

Christmas Mass During the Day 2025– Year A

Isaiah 52: 7-10; Ps 97; Heb 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

A few months ago, someone gave me a very precious gift. It was a relic of St Thérèse of Lisieux, boxed in a small metal case. As I write these which I am speaking to you now, she is before me on my desk.

This French Carmelite nun is well known for the collection of letters and diary entries which in book form is called the 'Story of a Soul'. Through its pages Thérèse proposes what she called the 'Little Way' as a way of living, in which even the smallest of tasks is performed with love for God.¹

But now an pivotal story from her life. It is Christmas Eve in the year 1886. Thérèse is just about to turn 14 years old. However, in some ways she is very much a little child. She is beloved by her family, but also a little spoiled. Being the youngest child everything is done for her. She has one real fault, she will cry at any little inconvenience, either to herself or for others. She herself called it 'extreme touchiness'.² She knows it is a problem, making her unbearable at times.

Anyway, this Christmas the family have returned from Midnight Mass, and it is customary for there to be gifts placed in the children's shoes. Thérèse went upstairs to take off her hat. As she did so, her tired father, and spying her shoes placed at the fireplace, spoke aloud saying aloud, 'Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!' Normally this sort of comment, or rebuke, would have been sufficient to send

Thérèse into floods of tears for hours. But this Christmas Day was different. Upstairs, after the initial shock, she composed herself, went back downstairs and opened her gifts with delight, much to the laughter of her father and surprise to her sister.

You might think it almost insignificant, but it was in truth a tremendous spiritual shift in this young girl. She would write: '*On that night of light (being Christmas) began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and most filled with graces from heaven. The work I had been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant.*' She goes on '*I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please other; since then I've been happy!*'³

On Christmas Day Therese received two shoes full of little gifts which delighted her. She also received a gift from Christ, His mercy filling her with self knowledge and Christian strength. And you, what do you desire this Christmas?

Today, we celebrate the day when the Virgin Mary gives birth to the Son of God into the world. What do you think when I say that? The Son of God – whom we also call the Word of God - is born into the world. Are you so used to hearing it that it does not fill you with fear and awe? Think about it for a moment. Think about its consequences for us, for everyone.

Listen to the opening lines of the Book of Genesis:

'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face

¹ I am reminded now of Brother Lawrence and his little book.

² Lisieux, St Therese 'Story of a Soul,' (ICS Publications, Washington, 1996) p.97

³ Ibid, pp98-99

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of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.'

Now hear afresh the opening lines of this morning's Gospel according to John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Words was God, He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.⁴

John is very purposefully echoing the creation story in Genesis. He is telling us that the God who created you, has united himself with his creation. This is Jesus, the Word of God, who is entering into the world. And, so when you gaze upon the baby Jesus, it is God who is gazing back at you. God is waiting at the door to be let in. It is God who has come to give you strength to over come the world, just like he gave to St Thérèse all those Christmas's ago. When she became a professed Carmelite, it is little surprise that she took the name of Sr. Thérèse of the *Child Jesus* and the Holy Face.

Put down the stocking. Put down the gifts. Go to the manger. Look at Him. Feel Him looking at you. There is something more waiting for you. Speak and listen. Be amazed once again.

May the peace and strength of Christ fill you this Christmas Day, and always.

⁴ John 1:1-5, 14