet victim! My sword is ready!! I am set to avenge you!!!"
 - The baby Jesus replies: "O beautiful angel! Put down your sword. It is not for you to judge the nature that I raise up and that I wish to redeem. The one who will judge the world is myself, the one named Jesus! The life-giving dew of my Blood will purify all my chosen ones. Don't you know that faithful souls always give me consolation in the face of the blasphemies of the unfaithful by a simple look of love?"
 - St. Therese would cry out in her spiritual autobiography about how important it was for us to recognize how much God wishes us to accept his merciful love. Like the Sacred Heart:
 - "“On every side God's love is unknown, rejected; those hearts upon whom you lavish [love] turn to creatures seeking happiness from them with their miserable affection; they do this instead of throwing themselves into your arms and of accepting your infinite love.... Among his own disciples, Jesus finds few hearts

who surrender to him without reservation, who understand the real tenderness of his infinite love.”

- Since our whole life is a call to turn away from sin and turn toward God, this path of spiritual childhood, needs to penetrate our entire life. Our whole existence is supposed to be grounded in a loving relationship with God the Father.
 - This is the secret, hidden from the wise and the clever of the world, which was revealed to Therese in all her childlike simplicity.
 - John Paul II wrote in 1997, in a document explaining why he was declaring her a doctor of the Church, that “the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood” is “the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit.”
 - When he visited Lisieux for the first time as Pope in 1980, he said that it was precisely the Holy Spirit that led St. Therese on this “little way” and helped her to walk it with great generosity. Not to be outdone by Pope Pius XI who at her canonization called her “the greatest saint of modern times,” Pope John Paul II in Lisieux said that she is, in fact, “our saint,” a saint for our times, and confessed that that was always the way he looked to her in his own life. He said that grasped the “fundamental mystery,” the “reality of the Gospel,” that we have truly received “a spirit of adoption that makes us cry out ‘Abba, Father!’ The “little way,” he continued, is the way of “holy childhood,” adding that nothing could be more fundamental and universal than the fact that God is our Father and we are his beloved children. “To be a child, to become like a child, means to enter into the heart of the greatest mission to which Christ has called each of us: to recognize one is God’s beloved child and be occupied with the affairs of the Father, just like Jesus was when he was 12 and discovered in the temple.
- This way of divine filiation is a way of love.
 - Thérèse embarks on the way of holiness, insisting on the centrality of love.
 - The great discovery of her vocation is one of the most beautiful passages in hagiography, when she saw that her vocation was to be love in the heart of the Church.
 - "Love", she wrote, "gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was burning with love. I understood that it was love alone that made the Church's members act, that if love were ever extinguished, apostles would not proclaim the Gospel and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love includes all vocation.... Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: 'O Jesus, my Love ... at last I have found my vocation; my vocation is Love!'"
 - August 24, 1997 in Paris: John Paul II wrote that St. Therese was “entirely captivated by the love of God. She lived the radical offering of herself in response to that love.”
 - A few days later, back in Rome, he said she “had a marvellous understanding of the overwhelming message of God’s love, received as a gift and lived with the humble trust and simplicity of children who in Jesus Christ totally entrust themselves to the Father. And she has become its authoritative teacher for the present and future of the Church.”
 - To love is the vocation of all of us, no matter what our state of life, from a Carmelite cloistered nun, to a priest, to married spouses, to widows and widowers, to young people.
 - “It is not happiness that attracts me... but Love alone! To love, to be loved and to return to earth to make Love loved.”
 - In order to be love in the heart of the Church, we must be like a child and receive God’s love and reciprocate it.
- It’s a way of greatness, but a path of humility
 - In her quest for sanctity, she believed that it was not necessary to accomplish heroic acts, or "great deeds", in order to attain holiness and to express her love of God. She wrote, "Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden

me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love."

- She wrote: *"Sometimes, when I read spiritual treatises in which perfection is shown with a thousand obstacles, surrounded by a crowd of illusions, my poor little mind quickly tires. I close the learned book which is breaking my head and drying up my heart, and I take up Holy Scripture. Then all seems luminous to me; a single word uncovers for my soul infinite horizons; perfection seems simple; I see that it is enough to recognize one's nothingness and to abandon oneself, like a child, into God's arms. Leaving to great souls, to great minds, the beautiful books I cannot understand, I rejoice to be little because 'only children, and those who are like them, will be admitted to the heavenly banquet.'*
- More and more Thérèse realised that she felt no attraction to the exalted heights of *great souls*. She looked directly for the word of Jesus, which shed light on her prayers and on her daily life. Thérèse's retreat in October 1892 pointed out to her a *downward* path.
 - Jesus' very descent, this emptying of the soul, is simply a spontaneous gesture of love, an automatic movement to catch him as he falls, so that he lights gently on the ground without being hurt. *"Make haste, and come down'* was what Our Lord said to Zachaeus. Jesus tells us to come down! But where must we come down? Celine, you know better than I... *'the birds of the air have their nests, but I have not where to lay My head'*. That is where we must come down, if we are to serve as a dwelling for Jesus; we must be *so poor that we have not where to lay our heads*... Jesus wants us to receive Him in our hearts; by now, doubtless, they are empty of creatures; but alas! I feel that mine is not wholly empty of me, which is why Jesus tells me to come down. And I too want to hide my face, I want my Beloved alone to be able to see it ... that in my heart at least He may lay down His dear head and feel that there He is recognized and understood."
 - A novice once sighed: "When I think of everything I still have to acquire!" She replied, "You mean, to lose! Jesus takes it upon himself to fill your soul in the measure that you rid it of its imperfections. I see that you have taken the wrong road; you will never arrive at the end of your journey. You are wanting to climb a great mountain and the good God is trying to make you descend it; he is waiting for you at the bottom in the fertile valley of humility."
- She wasn't discouraged by not feeling a call to the greatness of many of the great spiritual writers and martyrs: *"Instead of being discouraged, I concluded that God would not inspire desires which could not be realised, and that I may aspire to sanctity in spite of my littleness. For me to become great is impossible. I must bear with myself and my many imperfections; but I will seek out a means of getting to Heaven by a little way – very short and very straight, a little way that is wholly new.*
- This humility affected her prayer: *"For me, prayer is a movement of the heart; it is a simple glance toward Heaven; it is a cry of gratitude and love in times of trial as well as in times of joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus. . . . I have not the courage to look through books for beautiful prayers.... I do like a child who does not know how to read; I say very simply to God what I want to say, and He always understands me."*
- It affected her obedience: *"Our Lord has deigned to make me understand that by simple obedience I shall please Him best"*
- She gave one of her famous analogies of the path to holiness as describing it depended on God's greatness, not our own:
 - "I have always noticed, in comparing myself with the saints, the same difference between them and myself as we see between a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds and an obscure little grain of sand trampled underfoot by passers-by.... It is impossible for me to grow great.... But we live in an age of inventions:

- today there is no need to go to the trouble of climbing stairs; among rich people, an elevator has replaced the stairs. I also wished to discover an elevator to make me up to Jesus; because I am too little to climb the steep stairway of perfection.”
- To Fr. Maurice Belliere: we are called “to go up to God by the elevator of love, not to climb the rough stairway of fear.”
 - The three images, of the subterranean way, the little bird and the tiny child, together convince us of the truth that all Christian effort is *but a beginning*. Only God can bring a work to perfection; and the more a Christian realizes that his efforts are but a beginning the more room God is allowed to achieve perfection.
 - "In my little way there are only very ordinary things; *it is essential that little souls should be able to do everything I do.*"
 - This little path to greatness is a path lived in the ordinary little things of each day
 - "I want to sanctify my heartbeats, my thoughts, my simplest actions, uniting them to his infinite merits" (*Prayer* n. 10).
 - Sr. Martha of Jesus, a novice who spent her childhood in a series of orphanages and who was described by all as emotionally unbalanced, with a violent temper, gave witness during the beatification process of the 'unusual dedication and presence of her young teacher. "Thérèse deliberately 'sought out the company of those nuns whose temperaments she found hardest to bear.' What merit was there in acting charitably toward people whom one loved naturally? Thérèse went out of her way to spend time with, and therefore to love, the people she found repellent. It was an effective means of achieving interior poverty, a way to remove a place to rest her head."
 - St Therese translated “the little way” in terms of a commitment to the tasks and to the people we meet in our everyday lives. She took her assignments in the convent of Lisieux as ways of manifesting her love for God and for others. She worked as a sacristan by taking care of the altar and the chapel; she served in the refectory and in the laundry room; she wrote plays for the entertainment of the community. Above all, she tried to show a love for all the nuns in the community. She played no favorites; she gave of herself even to the difficult members. Her life sounds so routine and ordinary, but it was steeped in a loving commitment that knew no breakdown. It is called a “little way” precisely by being simple, direct, yet calling for amazing fortitude and commitment.
 - One of the reasons why Catholics and other Christians have been attracted to St Therese's style is because her “little way” seems to put holiness of life within the reach of ordinary people, to help them live out their days with confidence in God's love for them, to realize that each day is a gift in which their life can make a difference by the way they choose to live it, to put hope in a future in which God will be all and love will consume their spirit, to choose life, not the darkness of pettiness and greed. St Therese knew the difference love makes by allowing love to be the statement she made each day of her life.
 - it is truly essential to put our whole trust in Him who alone can sanctify our work, who can indeed sanctify us without works, since He may even bring forth children of Abraham from the very stones. It is necessary for us, when we have done all we can, to confess that we are *unprofitable servants*, whilst hoping that God in His grace will give us all that we need. That is the way of childhood."
 - John Paul II affirmed this in 1997: “The way she took to reach this ideal of life is not that of the great undertakings reserved for the few, but on the contrary, a way within everyone's reach, the "little way," a path of trust and total self-abandonment to the Lord's grace. It is not a prosaic way, as if it were less demanding. It is in fact a demanding reality, as the Gospel always is. But it is a way in which one is imbued with a sense of trusting abandonment to divine mercy, which makes even the most rigorous spiritual commitment light.”

- The little way of spiritual childhood is, paradoxically, the path of Christian maturity when it is lived generously.
 - In the school of the Gospel she indicates to you the path of Christian maturity. She calls you to an infinite generosity; she invites you remain in the heart of the Church as disciples and ardent witnesses of Christ's charity.
 - No matter how old we are, we're still God's children. Compared to eternity, we're still young. We just keep pretending we're grown-ups. If kids play with dollhouses, we try to pretend we can run the universe.
 - We can't see this truth unless we're childlike, because it's hidden from the wise and the clever.
- As we come to the end of our time today, we recall that she promised to spend heaven doing good on earth
 - She said on her deathbed: "I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love him, of giving my little way to souls. If God answers my desires, my heaven will be spent on earth until the end of the world. Yes, I want to spend my heaven doing good on earth."
 - The good she wants to do for us, today, during this Lent, is to pray for our conversion and holiness.
 - Her prayers for conversion are powerful.
 - We call to mind the story of Henri Pranzini, who in 1887 was convicted of the brutal murder of two women and a child. To the outraged public Pranzini represented all that threatened the decent way of life in France. St. Thérèse prayed hard for the conversion of Pranzini, so his soul could be saved, yet Pranzini showed no remorse. At the end of August, the newspapers reported that just as Pranzini's neck was placed on the guillotine, he had grabbed a crucifix and kissed it three times. Thérèse was ecstatic and believed that her prayers had saved him. She continued to pray for Pranzini after his death.
 - We ask her to pray for us, and to pray that not only we will entrust ourselves to God's loving mercy, but also follow her totally on the path to heaven.
- St. Therese wants us to trod that same path.
 - After telling one of her two adopted priest brothers, "my way is all confidence and love," she continued, "I hope that one day Jesus will make you walk by the same way as me."
 - She once noted the subject of yesterday morning's reading: that the places at Jesus' rights and left would be granted to the little children instead of the great saints and martyrs.
 - We need to make the effort:
 - "You cannot become half a saint. You must be a whole saint or no saint at all."
 - "Sanctity does not consist in performing such and such acts; it means being ready at heart to become small and humble in the arms of God, acknowledging our own weaknesses and trusting in his fatherly goodness to the point of audacity."
 - "If you want to be a saint, it will be easy ... you have but one goal: to give pleasure to Jesus." This care for our Lord eventually becomes the essential mark of sanctity.
- As we prepare to listen to continue our night of recollection listening to three other Teresa's who made it their one goal to please and love Jesus, to trust in his divine providence, and regularly to receive his mercy, we ask them to join Therese in praying for us, that we may make a good confession tonight, receive the outpouring of the Father's love, and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, cry out with loving trust "Abba Father!" tonight, tomorrow and forever.