

THÉRÈSE MARTIN was born in Alençon, France on January 2, 1873. Two days later, she was baptized Marie Frances Thérèse at Notre Dame Church. Her parents were Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin. After the death of her mother on August 28, 1877, Thérèse and her family moved to Lisieux. After an intense preparation by the Benedictine Nuns of Lisieux culminating in a vivid experience of intimate union with Christ, she received First Holy Communion on May 8, 1884. Some weeks later, on June 14th of the same year, she received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

She wished to embrace the contemplative life, as her sisters Pauline and Marie had done in the Carmel of Lisieux. However, she was prevented from doing this because she was too young. During an audience granted by Pope Leo XIII, she asked the Holy Father with childlike audacity to be able to enter the Carmel of Lisieux at the age of fifteen.

On April 9, 1888, she entered the Carmel of Lisieux. Therese prayed without great sensitive emotions, she increased the small acts of charity and care for others, doing small services. She accepted criticism in silence, even unjust criticisms, and smiled at the sisters who were unpleasant to her. In her writings, Therese often used flowers and roses as metaphors, either to refer to herself or to the acts of love she wanted to do. She referred to herself as the "little flower of Jesus" in the garden of God. She often referred to roses as a metaphor for the acts of love she tried to accomplish for God.

In her autobiographical manuscripts she left us not only her recollections of childhood and adolescence but also a portrait of her soul, the description of her most intimate experiences. She penetrated ever more deeply into the mystery of the Church and became increasingly aware of her apostolic and missionary vocation to draw everyone in her path.

Therese's final years were marked by a steady decline in health that she bore resolutely, and without complaint. Tuberculosis was her final suffering, but she saw that as part of her spiritual journey. She died on September 30, 1897, at the age of 24. On her deathbed, she is reported to have said, "I have reached the point of not being able to suffer any more, because all suffering is sweet to me". Her last words were, "My God, I love you".

Pope Pius XI canonized her on May 17, 1925. On December 14, 1927, St. Therese was proclaimed a Universal Patron of the Missions. Pope John Paul II declared her the thirty-third Doctor of the Church on October 19, 1997.

Therese has been a highly influential model of sanctity for Catholics and for others because of the simplicity and practicality of her approach to the spiritual life. She is the patron saint of Missionaries, France, Russia, AIDS Sufferers, Florists, Gardeners, Loss of Parents, and Tuberculosis.