

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN – OUR LADY'S SMILE

There had been for many years in the Martin family a statue of Our Lady, which they valued very highly. Where it originally came from is not known, but it had been given to Monsieur Martin, when a boy, by an old lady, who had the reputation of being a saint.

It was not like an ordinary plaster statue, and though not very big, was so heavy that even a strong person found it difficult to carry. Morning and night prayers were always said before the statue, to which the whole family had a great devotion. In fact, the hands had been kissed so often that some of the fingers had had to be replaced several times.

Every year when the month of May came round, the children would gather flowers in the country, and Our Lady's altar was beautifully decorated with snowy hawthorn branches. Little Therese was delighted at this; she used to clap her hands and jump for joy as she looked at the statue.

Madame Martin always said that no one would ever know all she owed to Our Lady, and after her death, when the family were moving to Lisieux, their first thought was for this great treasure. They took it with them to "Les Buissonnets," and it was placed in the room in which they assembled every day for prayers. Therese occupied this room all the time she was ill, and the statue stood beside her bed on an altar decorated with blue hangings. When the pain was less acute, she loved to weave garlands of daisies and forget-me-nots for Our Lady, and she often looked at the statue and prayed to be cured.

One day, in the month of May, when she was very much worse, her father came into the room in great distress. He gave Marie some money, and told her to write to Paris for a Novena of Masses to be said at the shrine of Our Lady of Victories to obtain the cure of his poor little Queen.

During this Novena, on Sunday, May 13, 1883, Therese became so ill that she did not even recognize her sisters. Marie felt sure she was dying, and throwing herself on her knees before the statue she implored Our Lady's help with the fervor and insistence of a mother pleading for her child's life. Leonie and Celine joined their prayers with hers, and the sick child begged her Heavenly Mother to have pity on her. It was a united cry of faith which forced the gates of Heaven.

Suddenly, the statue seemed to be alive. . . . Our Lady came towards the bed. Her face was indescribably beautiful, but it was her wonderful smile which filled Therese with joy. Like the warm rays of the sun after; a storm, it shone on the little sufferer. At once all her pain and weariness vanished, and she knew she was cured.