

Thérèse's Christmas Miracle

Letters From Saints

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When Thérèse was very young, she had a will of iron which, at times, exasperated her parents. Her mother, Zélie Martin wrote in a letter:

As for [Therese], one cannot tell how she will turn out, she is so young and heedless...her stubbornness is almost unconquerable. When she has said no, nothing will make her change; one could leave her all day in the cellar without getting her to say yes. She would sooner sleep there.

Sadly, her mother died when she was three and half years of age. Naturally, this was very difficult for young Thérèse. She withdrew into herself and maintained that stubbornness.

It showed up in different ways including a clinging to her childishness and being oversensitive which often resulted in tears over perceived slights and denials.

Thérèse recalls the story that when she was 13 years of age, she still struggled with her childishness.

The family had come home after midnight mass. As usual, the children's shoes had been left by the fireplace and filled with presents. Thérèse fully expected to open the gifts which had always been enjoyable to her father because of the excitement and surprise she expressed when opening the gifts. This in turn pleased her because she was pleased to see her father happy.

However, as she was ascending the steps to take off her hat before coming down to open the gifts, she heard her father say, “Thérèse ought to have outgrown all this sort of thing, and I hope this will be the last time.”

This hurt Thérèse very much to hear him say that. Her sister Céline who knew how prone Thérèse was to react with sobbing to a comment like this suggested that Thérèse not go downstairs to open the gifts as she would be too upset and burst into tears. And indeed she probably would have.

However, Thérèse believes that she experienced a healing as Jesus intervened and gave her the grace to master her emotions. Instead of being upset, she ran down the stairs and joyfully opened her gifts with nary a sign that she was upset by what had been said. Rather, her father who had been cross became excited and joined in Thérèse’s joy in opening her gifts. Her sister Céline was utterly shocked at how Thérèse acted and even more surprised at how she had not acted.

Thérèse called this her Christmas miracle because she firmly believed that Jesus had given her the strength of will to overcome her natural inclination to be upset and instead to act in a loving and joyful way.

And, it was not just for the moment. Instead, it was a genuine conversion. In fact, it was a turning point for Thérèse in giving up her childish and stubborn ways. Instead, she was given the grace to respond rather than to react. Thérèse no longer was oversensitive, and she was able to refine the gift of a strong will to channel it for doing God’s will. And, she did use that gift to accomplish His will. Within two years, Thérèse would enter the Carmelite order at the age of 15.

