

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux – a resource for the 2009 visit

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I. Summary of the Life of Thérèse

(January 2, 1873 to September 30, 1897 – she was 24 years old when she died.) Thérèse Martin was born in the Norman town of Alençon, the youngest child of Louis Martin, a watchmaker, and Zélie Guérin, a lace-maker. In many ways she lived the typical life of a middle-class late nineteenth century French girl. She was one of nine children, of which only five girls survived to adulthood, with childhood death common at this time.

Tragedy touched Thérèse’s life early; her mother died when Thérèse was just four years old. After this Thérèse turned in on herself, being extremely shy and oversensitive. She was intensely close to her older sisters, who acted as a mother to her; this is especially true of her sister Pauline. The family was a pious family, and attributed the intercession of the Blessed Mother to a miraculous healing of Thérèse. This was Thérèse’s school of faith; this is where she learned the basics of the catechism, the basics of prayer, and the rest required to live a Christian life.



On Christmas Eve 1886 Thérèse overheard her father make a cutting remark about her. For once, she held back her tears, and this moment in which she overcame her sensitivity became a turning point in her life. She called it her ‘complete conversion’. Now she was not motivated only by her own feelings; now she would be less sensitive and be able to live for God.

After this conversion experience, Thérèse quickly advanced in the spiritual life. Just before her fourteenth birthday she had a vision of the Infant Jesus, and understood in a moment the sacrifices that would be asked of her. She wanted to join the Carmelite Monastery in Lisieux. After many trials, including directly petitioning Pope Leo XIII, she was allowed to enter at the extremely young age of 15. There she joined her older sisters, Pauline and Marie, and would later be joined by her sister Céline and cousin Marie Guérin. Her sister Leonie would eventually become a Visitation nun in the nearby town of Caen.



Thérèse’s life as a Carmelite nun was cut off prematurely. By 1896 she had developed advanced tuberculosis, after much suffering, she died on September 30, 1897.

It would be easy to overlook the life of this French nun. She was entrusted with preparing young Carmelite nuns for their vows, and shared responsibility for the sacristy work of the monastery. Nothing of hers was published while she lived. During her life though she lived a simple spirituality, and this was her mission to the world. Her sisters had asked her to recount her life as a type of memory for the community, and this has become her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. This is the book that touched the world, and brought even Popes and princes to their knees in prayer. She re-teaches the world the simplicity of prayer, and the “Little Way” to God that is open to all.

She was canonized May 17, 1925, only 28 years after her death, by Pope Pius XI. She was declared a Doctor of the Church in October 19, 1997 by Pope John Paul II.

II. Saint Thérèse in the Life of the Church

Thérèse is one of the most popular saints since Apostolic times. Devotion to her appeals especially to young people, but also non-Catholics, and even non-Christians. She is the patron saint of those suffering from HIV/AIDS, missions (along with Saint Francis Xavier), France, and Russia.

While Thérèse as a cloistered nun, completely withdrawn from the world during her earthly life, she was very conscious of the fact that she was called “to mission to the world.” It is a common misperception that those who enter cloistered life turn their backs on the world. In truth they do not. It is by entering into the deep prayer of cloistered life that they may take the whole world up in prayer. Thérèse saw this as especially true, praying for priests and seminarians, for the conversion of convicts, and offering up the severe suffering of her last year for the sanctification of the world.

Her appeal consists primarily in her simple and accessible spiritual programme. This is open to all people, whether they be contemplative nuns like Saint Thérèse, active in the world like the priests she wrote to, or involved in hectic family life. All people, from young to old, can draw fruit from her “Little Way.”

For this reason Pope John Paul II declared her a ‘Doctor of the Church’ in 1997. This means that she holds a particular importance for all Christians. Her teachings have a universal relevance and contain a particularly important message. Unlike many of the Doctors, her writings are very accessible. Her main work, the autobiographical *Story of a Soul*, has inspired countless people over the past century, and will continue to do so.

III. Family of Saints, the Martin Family of Lisieux

It is impossible to understand the life of Saint Thérèse without looking at her family. The spirituality that the Saint teaches us was learned in her family, “the first school” of every child. It developed from the example of her parents, and from the interactions with her four older sisters.

The Martin family of Alençon and Lisieux was exceptionally devoted, but also very normal. Louis Martin, the father, was a watchmaker, an ordinary enough profession. Zélie, the mother, was primarily a homemaker, but like many other local women, she made the world-famous Alençon lace to supplement the family income. They lived in a normal middle-class house, and had the normal recreations of the time such as fishing, going on picnics, and visiting relatives.



It was very common at this time for tragedy to touch families. Louis and Zélie had nine children, four of whom died in infancy. Zélie died of cancer when Thérèse only four.

Both Louis and Zélie were exceptionally pious. Both attempted to enter religious life, but were turned away; God gave them a vocation to live in marriage. For over a year after their marriage they lived as “brother and sister,” until the intervention of a priest who told them it was part of God’s plan that they have children. This is somewhat ironic, since all of their children either died at a young age or became religious sisters.

Louis and Zélie were exceptionally holy people, the Church recognizes this. They were beautified in October 2008. This means that they are on the way to being recognized as saints of the Church. There are also active movements supporting the canonization of her sisters Pauline and Leonie.

Truly, the Martin household was a “domestic Church.” The parents were diligent to pass on the faith to their daughters, and trusted in the providence of God for their wellbeing. They took their children to Mass and Vespers often, and taught them the faith at home. The older sisters taught the catechism to the younger sisters.

Louis and Zélie demonstrated that holiness is not reserved to priests, monks, and nuns, but is the call of all people. This is taught by the Second Vatican Council. Some of Thérèse’s first memories are those of being surrounded by love and much fun and giggling (her words). This was a holy family, and also clearly a very happy family.

This was a community of love and mutual affection for one another. This community was not just on this earth, but extended into heaven. In a number of letters Zélie would write that she prayed to and talked with her children in heaven, and saw them as special protectors of the family still on earth. Four of the Martin sisters, Thérèse of course, Pauline, Marie and Céline all entered the same Carmelite monastery. Leonie became a Visitation nun.

A website about Thérèse’s parents: <http://www.Thérèseoflisieux.org/their-lives/>

IV. Prayer of Saint Thérèse

A point to ponder: At age 15 Thérèse enters the enclosure of the Carmel at Lisieux, never to see outside those walls again, yet oddly enough she is the patron saint of the missions. One aspect seems to be completely hidden, while the other aspect is completely public. This paradox in the life of Thérèse teaches us something about the “two-way” mystery of prayer.

First a quick gloss of Carmelite life. Carmelite nuns live a life of secluded prayer. From the moment a young woman enters the Carmel, she becomes a “voluntary prisoner of God.” Her whole life is devoted to prayer and penance. Her relationships are limited to a limited number of letters and the interactions she has with other members of the monastery. In Carmelite life this number is usually small; fewer than twenty is preferred (imagine only seeing the same twenty people for the rest of your life). The day is organized around the liturgy, Holy Mass and the singing of the Divine Office (praying the psalms in community seven times a day and also rising in the middle of the night for Matins). It is also a life of perpetual penance and fasting. By all accounts it is a hidden life. On the few occasions that an outsider is allowed in the nuns wear special veils that cover them from head to foot. They live their life for God alone.

But when you go to pray, go to your inner room and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and your Father that sees in secret will reward you. Gospel of Matthew vi:6

By her life as a Carmelite nun Thérèse teaches that there are two movements in prayer: 1) inward and 2) outward. The inward movement is demonstrated by her life hidden as a Carmelite, and allowed her to form a deep relationship with God. All prayer, whether that of a enclosed nun like Thérèse or that of those in the world like us, must have this *inward movement*. This is also demonstrated by the life of her parents, who were very much involved in the world in family, society and business, but also often ‘turned inward’ for prayer.

There are two primary examples of how the life of Thérèse demonstrates the outward movement of prayer:

Example 1: Prayer of Intercession: A Carmelite prays for the world. Thérèse started this long before she was a Carmelite. In her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, she writes how she read about a vicious murderer in the newspaper. He killed three people, and showed no sign of remorse or contrition. Thérèse believed deeply that God desires that no one go to hell, but feared that in this man’s hardness of hearing he may end up there. So even as a young girl she took to praying for this man. Day after day she read the paper, and there was no sign of remorse. She begged God to give him the grace of contrition. Finally, on day of his execution, which in France at that time was by guillotine, he knelt down and kissed the feet of Jesus on the crucifix a priest was wearing. This was enough of a sign for Thérèse. The man turned toward God asking for mercy.

Thérèse was also determined to be a saint. This was not pious pride run amok, but a keen self-awareness of the deep desire that God had for each of His children. She knew that God wanted her to be in heaven, and that He would provide her the means of getting there. This also, however, expressed a deep selflessness of Thérèse. She did not desire heaven so much for the joys of heaven, but she knew that she could much better reach out to the world from heaven than she would ever be able to on earth.

Example 2: Missionary: Saint Thérèse is the patron of missions. This may seem like an odd paradox, since she was voluntarily confined to a monastic enclosure. In the last months of her life, which she considered to be the “most productive”, she was confined to her bed in the monastery infirmary. This seems to be in stark contrast to the life of a missionary. They are out in the world, not confined to a few acres of French soil, but reaching out to people from the jungles of Peru, to the deserts of Australia. They are active, moving from place to place.

Since each of us has a mission (whether it be in our families, workplace, etc.) this teaches us two important things: the first movement of a mission and the proper goal of a mission. The first movement of any work carried out for God, whether it is to be a Christian parent or a Christian business person, or to leave all to spread the Gospel in a far-off land, must be to pray. This has been an aspect of mission always understood in the Church; in fact Saint Dominic founded an order of cloistered nuns to spiritually support his community of missionary preachers. In Thérèse’s own life this is demonstrated in her letters between herself and a seminarian turned missionary priest, Maurice. His life was always supported by her prayers, even after her death.

The goal of mission, and of prayer, must always be “to know Christ better, to love Christ more, and to follow Christ more closely” (*Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola*). The goal is not to be successful in the eyes of the world; it is not the completion of the mission, but rather remaining faithful to God during the mission. In many ways Thérèse could be considered a failure in the eyes of the world. When Thérèse had died, the mother superior of her monastery did not know what to write in her obituary to be sent to other Carmelite monasteries; Thérèse had done so little in her short life. But she strove to always be faithful to God, and for this she has been rewarded with a crown of glory in heaven.

Many of us can probably see this in their own lives. How many married couples have worked hard to pass the faith and values on to their children, and yet their children go wayward? How often in your working life do you work hard on a project for months, perhaps even years to see it get transferred to someone else (along with the credit that goes with it)? How often does a priest labour in a parish for years, just to be moved as his toil starts bearing fruit? The success is not what is accomplished, but the faithfulness in the work. Mother Theresa of Calcutta says: *It is not the greatness of our actions, but the greatness of the love we do them with that matters in the eyes of God.*

V. Passion of Saint Thérèse

Thérèse became ill 18 months before she died. During this final period of her life she suffered greatly, enduring terrible pain and the uncertainty that serious illness can bring. Yet throughout the physical and mental trials she maintained a sense of peace. Her faith assured her that, whatever had to be endured in life, something better awaited her when her time on earth was ended. Looking through a window she could see among the trees outside a 'black hole'; she told Mother Agnes, "I am in a hole just like that, body and soul. Ah! what darkness! However, I am still at peace."

In religious life Thérèse took the name 'Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face.' The two aspects of this name must have provided her with great encouragement during her suffering. In contemplating the child Jesus she had learned to rely completely on God; in meditating upon the image of the Holy Face she had learned something of the depth of Christ's own suffering on earth. This image shows Jesus suffering, crowned with thorns and giving His life for us. Thérèse sought to follow Him in offering her life, her sufferings, for the good of others.



Less than four months before her death she said, "Do not be troubled, little sisters, if I suffer very much and if you see in me, as I have already said to you, no sign of joy at the moment of death. Our Lord really died as a Victim of Love, and see what His agony was!"; and later, "Our Lord died on the Cross in anguish, and yet His was the most beautiful death of love."

On 8 July 1897 she was taken to the infirmary within the Carmel. There she stayed until her death, though her bed was taken out into the cloister at the end of August. A photograph records the moment. She received Holy Communion for the last time, and the Sacrament of the Sick, on 28th July. On 30th September she seemed a little stronger and sat up in bed, yet this was a final effort before she left this world. She died at 7:20pm that day. As she died, Mother Superior ordered that the infirmary bell be rung to summon the nuns. "Open all the doors!" she cried. Mother Agnes of Jesus (Thérèse's sister Pauline) observed, "those words made me think that in heaven God spoke them also to His angels." During her illness Thérèse had said, "I am not dying; I am entering into life." It was after her death that her life in heaven began; with it came a fame that she had never known in life, and she is now revered by countless millions around the world.



The most disappointing thing in the world is wasted suffering.
Venerable Servant of God, Archbishop Fulton Sheen

True veneration of Thérèse involved people turning to God and allowing his love to enter their lives through her intercession. Ireland was indeed privileged to receive the relics of Thérèse in 2001. The Visit, however, can only make sense if we focus on the message of Thérèse, so that the visit of her relics to Ireland will indeed be part of her own missionary desire to make God known and loved.

Reprint:

THE VENERATION OF RELICS

Christopher O'Donnell, O.Carm.

The visit to Ireland of the relics of St. Thérèse in the year 2001 could be seen as a pilgrimage in reverse. Normally people travel on pilgrimage to where a holy person is venerated. In the case of Thérèse we can see that in a sense she came to Ireland, just as her relics have visited over a dozen countries since their first journey throughout France in 1994.

The enthusiastic reception of the reliquary in so many countries is perhaps in marked contrast with the saint's own prediction her body would decay like any other. The three exhumations that took place revealed only bones, though signs and extraordinary manifestations were not, however, absent.

The Carmelite habit in which she was buried was found not to have completely disintegrated at the first exhumation and a palm buried with her was in a state of perfect preservation. At the second exhumation the new habit was decayed, but a white silk ribbon was intact which bore the words: "I intend to spend my heaven doing good on earth. After my death, I shall make a shower of roses rain down."

Her burial was quite providential. It had long been customary for Carmelites to have a cemetery in their grounds. But a civil law had been passed shortly before Thérèse's death stipulating interment only in public graveyards.

Thérèse's maternal uncle, Isidore Guerin, had bought a plot for the Carmelites, and soon people in their thousands were visiting her grave. Cures and spiritual favours began to be reported there very soon after her death. Her grave and these wonders certainly contributed substantially to her veneration, and hastened her beatification. It was part of what Pius XI would call, "the storm of glory"

Thérèse reaches beyond the grave

There are indications that Thérèse had some premonition about her future destiny, which is summed up in her well-known promise to spend her heaven doing good on earth. On at least two occasions during her final illness she indicated that things belonging to her, her nail-clippings and rose petals that she had loosened might be treasured later. We only have the account of her sister Pauline, Mother Agnes. We do not know how she said these things: did she smile? how seriously have we to take Agnes' comment that she spoke gravely? It is clear anyway that her sense of being able to send a shower of roses after her death was amply confirmed.

The visit of the saint's relics to Ireland was seen as a great grace. But it has to be placed in an appropriate context. There is always the danger of superstition or magic where relics are

involved. We can speak of these errors when power is ascribed to something beyond its natural capacities, such as to some words of a formula, to a rabbit's foot or a horseshoe. Relics have no virtue in themselves; their chequered history in the Church, however, shows both their dangers and their beauty.

Church teaching on relics

Three times in ecumenical councils there have had to be solemn pronouncements on the subject and for quite different reasons. At the Second Council of Nicea (787AD) there were those who sought such a pure religion that they were totally against any representation of Christ or the saints in images, and they also rejected relics. Foremost to the defence of icons and relics had been St. John Damascene (d. ca. 749): and the Church defending the legitimacy of icons and relics drew on his teaching: homage or respect is not really paid to an inanimate object, but to the holy person, and indeed the veneration of a holy person, is itself honour paid to God.

Four hundred years later there was a different problem. Now it was abuse of relics, false relics and exaggerations. At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) the Church condemned such abuses, but defended the good use of relics. A similar time elapsed when at the Reformation the idea of relics was again attacked. The Council of Trent defended the veneration of relics in 1563.

The Catholic position was therefore spelled out over a period of some eight hundred years, even though the use of relics goes back almost to the time of the Apostles. St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), following St. Augustine pointed out that it was natural that people should treasure what is associated with the dead, like a ring or the garment of a parent. He then developed four reasons already outlined in John Damascene which would later be taken up by Trent: the saints are members of Christ, they are children and friends of God and they are our intercessors. Therefore we want to draw close to them through their relics.

The place of relics

But do we really need relics, parts of the body of a saint such as bone, a hair (called a first class relic) or cloth that has been in contact with the saint's body (a second class relic)? If we have a lively faith in the Eucharist, do we need something infinitely inferior to the Body and Blood of the Lord? The origin of relics was largely associated with the Eucharist, which was celebrated at the burial place of holy people. In time the custom grew in the Church that Mass should be celebrated on the relics of the saints in the altar stone or wrapped in the corporal. Indeed, since Nicea II churches are not to be consecrated without relics, a point made again in Church law as recently as 1977 in the revised Rite of Dedication of a Church. The Church is therefore comfortable with relics and the Eucharist being somehow coupled together. Indeed Mass begins with the priest kissing the altar, in which relics are contained.

If, however, we are to understand the veneration of relics, and put to rest any unease associated with their veneration we need to get behind the practice of the Church in its Councils and liturgy to more profound reasons. Ultimately the use of relics can be understood only in a double context. Relics have had divine approbation and they reflect the incarnational nature of our Christian religion. The issue of God's approval emerges from the fact that there have been at all times miracles and especially healings associated with the relics of the saints. Already in the New Testament we find that handkerchiefs and other

garments which had touched the flesh of St Paul at Ephesus cured diseases (see Acts 19:12). In the Old Testament miracles had been worked through the mantle of Elijah and the bones of Elisha (see 2 Kings 2:14; 13:21).

Granted then that God has been pleased in this way to work wonders in biblical times and up to the present, we might still ask, why? Here we touch the deepest reality of our religion. God respects the human nature that he created: we are both spiritual and material. Even God's salvation of humanity from sin was by way of Incarnation: God became man in Jesus Christ. In the Christian religion we move from what is visible to what is invisible. Jesus tells us that if we see and know him, we also see and know the Father (see John 14:6-9). God comes to us through signs and symbols: the sacraments are tangible and visible -- such as water, bread, wine, oil, imposition of hands -- but through them we come into divine life. God comes to us in our very bodiliness. As the Anglican scientist and theologian, John Polkinghorne recently wrote, we are not apprentice angels, but a kind of package deal of closely related mind and body. Whenever people forget this truth either by neglecting the spiritual or the material, they come into serious distortions of life itself.

Relics are one way in which God helps us in our bodily humanity to rise to spiritual realities. Through relics we can feel close to a holy person. We have a deeper awareness of their life and mission, of their presence in the Communion of Saints. Religion can never be purely intellectual; it must rather touch us at different levels of our being. Relics are clearly not as important as the sacraments. Like the sacraments, relics can be abused. We cannot stop at the holy relics of the saints, but we must reach further into God's plans. Buddhism, the only other major religion apart from Catholic Christianity to have a major place for relics, insists too that we must go beyond the relic. One of its traditions is that the Buddha himself told his followers not to concentrate on his bodily remains but on his teaching.

Welcoming the relics of Thérèse

The correct veneration of relics looks beyond what is visible and material to God's love at work in the saint, to the inspiration of the saint's life and to God's good pleasure in confirming the virtue of the saint by signs and cures. People went to churches to welcome the Theresian reliquary. True veneration of Thérèse involved people turning to God and allowing his love to enter their lives through her intercession.

Ireland was indeed privileged to receive the relics of Thérèse. The Visit, however, can only make sense if we focus on the message of Thérèse, so that the visit of her relics to Ireland will indeed be part of her own missionary desire to make God known and loved.

Preparation for this timely visit involved a deepened understanding of the saint's doctrine, in particular her teaching on God's merciful love, on the Little Way of spiritual childhood which is a way of unending love. The teaching of this Doctor of the Church is at once simple and profound. It will only be if we allow Thérèse to lead us to Jesus and to Mary that the visit of her relics will be of any value to ourselves and to the millions of people who venerated the reliquary during this 80 day pilgrimage of grace.

Relics in the end must point beyond themselves to God, and any veneration or honour given to them is honour to God who has crowned the saints with glory, and who wishes to bless us through our love for, and appreciation of, his special friends.

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books are an encyclopædia on the Church, Ecclesia (1996) and Love in the Heart of the Church: The Mission of Thérèse of Lisieux (1997)
--J.L. Ryan, O.Carm.]

Appendix II: Resources on Thérèse of Lisieux

Thérèse is perhaps the most accessible doctors of the Church. Here basic work is her autobiography, but it is also quite easy to find her letters and poems, both of which have inspired generations. There are a number of good websites. Below is just a basic list of her writings and a few trustworthy websites:

Martin, Thérèse (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux). *Story of a Soul*. John Clarke, O.C.D., trans. ICS Publications: Washington, D.C. (1996).

Martin, Thérèse (Saint Thérèse of Lisieux). *Letters of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux* (in two volumes). John Clarke, O.C.D., trans. and ed. ICS Publications (1982).

Perhaps the best website: <http://www.Thereseoflisieux.org/>

Also: <http://www.littleflower.org/> and <http://www.stTherese.com/>

1. THE SCIENCE OF DIVINE LOVE, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom, hidden from the learned and the wise; for this reason Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, praising the Father who graciously willed it so (cf. Lk 10:21-22; Mt 11:25-26).

Mother Church also rejoices in noting that throughout history the Lord has continued to reveal himself to the little and the humble, enabling his chosen ones, through the Spirit who "searches everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10), to speak of the gifts "bestowed on us by God... in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language" (1 Cor 2:12,13). In this way the Holy Spirit guides the Church into the whole truth, endowing her with various gifts, adorning her with his fruits, rejuvenating her with the power of the Gospel and enabling her to discern the signs of the times in order to respond ever more fully to the will of God (cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 4, 12; *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4).

Shining brightly among the little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way is Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, a professed nun of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, the 100th anniversary of whose entry into the heavenly homeland occurs this year.

During her life Thérèse discovered "new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings" (Ms A, 83v·) and received from the divine Teacher that "science of love" which she then expressed with particular originality in her writings (cf. Ms B, 1r·). This science is the luminous expression of her knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom and of her personal experience of grace. It can be considered a special charism of Gospel wisdom which Thérèse, like other saints and teachers of faith, attained in prayer (cf. Ms C, 36r·).

2. The reception given to the example of her life and Gospel teaching in our century was quick, universal and constant. As if in imitation of her precocious spiritual maturity, her holiness was recognized by the Church in the space of a few years. In fact, on 10 June 1914 Pius X signed the decree introducing her cause of beatification; on 14 August 1921 Benedict XV declared the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, giving an address for the occasion on the way of spiritual childhood; and Pius XI proclaimed her blessed on 29 April 1923. Shortly afterwards, on 17 May 1925, the same Pope canonized her before an immense crowd in St Peter's Basilica, highlighting the splendour of her virtues and the originality of her doctrine. Two years later, on 14 December 1927, in response to the petition of many missionary Bishops, he proclaimed her patron of the missions along with St Francis Xavier.

Beginning with these acts of recognition, the spiritual radiance of Thérèse of the Child Jesus increased in the Church and spread throughout the world. Many institutes of consecrated life and ecclesial movements, especially in the young Churches, chose her as their patron and teacher, taking their inspiration from her spiritual doctrine. Her message, often summarized in the so-called "little way", which is nothing other than the Gospel way of holiness for all, was studied by theologians and experts in spirituality. Cathedrals, basilicas, shrines and churches throughout the world were built and dedicated to the Lord under the patronage of the Saint of Lisieux. The Catholic Church venerates her in the various Eastern and Western rites. Many of the faithful have been able to experience the power of her intercession. Many of those called to the priestly ministry or the consecrated life, especially in the missions and the cloister, attribute the divine grace of their vocation to her intercession and example.

3. The Pastors of the Church, beginning with my predecessors, the Supreme Pontiffs of this century, who held up her holiness as an example for all, also stressed that Thérèse is a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher and then imparted to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness (cf. Ms B, 2v^o-3^o).

This spiritual doctrine has been passed on to us primarily by her autobiography which, taken from three manuscripts she wrote in the last years of her life and published a year after her death with the title *Histoire d'une âme* (Lisieux 1898), has aroused an extraordinary interest down to our day. This autobiography, translated along with her other writings into about 50 languages, has made Thérèse known in every part of the world, even outside the Catholic Church. A century after her death, Thérèse of the Child Jesus continues to be recognized as one of the great masters of the spiritual life in our time.

4. It is not surprising then that the Apostolic See received many petitions to confer on her the title of Doctor of the Universal Church.

In recent years, especially with the happy occasion of the first centenary of her death close at hand, these requests became more and more numerous, including on the part of Episcopal Conferences; in addition, study conferences were held and numerous publications have pointed out how Thérèse of the Child Jesus possesses an extraordinary wisdom and with her doctrine helps so many men and women of every state in life to know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

In the light of these facts, I decided carefully to study whether the Saint of Lisieux had the prerequisites for being awarded the title of Doctor of the Universal Church.

5. In this context I am pleased to recall briefly some events in the life of Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Born in Alençon, France, on 2 January 1873, she is baptized

two days later in the Church of Notre Dame, receiving the name Marie-Françoise-Thérèse. Her parents are Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, whose heroic virtues I recently recognized. After her mother's death on 28 August 1877, Thérèse moves with her whole family to the town of Lisieux where, surrounded by the affection of her father and sisters, she receives a formation both demanding and full of tenderness.

Towards the end of 1879 she receives the sacrament of Penance for the first time. On the day of Pentecost in 1883 she has the extraordinary grace of being healed from a serious illness through the intercession of Our Lady of Victories. Educated by the Benedictines of Lisieux, she receives First Communion on 8 May 1884, after an intense preparation crowned with an exceptional experience of the grace of intimate union with Jesus. A few weeks later, on 14 June of that same year, she receives the sacrament of Confirmation with a vivid awareness of what the gift of the Holy Spirit involves in her personal sharing in the grace of Pentecost. On Christmas Day of 1886 she has a profound spiritual experience that she describes as a "complete conversion". As a result, she overcomes the emotional weakness caused by the loss of her mother and begins "to run as a giant" on the way of perfection (cf. Ms A, 44v·45v·).

Thérèse wishes to embrace the contemplative life, like her sisters Pauline and Marie in the Carmel of Lisieux, but is prevented from doing so by her young age. During a pilgrimage to Italy, after visiting the Holy House of Loreto and places in the Eternal City, at an audience granted by the Pope to the faithful of the Diocese of Lisieux on 20 November 1887, she asks Leo XIII with filial boldness to be able to enter Carmel at the age of 15 years.

On 9 April 1888 she enters the Carmel of Lisieux, where she receives the habit of the Blessed Virgin's order on 10 January of the following year and makes her religious profession on 8 September 1890, the feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. At Carmel she undertakes the way of perfection marked out by the Mother Foundress, Teresa of Jesus, with genuine fervour and fidelity in fulfilling the various community tasks entrusted to her. Illumined by the Word of God, particularly tried by the illness of her beloved father, Louis Martin, who dies on 29 July 1894, Thérèse embarks on the way of holiness, insisting on the centrality of love. She discovers and imparts to the novices entrusted to her care the little way of spiritual childhood, by which she enters more and more deeply into the mystery of the Church and, drawn by the love of Christ, feels growing within her the apostolic and missionary vocation which spurs her to bring everyone with her to meet the divine Spouse.

On 9 June 1895, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, she offers herself as a sacrificial victim to the merciful Love of God. On 3 April of the following year, on the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she notices the first symptoms of the illness which will lead to her death. Thérèse welcomes it as a

mysterious visitation of the divine Spouse. At the same time she undergoes a trial of faith which will last until her death. As her health deteriorates, she is moved to the infirmary on 8 July 1897. Her sisters and other religious collect her sayings, while her sufferings and trials, borne with patience, intensify to the moment of her death on the afternoon of 30 September 1897. "I am not dying; I am entering life", she had written to one of her spiritual brothers, Fr Bellière (Lettres 244). Her last words, "My God, I love you", are the seal of her life.

6. Thérèse of the Child Jesus left us writings that deservedly qualify her as a teacher of the spiritual life. Her principal work remains the account of her life in three autobiographical manuscripts (Manuscrits autobiographiques A, B, C), first published with the soon to be famous title of *Histoire d'une Âme*.

In Manuscript A, written at the request of her sister Agnes of Jesus, then Prioress of the monastery, and given to her on 21 January 1896, Thérèse describes the stages of her religious experience: the early years of childhood, especially the time of her First Communion and Confirmation, adolescence, up to her entrance into Carmel and her first profession.

Manuscript B, written during her retreat that same year at the request of her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, contains some of the most beautiful, best known and oft-quoted passages from the Saint of Lisieux. They reveal the Saint's full maturity as she speaks of her vocation in the Church, the Bride of Christ and Mother of souls.

Manuscript C, composed in June and the first days of July 1897, a few months before her death and dedicated to the Prioress, Marie de Gonzague, who had requested it, completes the recollections in Manuscript A on life in Carmel. These pages reveal the author's supernatural wisdom. Thérèse recounts some sublime experiences during this final period of her life. She devotes moving pages to her trial of faith: a grace of purification that immerses her in a long and painful dark night, illuminated by her trust in the merciful, fatherly love of God. Once again, and without repeating herself, Thérèse makes the light of the Gospel shine brightly. Here we find the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God's hands, to unity between love of God and love of neighbour, to her missionary vocation in the Church.

In these three different manuscripts, which converge in a thematic unity and in a progressive description of her life and spiritual way, Thérèse has left us an original autobiography which is the story of her soul. It shows how in her life God has offered the world a precise message, indicating an evangelical way, the "little way", which everyone can take, because everyone is called to holiness.

In the 266 Lettres we possess, addressed to family members, women religious and missionary "brothers", Thérèse shares her wisdom, developing a teaching that is

actually a profound exercise in the spiritual direction of souls.

Her writings also include 54 Poésies, some of which have great theological and spiritual depth inspired by Sacred Scripture. Worthy of special mention are *Vivre d'Amour!...* (Poésies 17) and *Pourquoi je t'aime, ô Marie!* (Poésies 54), an original synthesis of the Virgin Mary's journey according to the Gospel. To this literary production should be added eight *Récréations pieuses*: poetic and theatrical compositions, conceived and performed by the Saint for her community on certain feast days, in accordance with the tradition of Carmel. Among those writings should be mentioned a series of 21 *Prières*. Nor can we forget the collection of all she said during the last months of her life. These sayings, of which there are several editions, known as the *Novissima verba*, have also been given the title *Derniers Entretiens*.

7. From careful study of the writings of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and from the resonance they have had in the Church, salient aspects can be noted of her "eminent doctrine", which is the fundamental element for conferring the title of Doctor of the Church.

First of all, we find a special charism of wisdom. This young Carmelite, without any particular theological training, but illumined by the light of the Gospel, feels she is being taught by the divine Teacher who, as she says, is "the Doctor of Doctors" (Ms A, 83v^o), and from him she receives "divine teachings" (Ms B, 1r^o). She feels that the words of Scripture are fulfilled in her: "Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.... For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown" (Ms B, 1v^o; cf. Prv 9:4; Wis 6:6) and she knows she is being instructed in the science of love, hidden from the wise and prudent, which the divine Teacher deigned to reveal to her, as to babes (Ms A, 49r^o; cf. Lk 10:21-22).

Pius XI, who considered Thérèse of Lisieux the "Star of his pontificate", did not hesitate to assert in his homily on the day of her canonization, 17 May 1925: "The Spirit of truth opened and made known to her what he usually hides from the wise and prudent and reveals to little ones; thus she enjoyed such knowledge of the things above - as Our immediate Predecessor attests - that she shows everyone else the sure way of salvation" (AAS 17 [1925], p. 213).

Her teaching not only conforms to Scripture and the Catholic faith, but excels ("eminent") for the depth and wise synthesis it achieved. Her doctrine is at once a confession of the Church's faith, an experience of the Christian mystery and a way to holiness. Thérèse offers a mature synthesis of Christian spirituality: she combines theology and the spiritual life; she expresses herself with strength and authority, with a great ability to persuade and communicate, as is shown by the reception and dissemination of her message among the People of God.

Thérèse's teaching expresses with coherence and harmonious unity the dogmas of the Christian faith as a doctrine of truth and an experience of life. In this regard it

should not be forgotten that the understanding of the deposit of faith transmitted by the Apostles, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit: "There is growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on... through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth" (Dei Verbum, n. 8).

In the writings of Thérèse of Lisieux we do not find perhaps, as in other Doctors, a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but we can discern an enlightened witness of faith which, while accepting with trusting love God's merciful condescension and salvation in Christ, reveals the mystery and holiness of the Church.

Thus we can rightly recognize in the Saint of Lisieux the charism of a Doctor of the Church, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit she received for living and expressing her experience of faith, and because of her particular understanding of the mystery of Christ. In her are found the gifts of the new law, that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit, who manifests himself in living faith working through charity (cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 106, art. 1; q. 108, art. 1).

We can apply to Thérèse of Lisieux what my Predecessor Paul VI said of another young Saint and Doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena: "What strikes us most about the Saint is her infused wisdom, that is to say, her lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith.... That assimilation was certainly favoured by the most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit" (AAS 62 [1970], p. 675).

8. With her distinctive doctrine and unmistakable style, Thérèse appears as an authentic teacher of faith and the Christian life. In her writings, as in the sayings of the Holy Fathers, is found that life-giving presence of Catholic tradition whose riches, as the Second Vatican Council again says, "are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and prayer" (Dei Verbum, n. 8).

If considered in its literary genre, corresponding to her education and culture, and if evaluated according to the particular circumstances of her era, the doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux appears in providential harmony with the Church's most authentic tradition, both for its confession of the Catholic faith and for its promotion of the most genuine spiritual life, presented to all the faithful in a living, accessible language.

She has made the Gospel shine appealingly in our time; she had the mission of making the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, known and loved; she helped to heal souls of the rigours and fears of Jansenism, which tended to stress God's

justice rather than his divine mercy. In God's mercy she contemplated and adored all the divine perfections, because "even his justice (and perhaps even more so than the other perfections) seems to me clothed in love" (Ms A, 83v^o). Thus she became a living icon of that God who, according to the Church's prayer, "shows his almighty power in his mercy and forgiveness" (cf. Roman Missal, Opening prayer, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time).

Even though Thérèse does not have a true and proper doctrinal corpus, nevertheless a particular radiance of doctrine shines forth from her writings which, as if by a charism of the Holy Spirit, grasp the very heart of the message of Revelation in a fresh and original vision, presenting a teaching of eminent quality.

The core of her message is actually the mystery itself of God-Love, of the Triune God, infinitely perfect in himself. If genuine Christian spiritual experience should conform to the revealed truths in which God communicates himself and the mystery of his will (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 2), it must be said that Thérèse experienced divine revelation, going so far as to contemplate the fundamental truths of our faith united in the mystery of Trinitarian life. At the summit, as the source and goal, is the merciful love of the three Divine Persons, as she expresses it, especially in her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love. At the root, on the subject's part, is the experience of being the Father's adoptive children in Jesus; this is the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood, that is, the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit. At the root again, and standing before us, is our neighbour, others, for whose salvation we must collaborate with and in Jesus, with the same merciful love as his.

Through spiritual childhood one experiences that everything comes from God, returns to him and abides in him, for the salvation of all, in a mystery of merciful love. Such is the doctrinal message taught and lived by this Saint.

As it was for the Church's Saints in every age, so also for her, in her spiritual experience Christ is the centre and fullness of Revelation. Thérèse knew Jesus, loved him and made him loved with the passion of a bride. She penetrated the mysteries of his infancy, the words of his Gospel, the passion of the suffering Servant engraved on his holy Face, in the splendour of his glorious life, in his Eucharistic presence. She sang of all the expressions of Christ's divine charity, as they are presented in the Gospel (cf. PN 24, *Jésus, mon Bien-Aimé, rappelle-toi!*).

Thérèse received particular light on the reality of Christ's Mystical Body, on the variety of its charisms, gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the eminent power of love, which in a way is the very heart of the Church, where she found her vocation as a contemplative and missionary (cf. Ms B, 2r^o-3v^o).

Lastly, among the most original chapters of her spiritual doctrine we must recall Thérèse's wise delving into the mystery and journey of the Virgin Mary, achieving results very close to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council in chapter eight

of the Constitution *Lumen gentium* and to what I myself taught in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* of 25 March 1987.

9. The primary source of her spiritual experience and her teaching is the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments. She herself admits it, particularly stressing her passionate love for the Gospel (cf. Ms A, 83v·). Her writings contain over 1,000 biblical quotations: more than 400 from the Old Testament and over 600 from the New.

Despite her inadequate training and lack of resources for studying and interpreting the sacred books, Thérèse immersed herself in meditation on the Word of God with exceptional faith and spontaneity. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit she attained a profound knowledge of Revelation for herself and for others. By her loving concentration on Scripture - she even wanted to learn Hebrew and Greek to understand better the spirit and letter of the sacred books - she showed the importance of the biblical sources in the spiritual life, she emphasized the originality and freshness of the Gospel, she cultivated with moderation the spiritual exegesis of the Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments. Thus she discovered hidden treasures, appropriating words and episodes, sometimes with supernatural boldness, as when, in reading the texts of St Paul (cf. 1 Cor 12-13), she realized her vocation to love (cf. Ms B, 3r·-3v·). Enlightened by the revealed Word, Thérèse wrote brilliant pages on the unity between love of God and love of neighbour (cf. Ms C, 11v·-19r·); and she identified with Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper as the expression of her intercession for the salvation of all (cf. Ms C, 34r·-35r·).

Her doctrine, as was said, conforms to the Church's teaching. From childhood she was taught by her family to participate in prayer and liturgical worship. In preparation for her first Confession, first Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation, she gave evidence of an extraordinary love for the truths of the faith, and she learned the Catechism almost word for word (cf. Ms A, 37r·-37v·). At the end of her life she wrote the Apostles' Creed in her own blood, as an expression of her unreserved attachment to the profession of faith.

In addition to the words of Scripture and the Church's doctrine, Thérèse was nourished as a youth by the teaching of the *Imitation of Christ*, which, as she herself acknowledges, she knew almost by heart (cf. Ms A, 47r·). Decisive for fulfilling her Carmelite vocation were the spiritual texts of the Mother Foundress, Teresa of Jesus, especially those explaining the contemplative and ecclesial meaning of the charism of the Teresian Carmel (cf. Ms C, 33v·). But in a very special way, Thérèse was nourished on the mystical doctrine of St John of the Cross, who was her true spiritual master (cf. Ms A, 83r·). It should cause no surprise, then, if she who had been an outstanding pupil in the school of these two Saints, later declared Doctors of the Church, should later become a master of the spiritual life.

10. The spiritual doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux has helped extend the kingdom of God. By her example of holiness, of perfect fidelity to Mother Church, of full communion with the See of Peter, as well as by the special graces obtained by her for many missionary brothers and sisters, she has rendered a particular service to the renewed proclamation and experience of Christ's Gospel and to the extension of the Catholic faith in every nation on earth.

There is no need to dwell at length on the universality of Thérèse's doctrine and on the broad reception of her message during the century since her death: it has been well documented in the studies made in view of conferring on her the title of Doctor of the Church.

A particularly important fact in this regard is that the Church's Magisterium has not only recognized Thérèse's holiness, but has also highlighted the wisdom of her doctrine. Pius X had already said that she was "the greatest saint of modern times". On joyfully receiving the first Italian edition of the *Story of a Soul*, he extolled the fruits that had resulted from Thérèse's spirituality. Benedict XV, on the occasion of proclaiming the Servant of God's heroic virtues, explained the way of spiritual childhood and praised the knowledge of divine realities which God granted to Thérèse in order to teach others the ways of salvation (cf. AAS 13 [1921], pp. 449-452). On the occasion of both her beatification and canonization, Pius XI wished to expound and recommend the Saint's doctrine, underscoring her special divine enlightenment (*Discorsi di Pio XI*, vol. I, Turin 1959, p. 91) and describing her as a teacher of life (cf. AAS 17 [1925], pp. 211-214). When the Basilica of Lisieux was consecrated in 1954, Pius XII said, among other things, that Thérèse penetrated to the very heart of the Gospel with her doctrine (cf. AAS 46 [1954], pp. 404-408). Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, visited Lisieux several times, especially when he was Nuncio in Paris. On various occasions during his pontificate he showed his devotion to the Saint and explained the relationship between the doctrine of the Saint of Avila and her daughter, Thérèse of Lisieux (*Discorsi, Messaggi, Colloqui*, vol. II [1959-1960], pp. 771-772). Many times during the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Fathers recalled her example and doctrine. On the centenary of her birth, Paul VI addressed a Letter on 2 January 1973 to the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, in which he extolled Thérèse's example in the search for God, offered her as a teacher of prayer and theological virtue of hope, and a model of communion with the Church, calling the attention of teachers, educators, pastors and theologians themselves to the study of her doctrine (cf. AAS 65 [1973], pp. 12-15). I myself on various occasions have had the joy of recalling the person and doctrine of the Saint, especially during my unforgettable visit to Lisieux on 2 June 1980, when I wished to remind everyone: "One can say with conviction about Thérèse of Lisieux that the Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the people of our time the fundamental mystery, the reality of the Gospel.... Her 'little way' is the way of 'holy childhood'. There is something unique in this way, the genius of St Thérèse of Lisieux. At the same time there is the confirmation and renewal of

the most basic and most universal truth. What truth of the Gospel message is really more basic and more universal than this: God is our Father and we are his children?" (Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. III/1 [1980], p. 1659).

These simple references to an uninterrupted series of testimonies from the Popes of this century on the holiness and doctrine of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and to the universal dissemination of her message clearly express to what extent the Church, in her pastors and her faithful, has accepted the spiritual doctrine of this young Saint.

A sign of the ecclesial reception of the Saint's teaching is the appeal to her doctrine in many documents of the Church's ordinary Magisterium, especially when speaking of the contemplative and missionary vocation, of trust in the just and merciful God, of Christian joy and of the call to holiness. Evidence of this fact is the presence of her doctrine in the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church (nn. 127, 826, 956, 1011, 2011, 2558). She who so loved to learn the truths of the faith in the catechism deserved to be included among the authoritative witnesses of Catholic doctrine.

Thérèse possesses an exceptional universality. Her person, the Gospel message of the "little way" of trust and spiritual childhood have received and continue to receive a remarkable welcome, which has transcended every border.

The influence of her message extends first of all to men and women whose holiness and heroic virtues the Church herself has recognized, to the Church's pastors, to experts in theology and spirituality, to priests and seminarians, to men and women religious, to ecclesial movements and new communities, to men and women of every condition and every continent. To everyone Thérèse gives her personal confirmation that the Christian mystery, whose witness and apostle she became by making herself in prayer "the apostle of the apostles", as she boldly calls herself (Ms A, 56r^v), must be taken literally, with the greatest possible realism, because it has a value for every time and place. The power of her message lies in its concrete explanation of how all Jesus' promises are fulfilled in the believer who knows how confidently to welcome in his own life the saving presence of the Redeemer.

11. All these reasons are clear evidence of how timely is the Saint of Lisieux's doctrine and of the particular impact her message has had on the men and women of our century. Moreover, some circumstances contribute to making her designation as a Teacher for the Church of our time even more significant.

First of all, Thérèse is a woman, who in approaching the Gospel knew how to grasp its hidden wealth with that practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belong to the feminine genius. Because of her universality she stands out among the multitude of holy women who are resplendent for their

Gospel wisdom.

Thérèse is also a contemplative. In the hiddenness of her Carmel she lived the great adventure of Christian experience to the point of knowing the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ's love (cf. Eph 3:18-19). God did not want his secrets to remain hidden, but enabled Thérèse to proclaim the secrets of the King (cf. Ms C, 2v^o). By her life Thérèse offers a witness and theological illustration of the beauty of the contemplative life as the total dedication to Christ, Spouse of the Church, and as an affirmation of God's primacy over all things. Hers is a hidden life which possesses a mysterious fruitfulness for spreading the Gospel and fills the Church and the world with the sweet odour of Christ (cf. LT 169, 2v^o).

Lastly, Thérèse of Lisieux is a young person. She reached the maturity of holiness in the prime of youth (cf. Ms C, 4r^o). As such, she appears as a Teacher of evangelical life, particularly effective in illuminating the paths of young people, who must be the leaders and witnesses of the Gospel to the new generations.

Thérèse of the Child Jesus is not only the youngest Doctor of the Church, but is also the closest to us in time, as if to emphasize the continuity with which the Spirit of the Lord sends his messengers to the Church, men and women as teachers and witnesses to the faith. In fact, whatever changes can be noted in the course of history and despite the repercussions they usually have on the life and thought of individuals in every age, we must never lose sight of the continuity which links the Doctors of the Church to each other: in every historical context they remain witnesses to the unchanging Gospel and, with the light and strength that come from the Holy Spirit, they become its messengers, returning to proclaim it in its purity to their contemporaries. Thérèse is a Teacher for our time, which thirsts for living and essential words, for heroic and credible acts of witness. For this reason she is also loved and accepted by brothers and sisters of other Christian communities and even by non-Christians.

12. This year, when the centenary of the glorious death of Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is being celebrated, as we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, after receiving a great number of authoritative petitions, especially from many Episcopal Conferences throughout the world, and after accepting the official petition, or *Supplex Libellus*, addressed to me on 8 March 1997 by the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, as well as from the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel and from the Postulator General of the same order, I decided to entrust the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which has competence in this matter, with the special study of the cause for conferring the title of Doctor on this Saint, "after hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the eminent doctrine" (Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, n. 73).

After the necessary documentation had been collected, the two above-mentioned

Congregations addressed the question in the meetings of their respective consultors: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 5 May 1997, with regard to the "eminent doctrine", and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on 29 May of the same year, to examine the special "Positio". On the following 17 June, the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of these Congregations, following a procedure approved by me for this occasion, met in a plenary interdicasterial session and discussed the cause, giving a unanimously favourable opinion on granting the title of Doctor of the Universal Church to St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. I was personally informed of this opinion by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and by the Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Archbishop Alberto Bovone, titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia.

In view of this, on 24 August last, during the Angelus prayer in the presence of hundreds of Bishops and before a vast throng of young people from around the world, gathered in Paris for the 12th World Youth Day, I wanted personally to announce my intention to proclaim Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church during the celebration of World Mission Sunday in Rome.

Today, 19 October 1997, in St Peter's Square, filled with faithful from every part of the world, and in the presence of a great many Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, during the solemn Eucharistic celebration I proclaimed Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church in these words: Fulfilling the wishes of many Brothers in the Episcopate and of a great number of the faithful throughout the world, after consulting the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding her eminent doctrine, with certain knowledge and after lengthy reflection, with the fullness of Our apostolic authority We declare Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, virgin, to be a Doctor of the Universal Church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This having been duly enacted, We decree that this Apostolic Letter is to be religiously preserved and to have full effect both now and in the future; furthermore, it is thus to be judged and defined as right, and whatever to the contrary may be attempted by anyone, on whatever authority, knowingly or unknowingly, is null and void.

Given in Rome, at St Peter's, under the Fisherman's ring, the 19th day of the month of October in the year of the Lord 1997, the 20th of the Pontificate.

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