Zélie and Louis Martin

(Parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.)

Contents.

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Chapter One

A First for the Church – Married Couple to be Canonized.

The Canonization.

Though we tend to think that the desire to recognize the undoubted holiness of Zélie and Louis Martin has only emerged in the last five years or so, this is not the case. As far back as March 22, 1957, the Information Process on the holiness of Louis Martin was opened in Rome. That of his wife Zélie followed on October 10, in the same year.

There has been much development however in the past 60 years which has prompted the Church to take the positive action that resulted in this holy couple emerging as models of Christian married life. As such they are now presented to us as a couple to be emulated by all the faithful. Pope Francis has given the nod for their canonization.

So it was that Cardinal Angelo Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, announced on February 27, 2015, that the parents of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux – Louis and Zélie Martin – will be canonized in St. Peter's, Rome, in October 2015. This coincides very fittingly with the Synod on the Family, which will take place at that time in the Vatican. It is also exactly 90 years since Thérèse`s canonization.

Zélie Martin died of a very painful cancer at age 46. Loving husband Louis was left to cope with five young daughters: Marie, Pauline, Léonie, Céline and Thérèse. The youngest, Thérèse, was only four and a half years old when her mother died. Louis died in 1894, having suffered a serious mental illness for some years previously.

The Beatification

On Sunday, October 19, 2008, Mission Sunday, in the magnificent Basilica of Lisieux dedicated to the couple's youngest daughter Thérèse, Cardinal Saraiva Martins, Pope Benedict's delegate, beatified Zélie and Louis Martin, lacemaker and watchmaker respectively. This was the anniversary of the day on

which Thérèse herself was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1994.

In the course of his homily at the Beatification Mass, the Cardinal stated:

> ….Thérèse, the youngest-ever Doctor of the Church, described her family as garden soil, a *holy land* where she grew up with her sisters under the skillful and expert guidance of her incomparable parents. She wrote to Father Bellière just a few months before her death: *"The Good Lord gave me a father and mother more worthy of Heaven than of earth."*

Thérèse's deep conviction regarding the saintliness of her parents was shared by other members of her family. Léonie who was not as bright as her sisters, and caused her parents much anxiety, remarked to the Sisters of the Visitation in Caen: *"Noblesse oblige, I belong to a family of saints; I have to be up to standard."* Even the extended family referred to the Martins as "the saintly couple." For example, fourteen years after the death of Zélie, in a letter dating from 1891, Zélie's sister-in-law Céline Guérin wrote to Thérèse in Carmel: "What have I ever done that

God has surrounded me with such affectionate hearts?.....*Ah, my dear Thérèse, you had parents that are of those who can be called saints, and who merit to bring forth saints."* (Italics in original.) [1] There were similar testimonies from people who knew the Martins well, such as maids who worked for the family and from the many priests with whom they intermingled.

What factors contributed to the unusual events leading to the glorification of Thérèse's parents? First of all we look at the beatification process for this married couple. We note that there are two aspects to a beatification: firstly there must be evidence of the holiness of the candidates and this will emerge in the course of our story; secondly, an approved miracle needs to have taken place.

Regarding the latter the required miracle concerned a boy who recovered unexpectedly, and as it turned out miraculously, from an acute condition of the lungs. Pietro Schillero from Monza in Italy was born with a congenital lung defect and could breathe only with the help of a respirator. He was not expected to survive

[1] The Mother of the Little Flower, *Celine Martin,* Tan books and Publishers ,Inc,Rockford Illinois, 2005. P 112.

very long and was confined to a clinic. At the suggestion of a Carmelite friar, Fr. Antonio Sangalli, the family made a novena to Louis and Zélie Martin. Shortly afterwards the child was discharged from the clinic – completely cured. The Church accepted his cure as the miracle which opened the door to their Beatification.

Canonization Miracle.

Antonio Sangalli served as Vice-Postulator for the Martins Cause. The required miracle for the canonization involved a five-year-old Spanish child from Valencia known only as Carmen. (The parents prefer to remain anonymous.) Carmen was born on October 15, 2008, after 28 weeks of a very difficult pregnancy. "Prepare for the worst," the midwife said when the baby was born. Complications common in premature babies arose: among other things, respiratory difficulties, double sepsis, and a cerebral hemorrhage. Since Carmen was born on the feast of St. Teresa of Avila, Carmelite Reformer and Founder, Carmen's father went to a Carmelite monastery outside Valencia to beg the nuns to pray for her. The nuns took this intention to heart. Carmen's parents came

to Mass at the convent every Sunday and then went to visit their daughter at the hospital.

Late in November, Carmen's prognosis seemed hopeless. For the first time the mother was allowed to touch her baby, the incubator having been left open. The family began to plan a funeral. On November 23, the Prioress of the Carmelite convent gave Carmen's parents a card containing a prayer to Louis and Zélie Martin in Spanish. Carmen's mother and father had never heard of the Martins or even their famous daughter, St. Thérèse. Next day, Carmen was transferred to a new hospital. Contrary to all expectation, she began to make progress and her infection rapidly stabilized. She continued to recover and was allowed to leave the hospital on January 2, 2009, Thérèse`s birthday.

The matrix

These special people, Louis and Zélie Martin, were beatified and will be canonized purely as a married couple, not as individuals, a scenario unique in the history of the Church: a married couple to be canonized whose daughter has been declared a saint.

Both Louis and Zélie belonged to military families, and in the France of the Napoleons this would not be unusual. Both their grandfathers had distinguished themselves in the service of Napoleon Bonaparte. That fact might hint at the strict discipline that marked their family life, as well as telling us something of the fighting spirit displayed by Thérèse herself when confronted with terminal illness at an early age. In this she reminds us of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, daughter of another French soldier. Using a metaphor from military life, Thérèse tells us that she wished to acquire virtue “at the point of the sword.” St. Joan of Arc was her favorite saintly heroine.

The holiness of Zélie and Louis Martin can be said to be extremely well attested. Their daughter Thérèse is one of the great figures of the modern church, having received the title “Doctor of the Church” for her profound insights into the spiritual journey. Because of Thérèse, her parents, and indeed her whole family, especially her elder sisters Pauline and Céline – Mother Agnes and Sr. Geneviève respectively – have become well-known figures in the Catholic world also. Thérèse herself led the movement to recognize the holiness of her parents’ lives when she wrote in her

autobiography: “I was blessed in having saints for parents.”[1] Again she wrote, “I have only to look at my father to see how the saints pray.” [2]

Is this latest model of Christian family life too far beyond our reach? Perhaps. Certainly, many people will regard it so. And yet in an age where families are marked by frequent tension and domestic violence, an attractive alternative is all the more necessary. Our age is not radically different from nineteenth-century France. The Martins would have been aware of the anti-Christian and anti-marriage ideas current in the France of their day. From mid-century on, liberal writers like Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier advocated radical and communist values passed down from Voltaire and others. Among these was the abolition of marriage which liberals equated with a form of slavery. Nearer the Martins own day (1878) Jules Guesde in his *Socialist Catechism* wrote,

> Ought the family to be preserved? No, for up to the present it has been one of the forms of ownership, and not the least

[1] *The Story of a Soul*, translated by John Clarke ocd, ICS Publications Washington, DC 1996.

[2] Ibid.

> odious…The interest of the species, as much as the interest of the elements that enter into the composition of the family, demand that this state of things should disappear.[1]

In the intervening 150 years such attitudes have only hardened. In the canonization of Zélie and Louis Martin the Church is putting before us the ideal of strong Christian family life. It's a high standard. Yet we can reflect that if athletes never raised the bar above a certain height, no records would ever be broken and mediocrity would prevail all-round.

[1] *The Story of a Family: The home of the Little Flower*, Fr. Stephane-Joseph Piat, OFM, M.H Gill and Son, Dublin, 1954.p 396.

Chapter Two

Thérèse`s account of her family.

Before proceeding to the known facts regarding this saintly couple, we might explore Thérèse's witness to the quality of saintliness she noted in her parents. Thérèse tells us at the beginning of her *Story of a Soul* that before taking up her pen to chronicle her early life, she knelt before a statue of Mary. This was a treasured possession of the Martin family that eventually found its way to the Lisieux Carmel. Initially it was a gift to Louis Martin from a friend of the family – Félicité Baudoin – and it was given a place of honor in his Pavilion. This was the lady who had helped Louis set up his first shop in Alençon. The statue was a copy of a silver one made by the sculptor Edmé Bouchardon that had been displayed in the church of St. Sulpice in Paris, but was lost or

stolen during the French Revolution.[1] The family referred to the statue as the “Virgin of the Smile” to commemorate Thérèse’s experience of being cured from a malady that afflicted her as a child. Thérèse attributed her cure to the smile of the Virgin**.** The statue was the focal point for the family’s evening prayers and May devotions, when it was showered with every mark of honour and decorated with flowers and greenery that sometimes reached the ceiling.[2]

Thérèse takes up the story of her cure during a crisis point in her illness:

> One day I saw Papa enter Marie's room where I was in bed. He gave her several pieces of gold with an expression of great sadness and told her to write to Paris and have some Masses said at Our Lady of Victories so that she would cure his poor little girl. Ah! how touched I was to see my dear King's faith and love! I would have loved to be able to tell him I was cured; but I had already given him enough false joys,

[1] In this church famous Carmelite founder Hermann Cohen delivered his first sermon as a priest.

[2] This statue is now venerated in the chapel of the Carmel of Lisieux and is installed over Thérèse`s reliquary.

and it wasn't my desires which could work a miracle, and a miracle was necessary for my cure. A miracle was necessary and it was our Lady of Victories who worked it. One Sunday during the Novena of Masses, Marie went into the garden, leaving me with Léonie who was reading near the window. After a few moments I began calling in a low tone: "Mamma, Mamma." Léonie, accustomed to hearing me always calling out like this, didn't pay any attention. This lasted a long time, and then I called her much louder. Marie finally returned. I saw her enter, but I cannot say I recognized her and continued to call her in a louder tone: "Mamma." I was suffering very much from this forced and inexplicable struggle and Marie was suffering perhaps even more than I. After some futile attempts to show me she was by my side, Marie knelt down near my bed with Léonie and Céline. Turning to the Blessed Virgin and praying with the fervor of a mother begging for the life of her child, Marie obtained what she wanted.[1]

[1] *Story of a Soul*, ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1974, p 65.

Thérèse's account of her childhood and of her parents and siblings is charming in the extreme, though it oozes the French sentimentality of the times that some readers have found difficult to take. However, a not uncritical portrait of Thérèse quotes this appreciation from one of Thérèse's first admirers and editors, Mgr. Thomas N. Taylor: "Among her pages of rare beauty, few are more beautiful than those which afford a glimpse into the home of her parents, Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin. They rival sometimes the finest French prose."[1]

Quoting from her mother`s letters written to her sister Pauline in the Story of a Soul, Thérèse has this first comment to make: "I loved Mamma and Papa very much and showed my tenderness for them in a thousand ways, for I was very expressive." [2]

Then Thérèse goes on to quote at length from her mother's letters. Zélie describes the antics of her youngest child. She recounts various incidents of naughtiness, such as the following:

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[1] *Two Portraits of St. Teresa of Lisieux*, Etienne Robo, Sands and Co. London 1957. P 17.

[2] Story of a Soul, p 17.

"Baby is a little imp; she'll kiss me and at the same time wish me to die. 'Oh, how I wish you would die, dear little Mother!' When I scold her she answers: ' it is because I want you to go to heaven, and you say we must die to get there!' She wishes the same for her Father in her outbursts of affection for him."

And again: "Your Father just installed a swing, and Céline's joy knows no bounds. But you should see the little one using it; it's funny to see her trying to conduct herself as a big girl. There's no danger of her letting the rope go. When the swing doesn't go fast enough, she cries. We attached her to it with a rope, but in spite of this I'm still uneasy to see her perched so high." [1]

Thérèse concludes: "With a nature such as my own, had I been reared by parents without virtue or even if I had been spoiled by the maid, Louise, as Céline was, I would have become very bad and perhaps have even been lost." [2]

When Thérèse discusses her childlike innocence we are seeing something of the handiwork of her parents and of the values and qualities they instilled into their children. In the bosom

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[1] Story of a Soul, p 17.

[2] Ibid., p 24.

of this happy family there was a conscious effort to reflect what was perceived as the glory and beauty, the peace and order of heaven itself, or of the holy family home at Nazareth. Perhaps no family has better reflected as they did, many years beforehand, the words of Pope Paul V1 on his historic visit to Nazareth:

> The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus – the school of the Gospel. First, then, a lesson of silence. May esteem for silence, that admirable and indispensable condition of mind, revive in us...A lesson on family life. May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character...A lesson of work. Nazareth, home of the Carpenter's Son, in you I would choose to understand and proclaim the severe and redeeming law of human work.[1]

The Martin children were taught to always turn to God, they were taught to recite pretty prayers and simple poems redolent of the

[1] Paul V1, "Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth", January 5th, 1964

future life. On one occasion Thérèse quotes a letter from her mother to Pauline, describing her youngest child:

> …She speaks only about God and wouldn't miss her prayers for anything. I wish you could see her recite the poems she learned. Never have I seen anything so cute. She gets the exact expression and tone all by herself. But it is especially when she says: 'Little child with the golden hair, where do you believe God is?' When she comes to the words: He is up there in the blue heavens, she raises her eyes with an angelic expression. It's so beautiful that one doesn't grow tired of asking her to recite it, for there is something heavenly in her face.[1]

Like her father Thérèse recalls how, from her tenderest years she exulted in the beauties of nature with an almost Wordsworthian intensity. With the soul of a poet she drank in the sight of fields "enameled with cornflowers and all types of wild flowers. Already I was in love with the wide-open spaces."[2] Chapter Two of the *Story of a Soul* opens with an account of the death of her mother when

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[1] Story of a Soul, p 29

[2] *Ibid*., p 29.

Thérèse was only four and a half years old. She shares her vivid memories of her mother's death: "No one had any time to pay any attention to me, and I saw many things they would have hidden from me. For instance, once I was standing before the lid of the coffin which had been placed upright in the hall. I stopped for a long time gazing at it. Though I'd never seen one before, I understood what it was."[1]

Later in Carmel Thérèse recalled her father taking her into the bedroom to give her dead mother a goodbye kiss. This extremely sensitive child, who like all children, would cry over a lost bauble, had now no tears to shed for such an incalculable loss. Somehow the child realized that it was grief at a deeper level; it turned her thoughts to the heavenly realm to where, she believed, her mother had departed. Having adopted Pauline as her second mother, Thérèse goes on to tell how life had to keep going in the absence of her adored mother. She describes her attendance at Sunday Mass, seated beside her 'King' who urged her to listen. (The preacher had referred to St. Teresa of Avila.) She writes: " I did listen carefully but I looked more frequently at Papa than at the

[1] *Ibid*., p 33

preacher, for his *handsome* face said so much to me! His eyes, at times, were filled with *tears* which he tried in vain to stop; he seemed no longer held by earth, so much did his soul love to lose itself in the eternal truths. His earthly course, however was far from completed; long years had to pass by before heaven opened to his enraptured eyes and the Lord would wipe the *tears* from his good and faithful servant!"[1]

For Thérèse each Sunday was a reflection of the eternal Sabbath. A true romantic like her father, Thérèse was touched with melancholy feelings when this day of heavenly rest was drawing to a close. Then it was back to the dreary round of work and study, the unhappy lot of exiles here below! Contrary to the experience of many children in our own days, Louis Martin epitomized for Thérèse the God whom Jesus revealed to us as 'Father.' Thérèse idolized her father. For her he was fit to be king, "King of France and Navarre." [2]

Chapter 6 of *The Story of a Soul* is devoted to the pilgrimage Thérèse, Céline and their father made to Rome towards the end of

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[1] *Ibid*., p 42.

[2] Henry 1V of France was also King of Navarre in Spain.

the year 1887. Humanly speaking it was *the* most memorable event in Thérèse's life. During the course of her trip she would drink in the beauties of nature so lavishly scattered among the Swiss Alps. She would marvel at the finest achievements of art and architecture in Paris, in the cities of Italy, and especially in the splendour of Rome. All this spoke to her of the glory and grandeur of God. Thérèse realized she was seeing all this magnificence for the first and last time. She mused that the memory of those lofty Alpine peaks soaring into the wide sky would stand her in good stead later, amid the confines of her narrow cell in Carmel. But other and greater glories beckoned: "(My heart) had contemplated earthly beauties long enough; those of heaven were the object of its desires and to win them for souls I was willing to become a prisoner."[1]

Thérèse also provides us a good description of her Father in the course of her narrative. Céline fills us in on details of the trip omitted by her sister. Certainly Louis went out of his way to ensure his daughters would derive maximum enjoyment from the trip. This

[1] *Ibid*., p 141.

in spite of the fact that he had already suffered his first stroke a short time previously and would have easily become fatigued.

The Cloister.

Thérèse entered the Carmel of Lisieux in April of the year following the pilgrimage, as she tells us in chapter 7 of the *Story of a Soul*. If the year 1888 signaled Thérèse's reaching her spiritual home, it also marked the beginning of the break-up of her earthly home with the collapse of her beloved father's health. The final chapter (8) of Ms. A, addressed to her sister Pauline, who was Prioress in the Carmel, briefly records the fact of her father's death in the words of a more than dutiful daughter: "Last year, July 29, God broke the bonds of His incomparable servant, and called him to his eternal reward…' The curtains had finally been drawn on the family love nest at "Les Buissonnets."[1]

[1] *Ibid*., p 177. The name means 'The Shrubberies.'

Chapter Three

A marriage made in heaven.

At midnight on Tuesday July 13, 1858, in the historic northern town of Alençon, Normandy, France, not far from the beautiful Perseigne Forest, Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin were united in the sacrament of marriage. The ceremony took place in the church of Notre Dame and together with the officiating priest, a few chosen friends were the sole observers of the scene.[1] The church

[1] The ceremony took place at midnight which was not uncommon in those times. See; *St Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Life, Times, and Teaching.* Edited by Conrad de Meester ocd. ICS Publications, Washington 1997.

ceremony was preceded by a civil marriage required by law, which had taken place at 10 p.m in Alençon City Hall.

1858 was also an historic year in terms of church life in France. In the extreme southern part of the country in the equally historic town of Lourdes, only two days later, quite remarkable events were unfolding. On July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, a young peasant girl, Bernadette Soubirous, said farewell to her 'beautiful lady' at the rocky grotto of Massabielle. But the story did not end there. Bernadette's mission and message for a sick, suffering and often searching humanity was about to begin.

Many years later Zélie, now a seriously ill mother stricken with cancer, would make a difficult pilgrimage to the shrine of Lourdes, desperately seeking a cure. There are other interwoven threads linking these events, involving the Carmelite family, which I will bring together in the course of our story.

Louis Martin.

Louis Aloys Stanislaus Martin was born to Captain Pierre and his wife Marie Ney,[1] on August 22,1823, in the city of

[1] One of Napoleon's generals was Marshal Ney who became Prince of Moscow. His eldest son Joseph Napoleon inherited the title. He once asked Hermann Cohen, a friend of his, to stand in for him

Bordeaux. The city sits on the Garonne river and is world famous for its fine wines. A shortened form of Baptism followed immediately for the new arrival, with a view to the ceremonies being “filled in” later when the absent army father returned home. This was not an uncommon practice in France at that time. However as his father was unexpectedly detained on his final round of duty on France`s military campaign in Spain, the ceremonies later went ahead without him.[1] After being based in Bordeaux, Captain Martin subsequently took a post in Avignon and Strasbourg respectively, and on retirement in 1830 returned with his family to his native Normandy and settled in Alençon. Back home in familiar surroundings he felt he might be in a better position to promote the welfare of his family. Louis was just over seven years of age. Not much is known of the boy`s early life; we know he received a good basic schooling with the Christian Brothers which enabled him to read and enjoy the classics of French literature. But he did not attend a high school. When he

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playing the organ for Benediction in a Paris church. This was the event that led to Cohen’s conversion to Catholicism.

[1] Pierre Martin was helping the French to shore up the efforts of Bourbon Ferdinand V11 to regain the Spanish throne.

grew up Louis took up the delicate craft of watchmaking, his first apprenticeship taking place in Rennes, capital of Brittany.

As well as applying himself to his chosen career, Louis tried to deepen his cultural pursuits. A keen romantic in a romantic age, the young man made it his business to study such exponents of the spirit of the times as the poet-politician Alphonse de Lamartine, as well as another famous writer, François-René Chateaubriand[1] and the churchman Archbishop François Fénelon, famous for crossing swords with his episcopal colleague Jacques-Benigné Bossuet. Louis was accustomed to decorating his home with texts from these writers, including some from Bossuet. Thérèse would later quote a line from Lamartine in her *Story of a Soul*: "Time is your barque and not your home."[2]

A stanza from Chateaubriand which Louis copied and displayed in his retreat might indicate a melancholy temperament;

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[1] Having recovered his Christian faith after an early lapse, Chateaubriand wrote the extremely influential, *Le Genie du Christianisme*, "The Genius of Christianity."

[2] *Story of a Soul*, Ch 4. ICS, Washington. In the original manuscript Thérèse had incorrectly quoted Lamartine, using "life" rather than "time". The full stanza is as follows:

"Man for a mortal time is nothing.
To mourn it is only foolishness;
he who hoards it, hoards distress.
Time is your barque and not your home.
Let us hurry to reach the endless goal".
(Chateaubriand, *Les Tombeaux Champêtres.)*

Here shelter'd at last from this world's storms,

He sleeps who long the plaything of their fury lived.

Grief made his heart his home,

And in the forest's deep retreat he needs must dwell.[1]

We know that the young Martin studiously compiled at least two notebooks with texts from these and other writers which he dubbed, "Literary Fragments."

Other texts favored by Louis were of an otherworldly variety that would go well on the wall of a monastic cell. "God sees me. Eternity draws near and do we think about it"? These and such like reflect the French spirituality of the period with its leaning towards the life to come.

A competent artist, a talent also passed on to his daughters, Louis cultivated his good baritone singing voice that would later thrill his youngest daughter. His repertoire was extensive and

[1] These lines in imitation of Thomas Gray's famous Elegy in a Country Churchyard, were probably written in London in 1796 when Chateaubriand served as French ambassador.. The Epitaph of Gray`s poem reads:
Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown,
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.
(A Quiller-Couch, 1919, Oxford Book of English Verse.)

included airs from current operas.[1] He was also a good storyteller and an excellent mimic, a trait he also passed on to his daughters.

The climate of the times.

During the nineteenth century in France political and religious life were in the melting pot and had been since the French Revolution in 1789. Subsequently major flashpoints occurred in the capital but on the whole Louis and his future wife lived their lives in provincial seclusion, though Louis lived through the revolution of 1848 in Paris. Generally speaking, ever since the Enlightenment, the Catholic church, especially in France, was often at the mercy of anticlerical and revolutionary forces. But like Poland and Ireland the faith was rooted in the hearts of the ordinary people who did not yield too easily and held on tenaciously to their faith.

It would seem that the Martin and Guérin families had no bone to pick with either church or state – particularly not with the former. Employed in the defense and expansion of their country, both Zélie and Louis's grandfathers, as noted, served with

[1] One of these was *Le Juif Errant*, an old story written up as a contemporary novel and turned into an opera by Halevy. Here again we have a link with the Carmelite Hermann Cohen who described himself as a 'Wandering Jew.' Cohen's former girlfriend Celeste Mogador made her debut in this play in Paris.

distinction and without question in Napoleon's armies. In regard to religious life they fitted seamlessly into the ancient Catholic tradition of France, the "eldest daughter of the church." They were very much at home with the *Ancien Régime* and would have wished it to continue.

Louis Martin was always a lover of nature – a badge of the romantic temperament, and this was also evident in his hobby - fishing, so much so he was referred to by neighbors "Fisherman Martin." We can suspect also that angling primarily suited his contemplative temperament. Later on in Lisieux, Thérèse always sat nearby on her own, "contemplating eternity" as she tells us!

Perhaps because of his love of nature, when, as a young man, Louis set out to try his religious vocation, he applied to the Augustinian priory of the Great St Bernard on the borders of the scenic Swiss-French Alps, which he had visited as a tourist two years earlier. The priory was famous for its Great St. Bernard mountain rescue dogs. These were reputed to scent out stranded tourists who would revive themselves from the little brandy keg tied around the dogs' necks! Although this detail can be disputed it is still a good story.

At the priory, however, Louis met with keen disappointment. The Prior advised him to go home and study Latin before being allowed to join. Louis applied himself to such studies with his local pastor for a while, but after a bout of illness or perhaps breakdown, he abandoned the idea of religious life. It looked as if he would have to be content to live a devout single life. In pursuit of his chosen craft of watchmaking, Martin returned to Strasbourg where he had relatives, and over a period of four years applied himself to his craft. Though demanding great precision and dedication, it was a profession that suited his artistic and methodical temperament. Martin availed himself of his stay in Strasbourg to acquire a working knowledge of German. He had of course lived here as a child for a short period in a military setting. At the end of this period Louis headed for Paris where he could no doubt better perfect his craft.

This was an interesting period of about three years for the young, handsome and unattached bachelor. Unlike many other young bloods, however, Louis Martin didn't gravitate to Paris to savour a bohemian lifestyle. But few in his position could completely escape the seduction of the "City of Lights." It was the era of the dandy and the "good time" philosophy of life. It's an

interesting detail that Hermann Cohen, a brilliant concert pianist, was at about the same time escaping the snares of a dissipated life to which he had succumbed in Paris. [1] As we shall see, though they never met, Cohen would have an indirect influence on the devotional life of the Martin family through his Eucharistic apostolate as a Carmelite priest. We know from Zélie's letters that Louis experienced the siren call of temptation in the capital. Writing to her brother Isidore on January 1, 1863 when he also moved to Paris to study medicine, Zélie admonished him rather moralistically: "(My husband) knows Paris, and he tells me that you`ll be up against temptations that you will find hard to resist because you`re not religious enough. He told me what temptations he had, and what courage he needed to overcome his struggles. If you only knew what ordeals he went through."[2] She goes on to exhort him to pray, especially in the church of Our Lady of Victories near his lodgings. [3]

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[1] Cohen later converted to Catholicism, then became a Carmelite friar. As such he helped in founding and restoring Carmelite priories in France. In 1862 he founded the present Carmelite church and priory in Church Street, Kensington, London.

[2] A Call to a Deeper love, p 2

[3] Isidore Guérin intended to become a doctor but for some unknown reason he cut short his studies and settled for being a pharmacist.

This letter indeed says it all. Louis's daughter Thérèse shows no real awareness of the lifestyle of many young women in Paris in the 19th century and yet she gives occasional hints that she was not entirely oblivious of it. For instance, her rather scrupulous cousin Marie Guérin, when on holiday in Paris, wrote to Thérèse, complaining of the 'nudity' that was everywhere in evidence, Thérèse showed herself most understanding and aware in the letter she wrote in reply. (Quote?) Did Louis, we wonder, ever communicate to his family of attractive daughters the perils of life in Paris? We don't know. In mid-century during the period of Louis's perfecting his craft in Paris, the best known courtesan in the capital was a girl called Marie Duplessis, like Thérèse born in Normandy. She enjoyed wealth and riches and the company of many of the celebrities of the day, such as Alfred de Musset, (who contributed to her wealth).[1] These young women were known as 'courtesans' or 'demimondes' and they inspired many literary and musical themes. Alexander Dumas Jr wrote the novel *Lady of the Camellias* which was the inspiration for Verdi's opera *La Traviata*. 'Camille' or 'Marguerite' was really Marie Duplessis, mistress of

[1] Celeste Mogador, like a true feminist before her time, once defied de Musset. When he `ordered` her to share a glass of absinthe with him she promptly threw it in the fireplace.

Dumas at that time and later of Franz Liszt, Hermann Cohen's piano tutor.[1] Duplessis died of tuberculosis at the age of 23, one year younger than Thérèse when she died of the same disease. Could this explain why another, more modern, tragic figure, Edith Piaf, was also devoted to Thérèse? Many of these young women experienced deprived or abusive childhoods, by contrast with that of Thérèse who grew up in a loving family. Some however survived and turned their lives around. Later on in the century one such Parisian courtesan joined a convent and took the name, Sr. Mary Magdalen of Penitence. Another, a former girlfriend of Hermann Cohen, Celeste Vénard, known as Mogador, afterwards redeemed herself by marrying a Count and became a prolific writer.[2] Apart from the obvious temptations of the capital, we know that Louis also declined membership of some secret society. He had been invited by some friends to join a philanthropic club but this seemed to be a front for the unknown secret society.

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[1] Du Plessis was famous for wearing a carnation all year round.

[2] Mogador, Céleste. *Memoirs of a Courtesan in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Translated with an introduction by Monique Fleury Nagem. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002.

Back in Alençon, after completing his apprenticeship to his chosen profession, Louis Martin acquired his first premises at 15, Rue de Pont-Neuf and here he set up business as a watchmaker. Later he added to this a jeweler's shop. Louis was a successful businessman and would make a desirable partner; he is known to have turned down at least one prospect of marriage. As a strict Catholic he refused to open his business on Sundays in spite of the financial loss incurred. Sunday was the only day on which hard-working country people would have the leisure to shop, and Martin would have foregone the business of many a romantic swain looking for an engagement or wedding ring for his beloved. The suggestion of friends that he open an existing door on a side street like many other shops, was not an option with Louis either – even with the approval of the local Abbé. For the Martins, Sunday was the day that most reflected the eternal Sabbath.

To his flourishing business, Louis added a three-storey hexagonal property known as the Pavilion outside Alençon that served as a place of retreat, reading and relaxation. The Pavilion became his spiritual den. He also had considerable investments amounting to 22,000 francs and after the death of his wife he was

able to retire and live comfortably on the interest. The properties he owned were free of debt.

Chapter Four.

Historical Setting.

It may be useful to view the broader context that framed the lives of the parents of St. Thérèse. People are influenced by their time, place and culture and the Martins could not have been an exception to this rule.

The 1789 Revolution was a cataclysmic event in French history and tremors kept on repeating themselves in the years following. 1848, ten years before the Martins were married was a year of further revolutionary change in France and beyond. It was referred to as “The Springtime of the Nations,” just as the modern uprisings in Middle Eastern countries are referred to as “The Arab Spring.” This revolution followed on from an earlier outbreak in 1830. In 1848, Louis-Philippe, the *Citizen King* was deposed and the Second Empire came into being under Louis-Napoleon, later known as Napoleon III. There was anarchy on the streets of Paris and countless people were killed in the bloodshed that followed. In somewhat mysterious circumstances, perhaps by a stray bullet, the Archbishop of Paris, Denis-Auguste Affre, was killed at one of

the barricades, while trying to negotiate a truce. The death of Archbishop shocked the great mass of Catholics who would not be aware of the exact circumstances of his death. We can be sure, that although somewhat removed from military action in the capital, loyal Catholics like the Martins and the Guérins deplored these events.[1] While all this was happening Louis and Zélie Martin were young, devout Catholics, Louis was 25 and Zélie just 19.

Normandy, and particularly Lisieux, was the scene of an enormous struggle between Catholics, usually royalists, and republicans, usually agnostic and atheistic and moreover profoundly anti-clerical. Two weekly newspapers, on different sides of the conflict, *Le Normand* and *Le Progrès Lexcovien* continually exacerbated tensions. The first of these represented a solidly right wing stance in defence of the Church, and the latter was left-leaning. Thérèse's formidable sister Céline persuaded her hesitant uncle Isidore Guérin to take over the management of *Le Normand* at one point, in order to defend the rights and reputation of the church.

[1] The archbishop had conferred the sacrament of Confirmation on Hermann Cohen some years earlier.

It could be said that at an earlier period in the history of France all bishops without exception belonged to the nobility – “Throne” and “Altar” went hand in hand. This criticism was justified and Church reform would have been in order but it never happened. The French Revolution should have provided the opportunity for the Church to radically examine its relationship with the secular powers. The American Revolution in 1777, not laboring under the burden of history, was in a good position to avoid this ancient pitfall and there was never any question but that Church and State should remain separate.

In France, on the other hand, religion and state were so intertwined that the Church was aggressively resisted on all sides – by republican revolutionaries, anti-clericals and anarchists of all hues. The future, of course, lay with those who favored separation of Church and State. In all the political upheavals in France, the Church (including Religious Orders) always fared badly. Church property was either destroyed or taken over and Church personnel exiled or killed. As in post-Reformation England, many religious and priests took advantage of the situation and left to get married. Popular writers like Victor Hugo attacked the Religious Orders with a venomous pen. According to him they were more than outdated

– they were a “wasting disease” and a parasite in the contemporary world. In his great novel *Les Misérables* he wrote: “A monastery in France in the middle of the nineteenth century is like a school of owls blinking in the sunlight.”![1] This, coming from Hugo, who professed to be a religious person – he went to hear the famous preacher Lacordaire in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris – doesn’t say much for the anti-religious people! Hugo’s sister, in fact, was a Carmelite nun in the convent of Tulle.

Zélie Guérin.

Louis' future wife Azélie-Marie Guérin, known as Zélie, was born on December 23, 1831 in the village of Gandelain, situated in the Orne district of Lower Normandy. In her letters in later life Zélie revealed that her early years were far from happy; her mother treated her harshly. She had an older sister, Marie-Louise (Elise) and ten years later a third child Isidore came along. He was the darling of his mother and the reprimands that Isidore might have earned were often doled out to Zélie instead. Perhaps as a reaction to her own experience in youth, Zélie Martin showered each of her children impartially with an abundance of love and

[1] Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables,* Penguin Books. London, 1988, p 1206. As a leading Romantic poet and novelist, Hugo was admired by Louis Martin who often quoted him.

affection. In 1844, the Guérins moved to Alençon, thus setting in train the sequence of events that led to the midnight ceremony in Notre Dame church.

Zélie and Louis were both brought up as devout Catholics and like her future husband, Zélie initially wished to enter a religious order. She applied to the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, known as the Lazarists, but was refused admission to the convent for health reasons, or perhaps through the behind the scenes intervention of her mother. Zélie`s older sister Elise had earlier entered the Visitation convent in Le Mans. One of the Martin daughters, Léonie, regarded as the black sheep of the family, eventually lived out her life as a Visitation nun. Léonie made more than one attempt at religious life but eventually succeeded, finding her niche in the Visitation Convent at Caen. As a problem child and less bright than her sisters, Léonie caused her parents much anxiety – the family usually referred to her as ‘Poor Léonie.’

When she realized that religious life was not for her, Zélie decided to train in lace making, becoming an expert practitioner of the famous and centuries-old 'Point d' Alençon' or *Dentelle*, a fine, almost spidery lace. She opened her own business at the age of

23 in 1853.

In 1858 Zélie acquired the custom of the Maison Pigache in Paris, a deal that had been arranged by her older sister Elise when Zélie herself got cold feet about a trip to Paris. Zélie's work was so acclaimed that she was presented with a medal in a public hall in Alençon around this time.

Like many people before and since, Zélie opened an office in the front room of her home which was on the Rue St. Blaise. She was also a good entrepreneur and engaged people to work from their homes and bring the finished piece to her. She would then arrange the pieces into the desired finished product with expertly disguised stitching. Here we find a modern model for working mothers. Zélie was no plaster saint but a career woman and, like the martyred Carmelite nun Edith Stein – St.Teresa Benedicta – something of an early feminist. Zélie and Louis would prove to be good employers, they paid their workers well, and treated them like members of the family.

Recalling Louis Martin's earlier decision to settle into a bachelor existence, another factor, however, was at work, and in this case it seems indeed that marriages are made in heaven. One

day Zélie Guérin had a chance encounter with the tall, handsome Louis on an Alençon bridge, the Pont St. Leonard, near his home. Not quite as romantic perhaps as Dante seeing Beatrice for the first time walking by the River Arno in Florence, but it appears to have been love at first sight. The convent reject, Zélie, had vowed to have as many children as possible, some of whom might succeed in religious life where she herself had failed; perhaps to crown it all she might produce a longed-for missionary priest.

A pious family tradition holds that Zélie had at least three unusual experiences in her life and they related to the choice of a career and the choice of husband, in that order. The third was in regard to an over-scrupulous concern she had about her deceased daughter Marie-Hélène; Zélie recalled that the child, less than five years old, had fibbed to her on one occasion.

Zélie was impressed by the serious demeanour of the young man she encountered on the bridge and an inner voice told her, ‘This is he whom I have prepared for you.' This unusual circumstance was reinforced by the watchful eye of Louis' mother Fanny Martin who had been impressed by Zélie in a more down-to-earth way: both attended lacemaking classes in Alençon. She felt Zélie would make a good daughter-in-law and a good match for

her 35-year-old son. Within three months the couple were married, which might be described as a whirlwind romance. In addition to a wedding ring perhaps, jeweler Louis gave his new wife a beautiful medallion depicting the marriage of Sarah and Tobias with the names “Louis Zélie” inscribed at the bottom. On the reverse side a French inscription read: “M L uni a G Z 1858.” A beautiful pattern of leaves ran round the circumference of the medallion. The theme would seem to have been carefully chosen in view of the peculiar circumstances of this marriage. Sarah and Tobias knelt down and prayed together on their wedding night:

> ….“Blessed are you O God of our ancestors, and blessed is your name in all generations forever. Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you forever. You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support. From m the two of them the human race has sprung. You said, `It is not that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.` I am now taking this kinswoman of mine, not because of lust, but with sincerity. Grant that she and I may find mercy and that we may grow old together.

> And they both said, Amen, Amen." Then they went asleep for the night.[1]

Louis Martin has sometimes been depicted as a kind of sentimental dreamer but the evidence shows that this was far from the case. As we saw, he was an outdoor type who held a gun license for shooting game; moreover he was a keen billiard player. He had a strong social conscience would often wade in to help people when circumstances demanded it. When he lived in Lisieux a fire alarm would sound in the town to alert able bodied men to come and assist in extinguishing fires. Martin always responded to this call, at one time rescuing an old lady from a burning shack across the street from his home – an Irishwoman of all people. Daughter Cèline describes what happened:

> One morning a fire was raging in the interior of a hovel opposite Les Buissonnets. He ran to the help of the poor inmate, an elderly Irishwoman, who was all alone in the wretched cabin, and put out the flames. In such cases he preferred to be alone and stopped others from shouting "Fire!", lest dishonest persons should come to steal. The

[1] *Tobit*, Chapter 8.vv 5b-9.(NRSV)

poor woman raised her arms to Heaven, begging God in her native tongue to pour down his blessings on her rescuer." [1]

A strong swimmer, Louis saved people from drowning on more than one occasion. And once his own life was in danger due to the panic that sometimes grips a drowning person causing them to obstruct the efforts of a would-be rescuer.

Martin was fearless in standing up for his Christian principles and ran the gauntlet of taunts and sometimes threats, when he gave public witness to his faith. During the trip to Rome Cèline and Thérèse declined to play a game of cards with fellow pilgrims. They were annoyed with the girls, but their father came to their defence. He suggested that seeing they were on pilgrimage, the people involved ought to pay more attention to prayer. This drew a withering comment from one of the party: "Thank God Pharisees are a rare breed." [2] Thérèse tells us that her father went out of his way to show friendship to his detractors.

Again, in the same vein, Louis once forcibly removed the hat from the head of an indifferent onlooker as a procession of the Blessed

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[1] The Father of the Little flower, *Cèline Martin*, Tan Books, 2005, p 18/19.

[2] Piat, p 313.

Sacrament was passing by on the street. This “dreamer” was able to run a successful business as a clockmaker and jeweler, and when he decided to give priority to his wife's lacemaking business, he was equally successful as an entrepreneur. He was also quite artistic and Zélie would defer to his opinion on lace designs. Conrad de Meester wrote: “In addition he reserved to himself the perforation of the designs into the parchment, very hard work, done over a cushion with a specially mounted needle.”[1] His expertise as a watchmaker no doubt facilitated this precision work. Martin traveled regularly to the big department stores in Paris securing orders for his wife’s lace products. They even numbered Napoleon III among their clients and indeed the lace was ideally suited to, and widely used for royal robes. As a result of all this industry he was able to set up a roomy middle class home for his family.

[1] *St Thérese of Lisieux, Her Life, Times, and Teaching*. Edited by Conrad de Meester ocd.ICS Publications, Washington 1997, p 26.

Chapter Five

A Fruitful Marriage in Context.

Zélie’s first surprise in her married life was to discover that Louis intended to live a celibate life as a kind of compromise for his

own failed vocation. To offset this they took in a child from a big family in the neighborhood after the mother died. Marital abstinence continued for about ten months until a priest persuaded Louis to alter course. He suggested that their marriage might be blessed by God with religious vocations. It should be stated though that in a much less enlightened age than our own many young women had led such a sheltered existence that they were ignorant of the facts of life. It seems that Zélie was one of them. This, notwithstanding the fact that Zélie had expressed a keen desire to have numerous children whom she would scrupulously teach to love God. So perhaps the ten months abstinence had a positive side in acclimatizing her to the realities of married life.

In his notes Louis had copied out a passage which referred to the true and valid marriage of Mary and Joseph and apparently intended this to be his model.[1] There may have been – paradoxically it might seem – a strong romantic element in his approach. In ancient romance literature and tales of chivalry the

[1] The Canon Law of the Church distinguishes in marriage the qualities of 'ratam et consummatum,' `ratified and consummated`, that is a marriage which has been celebrated in the church is valid even if not consummated. However in the latter case a marriage can be annulled if not entered into from a `spiritual` motive mutually agreed by the couple. Admittedly this sounds like the exception proving the rule if not smacking of Jesuit casuistry. (See Canon 1061,par 1.)

lady love is untouchable and worshiped at a distance.[1] It`s a further paradox that even Scottish-born Dr. Marie Stopes whose name is synonymous with birth control clinics, urged a certain amount of distance and romance in marriage. This is how she begins her book *Married Love,* published in 1918: "More than ever to-day are happy homes needed. It is my hope that this book may serve the State by adding to their number. Its object is to increase the joys of marriage, and to show how much sorrow may be avoided."[2] In the course of her book she visualizes separate beds and even separate bedrooms for the married couple so as to preserve a certain distance, mystery and romance that might otherwise be threatened by the messiness of being constantly thrown together. There appears to have been an air of knight-errantry in Louis' make-up that might have been reinforced by his delving into the Romantics.

However, after Louis' change of direction, in due course Zélie presented her husband with nine children, one almost every year, or more accurately, nine children in thirteen years. Of these,

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[1] One of his favorites was Lamartine, in whose novel, the hero 'Jocelyn' was a clerical student close to ordination. He had saved a girl from death and subsequently wished to love her like brother and sister. This could have had some influence over Louis Martin also.

[2] *Married Love*, Dr. Marie Stopes, (new edition), Victor Gollancz, London 1995.

Thérèse was the youngest; another four died in infancy. Of the four deceased, Marie-Hélène lived to be just over five years but died suddenly from unknown causes on February 22, 1870. Six months later Zélie gave birth to her eighth child, Marie-Thérèse-Melanie, but she too was marked out for an even earlier grave, as a result of abuse and neglect by her carer, as Zélie's weak health did not allow her to breast-feed her children. This heartless woman allowed the child to starve to death, which occurred on October 8, 1870. It was too late when the child's parents became aware of the neglect and brought her home. We can only imagine the grief that consumed her loving parents by this series of catastrophes. It needed all of their indomitable faith to see them through. Louis's cousin Henry de Lacauve was the intended godfather of this child but at this time he was a prisoner of war. The successive deaths of the two boys, both named Joseph, were a source of particular sadness for the parents as one of their most cherished desires was to have a son who might become a missionary priest. Even when expecting her ninth child, Zélie was hoping for a boy who would fulfill this role. What she got was the future Patroness of Missions throughout the Catholic world.

Externally, 1870 was a disastrous year for France and the French people. In July 1870 Napoleon III, urged on by parliament, rashly declared war on Prussia. France had been provoked by the astute Otto Von Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor as he became known. Louis Martin, given his military background, was willing to play his part in the defence of his country. In a letter to her sister-in-law Zélie observed on November 30, 1870:

> I'm worried and upset. However, I don't have as much reason to be, as do many others, because, in all probability, Louis won't leave, and my brother is even surer yet of staying. I thank God for that, but it's still quite possible that they'll make men between the ages of forty and fifty go. I'm almost expecting it. My husband is not worried about it at all. He would not ask for any preferential treatment and often says that if he were free he would join 'francs-tireurs.'[1]

In fact Louis did join a Defence Group which was made up of these "sharp-shooters" in the Perseigne Forest in an effort to monitor enemy movements.

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[1] *A Call to a Deeper Love, The Family Correspondence of the Parents of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus,* Translated by Ann *C. Hess,* St. Paul's 2011. P p 74/75. (*francs-tireurs'* means 'sharpshooters.)

After a series of setbacks and the siege of Metz, Napoleon was defeated and captured at Sedan on September 2, 1870. One of his generals, Marshall McMahon, of Irish ancestry and future President of the Republic, was wounded.[1] This marked the end of the Second Empire and would result in complete victory for the Prussians and a humiliating defeat for France. It led directly to the unification of Germany, as Bismarck had foreseen and schemed; it also led to dire consequences for Europe and the world forty five years later with the outbreak of World War I.

In the aftermath of this defeat a Government of National Defence led to the Third Republic set up in Paris on September 4. They decided to continue waging war, but were not very successful. The Prussians laid on the pressure by besieging Paris with heavy artillery. The blockade lasted from September 1870 to January 1871. As the Prussian stranglehold developed, the French Commander Adolphe Thiers, who headed the Third Republic, surrendered Paris to the Prussians on January 28, 1871. It was an unthinkable capitulation for the proud French.

[1] Patrice MacMahon was a descendent of the group known as 'The Wild Geese' who fled Ireland with the legendary Patrick Sarsfield after the Treaty of Limerick in 1691. Many of these soldiers attained fame and high position in much of Europe and the New World.

George Raunheim, nephew of Hermann Cohen, was serving in the French army and wrote to his uncle on January 8, 1871, three days after Bismarck had ordered the bombing of Paris: “If Prussia believes it can demoralize our people by the despicable bombing of women and children – the first time in history this has been done – it is much mistaken. In spite of the 396 victims, the courage of the Parisians, men women and children is admirable and indomitable.”[1]

A revolutionary group called the Commune disagreed with Thiers` surrender and they assumed control in Paris on March 28. In the previous month a group of 10,000 Freemasons had joined the revolutionaries with the aim of venting their hatred of the church.

Meanwhile The Martin family found themselves caught up in a war situation. A unit of the Prussian army was on the move westwards under Friedrich Franz II, Commander of the 13th Prussian Army Corps, and by January 1871 they captured Alençon. Local families in the area were forced to billet the soldiers, a force of 25,000. The inveterate letter writer Zélie wrote

[1] Dom Jean-Marie Beaurin, *Fléche du Feu*. P 371

to her sister-in-law on January 17, 1871. It was a long letter and I quote some extracts: “It was pitiful to see our poor soldiers returning, some without feet, others without hands. I saw one with his face covered in blood…..does it make sense, when we have so few men to fight against the enemy, to send them to the slaughter like that, against an army like this one we`ve seen with our own eyes? No one imagined what it would be like. The Prussians have a powerful war machine. It`s very ominous to see their battalions with black flags and a skull on their helmets.” [1] The same question that Zélie posed has been repeated too many times since by mothers, wives and sweethearts.

> *She continues*: “Monday, three o’clock, all the doors were marked with a certain number of enemy soldiers to be housed. A big sergeant came to ask us to inspect the house. I took him up to the first floor while telling him we had four children. Fortunately for us he didn’t try to go up to the second floor. Finally, they made us take in nine of them and we can’t complain.”[2]

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[1] Ibid., p 78.

[2] Ibid., p 78.

So as a result of her intervention, a reduced number, nine soldiers, were foisted on the Martins and though the soldiers refrained from violence of any kind, they were still capable of eating them out of house and home as Zélie wryly observed. “They swallow mutton stew as if it were soup.” [1] The Prussian officers were strict with their men and when Louis reported an attempted robbery in his shop by one of them, he went along next day to intercede for the culprit as he feared he would be executed as another soldier had been for stealing eggs. Louis had physically overcome the soldier and averted the robbery in his shop. Again it`s difficult to see here the person who has been so often described as a dreamer and a wimp. The war was taking its toll. Any concerned and distressed mother will empathize with Zélie’s further comment in the same long letter:

> The town refused to pay the amount (the Prussians) demanded, and we`ve been threatened with reprisals. Finally the Duke of Mecklembourg was happy with 300,000 francs for an enormous amount of material. All the livestock in the surrounding area were taken. Now there’s no more milk

[1] Ibid., p 78.

> anywhere. What will my little Céline do? She drinks a liter a day! And what are the poor mothers who have only small children going to do? Nor is there any meat in the butcher shops. In short, the town is in desolation. Everyone is crying except me.[1]

These events were contemporary with the final sacrifice of the Carmelite friar Hermann Cohen who exerted an influence on French spirituality and devotion through his Movement for Nocturnal Adoration to which Louis Martin was so dedicated. Martin would later start Nocturnal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Lisieux. Cohen's collection of hymns and canticles was widely used in France in the nineteenth century and the Martins would have been familiar with these. The themes of his work revolved around devotion to Jesus present in the Eucharist, to Mary the mother of Jesus and to his Holy Childhood. These were also the themes that recur in the message of St. Thérèse.

At this very time Hermann Cohen was sent to minister as chaplain to the French prisoners of war in Spandau prison, near

[1] *Ibid*., p 79

Berlin. He undertook heroic and selfless work seeing to their spiritual and material needs. He died in this very month of January 1871, two days after the new German Empire had been declared.

Cohen had caught smallpox from one of the sick soldiers. Ironically it was the Archduke of Mechlembourg-Schlerin, grandfather of the Prussian Commander at Alençon in the current war, who had provided the young Cohen with letters of recommendation to his ambassador in Paris when the brilliant young pianist went there to further his career.

Napoleon III's Second Army of the Loire was defeated near Le Mans in January 1871 and this spelled the end for French resistance and the beginning of the Prussian advance through Brittany. At this point many Catholics believed there was divine intervention through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. It happened at Pontmain, near Laval. The people had been praying for protection. Prayers were being offered in the Church of Our Lady of Victories in Paris for the cessation of the war. At this point an apparition was reported reminiscent of that at La Salette in 1846 or Lourdes itself in 1858. On the evening of January 17, some children asserted the saw a "beautiful lady" and beneath her feet they read the message, "Pray children, God will hear you

soon. My son will show mercy." On the night of the apparition, General Von Schmidt, commanding the Prussian 20th Division, received the order to withdraw.

Legends soon grew around the inexplicable event. Schmidt himself was reported to have said: "We cannot go further. Yonder, in the direction of Brittany, there is an invisible Madonna barring the way."[1] Zélie broke the news to her husband: "The Blessed Virgin has appeared at Pontmain. We are saved."[2] Here we have a typical example of the unquestioning acceptance on Zélie`s part of reports of contemporary spiritual marvels. Ten days later an armistice was signed between France and Prussia. Zélie Martin`s trust in the power of Mary`s intercession was admirably justified.

Zélie Martin would have made a good war correspondent as we have seen. She provides a lot of fine and even humorous detail about these events in her letters at this time. The Martins showed remarkable courage and faith in this war situation. When peace of a sort returned life resumed as normal for the Martin family. Louis Martin, like many others, probably lost a considerable amount of

[1] The Glories and Triumphs of the Catholic Church, Benzinger Brothers, 1907.

[2] Piat, *The Story of a Family*, p 90.

his investments due to the uncertainties of war. An enormous amount of money was exacted from the conquered French by the Prussians. France was also forced to cede most of Alsace and parts of Lorraine to the new Germany. However, money was never a big issue for this family and they seemed to continue to live in comfortable circumstances.

During the course of the following year Zélie was expecting her ninth and last child. As it turned out this child would be the reason why we are honouring her parents in the first place. On January 2, 1873 Zélie gave birth to this latest child who would be called Thérèse in honour of her tragic sister who had died prematurely and needlessly two and a half years earlier. The rest is history.

Unrest in France continued unabated. Again Zélie Martin comments in a letter to her sister-in-law on May 29, 1871: “Everything that’s happening in Paris fills my soul with sadness. I just learned of the death of the Archbishop and sixty-four priests

who were shot yesterday by the Communards. I'm very, very distressed by it."[1]

The atrocities in Paris stemmed from political unrest within the population that had been simmering for many years. During the Industrial Revolution hoards of people from the provinces descended on Paris but there was not sufficient work to be found and disaffection soon followed. The Commune was mercilessly suppressed by the government during the Bloody Week of May 22 – 28. Those associated with the Paris Commune were known as Communards and 20,000 of these and their supporters were executed by the National Assembly army. Another 7,500 were imprisoned or exiled.

[1] This was Archbishop Georges Darboy shot with the priests and a number of other hostages, *A Call to a Deeper Love*, p 83.

Chapter Six.

The Family Hearth

The Martins were a most devout family and strong Christian values were inculcated in the children from their earliest years. The girls grew up in an atmosphere more like that of a fervent convent or monastery than a typical home. Their prayer lives centred on the Eucharist. They rose for 5.30 a.m Mass each day and followed a regimen of family prayers and devotions, listening to daily readings from Dom Gueranger's classic leather-bound fifteen-volume *The Liturgical Year*. This monumental work had pride of place on a sideboard in its own bookcase in the Martin household. Gueranger was a friend of Zélie's sister Elise, known as Sr. Marie-Dosithée who was a Visitation nun in Le Mans. Gueranger lived there for a while, and esteemed Elise as an outstanding religious. He was a

pioneer of liturgical reform in the French church in the nineteenth century.[1]

The Feasts of the Liturgical Year figured prominently in the Martin family and reference to them came readily from Thérèse's pen. She equated the feasts with Sunday rest, and they were for her another reflection of the eternal feast of heaven. Here again we have a hint of the romantic and melancholy streak in Thérèse's character. Another book that made it to the Martin reading list was a richly illustrated edition of *The Imitation of Christ*, and appropriately enough for a watchmaker, *The Clock of the Passion*. It is likely that *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Père Jean-Pierre de Caussade was further favorite. [2]

As a couple, in many ways Zélie was the more practical of the two. She was a strong woman and had decided ideas on training her children. We have only to look to Zélie if we wondered how her second daughter Pauline became such a forceful woman, who stood up to prelates and potentates when she considered her

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[1] Gueranger restored the Benedictines to France setting up the famous Abbey of Solesmes with its great tradition of Gregorian Chant..

[2] In her *Memoir* of her father, Céline also mentions the works of St. Alphonsus Ligouri, as well a History of France, a History of the Church, a History of the Empire and others.

sister's posthumous interests at stake. On the other hand Louis was a doting father who indulged his daughters and thought up exotic names for them. It`s apparent that he tended to spoil Thérèse whom he called variously his 'Little Queen' or 'The Orphan of the Berezina,'[1] although she herself denied that he spoiled her. She returned the compliment as we saw, by naming him 'King of France and Navarre.'

Such intimate family stratagems indicate that the Martin family were firmly based in the Monarchist tradition and they would not have welcomed the rising proletariat tide. If there was any tension between the couple it would have stemmed from the fact that Zélie realised that all children are not just little angels in disguise but need correction from time to time. Indeed she recognized that Thérèse herself was the most stubborn, obstinate and self-willed of the lot. At the same time she surmised that these traits could be channeled into achieving sainthood for the youngest of her children. We know all this because Thérèse's mother was a

[1] Berezina was a river in Belarus and the story of the orphan would have been familiar to Louis Martin as it figured in Napoleon`s Russian campaign. It involved a small child being abandoned by his mother in the frozen wastes, but was rescued by members of the army.

prolific letter writer who has minutely chronicled her children's early lives.

In a letter from her mother to Pauline that Thérèse quotes in the first chapter of her *Story of a Soul*, Zélie admitted that on one occasion she had to 'correct' Thérèse who was throwing a tantrum. The French term is 'corriger,' but Pauline, in her customary way, later changed this to 'raisonner' meaning to 'reason.' In the context the original word 'correct' seemed to imply 'spanking' or corporal punishment, which would explain why Pauline wished to water down her mother's expression.

True Love.

There was an unshakable bond of affection between this married couple. When absent from home they were in the habit of writing to each other frequently. We have very few of Louis's letters as he was not, unlike his wife, a keen correspondent, so it`s worth quoting one of them:

> Dearest, I cannot arrive at Alençon before Monday. The time passes slowly, for I long to be with you. I need not say I was very pleased to receive your letter, except that I

see by it that you are over-tiring yourself. So I recommend calm and moderation, above all in your lace work. I have some orders from the *Compagnie Lyonnaise.* Once more do not worry so much. With God's help, we shall manage to keep a nice little home. I had the happiness to communicate at Our Lady of Victories, which is like a little Heaven on earth. I lit a candle for all the family intentions. I kiss you all lovingly, while awaiting the pleasure of rejoining you. I hope Marie and Pauline are very good!

Your husband and true friend who loves you forever.

(Signed) Louis Martin.[1]

This was not written in the first flush of wedded bliss, but after five years of marriage and the birth of several children. 'The time passes slowly, for I long to be with you.' How many wives could only dream of having such a loving husband, who would sign off as 'your husband and true friend who loves you forever.' Here we have the ideal of Christian marriage writ large. This explains also why it's so important that in these times such a marriage

[1] Mongin, Hélène, *Louis and Zélie Martin*, Chapter 2.Edition de L'Emmanuel, Paris, 2008.p 31.(My translation)

should be showcased for the Catholic world. While it's a pity we don't have more of Louis' love letters to his wife, we can safely assume that the above example encapsulates what lost or unwritten letters may have contained. In Zélie's case there is no such dearth of material. With her tendency to more feminine self-disclosure, without counting her prolific output, Zélie obviously basked in the sunshine of her husband's love. Like any loving couple they couldn't bear to be apart; she was almost physically sick as a result. Again like a loving woman she wondered what her husband was doing at any given time of the day when they were not together. This extract from one of her letters says it all: "I'm longing to be near you, my dear Louis. I love you with all my heart, and I feel my affection so much more when you're not here with me. It would be impossible for me to live apart from you." For once the cliché, 'absence makes the heart grow fonder' rings true.

Here we are not dealing with world-renowned lovers in fact or fiction – Napoleon and Josephine, Victoria and Albert, Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde – love affairs where God seems to play no role. In the case of Zélie and Louis, their love would have made no sense to them if God or Christ didn't enter the equation. This is perhaps the main reason why their canonization is of such

significance for the present day. Not only are two people being canonized, but their marital love and fidelity are likewise being canonized. The married love between Zélie and Louis Martin, involving, as it does, intimate personal and sexual relationship, is now at last being endorsed by the Church – for the first time. This is long overdue. It means that the passionate search for God that should characterize every genuine Christian life is not impeded, nor is it compromised, by the most intimate human relationship. Nor, *pace* St. Paul and countless spiritual writers through the ages, is the heart divided and only half given to God, if given to a spouse in the mutual surrender that constitutes Christian marriage.

Sadly this idyllic family would experience deep tragedy and irreparable loss, but without the attendant despair of many doomed human love affairs – again either in fact or fiction. Zélie and Louis Martin enjoyed their married life for just over 19 years – July 13, 1858 – August 28, 1877. While the cross was not absent from the start – three children already dead in infancy and one at a mere five years – its shadow lengthened.

As a child Zélie had injured her breast against the corner of a table and apparently the injury later developed into cancer. It`s not clear why treatment was not sought in time and the young mother's

health deteriorated. Zélie had referred to the problem several years earlier and even contemplated having an operation to remove the tumour, but for some reason this was never carried out. Possibly, like many mothers in a similar situation, she simply carried on, prioritizing the needs of a young family to her own.

Seeking a miraculous cure, Marie, Pauline and Léonie took their mother to Lourdes in June 1877 and they stayed for a week, but the family were disappointed that it did not result in the desired cure. It had been a nightmare pilgrimage replete with mishaps, including bad accommodation and indifferent food. Indeed the journey to Lourdes aggravated Zélie's illness, especially after she sustained a nasty fall. Contrary to present usage of a quick dip in the baths, on her fourth visit to the baths Zélie was immersed in the icy water for fifteen minutes. She was disappointed not to meet the parish priest Abbé Peyramale with whom she had corresponded beforehand, but he was away at the time. It is more than likely that the person Zélie met and spoke to about Bernadette and the apparitions was Antoinette Tardhivail, the parish priest's housekeeper. She had been an eye-witness of some of Bernadette's apparitions and had reported them to him. The woman gave Zélie an account of what she saw, especially the

incident where Bernadette allowed a candle to burn right down to her fingers but showed no distress. Meeting this lady provided Zélie with a happy recollection afterwards of her visit to Lourdes.[1] A forlorn husband and his youngest daughters met the returning pilgrims at Alençon Railway Station. To her family's obvious disappointment, the resigned mother countered with Our Lady's words to Bernadette, inscribed in French on the balustrade of the Basilica, 'I do not promise to make you happy in this world but in the next.'

Like so many other heroic and unselfish mothers before and since, Zélie Martin's only desire was to have a few additional years so as to bring up her children under a mother's watchful eye. As the disease progressed on her return from Lourdes, her pharmacist brother Isidore, on being asked, told her frankly, "you have no more than a month to live," though in fact she lived about two months. One could wonder why Isidore did not provide his sister with some painkilling drugs. She suffered terribly in her final months and days. What a marvelous counter witness she gives to the euthanasia enthusiasts of today.

[1] Antoinette tried to repeat this experiment with Bernadette in the sacristy but the girl withdrew her hand very quickly!

And seeing the inevitable ahead, like so many other mothers in similar circumstances she mused: “what will become of poor Louis and his five girls? However, I leave them all to God.”[1] She knew she could depend on her brother and sister-in-law to help after “her departure,” but the family would need to move to distant Lisieux, but this was by no means assured at that particular time. Isidore even tried to force the issue, reinforced by his wife`e insistence. In a letter to her sister-in-law Zélie mentions that: “ Your letter has indeed touched me, as has that of my brother. Tears came into my husband`s eyes. He is astonished at your devotion, and I assure you that it comforts me greatly when I consider my departure from this world, to think of the help my dear children will have in you. As for going to live in Lisieux, my husband says neither `yes` nor `no.` We must leave it to time.” [2] This indicates that Zélie didn`t underestimate the wrench a move to Lisieux would mean for Louis. He had lived in Alençon for most of his life, including many happy years there with Zélie. He had a large circle of friends, most of them, like himself, deeply committed to the local church and associated groups within it. While he recognized the

[1] Piat: *Story of a Family*, p 219.

[2] Ibid., p 219.

attraction of being close to his extended family this was only one *pro* competing with many *cons*.

Zélie died on August 28, 1877. Thérèse was less than five years old. Indeed time did resolve the immediate problem, for after Zélie's death Louis sold his house and business and moved to Lisieux, to the north of Alençon, to be near his in-laws, the Guérins who ran a pharmacy in the town.

Chapter Seven

Life in Lisieux.

Settled in at Lisieux, Louis Martin continued to live an exemplary Christian life as he did in Alençon, looking after his family with the help of his eldest daughters Marie and Pauline, who efficiently took over the management of the household. Louis was most charitable to the poor or to any good causes that were brought to his attention. He was an active member of the recently founded St. Vincent de Paul Society.[1] He helped establish Nocturnal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Lisieux. Here I would like to draw attention again to the founder of Nocturnal Adoration of the Eucharist for men which became a key devotion for Louis Martin. Carmelite friar Hermann Cohen, mentioned several times previously, was instrumental in founding the movement for Nocturnal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in France, which was later to become a very popular institution.

[1] The Society was founded by contemporary Frederic Ozanam, now Blessed, a remarkable layman, historian and a Professor at the Sorbonne.

The first official meeting for Nocturnal Adoration took place on December 6, 1848 in the Basilica of Our Lady of Victories. There is a marble plaque in the Basilica attached to the pillar near the altar of St Augustine, recalling the first meeting for Night Adoration and its founder.[1]

As already pointed out the church of Our Lady of Victories was Louis Martin's favorite refuge for prayer during his time in Paris and on subsequent visits. He introduced his family to this church also which he regarded as heaven on earth. Thérèse herself passed over the glories of Paris and Notre Dame to sing the praises of this little church which for her was the jewel in the crown of Paris. On November 4, 1887, she visited there with her father and sister Céline during their pilgrimage to Rome. She wished to thank Our Lady for her intercession at the time of her unexpected recovery from mysterious illness.[2]

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[1] The inscriptions runs: "The movement for Exposition and Night Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris was inaugurated in this church on December 6 1848 through the efforts of Father Hermann and Monsignor De La Bouillerie, then Vicar General of the Diocese of Paris." Later he became Bishop of Carcassonne.

[2] *Story of a Soul*, John Clarke *OCD*, Ch. 6, The Trip to Rome(1887) ICS Publications, Washington DC, 1996. Martin arranged for the family to stay in the nearby Hotel de Bouloi so as to be near this church.

It was because of the connection with St. Thérèse that Pope Pius XI raised the church to the rank of basilica in 1927. Bronze panels around the altar depict various figures associated with the Eucharist and two are devoted to Thérèse and Hermann Cohen, her Carmelite brother. It depicts him holding a chalice and host accompanied by a colleague and with a pipe organ in the background suggesting his musical accomplishments. It is indeed a fitting tribute to two Carmelites whose memories are enshrined in this place of prayer. This unprepossessing church is the most frequented shrine of Our Lady in the whole of Paris.

Thérèse and her family, however, managed to get in some sightseeing of a more secular kind during the course of their pilgrimage. They visited the fashionable department store *Au Printemps* on the Boulevard Haussmann. Thérèse drew on her experience to illustrate a point of doctrine in her 'Litle Way.' Here she had her first taste of a ride in an elevator.[1]

She writes:

[1] *Printemps* means 'Spring' but there are sculpted figures of the four seasons on the façade. The full name of the store, 'Grand magazines du printemps' is written on the façade. The cupola has beautiful stained glass, which like that at Chartres, was dismantled and stored for safekeeping during WWII. The store is linked to the firm of Gucci.

> We are living now in an age of inventions, and we no longer have to take the trouble of climbing stairs, for, in the homes of the rich, an elevator has replaced these very successfully. I wanted to find an elevator which would raise me to Jesus, for I am too small to climb the rough stairway of perfection.' [And she concludes] ' The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain little and become this more and more. [1]

Another component of Thérèse's doctrine is linked to Venerable Leon Dupont. He was a remarkable man who has some points of similarity with Louis Martin. Dupont was certainly venerable looking in life. Just one year after the birth of, their only child Henrietta, his wife Caroline died. For the rest of his life Dupont devoted himself to prayer and works of charity. Like Martin he was a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and contributed large sums of money to it. In 1849, inspired by the example of his friend Hermann Cohen he established Nocturnal Adoration of the Eucharist in Tours. Apart from his other charitable activities, Dupont is perhaps best known

[1] *Story of a Soul*, Ch. 10, p 207.

for his impact on spreading the devotion to the Holy Face of Jesus. He is sometimes called the Apostle of the Holy Face. On July 8, 1848 a Carmelite nun, Sr. Mary of St. Peter died with a saintly reputation in the convent at Tours.[1] Thérèse and her sisters acknowledged that they inherited their devotion to the Holy Face from Mary of St. Peter as transmitted by Lisieux foundress Sr. Genéviève. Dupont, became interested in Sr. Mary's visions and promoted the devotion. Thérèse drew comfort and strength from this devotion at the onset of her father's mental illness, especially in the context of his "veiled face." She added the title "and of the Holy Face" to her existing title of "Thérèse of the Child Jesus." Thérèse's sister Céline painted a remarkable picture of the Holy Face, drawing on the recently available photographs by Secondo Pia, the first person to photograph the famous Shroud of Turin.

Hermann Cohen, who helped restore Carmelite priories for men in both France and England, composed several collections of hymns. One of these collections was called "Thabor" and they were based on Eucharistic themes. One hymn was entitled:

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[1] An account of her life published in English in 1938 carries the subtitle, 'A forerunner of St. Thérèse of Lisieux.' The Carmel of Tours was first founded by St. Teresa's friend, Blessed Anne of St. Bartholomew.

The Little Flower of the Divine Prisoner.

(Words and music composed by Hermann Cohen ocd)

Between two cold bars, there grew a humble plant

that charmed away the cares of a poor prisoner.

It was the sole happiness of his suffering soul,

The only pastime of his dismal abode! .

"Under the dark walls of his somber retreat,

His hand had planted it. ..his tears had watered it!

And as reward for his cares, he saw the poor little thing

Give him in return, its scents and its flowers.[1]

Some of these hymns were composed by Cohen at the desert house he established at Tarasteix near Lourdes around the time the apparitions to Bernadette took place. We will remember of

[1] *Letters of St. Therese of Lisieux, Volume 11 (1890-1897) Trans. John Clarke,ICS Washington*.P 1277. *The Little Flower of the Divine Prisoner*. Here again we have a clear spiritual link between Hermann Cohen and Thérèse of Lisieux. Thérèse mentions a picture prayer card she had on this theme given her by Pauline, though she does not quote the hymn. The sentiments of the hymn were very much her own, however, and indeed in popular devotion she has been best known as the Little Flower.

course that some years later in another part of France, Thérèse of Lisieux would refer to herself as the Little Flower. Her autobiography begins with the words, “The springtime story of a little white flower.” The idea of Jesus being a “prisoner of love” in the tabernacle would have appealed greatly to Thérèse’s romantic nature. There are secular love songs with this title. One of her poems indeed treats explicitly of this theme:

‘A speck of dust (not more) I’ve made

My place – from which I do not stir –

The sanctuary’s holy shade,

So close there to love’s prisoner.’[1]

Céline gave Thérèse a picture with this theme on the occasion of her retreat for First Communion.

Thérèse’s devotion to the Eucharist was typically Carmelite, a devotion Carmelites inherited from the one they call their Holy Mother, St.Teresa of Avila. Hermann Cohen himself had an

[1] *Collected Poems of St. Thérèse of Lisieux,“* The Atom of Jesus-the-Host”, translated by Alan Bancroft, Gracewing 2001.

extraordinary devotion to the Eucharist and referred to himself as a ‘convert of the Eucharist.’

In his work of Eucharistic Adoration Hermann Cohen enlisted the support of like-minded people like Cyrille de Bengue who organized Eucharistic devotion on September 6, 1878 in a little temporary chapel on the hill of Montmartre, the highest point in Paris. This was the period when the great basilica known as Sacré-Coeur was being built on this site. It was a mark of national reparation in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war. Thérèse would later send her gold bracelet to be used in the fashioning of the tabernacle of the new basilica. The historic pilgrimage to Rome made by Thérèse, Céline and her father was officially launched from Sacré-Coeur which was partially built at the time. She would have inherited her love of the Eucharist from her father who, as we noted, attended Nocturnal Adoration of the Eucharist whenever possible. He continued this practice when he moved from Alençon to Lisieux and had his monthly hour of “watching” scheduled at his local church.

Naturally we might expect that in a house like that of the Martins, members of the clergy would gravitate there. One frequent

clerical visitor was the eminent Jesuit, Almire Pichon who became Thérèse's spiritual director. [1]

Decline in health of the Patriarch.

Losing three of his five daughters one by one to the convent was a severe trial to a devoted father, though it should be said that the sacrifice was made willingly and heroically. Like his wife Zélie, Louis Martin was not spared the cross. On May 1, 1887 Louis suffered an initial stroke from which, however, he made a good recovery. This was shortly before his youngest daughter followed her sisters to Carmel. It has been noted that when he was 54 he had a mishap while out fishing. Piat writes: "Stung by a venomous fly, he had neglected the puncture. The infection had spread, and behind the left ear a painful sore formed which, years later, thanks to treatment equally barbarous and mistaken, spread until it was the size of the palm of his hand, and healed very slowly."[2] One wonders if this had something to do with the initial stroke.

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[1] He had already directed her older sisters. According to Marie Martin, her father considered him "the friend and director of the Martin family."

[2] Piat, *Op. cit.*, p 339.

Louis' behaviour became somewhat erratic and he began to hallucinate. On June 23, 1888 he made his escape to the port of Le Havre. Apparently he got the idea that it would be a good thing to get completely away so as to allow his daughters to follow up their vocations. After an anxious three-day search the family received a telegram from Le Havre asking them to come and collect him. Céline and Isidore Guérin immediately went to fetch him home. Then on August 12 he suffered a further stroke and his mental health also began to deteriorate. On one occasion he grabbed a revolver, which he wouldn't put down, thinking he was defending his daughters. In view of this situation his brother-in-law Isidore Guérin, who had disarmed him with the help of a friend, insisted he be hospitalized. They managed to get him out of the house as if for a walk and then took him to the mental hospital Bon Sauveur in Caen, stopping at Lisieux on the way where he saw only Pauline.

We must consider the stigma attached to mental illness at that time if we are to appreciate the heavy cross endured by his devoted daughters. In addition there were whisperings from relatives and friends about his "mystical ravings" and it was suggested that losing his daughters to the convent had triggered

the whole thing. Isidore Guérin, fearing that Louis would give away all his money, arranged for a lawyer to have him sign a document renouncing administration of his affairs. The sick man was heard to comment, “Oh, my children are abandoning me.” Here the white-haired and venerable patriarch appears as a forlorn figure slightly reminiscent of King Lear losing his grip on reality. Though unlike Lear, two out of three of whose daughters abandoned him, Louis’ troubled mind convinced him his daughters had done the same. It was far from true of course but you cannot communicate that to one in whom ‘the tempest in the mind’ got the better of his judgement. He must have felt like King Lear out in the physical tempest, ‘contending with the fretful elements.’

In the *Story of a Soul* Thérèse recalls a kind of premonition she experienced at one time when she had a vision of her father at their home. Louis was away on a business trip to Alençon at the time, but in her vision he appeared to be wandering through the garden with his face veiled. In fact as his illness got worse Louis would sometimes cover his head in this manner. Ironically when Thérèse had her mysterious illness at the age of ten, Louis’ first reaction was that she was going insane.

This is how Thérèse recalls the scene later:

I had permission to be with Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, and we were talking as always about the things of the other life and our childhood memories. I recalled to her the vision I had seen at the age of six or seven, and all of a sudden, while I was describing the details of the strange scene, we understood simultaneously what it meant. It was indeed Papa whom I had seen advancing, bent over with age. He was bearing on his venerable countenance and white hair the symbol of his glorious trial. Just as the adorable Face of Jesus was veiled during His Passion, so the face of His faithful servant had to be veiled in the days of his sufferings in order that it might shine in the heavenly Fatherland near its Lord, the Eternal Word!' [1]

Their father's mental illness was one of the greatest trials Thérèse and her sisters had to suffer. Céline and Léonie accompanied their father to Caen and stayed for some time with the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. However they were only allowed to see him once a week, though they came to enquire

[1] *Story of a Soul,* pp 45-46.

about him every day. In spite of his wandering mind, the patient was extremely docile. He continued with his devotions and received holy communion devoutly whenever possible.

At the insistence of their uncle, though not immediately, the daughters agreed to bring their father back to Lisieux but there was little they could do for him. After almost three years, in view of his increasing frailty due to paralysis, it was decided that Louis might safely return. On May 10, Isidore Guérin went to Caen and brought his brother-in-law back to Lisieux. On May 12 he was able to visit the Carmel for a bitter-sweet reunion with his daughters – for the last time. At first he stayed with the Guérins but in July was able to move into a new home in the Rue L'abbey with his daughters Léonie and Céline. On May 27 an additional stroke paralyzed Louis' left arm and he received the last sacraments. Then on June 5 he suffered a heart attack.

Isidore Guérin had inherited a magnificent château on 100 acres of ground. It was called "La Musse" and was situated in the district of Evreaux. It was decided to take Louis there the following month. They were able to wheel him out to view the surrounding scenery which of course he loved. There in La Musse Louis

suffered a final heart attack and died peacefully on July 29, 1894 in the presence of his daughter Céline and the devoted Guérin family.

Chapter Eight.

A Daughter`s Testament.

It seems appropriate to add to this account of the life of Thérèse's parents something of Thérèse's own spirituality which must inevitably reflect the values they imparted to her. It is almost universally agreed that the message of St. Thérèse of Lisieux marks a watershed in Christian spirituality. Certainly with regard to how we look at the lives of saints there is BT and AT – Before Thérèse and After Thérèse.

Before Thérèse, saints were people to whom all kinds of marvelous things happened – there were almost daily revelations of one kind or another. And of course they invariably were members of Religious Orders, the exception being saints like the secular priest St. John Vianney. In addition to extraordinary spiritual experience, even more emphasis was placed on a severe regime of extraordinary penance. Self-inflicted corporal punishment, deprivation of sleep and rigid fasting were regarded as the stock in trade of sainthood in those times. We see this in the life for instance of Henri Lacordaire, the great Dominican preacher of Notre Dame in Paris, and also in the practices of St. John

Vianney, the Curé d'Ars, patron of parish priests. This was just some decades before Thérèse's time. Lacordaire was happy to have morning prayer at 4 am every day, though to be fair to him the General of the Order tried hard to impose a 3 am rise in Dominican houses.

After Thérèse, people began to realize that you can become a saint by simply doing the ordinary, mundane chores of everyday life for the right motives, and you need never be blinded by heavenly spotlights as you go about your daily business. Now her insights have been blindingly verified in the canonization of her own parents, precisely as a loving couple completely committed to family life. Children imbibe manifold impressions and values from the example of their parents lives. Though Thérèse`s mother died when she was extremely young, still as a precocious child she could have assimilated an unknown quantity of material in those first tender years. We will probably never know to what extent her life and message were influenced by them. It`s true that her father Louis had a longer-lasting influence on her up to the time she entered Carmel as a fifteen year old, but with Pauline as her second mother, the pattern of ordinary loving family relationships continued unabated after Zélie`s death.

Thérèse has presented the Catholic world with a blueprint for holiness, bringing the possibility of sainthood for all into the light of day. She shifted the focus from the traditional bias to the life of the cloister to that of the family hearth. Thanks to her, the prayer, the suffering and the endurance of her parents Louis and Zélie now shine forth in their own light and in their own right and not in the reflected glory of their saintly daughter. A Church which has too long neglected the quiet heroism of the hearth is now in a position to make amends.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux has had a phenomenal appeal to people of all kinds since her death in 1897. Under obedience to her Prioress, Mother Agnes – her sister Pauline - she wrote an account of her childhood in the privileged home set up by her saintly parents. The account lead up to her entrance into Carmel and subsequent Profession. Later she wrote a second account of her life in Carmel for Mother Gonzague who had succeeded Pauline as Prioress. Thérèse included in the manuscripts an account of her teaching which became known as the “Little Way”, a way of confidence and trust and of total surrender to God`s merciful love. When this was published after her death it was read by millions and eventually translated into over forty languages.

The fact that recourse is taken to her doctrine in many documents of the ordinary Magisterium of the Church is a sign of the ecclesial reception of the saint's teaching, especially when speaking of the contemplative and missionary vocation, of trust in a just and merciful God, of Christian joy, of the vocation of holiness. The presence of her doctrine in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" is a testimonial to this.

The section on prayer in the "Catechism" opens with a quotation from Thérèse:

> For me prayer is an aspiration of the heart, a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and live in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites it to Jesus. (Chapter 11.)

So she has certainly changed things. The Carmelite writer , Conrad de Meester puts it this way; 'How could we forget how much we owe St. Thérèse for her contribution in leading us back to an understanding of God as a loving father, the true face of God as revealed by Jesus in the Gospels."

As we try to measure the impact of St. Thérèse of Lisieux in our times, we need perhaps to look at her story in the context of her age – 19th century France.

It is in this context that we view the phenomenon that is Thérèse of Lisieux. Thérèse has long since captured the hearts of the Catholic faithful. Countless people have made the pilgrimage to her shrine in the Carmel of Lisieux where she lived and died. It should be said perhaps that this conservative Normandy town was somewhat removed from the turmoil on the streets of Paris in earlier times. Just before her time monasteries and convents were making a comeback in France. The famous preacher Henri Lacordaire restored the Dominican Order in France also. An exiled Spaniard , Fr. Dominic Arbizu y Munarriz began the restoration of Teresian Carmelite Friars to France in 1839, by opening the first house in Bordeaux..He would later be greatly helped in his work of restoration by the famous convert Hermann Cohen.

The Carmel of Lisieux was founded from the convent of Poitiers in the previous year 1838, possibly without state

authorization, like dozens more throughout France. The authorities tended to turn a blind eye to such developments. This was a mere 50 years before Thérèse entered as an novice in Lisieux. Mother Genévieve was a member of the first community. Although she was not the founding Prioress, but rather Subprioress and mistress of novices, she made a great impression on Thérèse who mentions her quite a bit in the Story of a Soul. She had in fact succeeded Mother Elizabeth the foundress as Prioress early on, as Elizabeth had died many years before Thérèse entered. Genéviève was regarded as the real founder of the convent. Thérèse`s sister Céline became known as Sr. Genéviève in succession to the revered founder, thus inheriting her name and that of the illustrious patron of Paris. The convent buildings themselves were only completed about ten years before Thérèse`s entry, the parlors and chapel had not been built in her time.

It is not possible of course for everyone to travel to Lisieux , but Thérèse, in her own way has solved this problem - she goes on pilgrimage to meet the people themselves. Amazingly too, the relics of her parents have followed suit, having been venerated in

France and recently in the Diocese of Portsmouth in the UK. The pilgrimage will go on.

It`s no surprise that `relationship` is one of the buzz words of our time. It is at the root of much that emerges from the media and all that is represented by the word `Hollywood`.Thérèse revels in the mystical truth that God has "need" of us. The late Sebastian Moore OSB from Downside Abbey in England remarked that Thérèse`s spiritual experience could be described using Paul Tillich`s dictum about God as the ultimate ground of all being; Moore suggests that her experience was that of "having the ground of my being desire me." [1] Thérèse must surely have imbibed from an early age the unconditional love of her parents with the unspoken message that we cannot earn love, only accept it gratefully.

[1] The quote is from his short book called `The Inner Loneliness.`

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