

Chapter Three – The Early Childhood of Therese – Her First Victory

Little Therese, having been so long in the country, took some time getting used to the town. She would scream loudly when fashionably dressed ladies came near her, and if they wanted to take her in their arms they had first to remove the offending hat, because she had a special dislike for hats. She kept her smiles for people dressed like her peasant friends.

But soon she became at home, and all her love centered on her mother. She followed her about everywhere, in the house and in the garden, and never liked to be parted from her. She would not even go upstairs alone without stopping on each step and calling: “Mamma”; and if her mother did not answer immediately, “Yes, darling,” she would refuse to move.

Once, when her mother was telling her how God rewards good children, and how, in spite of His kindness, He is obliged to punish the naughty ones, Therese answered:

“I know what I should do if I had been naughty! I would hide myself in your arms, and you would hold me so tight that God would not be able to take me from you.”

She seemed so convinced that she would be safe from punishment if she took refuge with her mother that Madame Martin’s thoughts turned to Our Blessed Lady, and she resolved to inspire the child with a great love and trust for her Heavenly Mother.

Therese had such an affectionate nature that she could not bear to think she had caused her parents the least pain, not would she be parted, even for a short time, from those she loved. Marie used to give Celine lessons, but she would not let Therese stay in the room, fearing this would distract her pupil. The little one, however, begged so hard to be with Celine, and promised so earnestly to be good, that at last she was allowed to come. Marie gave her beads to thread and some pieces of stuff to sew, and she sat on a little stool as quiet as a mouse. If her needle came unthreaded, she did not say a word, but big tears would fall silently until Marie came to the rescue and made her happy by rethreading the needle.

She did not enjoy any treat which she could not share with Celine. Once, when she was only two or three, she went to see her aunt, a Visitation nun, who gave her a pretty basket full of sweets decorated with two sugar rings. Therese immediately decided that one of these rings must be for Celine, and was full of delight at the thought of giving it to her when she got home. But alas! on the way, she upset all the sweets, and the precious rings were lost. Bitter lamentations followed, because she had, after all, no present for her sister.

While Therese was away in the country, Madame Martin constantly recommended her to the protection of her Guardian Angel. He gave proof of his watching care after his little charge had returned home.

One morning Madame Martin had gone out, according to her custom, to hear an early Mass, leaving her baby daughter, then only fifteen months old, fast asleep in her cot. What was her astonishment on her return to find the child on a chair beside the bed, still sleeping peacefully, while the cradle lay overturned on the floor! It was humanly speaking impossible to explain how she had escaped being hurt by the fall, or who had put her on the chair. The only solution seemed to be that her Guardian Angel had taken care of her. But though our good Angel accompanies us everywhere, there is often a wicked spirit who hover round us trying to make us do wrong.

One of his first attacks on little Therese was by tempting her to vanity when she was barely three years old.

She and her sisters had been invited by a friend to spend the day in the country. Madame Martin told Marie to dress Therese, and to put on her best frock, which had short sleeves. But on second thought she said:

“No, put on another frock; it is too cold for her to have bare arms.”

Therese at once felt the call of temptation. She wanted very much to wear the best frock, for she said to herself:

“I should look ever so much prettier with bare arms.”

But while the bad Angel was whispering thoughts of vanity, her good Angel was speaking gently to her heart, and his voice prevailed. Therese let herself be dressed without a word.

She had won her first victory, and her Angel thanked God for the grace given her.