

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN – THERESE PREPARES FOR HER FIRST COMMUNION

IMMEDIATELY after this marvellous recovery, the whole family went on a visit to friends at Alencon. During her stay, Therese was kissed and made much of by everyone, and provided with new amusements every day. At ten years old the heads of little girls are easily turned, but Therese's illness had made her more thoughtful. She understood better now, the vanity of earthly things, and in spite of the fun time she was having at Alencon, her one desire was to return to "Les Buissonnets" to prepare for her First Communion. How she longed to receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament!

When quite a tiny child, if she saw her sisters going to Midnight Mass, she would beg them to take her with them, so that she too might receive "little Jesus." Her delight was unbounded when Celine made her First Communion. Therese had still four years to wait before the great day came for her, but she did not think it was too long to get ready for Our Lord. She began her preparation with Celine, and shared the instructions, given by Pauline, who had not yet entered Carmel.

Therese's longing to receive Jesus grew so intense that, happening one day to meet the Bishop of Bayeux in the street, she forgot her natural shyness and was going to run up to him to ask if she might make her First Communion before the fixed age, when Marie held her back. Her elder sister wished to teach her not to ask so long months had to pass before her desire was realized.

She used the time well, and made a number of little sacrifices. These she offered to the Holy Child as so many flowers which were to become a soft cradle for Him to rest in when He visited her heart. A few months before her First Communion, she counted these "acts" and marked them down in a little book which Pauline had sent her from the Carmelite convent. Among the "acts" there was one very hard one which Therese had to make everyday. She was so fond of reading that she could have spent the whole day with a book, but her sisters had decided that half an hour a day was quite enough therefore, as the time was up, she would promptly shut the book even if she were in the middle of a most interesting passage.

She did many other things to please Our Lord. Often, at the school recreation, she would give up her favorite games and play those which the others liked. At table, if she did not care for what was put before her, she ate it without making any fuss, and never grumbled if she did not get what she wanted. One day her father told Celine that he would allow her to have drawing lessons. Then, turning to Therese, who had long wanted to learn drawing, he added: "And what about you, little Queen? Would you like to have lessons too?" Before she had time to answer an eager "Yes," Marie said:

"It would not be worth while; she has not the same taste as Celine."

Therese need only have said a word and her request would have been granted, but she wanted to give Our Lord a very big "act," and so she kept silence. . .

When Pauline entered Carmel, Marie became Therese's new "little mother." Every day she would take Therese on her knee and speak to her about her First Communion. She told her that all the happiness of her life on earth would depend upon that great event. One evening, she spoke so earnestly about the value of suffering that all at once Therese felt a great desire to suffer much, that she might give God every possible proof of love. She used to meditate a great deal, and would often hide herself in a corner of her room, which she could shut off with the bed-curtains, and there reflect on the swift passing of this life and on Eternity. She called this "thinking." "I am only just eleven," she would say to herself, "yet already I have lost my mother, Pauline has gone away, and soon my other sisters will go too. Life is only a dream, a kind of anteroom where we get ready to appear before Our Lord. I will not waste my time on silly trifles, but I will try and have my soul very beautiful when my turn comes."

Such serious thoughts did not make Therese any less a child. It is true she had become more reserved since her mother's death, and she was so extremely sensitive that the smallest thing would make her cry. But she was ashamed of this weakness and set herself bravely to fight against it and to strengthen her will.