

St Therese of Lisieux

October 1st, 2021

Today the Church remembers a young woman who died at the age of 24. She had a disease called Tuberculosis. When she died in the 1890s on average more than 100,000 people a year died from Tuberculosis in France.¹ At that time France's population was a little bigger than Canada's today. France in the 1890s was around 38 million, Canada today is about 36 million.

Now the reason I am beginning my homily this way is because St Therese would have understood what it was like to live in a world like the one we are living in today with COVID19. Tuberculosis killed far more people in a year than COVID has done. However, like COVID it affected a person's ability to breathe and was something that people were constantly vigilant about. It was always in the forefront of peoples' minds because it impacted so many people lives.

Therefore St. Therese is a saint who is particularly inspirational during the challenging days in which are now living through. What she discovered above all else was she was to be an apostle of love. In reading St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, she was struck by how St. Paul says that every spiritual act is empty if it is devoid of love. Speaking of the Apostle Paul, she wrote in her spiritual biography these words:

For the Apostle insists that the greater gifts are nothing at all without love and that this same love is surely the best path leading directly to God. At length I had found peace of mind. Then, nearly ecstatic with the supreme joy in my soul, I proclaimed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is love. Certainly, I have found my place in the Church, and you gave me that very place, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction.

Having discovered this calling as a teen ager, in every circumstance she could she promoted this way of love: "Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smile, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest thing right and doing it all for love".

This was how during a world living with the epidemic of Tuberculosis, that hit France with a particular severity, she was able to keep at peace. Now it is important to also mention that in the last year of here life she suffered terribly and felt times of deep isolation and even abandonment from God. But through it all, she continued to deeply trust in Jesus and listen to his voice, as he spoke to her through Scripture and the teaching of the Church.

How different was the attitude of St. Therese from those referred to in our first reading from Baruch? This passage dates from a time in the history of the Jewish people where their culture and society were collapsing as the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding country of Judah were under siege. Repeatedly the writer Baruch recalls that the people did not listen to the counsel and voice of the Lord and consequently there were experiencing the curse resulting from their disobedience to God.

¹ <https://academic.oup.com/shm/article-abstract/3/3/387/1734498?redirectedFrom=PDF>

What we learn from this is that when we turn away from the one who is Love and do not follow in the way of Love, we experience a kind of spiritual infection that leads to confusion and turmoil in our lives and the world in which we live. Therefore, saints like St. Therese are such an inspiration and hope for us, because they remind us that even when there is a crisis in our country, like COVID19, we can be a people who are learning the way of Love and so pray with today's Collect these words:

O God, who open your kingdom to those who are humble and to the little ones, lead us to follow trustingly in the little way of Saint Therese"