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ADVENT *and* CHRISTMAS WISDOM

— *from* —

SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's Own Words

John Cleary



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PART I



READINGS *for*
ADVENT



DAY 1

The Divine Sun Shines on the Smallest Flower

God's Love is made manifest as well in a simple soul which does not resist His grace as in one more highly endowed.... He has created the little child, who knows nothing and can but utter feeble cries, and the poor savage who has only the natural law to guide him, and it is to their hearts that He deigns to stoop. These are the field flowers whose simplicity charms Him; and by His condescension to them Our Saviour shows His infinite greatness. As the sun shines both on the cedar and on the floweret, so the Divine Sun illumines every soul, great and small, and all correspond to His care—just as in nature the seasons are so disposed that on the appointed day the humblest daisy shall unfold its petals.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, I, "EARLIEST MEMORIES"

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 Jesus Christ, you love me exactly as I am. Though I am small and meek in your presence, you love me all the more. It is my smallness that moves you to draw me closer to your heart. You do not allow my shortcomings to provide any distance between us. I cannot reach you, cannot even approach you, through my own efforts. It is your grace alone that unites us. I am but a child—one of those little ones you asked to come closer to you. Move me to view your kingdom with eyes of wonder, like the eyes of a child seeking only comfort from his loving Father. Amen.



ADVENT 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 the Advent season, consider how Jesus draws you closer 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

Go the Extra Mile

To give up one's cloak is, it seems to me, to renounce every right, and to regard oneself as the servant, the slave, of all. Without a cloak it is easier to walk or run, and so the Master adds: "And whosoever shall force thee to go one mile, go with him other two" (Matthew 5:41).

It is therefore not enough for me to give to whoever asks—I ought to anticipate the wish, and show myself glad to be of service; but if anything of mine be taken away, I should show myself glad to be rid of it.

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

SCRIPTURE

In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

ACTS 20:35

Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.

LUKE 6:38

PRAYER

Oh Lord our God, you give us every good thing we need without us having to ask. You are our strength when we tire; you are our nourishment when we hunger; you are our hope when we despair. Fill our hearts with the grace to persevere through any and every struggle; strengthen our resolve to keep our attention focused on your word and act according to its wisdom. When others stumble and fall, move us to lift them up in a spirit of humble service. Help us to understand that by giving to others we are brought ever closer to you through our acts of loving service. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Make an effort on this day or the next to go above and beyond in an act of service for another. Where you might ordinarily stop in your service to someone who needs help, make the effort to go the extra mile to share God's love with someone in need. Anticipate what a person might need in a given situation—it might be different than it initially appears. Take time to study the situation, to ask questions of the person in need, and be willing to give the time and energy it takes to *listen*. Often, all people want is someone who will really listen to them and understand what they are feeling.





Have Confidence in His Infinite Mercy

From the time of my childhood I felt that one day I should be set free from this land of darkness. I believed it, not only because I had been told so by others, but my heart's most secret and deepest longings assured me that there was in store for me another and more beautiful country—an abiding dwelling-place. I was like Christopher Columbus, whose genius anticipated the discovery of the New World. And suddenly the mists about me have penetrated my very soul and have enveloped me so completely that I cannot even picture to myself this promised country...all has faded away.

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

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

Kind and merciful Father, your generous love is without measure, your mercy knows no bounds. Though I have sinned in myriad ways and offended you with my thoughts and words, action and inaction—still you forgive me. Despite all of my failings, you forgive me and celebrate my return when I come running to you, seeking your mercy. Dear Lord, your ceaseless mercy fills my heart with a confidence in your love; though I fail you at times, I am never overwhelmed with grief or despair at my sin. I know your mercy abounds and there

is nothing that can keep us apart. I pray that I might show mercy to those who offend me, reflecting as best as I am able, in my human condition, some measure of the divine love and forgiveness you radiate unceasingly. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Spend ten minutes in quiet reflection this evening. Consider those times during the past few weeks when you offended God. In what ways did you fail to love him? Did you sin against him through things you did or said? Things you failed to do or say? When you sinned against God, how do you feel? Were you overwhelmed with grief? Did you despair? Were you unaffected at that moment, only feeling the impact of the sin in retrospect? Were you confident of God's mercy? Did you turn to him with a penitent heart and express your remorse for having offended him? Consider participating in the sacrament of reconciliation during this Advent season. Make it a weekly commitment. Open up completely to God with great confidence in his mercy. See how your relationship deepens through this experience.





God's Love Is Unconditional

How can a soul so imperfect as mine aspire to the plenitude of Love? What is the key of this mystery? O my only Friend, why dost Thou not reserve these infinite longings to lofty souls, to the eagles that soar in the heights? Alas! I am but a poor little unfledged bird. I am not an eagle, I have but the eagle's eyes and heart! Yet, notwithstanding my exceeding littleness, I dare to gaze upon the Divine Sun of Love, and I burn to dart upwards unto Him! I would fly, I would imitate the eagles; but all that I can do is to lift up my little wings—it is beyond my feeble power to soar...With daring self-abandonment there will I remain...my gaze fixed upon that Divine Sun. Nothing shall affright me, nor wind nor rain. And should impenetrable clouds conceal the Orb

of Love, and should I seem to believe that beyond this life there is darkness only, that would be the hour of perfect joy, the hour in which to push my confidence to its uttermost bounds. I should not dare to detach my gaze, well knowing that beyond the dark clouds the sweet Sun still shines.

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

SCRIPTURE

He said..., "you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

LUKE 10:27

I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.

GALATIANS 2:20

In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.

1 JOHN 4:9–10

PRAYER

Oh Lord, my God, you have loved me into being. Without you, all that I am, all the joys that move me to praise you, all the sadness and loneliness that bind me ever closer to you, and every breath of my life from birth to death would never

be. I have every confidence that you will hold me close to your loving heart, for you have never wavered in your unconditional love for me, for my neighbor, or for all of humanity throughout the history of our great and enduring covenant of love. I ask that you grace my heart to avoid any temptation that might keep me from you, and I ask this in the name of your Son, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

At the close of this day, as you prepare for sleep, spend ten to fifteen minutes in quiet reflection. Consider the blessings you have received throughout your life to this point. Consider the tragedy, periods of loneliness, and stretches of spiritual dryness that have brought you closer to God. How has the love of God shaped your life? How has God's love moved you to love? In what ways do you share the love of God with those closest to you? With strangers?

As Christmas Day approaches and the anticipation of God's greatest gift fills your heart, how would you like the love of God to further shape your behavior and outlook this Advent season? In what concrete ways can you your love emulate the unconditional love you have known from your heavenly Father?





Find Your Joy in God Alone

I had one other great wish; it was to love God only, and to find my joy in Him alone. During my thanksgiving after Holy Communion I often repeated this passage from the *Imitation of Christ*: “O my God, who art unspeakable sweetness, turn for me into bitterness all the consolations of earth.” These words rose to my lips quite naturally; I said them like a child, who, without well understanding, repeats what a friend may suggest. Later on I will tell you...how Our Lord has been pleased to fulfill my desire, how He, and He alone, has always been my joy.

THE STORY OF A SOUL, IV, “FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION”

SCRIPTURE

My soul, be at rest in God alone, from whom comes my hope.

God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;

I shall not fall.

My deliverance and honor are with God, mysterious rock;

my refuge is with God.

Trust God at all times, my people! Pour out your hearts

to God our refuge!

PSALM 62:6–9

PRAYER

Loving Father, it is you alone who gives my heart rest, in whom I trust completely and who knows every corner of heart, the depths of my person I have yet to come to know myself. Reveal yourself to me, oh wonderful God, and help me to experience your love in everything I do, every word I speak, and every person I meet. Despite the distractions and temptations that come my way, grace me with the perseverance to rely on you, my rock and my protection. When the deception of those who would do me harm attempts to pull me away from you, hold me close to your heart. Every comfort I desire and all the nourishment I require comes from you, dear Lord. Never let me go. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Make daily/nightly reading of the Gospels part of your Advent spiritual routine for growth. Do not attempt to read too large a passage in one sitting. Choose ten verses or less and reflect on every phrase you read. Allow small portions of text, a verse or two at a time, penetrate your heart. Think on these words, pray on them, meditate on them. In what way is God speaking to you through the Scripture you consume? How is he instructing you in how to view the world and those you meet throughout your day, even in affairs that seem mundane? How is he revealing himself to you? How is he revealing yourself to you? Put yourself in the crowd of people who follow and listen to the Lord. Let his words guide you.

