

CHAPTER NINETEEN – FIRST COMMUNION TRIALS

THE First Communion day dawned at last, bright and cloudless. It was Thursday, May 8, 1884. Therese, who had made the retreat as a boarder at the Abbey, woke very early and sat up in bed, her heart beating with joy. She kept saying to herself over and over again:

"Today! Today! It has really come."

When it was time to get up, she was dressed in her snowy white frock, and with her little companions in procession to the chapel. She never forgot the impression made on her by the beautiful hymn which was sung just before Communion:

Who can describe the sweetness of Therese's first meeting with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! She had waited long for Him, and now that He had come at last her happiness was so great that she could not keep back her tears. Her companions, much surprised to see her cry, said to each other afterwards:

"What was the matter with Therese? Do you think she was afraid of having done anything wrong? Perhaps she was crying because her mother and the Carmelite sister she is so fond of were not there."

They did not understand it was the joy which Our Lord had poured into her heart which had overflowed in tears. She could not possibly be sad because her mother was not there, for Heaven had come to her with Our Lord, and she felt that her mother was very near to her. Neither was she crying because she missed Pauline. In fact, she was more closely united to her sister than before, for at the very time that Therese made her First Communion, Pauline was professed as a Carmelite nun, and gave herself to Jesus for ever. Therese was perfectly happy, and even the beautiful presents she received did not take her thoughts away from Our Lord.

Another great event of that memorable day was her Consecration to Our Lady. Probably because she was motherless, Therese was chosen to recite the act of Consecration in the name of her companions. She said it very earnestly, asking her Heavenly Mother to take the place her own mother and to keep her safe from harm. In evening, Monsieur Martin took his "little Queen" to Carmel. There she saw Pauline, and her happiness was complete as she thought that the day would soon come when she would join her "little mother" and make ready for Heaven by her side.

From the time of her First Communion little Therese was to receive Our Lord, she prepared for all her Communions with the greatest fervor.

On June 14 of the same year, she was confirmed, and that day, too, left ineffaceable memories behind. On one occasion, during the preparatory Retreat, Therese seemed lost in

thought. Celine asked her what she was thinking about, and she poured forth in burning words all she felt about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul. As she spoke, such a light shone in her eyes that Celine could not meet her gaze, but had to lower her own. But these bright days were not to last. Therese had asked for suffering, and Our Lord was about to grant her prayer.

All at once her mind became filled with darkness— that is, with terrible scruples which never left her any peace. Her simplest actions and thoughts seemed to her to be sins, and made her miserable and unhappy. She, who was later to attract so many souls by her loving confidence in God, became troubled by constant fears. Her only comfort during this sad time was her sister Marie, whose wise advice she obediently followed. But even this help she was not to have long.

On October 15, 1886, Marie went to join Pauline in the Carmelite Convent. Therese was then thirteen and a half. When Marie left, she cried as if her heart would break. What would happen to her now that she had no one to guide her and take charge of her soul? In her grief she turned to her baby brothers and sisters in Heaven, for she felt sure that they, who had never known trouble or fear, would pity their sister who was suffering on earth. Her prayer was answered. Suddenly the heavy cloud of sadness lifted, she saw clearly again, and her soul was once more filled with peace. It was God's reward for her obedience and her trust in Him.