

St. Therese - A
I Kings 19:11-13a;
Galatians 2:19-20;
Matthew 18:1-4
Little Flower - 9/28/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of St. Therese, our patron saint. Although our parish is named St. Therese of the Infant Jesus, her actual name as a Carmelite Sister was Sr. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. This is why her coat of arms is divided in two, Jesus in a crib and the Holy Face.

Patron saints intercede for us, i.e., pray for us, and serve as role models for us. We believe that St. Therese really does shower down roses upon us at Little Flower, and we believe that we can learn from her life. All three readings today give us insight into St. Therese's life and into our own lives.

In today's first reading, God revealed himself to Elijah not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in a tiny whispering sound. At various points in her life, St. Therese had a very hard time hearing the tiny whispering sound of God's presence. St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila, the great mystics of the Church, often refer to the "dark night of the soul," those times when we do not experience God's presence in our lives, those times when we feel that God is absent from our lives. However, Fr. Ron Rolheiser suggests that "the ups and downs of faith have to do with the rhythms of ordinary life, especially the rhythm of love."¹ During those dark nights of the soul, what keeps faith strong is commitment. Faith is not just an experience or a feeling. It is also a choice and a commitment.

To the Galatians, St. Paul wrote, "*It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me*" [NRSV]. Paul's statement is paradoxical. He was the strongest personality in the New Testament next to Jesus, yet he wrote that it was no longer he who lived but Christ who lived in him. The more Christ-like he became, the more fully himself he became. We do not want to make St. Therese into a plaster saint. For all of her good qualities, St. Therese had emotional issues and she had faults, yet despite all her issues and faults, she became not only a saint but also a doctor of the Church. St. Paul and St. Therese give all of us hope. No matter what our issues, no matter what our faults, the more we strive to become Christ-like by dying to ourselves, the more we will become our best selves.

Finally, in today's Gospel, we are called to become like little children, to humble ourselves, if we want to become great in the kingdom of heaven. St. Therese certainly saw herself as the Little Flower of Jesus and her way as the Little Way. When Jesus calls us to become like little children, he is not calling us to become babified Christians. Nor is he calling us to be passive or dependent Christians. Rather he is calling us to recognize that we are not self-made men or women, i.e., to acknowledge our complete dependence on God for all that we are and have, including our very existence, as St. Therese did.

My brothers and sisters, in the Old Testament, God said, "*Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy*" [Leviticus 19:2]. St. Therese is a model for us. If we imitate her by deepening our faith and religious commitments, by striving to grow into the likeness of the Risen Christ, and by acknowledging our complete dependence upon God while trying to do his will, we, like St. Therese, will become holy despite our limitations and our faults.

¹Fr. Ron Rolheiser, "Searching for a Word Filled with Reality," November 13, 2013, <http://ronrolheiser.com/searching-for-a-word-filled-with-reality/#.VC1cuBbDXXM>.