

*the story of a* **Soul**



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*Thérèse of Lisieux*

*Translated and Edited  
by Robert J. Edmonson, CJ*

PARACLETE HERITAGE EDITION



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*The Story of a Soul*

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS PARACLETE HERITAGE EDITION OF

## *The Story of a Soul*



**O**f the thirty-three Doctors of the Church, only three are women: St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, and this youngest of them all. No better explanation of St. Thérèse of Lisieux's contribution to the Christian faith can be given than that of Pope John Paul II, in his homily of October 19, 1997:

[H]er ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity, and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters. . . .

Thérèse of Lisieux did not only grasp and describe the profound truth of Love as the center and heart of the Church, but in her short life she lived it intensely. It is precisely this convergence of doctrine and concrete experience, of truth and life, of teaching and practice, which shines with particular brightness in this saint, and which makes her an attractive model especially for young people and for those who are seeking true meaning for their life.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the most beloved of saints because she is so accessible. While some saints, such as Thomas Aquinas, might seem too cerebral, and others, such as Francis de Sales, might seem too holy for ordinary people to relate to, Thérèse set out to be little, childlike, God's humble "little flower." Every one of us can relate to that.

Thérèse was born in northwestern France in 1873 and died of tuberculosis in 1897 at the age of twenty-four. The youngest of nine children, of whom four died early, she lost her mother when she was four and was raised by her saintly father and her four surviving sisters.

One childhood event revealed much about the future saint's character. "One day Léonie [an older sister], thinking she was now too big to play with dolls, came and found us both with a basket full of dresses and pretty little pieces of cloth intended to make others; on top was sitting her doll. 'Here, little sisters,' she said, 'you choose, I'm giving you all this.' Céline [another sister] stuck out her hand and took a little ball of yarn that she liked. After thinking about it for a moment, I in turn stuck out my hand and said, 'I choose all!' And I took the basket without further ceremony."

Reflecting on this incident, Thérèse wrote,

This childhood trait sums up my whole life. . . . I understood that in order to become *a saint* you have to suffer a lot, always be in search of what is the most perfect, and forget yourself. I understood that there are many degrees of perfection, and that each soul is free to respond to Our Lord's advances, to do little or much for Him—in a word, to *choose* among the sacrifices that He requires. Then, just as in the days of my childhood, I cried out, "Dear God, *I choose all*. I don't want to be a *halfway Saint*. It doesn't scare me to suffer for You; I'm afraid of only one thing, and that is to hold onto my *will*. Take it, because '*I choose all*,' all that You want! . . ."

Thérèse's quest to join two of her sisters in the Carmelite convent by becoming a nun at the age of fifteen took her all the way to Rome to appeal to the Holy Father. When the authorities determined that she truly had a vocation, and was not just copying her sisters, her unusual request was granted. This began a period of only nine years during which this young woman was to live out her vocation on earth.

Many people call Thérèse "The Little Flower." She may have given herself this name because she had a favorite child's picture book that illustrated an anonymous nineteenth-century poem called *The Divine Prisoner's Little Flower*. Thérèse called herself a little flower beginning with the first pages of *The Story of a Soul*, and the name has stayed with her ever since.

Perhaps sensing that her little sister was destined to become a saint, in 1894 Thérèse's sister Pauline, now the Prioress of her convent, asked Thérèse to write down the story of her soul, a story that was intended originally only as a personal reflection from one nun to another.

After Thérèse's death, Pauline gathered the notebooks, edited them to eliminate overly personal stories, and sent them to a priest who had led retreats at the convent. It was Dom Madelaine who suggested the book's title and its chapter divisions.

The edited manuscript was sent out to other Carmelite houses in place of the obituary that is usually sent at the death of a nun or monk. The first printing of two thousand copies brought demand for another, then another and another, and by the time Thérèse was canonized in 1925,

twenty million copies had been sold in France alone, besides the millions of copies sold in other languages.

A passage from near the end of the book sums up Thérèse's heritage:

“Since Jesus went back up into heaven, I can follow Him only by the prints that He left behind. But those prints are so resplendent that they're perfumed! I have only to cast my eyes on the Holy Gospel, and immediately I breathe the perfumes of Jesus' life, and I know in which direction to run. . . . It's not to the first place, but to the last one, that I cast myself. Instead of pressing forward with the Pharisee, I repeat, full of confidence, the humble prayer of the tax collector.

“But above all I imitate Mary Magdalene's behavior, her surprising—or rather her loving—audaciousness that charmed Jesus' Heart and captivates mine.

“Yes, I feel it. Even when I might have on my conscience all the sins that can be committed, I would go with a heart broken with repentance to throw myself into Jesus' arms, because I know how much He cherishes the prodigal who comes back to Him.”

Such humility and such hope radiate from this passage!

Just before St. Thérèse died, she told her sisters that she would spend her time in heaven doing good on earth, and would send a shower of grace—what she called a “shower of roses”—to those on earth. For well over a century, her words have brought a shower of grace to millions of readers. May this beautiful new edition of her work serve to further spread the captivating story of God's humble Little Flower, St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

— *Robert J. Edmonson, CJ*

*the story of a* **Soul**



1  
ALENÇON  
1873–1877

*The song of the mercies of the Lord / Surrounded by love  
Trip to Le Mans / My character / I choose all*



*Springtime story of a little white Flower  
written by herself and dedicated to  
the Reverend Mother Agnes of Jesus*

[my sister Pauline, the current Prioress of the  
Carmelite Convent at Lisieux]

**I**t is to you, beloved Mother, to you who are twice my Mother, that I am coming to entrust the story of my soul. . . .

The day you asked me to do this, it seemed to me that it would consume my heart needlessly by causing it to be engrossed with itself. But afterward Jesus made me feel that by simply obeying I would be pleasing to Him. Besides, I'm going to only do one thing: begin to sing of what I ought to repeat forever: "*The mercies of the Lord!!!*" [see Ps. 89:1]. . .

Before taking my pen in hand, I knelt before the statue of Mary (the one that gave us so many proofs of the Queen of Heaven's motherly partiality for our family), and I begged her to guide my hand so that I might not write a single line that would not be pleasing to her. Then, opening the Gospels, my eyes fell on these words: "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they

came to him” [Mk. 3:13]. Now this is the mystery of my calling, of my whole life, and above all the mystery of Jesus’ privileges over my soul. He doesn’t call those who are worthy, but those He wants, or, as St. Paul puts it: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” [Rom. 9:15–16].

For a long time I wondered why God showed partiality, why all souls don’t receive the same amount of graces. I was astounded to see Him lavish extraordinary favors on the Saints who had offended Him, such as St. Paul and St. Augustine, and whom He so to speak forced to receive His graces. Or when I read the life of Saints whom Our Lord was pleased to embrace from the cradle to the grave, without leaving in their path any obstacles that might hinder them from rising toward Him, and granting these souls such favors that they were unable to tarnish the immaculate brightness of their baptismal robes, I wondered why poor primitive people, for example, were dying in great numbers without even having heard the name of God pronounced. . . .

Jesus consented to teach me this mystery. He placed before my eyes the book of nature; I understood that all the flowers that He created are beautiful. The brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily don’t take away the perfume of the lowly violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. . . . I understood that if all the little flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose its springtime adornment, and the fields would no longer be sprinkled with little flowers. . . .

So it is in the world of souls, which is Jesus’ garden. He wanted to create great Saints who could be compared to lilies

and roses. But He also created little ones, and these ought to be content to be daisies or violets destined to gladden God's eyes when He glances down at His feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wants us to be. . . .

I understood that Our Lord's love is revealed as well in the simplest soul who doesn't resist His grace in anything, as in the most sublime of souls. In fact, since the essence of love is to bring oneself low, if every soul were like the souls of the holy Doctors who have shed light on the Church through the clarity of their doctrine, it seems that God wouldn't come down low enough by coming only as far as their great hearts. But He created the child who doesn't know anything and only cries weakly, He created poor primitive persons who only have natural law as a guide—and it is to their hearts that He consents to come down: Here are wildflowers whose simplicity delights Him. . . .

By bringing Himself low in this way, God shows His infinite greatness. Just as the sun shines at the same time on the tall cedars and on each little flower as if it were the only one on earth, in the same way Our Lord is concerned particularly for every soul as if there were none other like it. And just as in nature all the seasons are arranged in such a way as to cause the humblest daisy to open on the appointed day, in the same way all things correspond to the good of each soul.



Doubtless, dear Mother, you're wondering with surprise where I'm going with all this, because until now I haven't said anything that looks like the story of my life. Yet you've asked me to write without holding back anything that might

come to my thoughts. But it isn't about my life, properly speaking, that I'm going to write; it's about my thoughts concerning the graces that God has consented to grant me. I find myself at a point in my life when I can take a look back at the past. My soul has matured in the crucible of outward and inward trials. Now, like a flower strengthened by the storm, I lift my head, and I see that the words of the twenty-third psalm are coming true in me. ("The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. . . . Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.") Always the Lord has been for me "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love" [Ps. 103:8].

So, Mother, it is with happiness that I come to sing near you of the mercies of the Lord. . . . It is for you alone that I'm going to write the story of the *little flower* picked by Jesus. So I'm going to talk without restraint, without worrying about the style or the many digressions that I'm going to make. A mother's heart always understands her child, even when the child doesn't know how to do anything but stammer, so I'm sure that I'll be understood and read by you who formed my heart and offered it to Jesus! . . .

It seems to me that if a little flower could talk, it would tell simply what God has done for it, without trying to hide its blessings. Under the pretext of a false humility it wouldn't say that it is unsightly and lacking in perfume, that the sun has taken away its beauty and its stem has been broken, while it recognizes just the opposite in itself.

The flower that is going to tell its story rejoices in having to publish abroad the completely undeserved kindness of Jesus. It recognizes that nothing in itself was capable of attracting His divine glance, and that His mercy alone has made everything that there is of good in it. . . . It is He who caused it to be born on holy ground and, as it were, completely imbued with a *virginal perfume*. It is He who caused it to be preceded by eight dazzlingly white lilies [my older sisters and brothers]. In His love, He wanted to preserve His little flower from the poisoned breath of the world. Hardly had its petals begun to open when the divine Savior transplanted it onto the mountain of Carmel, where already the two Lilies who had surrounded it and gently rocked it in the springtime of its life [my sisters Pauline and Marie] were spreading forth their sweet perfume. . . .

Seven years have passed since the little flower took root in the garden of the Bridegroom of virgins, and now *three* Lilies wave their scented petals around her [now that my sister Céline has also entered Carmel]. A little farther away one more lily [my sister Léonie] is blossoming under Jesus' gaze, and now the two blessed stalks who produced these flowers [Papa and Mama] are reunited for eternity in the heavenly Homeland. . . . There they have found once again the four lilies [my two brothers and two sisters who died at an early age] whom the earth did not see in bloom. . . . Oh! May Jesus consent not to leave long on the far shore the flowers who remain in exile; may the branch of lilies be soon complete in heaven!

---

Mother, I have just summarized in a few words what the Good Lord has done for me. Now I'm going to enter into the details of my life as a child. I know that where another would only see a boring tale, your *motherly heart* will find charms. . . .

And then the memories that I'm going to bring up are also yours, since it is by your side that my childhood flowed, and I have the happiness of belonging to the incomparable parents who surrounded us with the same care and the same tenderness. Oh! May they consent to bless the littlest of their children and help her sing of the mercies of the Lord! . . .

---

In the story of my soul up to my entrance into Carmel I distinguish three very different periods. The first, in spite of its shortness, is not the least fruitful in memories: It extends from the awakening of my reason, up to the departure of our dear mother for the Homeland of heaven. God gave me the grace to open my intelligence quite early and to engrave so deeply in my memory the remembrances of my childhood that it seems to me that the things that I'm going to tell about happened yesterday. Without a doubt, Jesus wanted, in His love, to make me know the incomparable mother that He gave me, but whom His divine hand was hastening to crown in heaven! . . .

All my life it pleased the Good Lord to surround me with *love*. My earliest memories are imprinted with smiles and the most tender of embraces! . . . But if He had placed much *love* near me, He had also placed love into my little heart, creating it to be loving and sensitive. So I loved Papa

and Mama very much, and showed them my tenderness in a thousand ways, because I was very expansive. Only the means that I used were sometimes strange, as a passage from a letter from Mama shows:

The baby is an unparalleled imp; she comes and gives me a hug and tells me she wants me to die: “Oh! How I wish that you would die, my poor little mother! . . .” She’s scolded, and she says, “But it’s so that you will go to heaven, since you say that you have to die to go there.” In the same way she wishes death for her father when she’s in the midst of her excesses of love.

On the twenty-fifth of June, 1874, when I was barely eighteen months old, here is what Mama said about me:

Your father has just installed a swing. Céline [three and a half years older than Thérèse] is an unparalleled joy, but you ought to see the little one swing—it makes me laugh. She holds herself like a big girl; there’s no danger that she’ll let go of the rope, but when it doesn’t go high enough, she cries out. We attach another rope onto her in front, but in spite of that I’m uneasy when I see her perched up there.

A funny adventure happened to me recently with the little one. I’m in the habit of going to Mass at 5:30 AM. In the early days I didn’t dare to leave her alone, but when I saw that she never woke up, I wound up deciding to leave her. I put her to bed in my own bed, and I pulled the cradle so close that it was impossible for her to fall out. One day I forgot to push the cradle into place. When I got home the little one wasn’t in my bed. At the same time I heard a cry,

so I looked around, and I saw her sitting on a chair across from the head of my bed. Her little head was lying on the cross bar, and she was asleep there—sleeping badly, because she was uncomfortable. I couldn't understand how she had fallen into that chair in a sitting position, because she'd been lying in bed. I thanked God that nothing had happened to her. This was really providential—she ought to have rolled off onto the floor. Her guardian Angel watched over her, and the souls in purgatory to whom I pray every day for the little one protected her. That's how I figure this . . . go figure it out for yourself! . . .

At the end of the letter, Mama added, "The little baby has just passed her little hand over my face and kissed me. This poor little one doesn't want to leave me, she's with me continually. She loves to go out in the garden, but if I'm not there she doesn't want to stay and cries until she's brought back to me. . . ." Here's a passage from another letter:

Little Thérèse was asking me the other day if she would go to heaven. I told her yes, if she was very good; she replied, "Yes, but if I weren't cute, I'd go to hell. . . . But I know what I'd do, I'd fly up to be with you who would be in heaven. How would God do to take me? . . . You would be holding me tight in your arms?" I saw in her eyes that she positively believed that God couldn't do anything to her if she were in her mother's arms. . . .

Marie [twelve years older than Thérèse] loves her little sister a lot—she finds her very cute. It would be very difficult for her not to, since the poor little one is very afraid of hurting her. Yesterday I wanted to give her a rose, knowing that that

would make her happy, but she started begging me not to cut it, because Marie had told her not to. She was red in the face with emotion, but in spite of that, I gave her two of them. She didn't dare to appear in the house. It didn't matter that I told her the roses belonged to me. "No, no," she said, "they're Marie's."

She's a child who easily gets emotional. As soon as some little bad thing happens to her, the whole world has to know about it. Yesterday after she unwittingly dropped a little corner of the tapestry, she was in a pitiful state, and then her father had to be told right away. He came home four hours later. Nobody was thinking about it any more, but very quickly she went to Marie and told her, "Tell Papa that I tore the paper." She was like a criminal awaiting the judge's sentence, but she has in her little head that she's going to be forgiven more easily if she accuses herself.

I loved my dear *godmother* [my oldest sister, Marie] very much. Without looking like it, I paid a lot of attention to everything that was being done and said around me. It seems to me that I had as much discernment about things as I do now. I used to listen attentively to what Marie was teaching Céline so I could do as she did. After she left the Visitation school, in order to be granted the favor of being allowed in her room during the lessons that she was teaching Céline, I was very good and I did everything she asked. So she showered me with presents, which, in spite of their being of little value, gave me a great deal of pleasure.

I was quite proud of my two big sisters [Marie and Pauline], but the one who was my *ideal* as a child was Pauline. . . .

When I started to talk and Mama asked me, “What are you thinking about?” the answer was an invariable, “Pauline! . . .” Another time, I was tracing my little finger over the floor tiles, and I said, “I’m writing ‘Pauline’! . . .” Often I used to hear that of course Pauline was going to be a *nun*. So, without knowing too much about what that was, I thought, *I’m going to be a nun, too*. That’s one of my earliest memories, and ever since, I’ve never changed my resolve! . . .

You were the one, dear Mother [Pauline], whom Jesus chose to engage me in marriage to Himself. You weren’t at my side then, but a link had already been formed between our souls. . . . You were my *ideal*, I wanted to be like you; and it was your example that, from the age of two, drew me to the Bridegroom of virgins. . . . Oh! What sweet thoughts I would like to confide in you! But I need to pursue the story of the little flower, its complete and general story, because if I wanted to talk in detail about my relationship with “Pauline,” I’d have to leave everything else out! . . .

Dear little Léonie [my middle sister, nine years older than I] also held a big place in my heart. She loved me a lot. In the evening she was the one who watched me when the whole family used to go for a walk. . . . It seems as if I can still hear the gentle songs that she used to sing in order to help me go to sleep. . . . In everything she looked for a way to please me, so I would have been very upset if I gave her trouble. I remember her First Communion very well, especially the moment when she carried me in her arm to take me with her into the rectory. It seemed so beautiful to be carried by a big sister dressed all in white like me! . . . That night I was put to bed early because I was too little to stay at the big dinner, but I can still

see Papa coming in, bringing his little darling some pieces of the dessert. . . .

The next day, or a few days later, we went with Mama to Léonie's little girlfriend's house. I think that that was the day our dear Mother took us behind a wall to give us some wine to drink after the dinner (that poor Mrs. Dagonau had served), because she didn't want to hurt the good woman, but she also didn't want us to miss out on anything. . . . Ah! How delicate is the heart of a mother! How it translates its tenderness into a thousand watchful caring acts that no one would think about!

Now it remains to me to talk about my dear Céline, my little childhood friend, but I have such an abundance of memories that I don't know which ones to choose. I'm going to excerpt a few passages from letters that Mama wrote you at the Visitation school, but I'm not going to copy everything—that would take too long. . . . On July 10th, 1873 (the year I was born), here is what she told you: "The wet nurse brought back little Thérèse on Thursday. All she does is laugh. She especially liked little Céline, and she burst into laughter with her. You might say that she already wants to play; that will come soon. She holds herself up on her little legs, stiff as a little post. I think she's going to walk early and that she will have a good character. She seems very intelligent and gives the appearance of having a good future. . . ."

But it was especially after I came home from the wet nurse's that I showed my affection for dear little Céline. We got along very well, only I was livelier and more naïve than she was. Although I was three and a half years younger, it seemed to me that we were the same age.

Here's a passage from one of Mama's letters that will show you how sweet Céline was and how naughty I was:

My little Céline is completely given over to virtue—it's the innermost feeling of her being; she has a truthful soul and hates evil. As for the little imp, it's hard to know how she'll turn out, she's so little, so scatterbrained! She has more intelligence than Céline, but she's not as sweet, and her hardheadedness is practically unshakable. When she says "no" nothing can make her give it up. You could put her in the cellar for a whole day and she'd go to sleep there rather than to say "yes."

Yet she has a heart of gold. She's full of hugs and says exactly what she thinks. It's curious to see her run after me and confess, "Mama, I pushed Céline just once, I hit her once, but I won't do it again." (It's like that for everything she does.)

Thursday evening we were taking a walk near the train station when she absolutely wanted to enter the waiting room to look for Pauline. She ran ahead with a joy that pleased me, but when she saw that we had to go back home without getting on board the train to go get Pauline, she cried all the way home.

This last part of the letter reminds me of the happiness that I felt when I saw you come back from the Visitation school. You, Mother, took me in your arms, and Marie took Céline. Then I gave you lots of hugs and I bent over backward in order to admire your big pigtail. . . . Then you gave me a chocolate bar that you had been keeping for three months. You can imagine what a treasure this was for me! . . .

I also remember the trip that I took to Le Mans; this was the first time that I went on a train. What a joy it was to be

traveling alone with Mama! . . . However, I don't know why anymore, but I began to cry, and all our dear Mother could present to my aunt in Le Mans was a little *ugly duckling*, all red with the tears that she had shed on the way. . . .

I don't remember anything about that visit, but only the moment when my aunt passed me a little white mouse and a little cardboard basket full of candies on which were *enthroned* two little sugar rings, just about the thickness of my finger. Immediately I cried out, "Such happiness! There will be a ring for Céline!"

But, such sadness! I took my basket by the handle, gave my other hand to Mama, and we left. After a few steps I looked at my basket and saw that my candies were almost all strewn on the street, like Tom Thumb's stones. . . . I looked closer and saw that one of the precious rings had suffered the deadly fate of the candies . . . I didn't have one to give to Céline! . . . Then my sorrow burst out, and I asked to go back; Mama didn't seem to be paying attention to me. It was all too much—my *tears* were followed by my *cries*. . . . I couldn't understand why she didn't share my pain, and that very much increased my suffering. . . .

---

Now I'll come back to the letters in which Mama talked to you about Céline and me. They're the best means I can use to let you know my character. Here's a passage in which my faults stick out like a sore thumb: "There's Céline, who plays a dice game with the little one. They argue from time to time, and Céline gives in, in order to have a pearl in her crown. I'm obliged to correct the little baby, who flies into terrible rages.

When things don't go the way she wants them to, she rolls on the ground like a madwoman who thinks all is lost. There are times when it gets so strong that she loses her breath. She's quite a nervous child, but she's cute and very intelligent—she remembers everything." You see, Mother, how far I was from being a little girl with no faults!

Nobody could even say about me that "I was good when I was asleep," because at night I was even more wiggly than during the day. I would send the covers flying, and then (asleep all the while) I would crash against the wood of my little bed. The pain would wake me up, and I would say, "Mama, I've been *bumped*." My poor dear mother had to get up and establish that I did in fact have knots on my forehead, and that I had been *bumped*. She would cover me up securely and go back to bed. But after a short time I started *being bumped* again, so that they had to *tie me in* my bed. Every night, little Céline would come and tie the several cords that were intended to keep the little imp from getting *bumped* and waking up her mama. This method finally worked, so from then on I was *good* while I was *asleep*. . . .

Another fault I had (when I was awake) and which Mama didn't talk about in her letters, is that I was very conceited. I'm only going to give you two examples so as not to make my story too long. One day Mama told me, "Dear little Thérèse, if you want to kiss the ground, I'm going to give you a penny." A penny was quite a lot of money for me. In order to get it I didn't have to lower my *great* height, because my *little* height didn't put a big distance between me and the ground. However, my pride revolted at the thought of *kissing the ground*, so, standing up very straight, I told Mama, "Oh! No, Mother, I'd rather not have a penny! . . ."

Another time we were supposed to go to Grogny to Mrs. Monnier's. Mama told Marie to dress me in my pretty, sky-blue, lace-trimmed dress, but not to leave my arms bare so the sun wouldn't burn them. I let myself be dressed with the indifference that children my age should have, but inside I was thinking that I would have been much nicer if my little arms were bare.

With a nature like mine, if I had been brought up by parents who lacked virtue, or even if like Céline I had been spoiled by Louise [our maid], I would have become bad and perhaps would have become lost. . . . But Jesus was watching over His little bride-to-be. He wanted everything to turn out for her good, even her faults, which, curbed early on, have been used for her growth in perfection. . . . Since I was full of *self-love* and also *love of good*, as soon as I began to think seriously (which I did when I was quite little) it was enough for someone to tell me that something wasn't good, for me not to want to repeat it twice. . . .

I'm pleased to see in Mama's letters that as I grew up I gave her more consolation. Since all I had around me were good examples, I naturally wanted to follow them. Here's what Mama wrote in 1876: "Even Thérèse sometimes wants to get involved in religious practices. . . . She's a charming child, fine as a shadow, very quick, but her heart is sensitive. Céline and she love each other a lot. They're all each other needs to keep from getting bored. Every day right after dinner Céline goes and gets her little rooster doll. She suddenly catches Thérèse's hen doll—I can't get over it!—but she's so quick that she grabs it on the first jump. Then they both take their animals and sit beside the fire and play nicely together for a long time." (It

was little Rose who had given me the hen and the rooster as a present, and I had given the rooster to Céline.)

The other day Céline was sleeping with me, and Thérèse was sleeping on the second floor in Céline's bed. She had begged Louise [our maid] to take her downstairs so they could dress her. Louise went up to look for her and found the bed empty. Thérèse had heard Céline and had gone down to be with her. Louise said to her, "So you don't want to go down and get dressed?" "Oh no, poor Louise, we're like the two little chickens, we can't be separated!" And when she said that, the two girls kissed and hugged each other. . . . Then that evening, Louise, Céline, and Léonie left for the Catholic circle and left poor Thérèse, who understood very well that she was too little to go. So she said, "If only they wanted to put me to bed in Céline's bed! . . ." But no, they didn't want to. . . . She didn't say anything and stayed alone with her little lamp, and fifteen minutes later she was fast asleep. . . .

Another day Mama wrote again: "Céline and Thérèse are inseparable; you can't imagine two children loving each other more. When Marie comes to get Céline to teach her her lesson, poor Thérèse dissolves into tears. Alas, what is going to become of her? Her little friend is going to go away! . . . Marie feels sorry for her, she takes her along, too, and the poor little one sits on a chair for two or three hours. They give her pearls to string or a rag to sew. She doesn't dare budge and often heaves great sighs. When her needle loses its thread she tries to rethread it. It's curious to see her, not managing to get it threaded and not daring to disturb Marie; soon you can see two big tears running down

her cheeks. . . . Marie quickly comforts her, rethreads the needle, and the little angel smiles through her tears. . . .”

In fact I can remember that I couldn't be separated from Céline. I would rather leave the table before finishing my dessert than not follow her as soon as she got up to leave. I would turn in my high chair and ask to be put down, and then we would go play together. Sometimes we went with a little friend, which pleased me to no end because of the park and all the beautiful toys that she used to show us, but it was really to please Céline that I would go.

What I really preferred was to stay in our little yard to *scratch the walls*, because we would pull off all the little shiny flakes of stone that we would find there, and then we would go *sell them* to Papa, who would buy them, looking very serious.

On Sundays, since I was too little to go to services, Mama stayed to watch me. I was very good, and I would only walk on tiptoe during the Mass. But as soon as I saw the door open, there was an unparalleled explosion of joy. I would rush in front of my *pretty* little sister, who was then *decked out like a chapel* . . . and I would say, “Oh, dear Céline, quick, give me some blessed bread!” Sometimes she didn't have any, since she had arrived there too late. . . . What could I do now? It was impossible for me to go without it; it was *my Mass*. The answer was quick in coming: “You don't have any blessed bread? Well, make some!” No sooner said than done. Céline would take a chair, open the cupboard, take out some bread, cut a mouthful, and very *seriously* recite a *Hail Mary* over it, then present it to me. And I, after making the sign of the Cross with it, would eat it with *great devotion*, claiming that it *tasted* exactly like *blessed bread*.

Often we would do *spiritual teachings*. Here's one example that I'm borrowing from Mama's letters: "Our two dear little ones, Céline and Thérèse, are angels of blessing, two little angelic natures. Thérèse is Marie's joy, happiness, and glory; it's unbelievable how proud she is of her. It's true that she comes up with answers that are quite unusual at her age; she shows up Céline, who's twice as old as she is. The other day Céline was saying, 'How is it that God can be in such a little Communion host?' Little Thérèse said, 'That's not so surprising since God is all-powerful.' 'What does that mean, "all-powerful"?' 'Well, it means He can do what He wants! . . .'"

One day Léonie, thinking she was now too big to play with dolls, came and found us both with a basket full of dresses and pretty little pieces of cloth intended to make others; on top was sitting her doll. "Here, little sisters," she said, "you *choose*, I'm giving you all this." Céline stuck out her hand and took a little ball of yarn that she liked. After thinking about it for a moment, I in turn stuck out my hand and said, "*I choose all!*" And I took the basket without further ceremony. Those who were watching the scene thought it was quite fair—Céline herself didn't think to complain. (Besides, she had no lack of toys; her godfather showered her with presents, and Louise found a way to get her anything she wanted.)

This childhood trait sums up my whole life. Later, when perfection made its appearance to me, I understood that in order to become *a Saint* you have to suffer a lot, always be in search of what is the most perfect, and forget yourself. I understood that there are many degrees of perfection, and that each soul is free to respond to Our Lord's advances, to do little or much for Him—in a word, to *choose* among the