Meet St. Thérèse of Lisieux! • Saints for kids

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a young girl named Thérèse Martin who loved Jesus very much. But sometimes, even girls and boys who love Jesus very much have a hard time loving others, like their mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers. This was the way it was for Thérèse, too.

Sometimes, Thérèse did not do what her father and mother asked her to do. Sometimes, Thérèse said angry words to her big sisters. And sometimes, when Thérèse didn't get her way, she would throw a big fit, rolling all over the floor in tears and anger.

"Nothing can make Thérèse give in," her mother used to exclaim.

But Thérèse loved her mother and father and three older sisters. She knew that most of the time, Jesus would want her to show her love for them by saying "yes" instead of "no."

But saying "no" was easy, and saying "yes" was very hard! How could she change those pesky noes into yeses?

One day, Thérèse's father gave her a little white flower.

"Here is a flower for you, my little Queen!" he said.

"Thank you so much, Papa!" Thérèse exclaimed. Papa knew flowers always made her happy.

Suddenly, Thérèse knew how to turn her noes into yeses! Every time she did what Jesus wanted her to do
instead of what she wanted, she could imagine her sacrifice was like a flower for Jesus. Her First Holy Communion day was coming up. If she made many sacrifices for Jesus, she could give him a spiritual bouquet of flowers on her special day.

That night, after she was tucked into bed and kissed goodnight, Thérèse was left alone in the dark.

Thérèse was afraid of the dark, and being alone in it was even worse. She thought about tiptoeing downstairs to Papa, but he said she must stay in bed and go to sleep. But she was still afraid.

How would she ever fall asleep?

Then she had an idea! “Instead of being afraid, I will give Jesus a flower,” she thought.

Thérèse thought about all her favorite flowers. “I know! I will give Jesus a white moonflower. They must not be afraid of the dark, because they only bloom at night! They are beautiful and brave!”

And Thérèse forgot all about the darkness, and fell asleep dreaming of flower vines reaching for the moon.

A few days later, Thérèse asked Pauline to give her a ride in the wheelbarrow. Pauline went so fast, Thérèse felt she was flying!

But then the wheelbarrow hit a bump, and Thérèse went sprawling into a patch of gravel.

“Oh, Thérèse!” Pauline cried. “Are you all right?”

Thérèse was not all right. Her knee was scraped and bleeding, and hot tears filled her eyes. Thérèse was about to say something sharp and hurtful to her sister . . . but then she saw Pauline’s worried face. Poor Pauline had not meant for Thérèse to get hurt!

So she swallowed her sharp words. Instead, she smiled and said, “My knee hurts, but I will be all right.”

And she lifted her flowers of bleeding hearts up to heaven.

Another time, Thérèse was playing with a little red ball. She was having fun imagining the Child Jesus playing with the little ball, too!

Then her older sister Celine came along. “May I play with you?” she asked.

Normally, Thérèse and Celine got along very well, sharing everything. But today, Thérèse didn’t want to share! She wanted to play by herself.

But she knew that the Child Jesus would want her to be kind to Celine. So she smiled at Celine and said, “Let’s play catch!”

And she gave the Child Jesus a red rose, because its sharp thorns reminded Thérèse that sometimes it hurts to sacrifice for love. But even though it hurt a little at first, the sweet scent of the rose was worth it!

At last, it was the great day of Thérèse’s First Holy Communion! She had made many sacrifices for Jesus so that she could offer him a beautiful spiritual bouquet.

Though Thérèse was happy to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, she couldn’t help but feel a little sad, too, for her Mama and sister Pauline were not there. Her Mama had died, and Pauline had gone away to live as a nun in a convent.

Thérèse decided to add one more flower to her spiritual bouquet: a pretty little Forget-Me-Not, for she remembered that both her Mama and Pauline had told her that they would always keep her close in their hearts.

Even if they could not be there beside her, surely they were both praying for her! And besides, when she received Holy Communion, she would be closer to them than ever.

And on that special day, as she knelt to receive Jesus in the Eucharist for the first time, Thérèse presented him with all the “flowers”—the little sacrifices and acts of love—that she

had made especially for him.

“I love you, Jesus, and I give myself to you forever,” Thérèse prayed.

And Jesus smiled, filling her heart to overflowing with love and joy.

About Thérèse

Thérèse Martin was born in France on January 2, 1873, the last of nine children, four of whom died in infancy. After losing her mother to breast cancer at the age of four, Thérèse became a very sensitive child, crying over almost anything. But under the loving guidance of her father and four older sisters, she grew in holiness and wisdom far beyond her years.

By May 1887, Thérèse was determined to enter the Carmelite community at Lisieux. After overcoming objections from Church officials over her young age, the fifteen-year-old Thérèse entered the convent where she would live for the rest of her life with three of her sisters who also became Carmelite nuns (another sister became a Visitation nun). Over the remaining nine years of her life there, Thérèse blossomed in strength and holiness. In 1895, she was ordered to write a memoir of her childhood; this, together with some of her other writings, was published after her death as *Story of a Soul*. She died of tuberculosis in 1897 at the age of twenty-four.

Story of a Soul quickly became one of the most popular spiritual writings of the twentieth century. Despite its apparent simplicity, many have found in it a profound wisdom, so much so that Pope John Paul II declared her a Doctor of the Church, one of only four women so named.

In *Story of a Soul*, she tells of how she prepared a spiritual bouquet for Jesus on the occasion of her First Communion:

I shall always remember my First Communion Day as one of

unclouded happiness. It seems to me that I could not have been better prepared. Do you remember, dear Mother, the charming little book you gave me three months before the great day? I found in it a helpful method which prepared me gradually and thoroughly. It is true I had been thinking about my First Communion for a long time, but, as your precious manuscript told me, I must stir up in my heart fresh transports of love and fill it anew with flowers. So, each day I made a number of little sacrifices and acts of love, which were to be changed into so many flowers: now violets, another time roses, then cornflowers, daisies, or forget-me-nots—in a word, all nature's blossoms were to form in me a cradle for the Holy Child.

The story above imagines what kinds of sacrifices Thérèse might have made for her spiritual bouquet. We know from the writing of her mother (as well as her own words) that, as a young child, Thérèse could be "incredibly stubborn," and sometimes fought with her sisters. We also know that she imagined herself as a little ball for Jesus to play with, and that she was afraid of the dark. And in Story of a Soul, she describes numerous little sacrifices and acts of love that she made for the sake of Jesus.

However, the wheelbarrow incident described in this book is wholly imagined . . . and we don't really know what she thought of squash.

In the little sacrifices she made for others, Thérèse imitated Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. All of us are called to follow Jesus in this way. If Thérèse could do it, so can you!

What "flowers" would you like to give to Jesus?

Seven Sayings from the Saint to Help You Grow in Holiness

Here are seven sayings from St. Thérèse, lightly adapted from *Story of a Soul* for kids. The text is excerpted

from ***Little Lessons from St. Thérèse of Lisieux: An Introduction to Her Words and Wisdom*** by Becky Arganbright.

Open the Holy Gospels

As Our Lord is now in Heaven, I can only follow Him by the footprints He has left—footprints full of life, full of fragrance. I have only to open the Holy Gospels and at once I breathe the perfume of Jesus, and then I know which way to run; and it is not to the first place, but to the last, that I hasten.

Prayer is an uplifting of the heart

How wonderful is the power of prayer! It is like a queen, who, having free access to the king, obtains whatsoever she asks. In order to secure a hearing there is no need to recite set prayers…were it so, I ought indeed to be pitied! … I have not the courage to look through books for beautiful prayers. I only get a headache because of their number, and besides, one is more lovely than another. Unable therefore to say them all, and lost in choice, I do as children who have not learned to read—I simply tell Our Lord all that I want, and He always understands.

With me prayer is an uplifting of the heart; a glance towards heaven; a cry of gratitude and love, uttered equally in sorrow and in joy. In a word, it is something noble, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites it to God. Sometimes when I am in such a state of spiritual dryness that not a single good thought occurs to me, I say very slowly the "Our Father" or the "Hail Mary," and these prayers suffice to take me out of myself, and wonderfully refresh me.

Strew flowers before Jesus

I ask only for Love. To love You, Jesus, is now my only desire. Great deeds are not for me; I cannot preach the Gospel or shed my blood. No matter! … I, a little child, stay close

to the throne, and love You for all who are in the strife.

But how will I show my love, since love proves itself by deeds? Well! The little child will strew flowers . . . she will embrace the Divine Throne with their fragrance, she will sing Love’s Canticle in silvery tones. Yes, my Beloved, it is thus my short life shall be spent in Thy sight. The only way I have of proving my love is to strew flowers before You—that is to say, I will let no tiny sacrifice pass, no look, no word. I wish to profit by the smallest actions, and to do them for Love.

Roses must be gathered from amid thorns

I will sing always, even if my roses must be gathered from amid thorns; and the longer and sharper the thorns, the sweeter shall be my song.

Always see the good side of things

There are people who make the worst of everything. As for me, I do just the contrary. I always see the good side of things, and even if my portion be suffering, without a glimmer of solace, well, I make it my joy.

Show charity to others

Yes, I know when I show charity to others, it is simply Jesus acting in me, and the more closely I am united to Him, the more dearly I love my Sisters. If I wish to increase this love in my heart, and the devil tries to bring before me the faults of a Sister, I am quick to look for her virtues, her good motives; I call to mind that though I may have seen her fall once, no doubt she has gained many victories over herself, which in her humility she conceals. It is even possible that what seems to me a fault, may very likely, on account of her good intention, be an act of virtue.

God will carry you

You make me think of a little child that is learning to stand but does not yet know how to walk. In his desire to reach the top of the stairs to find his mother, he lifts his little foot to climb the first step. It is all in vain, and at each renewed effort he falls. Well, be like that little child. Always keep lifting your foot to climb the ladder of holiness, and do not imagine that you can mount even the first step. All God asks of you is good will.
From the top of the ladder He looks lovingly upon you, and soon, touched by your fruitless efforts, He will Himself come down, and, taking you in His Arms, will carry you to His Kingdom never again to leave Him. But should you cease to raise your foot, you will be left for long on the earth.

This post was adapted from *Flowers for Jesus: A Story of Therese of Lisieux as a Young Girl* and *Little Lessons from St. Therese of Lisieux: An Introduction to Her Words and Wisdom.*