

Thursday 9 | May
2024

DAY 2

MEETING THE VIRGIN OF THE SMILE

*“The elevator which
must raise me to
heaven is your arms, O
Jesus!”.*

At 7:50 a.m. we gathered together encircled in the meeting room next to the Hermitage chapel for a guided meditation drawing us into a restful silence... and our second day in Lisieux begins.

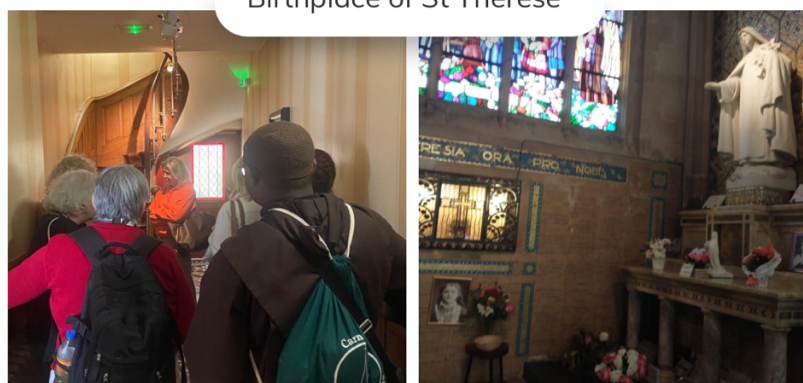
Contemplating the beauty of nature

After a leisurely French breakfast of bread, croissants, jam, juice and – for some of us – much needed coffee, followed by a treasureable forty-five minutes of free time, to ready for the day. It is gloriously sunny, bright and brisk outdoors.

At 9:45 a.m. we gather to head off to Alençon, which occurred at 10:00 a.m. All along the route to Alençon we were blessed with not only a glorious, sunny day but with the loveliest of all agrarian views of pasturelands, a few crops, hamlets, and grazing cattle, sheep and more. The entire area appears “alive”. The grass is so green, the water rushing and brisk, the cows even seem to sing they are quite beautiful contently grazing in their meadows. No wonder St. Therese was so in love with nature and flowers and why St. Louis loved to be fishing! In more ways than imagined we were treated with the simplicity, the purity, and beauty of how life can be lived in nature and in our families.



Birthplace of St Therese



On the way to Alençon – in betwixt and between the natural landscapes – we were given another beautiful talk by Fr. Kelvin to go deeper into ‘Why I love you, O Mary’ and her ‘yes’. He explained in detail the memories of the Martin family starting in 1854 at <https://louissetzelie.com/les-lieux-du-sanctuaire-louis-et-zelie/> where Sts. Louis and Zelie first met – a marriage made in heaven – and destined for goodness. Both Zelie and Louis aspired towards religious life, and both were denied the vocation as they were destined for the vocation to marriage.

“Jesus is doing all in me, and I am doing nothing”.

St. Louis became a successful watchmaker and St. Zelie a lace-maker of what would become the Dentelle au Point d’Alençon lace making, now almost extinct. On July 13th in the same year, they met, Louis and Zelie were married at the Notre Dame church in Alencon where Therese was also baptized. We had the joy of participating at the solemn Mass of the Ascension of the Lord with baptism of 7 children.

Sts. Louis and Zelie were canonized in 2015 by Pope Francis after being Beatified by St. John Pope Paul II. Of prime importance it was the first time the Vatican ever recognized a married couple together as saints. In their vocation of marriage, they were blessed in Alencon with nine children; only five of which lived: Marie, Pauline, Celine, Leonie and Therese.



Learning in the school of Confidence

In light of our pilgrimage theme of abandonment into the darkness and dependence on the Lord through the filial love of Mary, Fr. Kelvin then recounted the story of Therese and her stairway fears. With each step along the way she called upon her mother (Zelie) to give her permission to take another step, depending on her wisdom and loving guidance into safety. She waited upon each step and when/if her mother

did not respond right away Therese would simply hold, her position and stay until her mother directed her. This image we hold of Therese and her fear of the unknowns along the stairway path was the solid basis that would later yield – in part – to her “Little Way” doctrine that similarly used the elevator image as the replacement of mother’s good guidance and safety to that of Our Lord himself taking “Little” Therese up into his arms providing an elevator of sorts to her Paradiso. The underpinning of the doctrine and imagery is the “littleness” of one who accepts and responds as children, dependent on His infinite mercy and love.

*Therese cries out
“mama mama at each
step”...Therese my
child replied Zelig*

*“...not allowing one
little sacrifice to
escape, not one look,
one word, profiting by
all the smallest things
and doing them
through love”*

This is an elevator that only allows little ones in. Fr. Kelvin reminded us of Therese’s two scriptural basis for this image: 1. Prov. 9: 4-14 “whosoever is a little one let them come to me” and Jesus would say in the Gospel, “let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 19:14). 2. Is. 66:13 “As one whom his mother comforts so I will comfort you. I will hold you at my breast, and dandle on my knees”. Fr. Kelvin explains that Jesus is the elevator for the little, frail and weak ones who picks them up and takes them to Him. We need to be able to respond to His invitation “Come to me”.



The way of perfection: Straight, Short and New

For Therese it was important that the way has 3 characteristics: It must be straight, short and new.

Since elevators had just recently been introduced during this time; that and her vivid experience of the stairs and the need to be lifted by some means – first by the love and nurturing of her mother and lastly by the arms of Jesus to heaven, the ultimate elevator.

We need to become as little children, wholly dependent upon his infinite mercy and love...trusting in His guidance. Therese – through her own experience of

woundedness became a ‘Wounded Healer’ and remains so to this day. Her “Little Way” demonstrates also that not even imperfections can discourage us before the Lord for He knows us even better than we but need to trust Him and have confidence in His Infinite mercy knowing He is doing all in me (us).

We were then given a lovely allocution on the importance of a name. Name in French religious context takes on a deeper meaning; a mystery which defines your past. When a pope is elected, he is asked, “by what name would you like to be called” or “by what mystery do you want to be known or identified?”

Therese took on – in religious life – the name or names of St. Therese of the Child Jesus [and] the Holy Face of Jesus. Fr. emphasized its deeper meaning as it reflects two moments of the life of Christ: helpless at the birth, in the stable in Bethlehem and again at the end on the Cross when Jesus was helpless, completely, vulnerable and at the mercy of others. Similarly, the “Little Way” and the very choosing of this name: St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face of Jesus was born of this mystery.

Visiting the Museum of the home and birthplace of St Therese, we were given an amazing tour by Sr. Marie Catherina who was as welcoming as she was knowledgeable of the Martin family.

We returned to our motorcoach and journey back again with the beautiful backdrop of the countryside and all our stories of the day. Back at the Hermitage, we celebrated Evening prayer at the Monastery chapel facing the tomb of St. Therese. This was followed by another satisfying dinner and Adoration at 8:30 p.m. although many of us contemplated the blessings of the day and how they relate to how we are drawn. May God be praised.

*“Everything is grace,
grace is everything”.*

