

## CHAPTER TWENTY - TWO – VOCATION OF THERESE, HER LOVE FOR CELINE

EMBOLDENED by her first success, Therese had now only one wish to do all she could for the conversion of sinners. For a time she was full of the idea of going on the foreign missions, but remembering Pranzini's conversion, she understood that souls are saved chiefly by prayer and sacrifice, and made up her mind to be a Carmelite.

Another reason which helped her decision was that Carmelites pray particularly for priests, and there seemed to her to be no greater and nobler vocation than to consecrate one's life to helping the ministers of God. Though barely fourteen, she wanted to set to work at once and to enter the Carmelite convent the following year on Christmas night, the anniversary of her great victory. But would her family consent to her going so young? She was not afraid of what the Carmelites themselves would say. Mother Prioress was quite willing to receive her, and Sister Agnes of Jesus encouraged her, but she dreaded grieving Celine. The two sisters had no secrets from each other, and it seemed almost impossible to break the ties which bound them so closely together, Celine, however, had already guessed the intention of Therese, and, far from opposing it, she did all she could to help her to carry out her plan.

But there was still her father to tell, and this was the hardest trial of all. How could she tell him his "Queen" was going to leave him when he had already given three of his children to God? Before confiding her secret to him, she prayed a great deal and waited for the Feast of Pentecost, asking the Holy Spirit to inspire her what to say. Her opportunity came in the evening after Vespers. Monsieur Martin was sitting in the garden, and from the expression on his face she could see that his heart was full of peace.

All around was calm and beautiful, the tall treetops gilded by the rays of the setting sun, the birds twittering their evening hymn. Without a word she sat down beside her father, her eyes already wet with tears. He looked at her lovingly. "What is it, little Queen? Tell me," he said. And as if to hide his own feelings, he rose from his seat and walked slowly up and down, holding close to him his last and dearest child. Through her tears Therese told him that she wanted very soon to become a Carmelite. He listened, and his tears fell too. He did not try to turn her from her vocation; he simply pointed out to her that she was very young to take such an important step. But she pleaded her cause so eloquently that he was completely won over, and answered as a saint would have done. Wishing to turn the conversation a little from the painful subject of their separation, he picked a tiny white flower and explained to her how God had made it grow and blossom by giving it cooling dew and the warm rays of the sun. And Therese thought she was listening to the story of her own life. . . How much she must have loved Our Lord to have been ready for His sake to leave her father! Even when she was a baby she could not bear to think that he would die and go away from her. And now she was asking to be separated from him. But his consent did not finally decide her future.

Her uncle, Monsieur Guerin, had also to be consulted, and he was at first very much opposed to her going. He gave way at last, but no sooner was this difficulty overcome than another arose—the Superior of the Carmelites refused to receive her till she was twenty-one. He said, however, that he was only the delegate of the Bishop, and that his decision

would be altered if she could obtain his lordship's permission.

It was raining in torrents when poor Therese left the Superior's house. She had always noticed that when she was sad the sky wept in sympathy with her, and when she was happy it was blue and cloudless. Her father could not console her. At last he suggested that they should go together to Bayeux to visit Monseigneur Hugonin, and she gladly accepted the offer. To look older than she really was, she put up her hair, which usually fell in curls down her back. It was an anxious moment when she, who generally left all the talking to her sisters, found herself in the presence of the Bishop, explaining to him the object of her visit. Monseigneur hesitated, and suggested that she ought to stay a little longer with her father. But Monsieur Martin came to the aid of his "little Queen," saying that he intended shortly to take her on a pilgrimage to Rome, and that if his lordship could not give the desired permission, they would ask it of the Pope. The Bishop was as much touched by the generosity of the father as by the earnestness of the child; but he let them go without giving a definite answer. It seemed to Therese as if all her hopes were now shattered forever, but in spite of her grief there was peace in her heart, because she trusted Our Lord and only wanted to do His Will.