

# St Thérèse of Lisieux

## PowerPoint Resource for use with small groups

The relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux will visit England and Wales for a month from 16<sup>th</sup> September 2009. These notes have been prepared to accompany a *PowerPoint* presentation that could be used with a small group prior to or during the visit. Alternatively, it could be used in a parish setting to provide some background in preparation for the visit.

The same text is to be found in the notes section of each slide of the presentation; it is repeated here for ease of access and to allow you to edit and/or expand particular points according to your own situation. We have deliberately included more rather than less so you can choose what is relevant to your own context according to the time that you have available. If you do delete a slide, then the numbering of subsequent slides in the text below will need to be altered.

For those who wish, the text could be used as it stands as a 'script', while others may prefer to adapt it according to their own situation. There are many things that could be said about St Thérèse; some themes that the National Working Party of the visit of the relics chose to focus upon are:

- 1 Holiness
- 2 Prayer
- 3 Family life as a school of charity
- 4 Vocation
- 5 Evangelisation and her appeal to young people

You can get more information about St Thérèse and the visit of her relics from [www.catholicrelics.co.uk](http://www.catholicrelics.co.uk)

This resource was created by the Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation (CASE) which is an agency of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. It offers a wide range of resources and has four websites: [www.caseresources.org.uk](http://www.caseresources.org.uk) (to support Catholics to evangelise); [www.yfaith.co.uk](http://www.yfaith.co.uk) (to encourage 11 – 13 year olds in their journey of faith) [www.life4seekers.co.uk](http://www.life4seekers.co.uk) (to support spiritual seekers as an online expression of the Catholic Enquiry Office); [www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk](http://www.comehomeforchristmas.co.uk) (to reach out to resting Catholics). Tel: 020 79014863. Email: [info@caseresources.org.uk](mailto:info@caseresources.org.uk)

### SLIDE 1:

You could open the session by asking **[click]** what Alaska, people with AIDS, airline pilots and Australia have in common. (Alternatively, this question and the four images could be displayed on the screen as people gather and wait for the gathering to start\*.) It's not just that they all start with the letter A, but they also share the same **[click]** patron saint: St Thérèse of Lisieux.

*\* As people gather, you might like to play one of two original songs written for the Visit of the Relics by Mike Stanley: My Song of Today and Little Child (available from [http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/ccb/catholic\\_church/relics\\_of\\_st\\_therese\\_of\\_lisieux/news\\_and\\_resources#music](http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/ccb/catholic_church/relics_of_st_therese_of_lisieux/news_and_resources#music))*

### SLIDE 2: **[click]** to bring up

She's also a patron of other things, most especially of missionaries, **[click]** people who go out to the whole world with the Good News of God's love and mercy. Although she had a real desire to be a missionary **[click 1st part of quotation will appear]**, she actually died aged just 24 after having spent the last nine and a half years of her life as an enclosed nun in an obscure convent in northern France. However, since her death, her relics have been flown to **[click names of some of the countries visited will appear]** over 40 countries across the globe and the Word of God has been preached at each of these events fulfilling her desire to **[click]** **'...be a missionary, not just for a few years, but 'til the end of time!'** We'll come back to what happened after her death shortly, but first of all, who was she?

### SLIDE 3: **[click]** to bring up

Marie Françoise Thérèse Martin was born in **[click]** Alençon in Normandy at 11:30pm on January 2nd in 1873. Her parents were **[click]** Louis and Zélie Martin; he was a watchmaker and she had a successful lace making business. **[click]** Thérèse was their ninth and youngest child. Although they were reasonably well off, the family faced many difficulties: **[click]** two brothers and two

sisters died very young and Thérèse herself nearly died, but they responded to these challenges with **[click]** faith and trust in God rather than becoming bitter about difficult things that happened.

**SLIDE 4:** **[click]** to bring up

This is a photograph of life-sized models of the family. When Thérèse was first born, her mother really struggled to feed her and she had to go and stay with another family, the Tailles, until she grew stronger. Perhaps this was a sign of the breast cancer **[click]** that caused Zélie Martin's death when Thérèse was just 4 years old **[click]** a few months after this photograph was taken.

*\*\*\*If your presentation needs to be short, omit this paragraph\*\*\**

Thérèse's mother went to Lourdes in June of 1877 and died on 28<sup>th</sup> August that same year. While she was hopeful of a cure, she placed all her trust in God and encouraged others to do the same. The Church is currently investigating whether to declare Thérèse's parents as Saints as well. They were recognised as Blessed in October 2008 and we can be confident they are an excellent example to follow.

**SLIDE 5:** **[click]** to bring up

This was the atmosphere of faith in which Thérèse grew up. Faith did not 'magic away' their problems but gave them strength to cope with tragedy. Because of their faith, they were able to place their trust and hope in God, and were able to love each other despite the hard things that happened. One example of this was when she became dangerously ill at the age of ten. Her father arranged for a Novena of Masses to be said in the hope she would be cured. However, she became even worse and her doctor said that he couldn't help her. She describes in her autobiography how her sisters were kneeling in front of **[click]** this statue of Our Lady in the bedroom and Thérèse was praying too. This is her actual description of what happened: **[click]** **'Suddenly the Blessed Virgin glowed with a beauty beyond anything I had ever seen. Her face was alive with kindness and an infinite tenderness, but it was her enchanting smile which really moved me to the depths. My pain vanished and two great tears crept down my cheeks ~tears of pure joy!'** She was cured instantly.

**SLIDE 6:** **[click]** to bring up

By this stage, Louis Martin had moved his family to the town of Lisieux just over an hour north of Alençon so that Zélie's brother and sister-in-law could help with the care of the five girls. Thérèse attended school between the ages of eight and thirteen. Although she was bright, school was often difficult for her. She sometimes struggled to be friends with the other girls as she was extremely shy and sensitive. She would cry really easily and then would become upset that she had given in to tears and so would end up crying because she cried! However, she was spiritually very mature, so much so she knew God was calling her to become a nun.

*\*\*\*If your presentation needs to be short, omit this paragraph\*\*\**

She first spoke about this to the Mother Superior at the Convent when she was just nine years old. Shortly after this, she suffered another loss when her beloved sister Pauline left home to become a Carmelite nun. **[click]** All five sisters eventually became nuns, but Pauline was the first to go. This was especially sad for Thérèse as she was so close to Pauline; she called her big sister her 'little mother' as she had helped bring her up after their mother had died.

**SLIDE 7:** **[click]** to bring up

*\*\*\*If your presentation needs to be short, omit this slide\*\*\**

In lots of ways, Thérèse was quite the 'baby' of the family. Not only was she the youngest, but because there was a lot of tragedy in her early life, people tended to mollycoddle her a bit. In her autobiography, she tells various stories of how she could be stubborn and childish. This all changed overnight the Christmas she turned fourteen. **[click]** She described how she knew she **'needed a miracle'** to overcome her childishness if she was going to be considered adult enough to join the Convent. When the family returned home from Midnight Mass, they had a childish tradition of having presents in their shoes that Thérèse still clung to **[click]**. Without her father realising, she overheard him say, 'Thérèse ought to have outgrown all this sort of thing...' Normally this would have reduced her to tears, but with God's help she was able to act in a mature way; she said that her heart was changed from that night onwards and she no longer focussed on herself and her own feelings.

**SLIDE 8:** **[click]** to bring up

At fourteen, she was considered far too young to join the Carmelite Convent and become a nun, but Thérèse was confident this was her vocation in life. So confident, in fact, that when it looked like the local priest and bishop would make her wait until she was at least twenty-one, she went on pilgrimage to Rome and found a way to speak to the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII **[click]**. Although he didn't promise

to solve her problem instantly, the Pope gave her the best advice he could when he encouraged her to go along with what the superiors decided and said **[click]**, ‘... **you will enter if it is God’s Will.**’ As strong willed as she was, Thérèse understood the importance of obedience.

To be brave enough to approach the Pope and speak to him was amazing for someone as naturally shy as Thérèse. **[click]** She has been described as having ‘**holy daring**’; a deep courage to step out in faith and do God’s Will, even if the circumstances are really challenging. Thérèse’s trust in God was stronger than any of the other things which might have put her off. She is an excellent example to us of how to do what we know to be right, especially when things are difficult. **[click]** We can also ask her to pray for us when we lack clear direction, when we need to work out what God’s Call is in our own lives.

**SLIDE 9:** **[click]** *to bring up*

There are many things we can learn from her: we can be inspired by how she dealt with the whole situation. In her struggle to enter the Convent, she didn’t just go along with what society thought was ‘normal’; **[click]** she had the courage of her convictions.

**[click]** She didn’t ignore authority, but she also made sure she took action and stood by what she knew to be right.

**[click]** She faced her challenges with great faith in God, with love for those around her and with hope for the future.

**[click]** She was also very practical... this photograph was taken just before she entered the Convent at Easter, 1888, fifteen years old. She wore her hair up like that for the first time six months previously when she had gone to ask her local bishop for permission to become a nun at such a young age ~she was determined to look as grown up as possible! **[click]** Thérèse is a superb example of how to seek God’s Will, how to do everything possible to put that into action and how to trust God to bring about the right outcome.

**SLIDE 10:** **[click]** *to bring up*

At long last, she entered Carmel on April 9<sup>th</sup> 1888, and took the name Sr Theresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. Although this had been her heart’s desire from the age of 3, it was still not easy to leave home behind, **[click]** especially her beloved father and Celine with whom she had shared so much. The type of nun Thérèse became is called a Carmelite **[click]**, this means that once she entered the convent, she would not come out again. Such nuns isolate themselves from the World not because they hate people, but because they love them so much they want to be able to totally concentrate on praying for them. Thérèse was only able to make the sacrifice of leaving everything behind because she was certain that Christ was waiting for her in the quiet of the Carmelite Convent. She saw becoming a nun as getting married to Jesus, and she wanted this more than anything else in the World.

*\*\*\*If your presentation needs to be short, omit this paragraph\*\*\**

To try to explain this idea to the other young women who were preparing to profess their vows to God, **[click]**, Thérèse made a wedding invitation with Jesus, ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords’ named as the groom, and herself ‘Little Thérèse Martin’ as the bride. What’s interesting about the invitation is that although the ceremony is shown as 8<sup>th</sup> September 1890 (the date she made her vows), she describes how her wedding reception will be ‘...tomorrow, the Day of Eternity.’ Thérèse had great faith that anything she gave up on Earth would be given her a hundred times over in Heaven.

**SLIDE 11:** **[click]** *to bring up*

Day to day life in the Convent was pretty uneventful. **[click]**, While Sister Thérèse found a ‘**deep and serene peace beyond description**’, she also said: **[click]**, ‘**I found a nun’s life was just what I imagined it would be. None of its sacrifices surprised me, though there were at first more thorns than roses on my path.**’

Thérèse had not expected to be ‘babied’ in the Convent and she was not disappointed; she committed herself to obedience, prayer and sacrifice. One of the chief duties of a Carmelite nun is to pray, to pray for the whole World. Thérèse had a particular passion to pray for priests, and she was overjoyed when she asked to become a kind of ‘spiritual sister’ and to write letters to two young men who were training to become missionary priests.

Her other tasks involved things like helping to form the novices (trainee nuns) and working in the laundry **[click]**. It wasn’t all work though, the sisters sometimes entertained each other during their times of recreation **[click]**: these two photographs are of St Thérèse in a play she wrote about St Joan of Arc.

**SLIDE 12:** [click] to bring up

On Good Friday 1896, Thérèse began coughing up blood and her health deteriorated sharply. The other nuns did not realise how ill she was at first because she made so little fuss. Thérèse seemed to be aware she would not live long and looked ahead to the happiness of Heaven she hoped for. In her own words, [click] **'I feel that my mission is soon to begin, to make others love God as I do... I will spend my Heaven doing good on Earth. [click] After death I shall let fall a shower of roses.'**

[click] Her apparently insignificant life ended early when she died from tuberculosis aged just 24 on the evening of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1897. Her feastday is kept on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

**SLIDE 13:** [click] to bring up

TB is a horrible, suffocating illness and during her last months, Thérèse was in a great deal of pain [click]. She accepted this suffering with a spirit of love and did as best as she could to continue writing her autobiography as she had been told to do to by her eldest sister Pauline who was now in charge of the convent.

She also suffered emotionally [click] and had been particularly upset by her father's illness. Louis Martin had developed arteriosclerosis which restricted the flow of blood to his brain and his legs; this meant he couldn't walk properly and he suffered from horrible hallucinations. People often misunderstand mental illness and the two sisters still living at home had to endure many cruel comments. For Thérèse, to see her beloved family struggle in this way was heart-breaking.

Alongside her physical and emotional pain, Thérèse's greatest trial [click] was the profound spiritual darkness she experienced which really tested her faith to the limit. However, she relied on God to bring her through these challenges and she had a deep inner peace that Jesus would never actually abandon her even when she felt real anguish. She got through her worst times by focussing on God's love in that present moment and advised others that [click] **'When we surrender to discouragement or despair, it is usually because we are thinking too much of the past or the future.'**

For Thérèse, [click] embracing suffering rather than trying to avoid it was a way of mirroring Jesus in His love for His Father and for all humanity.

**SLIDE 14:** [click] to bring up

Just as she predicted, Thérèse had more impact after she died. The account of her life she had been told to write is called *Story of a Soul*. [click] Popular with all sorts of different people, it has been translated into more than fifty languages. [click] She was declared a Saint by Pope Pius XI on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1925 and many miracles have happened through her intercession. This means the Church is totally confident she is in Heaven because when people pray to her and ask her to pray for them, miraculous events occur [click]. Only God can perform miracles so St Thérèse must be with Him in Heaven if praying to her produces such spectacular results.

[click] In 1997 she was declared by Pope John Paul II to be a Doctor of the Church; this means that her message has universal relevance, that everybody in the Church can learn from her teaching and example, not just a few people.

**SLIDE 15:** [click] to bring up

Shortly before she died, she said: **'I feel that my mission is soon to begin, my mission to teach souls my little way... the Way of Spiritual Childhood, the way of trust and absolute self-surrender'**. St Thérèse has become known throughout the World for her 'Little Way'. She totally lived out the idea of an English Bishop, Richard Challoner, who lived about 100 years before her. He said, [click] **'Sanctity (being holy) does not so much depend upon doing extraordinary actions... [click] as doing our ordinary actions extraordinarily well.'**

Sometimes we can misunderstand that being a Saint means you have to do amazing, outstanding things. For St Thérèse, holiness meant doing very many little things very well. She teaches us that [click] **'Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but at the love with which we do them.'** For Thérèse, it is all about love, about being humble and trusting enough to come before God with open hands and receive freely from Him: [click] **'In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works...'**

This doesn't mean that what we do is irrelevant. Rather, Thérèse believed that doing all the ordinary

actions of daily life in a humble, hidden way was precisely what God wants of us. She teaches us that small things like chopping vegetables, doing laundry, responding promptly when called and staying cheerful when people hurt us are straight paths to Heaven.

Although these things sound very ordinary, to live them out with the right attitude day after day is extremely challenging, which is precisely why she looked to God Our Father to help her do things in a holy way and thus draw her to Himself in Heaven.

**SLIDE 16:** [\[click\]](#) to bring up

Sr Patricia Mary is a modern day Carmelite from Manchester. Here she explains how the Little Way works by comparing it to a staircase [\[click\]](#) on photo to play video (90 secs in length) [www.vimeo.com/5390638](http://www.vimeo.com/5390638). This and other clips can be accessed from [www.vimeo.com/channels/relics](http://www.vimeo.com/channels/relics). To play the video properly you need to be connected to the Internet. Alternatively, you can download the clip beforehand from the above link.

**SLIDE 17:** [\[click\]](#) to bring up

Thérèse really loved the Bible and carried a small book of the Gospels near her heart at all times. She copied out all the Scripture verses about God's special love for those who have the heart of a child. [\[click\]](#) She felt her vocation was to be love at the heart of the Church and she based her confidence upon Jesus's promise that [\[click\]](#) **'Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'** (Matt 18:3)

**SLIDE 18:** [\[click\]](#) to bring up

Thérèse longed to be a missionary and let the whole world know the Good News of God's love. She was not able to do this during her life, but since her death, millions of people have come to hear this message, first through her autobiography, and over the last fifteen years also through the visit of her relics. The word **'relic'** comes from a Latin term meaning that which has been **left behind**. Relics are either part of the physical remains of a Saint's body after their death, or an object that has been in contact with their body, *eg* their Rosary beads or a prayer book. The most significant relic we have is the Cross on which Jesus was crucified.

*Extra background information has been included here which may be too much detail for an evening gathering. If you are using this in a parish setting, it is likely that you will have a little more time available.*

When relics are venerated, great respect is shown to them. For example, Catholics kiss the wood of the Cross at the Liturgy of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday. The veneration of relics is found in many religions and is rooted in the natural human instinct to treat with reverence anything connected with those we love who have died. [\[click\]](#) We see examples of this in the Bible when in the Old Testament [\[click\]](#), miracles were worked through the cloak of the prophet Elijah (2 Kg. 2:14) and the bones of his follower Elisha (2 Kg. 13:21). [\[click\]](#) The New Testament speaks of healings worked by handkerchiefs that had been in contact with St. Paul's body (Acts 19:12).

From the very beginning of the Church, the bodies of the martyrs were shown great respect and held in special veneration and honour. Although the practice of venerating relics is sometimes misunderstood, true veneration of relics is a way of giving glory to God and expressing our faith in Him. [\[click\]](#) St Jerome taught that the bodies of the martyrs were honoured as way of showing honour to God who had made those bodies, and in whose honour the martyrs had died. [\[click\]](#) St Augustine's way of explaining it was that the body of the Saint whose relics these are was so full of the Holy Spirit during their lifetime, that even after the person has died, it is right and proper to honour the place where the Holy Spirit dwelled so powerfully.

When some Saints die, their bodies don't decay as you might expect, for example, St Bernadette. However, St Thérèse, with typical humility, predicted that her body would not remain 'incorrupt in this way'. Soon after she died, lots of people came to her tomb to pay their respects and many miracles happened. Because so many prayers were answered, healings were granted and lives were changed, it was decided to move her remains to a special casket that could be moved around. This has meant that millions more people have been able to venerate her relics and graces have carried on being poured out, fulfilling her promise that after her death she would 'let a shower of roses fall to Earth'.

**SLIDE 19:** [\[click\]](#) to bring up

So far her relics have visited over 40 countries and England and Wales are next.

*The details for Portsmouth, the first place on the tour, have been included. Please change for the*

*details of one more local to you. If you are not sure which venue will be your nearest, please click here:*  
[http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/ccb/catholic\\_church/relics\\_of\\_st\\_therese\\_of\\_lisieux/locations\\_and\\_dates](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/ccb/catholic_church/relics_of_st_therese_of_lisieux/locations_and_dates)

**[click]** This is what the relics look like, they are sealed in a large casket which will be taken around over 20 churches in England and Wales. **[click]** Here is Pope Benedict paying his respects. People can venerate the relics in whatever way helps them to pray. Some people like to kiss the casket, or place their hands reverently upon it, while others may prefer just to pray quietly for a few moments.

A pilgrimage is a spiritual journey of some kind. Going on a pilgrimage helps us to get out of the routine of daily life in which we can easily become stuck, and by involving us in a physical journey suggests that our spiritual life also needs to move forward and grow. In places where her relics have previously visited, there have been many graces: healings, conversions, answers to prayer, people discovering their vocation. It is important that we have expectant faith, that we prepare for the visit of the relics with prayer, and so we will draw our time to a close by praying together.

Two options for a closing prayer time are included so you can choose according to what works best in your situation. The longer version has a slide with a collection of St Thérèse's inspirational phrases appearing slowly while reflective music is played (eg Mike Stanley's *My Song of Today and Little Child* or maybe just an instrumental piece) with a prayer gathering these thoughts together at the end. Alternatively, if your presentation needs to be short, go straight to the final slide and pray the prayer together.

*\*\*\*If your presentation needs to be short, omit this slide and go straight to the prayer below.\*\*\**

**SLIDE 20:** **[click]** to bring up

*Phrases of St Thérèse appear, maybe accompanied by music?*

**SLIDE 21:** **[click]** to bring up

**God our Father,**

**You have promised Your Kingdom to those who are willing to become like little children.**

**Help us to follow the way of Saint Thérèse with confidence so that by her prayers we may come to know Your eternal glory.**

**Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever, AMEN**

**SLIDE 22:** **[click]** to bring up

Copyright slide

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