

CHAPTER TWELVE – HOW THERESE SPENT HER HOLIDAYS

You know, children, that to become holy, God does not only ask us to make "acts" of mortification. He wants us to do our ordinary actions well. For instance, if you are having recreation or holidays you may enjoy yourselves thoroughly, but without forgetting that you belong to God. More than this, you should make use of these amusements to raise your hearts to Him. If this seems difficult to understand, I will explain what I mean by showing you how Therese spent one of her holidays.

Thursday was always a great day with Therese. It was a holiday for her and for her confidante and playmate, Celine. Celine was now old enough to be at school at the Benedictine Convent, and though she came home every evening, it was almost bedtime when she had finished her homework, and poor Therese saw very little of her. The two children, therefore, longed for Thursday, when they could be together.

One Thursday was to be a whole holiday, and they were told overnight that there was to be a picnic party. It was barely seven o'clock when Pauline came to call her "little girls," but they were already wide awake, and jumped out of bed, bubbling over with joyous anticipation. They made their morning offering, dressed quickly, and then said their prayers. The sun was shining brilliantly, and everything promised a hot day. As soon as breakfast was over, they slung their baskets over their shoulders and set off in the highest spirits. Along the road they picked flowers under the hedgerows, and all at once they found a nest in the bushes. As Therese was too small to see, Pauline lifted her up, and she parted the hedge carefully, holding her breath so as not to frighten the baby birds.

"Would you like to take them home?" asked her father. "They are starlings; you could put them in the aviary with the other birds."

Therese became thoughtful for a moment. She was very fond of pets. She had doves, parakeets, canaries, bullfinches, and linnets in her aviary, and some goldfish in a glass bowl. These little starlings would get on so well with the other birds. But then it would never do to take them from their mother. Therese instinctively protected everything weak and helpless. She was afraid of hurting even an insect, and left the nest untouched.

They continued their walk, and as Therese looked at the woods and meadows, she seemed to hear them telling her of the goodness of God, and of His uncreated loveliness reflected in the beauty of creation.

"Only think," she exclaimed—"God has made all this out of nothing, just to make us happy! I do love Him!"

At last they found a splendid place both for lunch and fishing in a meadow by the side of a broad stream. The walk had sharpened their appetites, and they were not slow to unpack their hampers. But Therese did not forget to say her grace. After a merry lunch they all

wandered off in different directions to amuse themselves as they liked. Therese spent her time trotting to and fro between her sisters, gathering armfuls of flowers, or sitting beside her father trying to catch minnows with her own little rod.

Finally, she settled herself apart on a grassy bank, and gazed in silence at the landscape before her. Her thoughts turned to her mother in Heaven, and she began to understand that this earth, in spite of its loveliness, is only a place of exile, a path leading to the land where everything is far sweeter and more beautiful, and where the happy days will last for ever. She had felt like this once before when outfishing with her father. In spite of her enjoyment there had been the same sense of disappointment. The jam sandwiches, prepared by Pauline, which had been so fresh and tempting in the morning, were stale and uninviting when lunch time came. This somehow made earth seem sadder, and Therese began to see that only in Heaven will there be perfect joy.

But the picnic seemed likely to end in disaster, for during the afternoon a storm had been gathering, and now suddenly burst. Monsieur Martin caught up his little daughter and carried her away from the trees, which he feared might attract the lightning. As he was crossing the meadow, a thunderbolt fell close to them. But Therese was not at all frightened, for she knew she was in God's hands as surely as she was in her father's arms. The storm soon passed, and tired and happy they returned home through the fields, on which the raindrops were sparkling like diamonds in the sun.