

October 1, 2026

Feast of S.

Theresa of Lisieux

There are various aspects in Theresa's spirituality. One, of course, is her relationship to God as to a very loving and caring father. Another one of Theresa's spirituality is the theme of "littleness".

Theresa's language was the language of a young girl of a certain epoch, not particularly attractive to men of another age. When it is found attractive, it runs the danger of leading to a romantic mystique of childhood fostering immaturity and childish irresponsibility. But that was not Theresa's spirituality. Behind her language, certainly too sweet (at least to my taste), is a very keen awareness of the radical demands of Jesus' Good News.

In the society in which Jesus lived, and which was extremely conscious of social classes, the dominant value, even more important than money, was prestige, which, of course, was intimately related to power. And it is in that context that Jesus presents the child as a model. The disciples, like everyone else, were concerned about "greatness". They ask Jesus which of them will be the **greatest** in his Kingdom. Jesus takes a little child and says : "Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".

The child is a live parable of "littleness", the opposite of greatness, status and prestige. Children in that society had no status at all, they did not count. For Jesus, it was to such as these that the kingdom belonged. There is no evidence whatsoever for the popular opinion that the image of the little child for Jesus was an image of innocence, of candor. In fact Jesus was very well aware of the immature and irresponsible perversity of children at times and He uses this very trait in a parable in which it is the Pharisees who are being compared with children -- the parable of the children in the market place who refuse to play either the joyful game of weddings or the mournful game of funerals (Mt 11:16-17).

But the little child who is an image of the kingdom is a symbol of those who have the lowest places in society, the poor and the oppressed, the prostitutes and tax-collectors -- the people whom Jesus

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often called the little ones or the least. Jesus' concern was that these little ones should not be despised and treated as inferior. His concern was also that no one of His disciples would seek rank, and prestige, and power. The kingdom of His dream was a society in which there will be no prestige and no status, no division of people into inferior and superior. Everyone will be loved and respected, not because of education or wealth or ancestry or authority or rank or virtue or other achievements, but because he/she, like everybody else, is a person, a son or daughter of God.

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