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LENT *and*
EASTER
WISDOM
— *from* —
SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX
Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's Own Words

John Cleary



Liguori

LIGUORI, MISSOURI

For my parents, John and Carol Cleary

~

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DAY 1

ASH WEDNESDAY

The Little Way: Our Journey Begins

God would not inspire desires which could not be realized, 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. We live in an age of inventions; nowadays the rich need not trouble to climb the stairs, they have lifts instead. Well, I mean to try and find a lift by which I may be raised unto God, for I am too tiny to climb the steep stairway of perfection....

Thine Arms, then, O Jesus, are the lift which must raise me up even unto Heaven. To get there I need not grow; on the contrary, I must remain little, I must become still less.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, IX, "THE NIGHT OF THE SOUL"

SCRIPTURE

People were bringing children to him that he might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Amen, I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.” Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

MARK 10:13–16

PRAYER

Lord, though I am too small to reach you by my own means, still I reach out to you. Hold me close to you, as a father would his child, and may your love fulfill my desire to love you as you ask that I love you. Without you, I am left to my imperfections and the sad despair that what I have is not enough to satisfy my needs. Lift me up, loving Father, and grant me what I need to be always near you so I might fulfill your command to love you with all that you provide me in my humility. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

In what ways do your imperfections and weaknesses move you to rely more and more on the love of God? How has this reliance on the Lord grown as you’ve aged? Does this perspective move you to greater forgiveness of yourself? In what ways? In your reflections throughout Ash Wednesday, consider how Jesus draws you closer to him when you “make yourself small” and confess your inability to give him all that he asks of you by your will alone. Understand that it is your weakness that allows him to love you to the depths both you and he desire. Reflect on this “little way” to God. How does it suit you?





DAY 2

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

The Word of God Is Manna From Heaven

However beautiful and touching a book may be, my heart does not respond, and I read without understanding, or, if I understand, I cannot meditate. In my helplessness the Holy Scriptures... in them I find a hidden manna, genuine and pure. But it is from the Gospels that I find most help in the time of prayer; from them I draw all that I need for my poor soul. I am always discovering in them new lights and hidden mysterious meanings. I know and I have experienced that “the Kingdom of God is within us” (Luke 17:21). Our Lord has no need of books or teachers to instruct our souls. He, the Teacher of Teachers, instructs us without any noise of words.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, VIII, “PROFESSION OF SOEUR THÉRÈSE”

SCRIPTURE

The grass withers, the flower wilts, but the word of our God stands forever.

ISAIAH 40:8

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

MATTHEW 24:35

PRAYER

Oh Lord our God, Word made flesh, nourish and inspire me through your holy Scripture. It is your word that sustains me when I stumble and fall, it lifts me up when I am overcome by sadness, and it settles my mind when I am filled with worry. I ask that you move me to turn to your word each day, and that I share its inspiration with all people I meet throughout the day, that they may know your love and wisdom through me, in my own words and in my actions. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

Make daily and/or nightly reading of the Gospels part of your Lenten spiritual routine for growth. Imagine yourself in scenes from the Gospel watching Jesus interact with those he encounters. For example: Select Luke 10:38–42. Imagine yourself a friend and a fellow villager of Mary, Martha, or Lazarus. You happen to meet one of them in the village and you are told that Jesus is coming to visit in Bethany. You express your interest to meet Jesus and through your friends find yourself invited to a dinner with them and Jesus. Close your eyes and try to imagine what your meeting and ensuing conversation with Jesus would be like. Draw some practical fruit from it.





DAY 3

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

Have Confidence in the Father's Infinite Mercy

O Jesus! Would that I could tell all little souls of Thine ineffable condescension! I feel that if by any possibility Thou couldst find one weaker than my own, Thou wouldst take delight in loading her with still greater favours, provided that she abandoned herself with entire confidence to Thine Infinite Mercy.

But, O my Spouse, why these desires of mine to make known the secrets of Thy Love? Is it not Thyself alone Who hast taught them to me, and canst Thou not unveil them to others? Yea! I know it, and this I implore Thee! I entreat Thee to let Thy Divine Eyes rest upon a vast number of little souls, I entreat Thee to choose, in this world, a legion of little victims of Thy love.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, XI, "A CANTICLE OF LOVE"

SCRIPTURE

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.” So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.” But his father ordered his servants, “Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.” Then the celebration began.

LUKE 15:18–24

PRAYER

Good and generous Father, knowing your mercy is unconditional escapes me when I stray from you. May I know this great comfort and turn from my misery and return to your loving embrace. May I practice mercy toward those who have harmed me and unchain from my heart those feelings of anger, vengeance, and ill will that bind me and prevent me from loving as I am called to love. I ask this through your merciful Son and my loving Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

LENTEN ACTION

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Can I be as generous with my mercy as I have known such generous mercy from my God? By God’s grace, I will reach out to someone today with mercy and let that person know I am praying for each of us that mercy and forgiveness will be shared between us. I will make the first step, the most difficult and vulnerable step, for it is God who seeks to share his infinite mercy with his sons and daughters.





DAY 47

EASTER

Rejoice! The Lord Is Risen

Many were the graces I asked. I felt myself truly a queen and took advantage of my title to obtain every favour from the King for His ungrateful subjects. No one was forgotten. I wished that every sinner on earth might be converted; that on that day Purgatory should set its captives free; and I bore upon my heart this letter containing what I desired for myself:

O Jesus, my Divine Spouse, grant that my baptismal robe may never be sullied. Take me from this world rather than let me stain my soul by committing the least willful fault. May I never seek or find aught but Thee alone! May all creatures be nothing to me and I nothing to them! May no earthly thing disturb my peace!

THE STORY OF A SOUL, VIII, "PROFESSION OF SOEUR THÉRÈSE"

SCRIPTURE

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. Then the angel said to the women in reply, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you." Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

MATTHEW 28:1-10

PRAYER

Oh, glorious Lord, I thank you for this day, this magnificent day on which you have defeated death and, in doing so, opened the gates of heaven to your beloved creatures, man and woman. I am overcome, good and great God, with gratitude and joy for this blessed day. The hope that you have given me in winning this victory for humankind, is a joy beyond belief. To know that, by your grace, I will be with you in heaven when I depart this earth is to know the greatest love of all. And it is all possible because of you, dear Lord; by your love and grace is this possible, and for this and all that you do in every aspect of my life, I thank you and praise your holy name, now and forever. Amen.

EASTER ACTION

During your day today, keep in mind everything for which you are grateful. From family and friends to good health (your own and others, if applicable) and good food, thank the Lord and praise his name in everything you do and say. Keep in mind your gratitude for God and generosity throughout this day as you experience every person you engage, participate in each activity you do (from setting the table to mashing the potatoes), and in every breath you draw. Remember the Little Way, that is, experiencing the divine in every moment, in everything you say and do. All is given in love of God, no matter how small or routine. This sets a person's eyes on God in every moment, allowing time and space only for God.





DAY 48

EASTER MONDAY

Committed to Sincere Love

How many souls might attain to great sanctity if only they were directed aright from the first! I know God has no need of anyone to help Him in His work of sanctification, but as He allows a clever gardener to cultivate rare and delicate plants, giving him the skill to accomplish it, while reserving to Himself the right of making them grow, so does He wish to be helped in the cultivation of souls.

...This reminds me that I used to have among my birds a canary which sang beautifully, and also a little linnet taken from the nest, of which I was very fond. This poor little prisoner, deprived of the teaching it should have received from its parents, and hearing the joyous trills of the canary from morning to night, tried hard to imitate them. A difficult task indeed for a linnet! It was delightful to follow the efforts of the poor little thing; his sweet voice found great difficulty in accommodating itself to the vibrant notes of his master, but he succeeded in time, and, to my great surprise, his song became exactly like the song of the canary.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, V, "VOCATION OF THÉRÈSE"

SCRIPTURE

The aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, wanting to be teachers of the law, but without understanding either what they are saying or what they assert with such assurance.

1 TIMOTHY 1:5–7

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality.

ROMANS 12:9–13

PRAYER

Good and generous Father, God of Love, pour out your love for the world through me, your willing vessel, your instrument. I am here to serve your will without judgment, without bias. Guide me, lead me to those people who desire your love, to those people who need to know your love as they struggle with any and all difficulties they are experiencing at this time. Do not allow me to become distracted by any negative feelings as to who deserves your love and who does not—help me to understand that everyone deserves your love, regardless of my opinion of who they are and what they have done. Join my will with your own so that I might share your love and spread your good news to the everyone in my corner of the world. Amen.

EASTER ACTION

Spend time this day or tomorrow with someone who irritates you or who has irritated you in the past. Give the person your time and attention during the minutes you share, knowing that it is God's abiding and generous love you bring. Notice how your relationship with this person is transformed when you view him or her with eyes of our loving Father. Understand that the only thing that has kept you from loving this person is your judgment. Pray for this person—and for yourself—before and after you share part of your day together.





DAY 49

EASTER TUESDAY

Jesus' Peace Never Leaves Us

Dear Mother, I feel that I have expressed myself with more than usual confusion, and I do not know what you can find to interest you in these rambling pages, but I am not aiming at a literary masterpiece, and if I weary you by this discourse on charity, it will at least prove your child's good will. I must confess I am far from living up to my ideal, and yet the very desire to do so gives me a feeling of peace. If I fall into some fault, I arise again at once—and for some months now I have not even had to struggle. I have been able to say with our holy Father, St. John of the Cross: “My house is entirely at peace,” and I attribute this interior peace to a victory I gained over myself. Since that victory, the hosts of Heaven have hastened to my aid, for they will not allow me to be wounded, now that I have fought so valiantly.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, IX, “THE NIGHT OF THE SOUL”

SCRIPTURE

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but love surrounds those who trust in the LORD. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just; exult, all you upright of heart.

PSALM 32:10–11

PRAYER

Steadfast and loving Father, you draw me near when I am in my greatest need. It is you who nourishes me in every way, throughout my days and years. When my life is troubled, dear Father, and beset by gusts of wind that seek to destroy my small boat, help me to understand that the difficulties I encounter on my journey only bring me closer to you when I put my trust and faith completely in you. Move me, Lord, to view my daily troubles as an avenue to greater love and deeper relationship with you, my Father in heaven. I ask this through your Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

EASTER ACTION

During your day today or tomorrow, take a moment to reflect on the recent difficulties you have experienced in your life. Focus on one or two of these situations and consider how each one brought you—or had the potential to bring you—closer to God. Did the situation seem devoid of the divine as you experienced it? That is common. It can be difficult to be centered and focused on the Lord during times of great difficulty. But after such a situation passes, can you see how the struggle you faced brought you closer to the Lord? Consider praying on this matter—focusing on such a situation—for five minutes.



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