

SECULAR ORDER ANNUAL RETREAT 2009

**Fr Matt Blake OCD**  
Marist Centre, Nympsfield  
27th – 31st July 2009

**Therese of Lisieux: her relics arrive in England**

The Retreat opened in the Chapel with a short talk followed by Compline. The following psalm and stanza from the Spiritual Canticle of St John of the Cross were given us to reflect and pray on.

Preserve me God, I take refuge in you  
I say to the Lord: You are my God.  
My happiness lies in you alone.

He has put into my heart a marvellous love  
For the faithful ones who dwell in his land.  
Those who choose other gods increase their sorrows.  
Never will I offer their offerings of blood,  
Never will I take their name upon my lips.

O Lord it is you who are my portion and cup  
It you yourself who are my prize.  
The lot marked out for me is my delight  
Welcome indeed the heritage that falls to me.

I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel,  
Who even at night directs my heart.  
I keep the Lord ever in my sight  
Since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm.

And so my soul rejoice, my soul is glad;  
Even my body shall rest in safety.  
For you will not leave my soul among the dead,  
Nor let your beloved know decay.

You will show me the path of life,  
The fullness of joy in your presence,  
At your right hand happiness for ever.

*(psalm 15/16 – Evening Prayer I, week 2 Sunday)*

**The Spiritual Canticle (Stanza 27)**

There he gave me his breast:  
There he taught me a sweet and living knowledge;  
And I gave myself to him,  
Keeping nothing back;  
There I promised to be his bride

Excerpts from p.580-583 (Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez OCD – Collected Works of St John of the Cross) from the introduction and commentary on this verse by John of the Cross, quoted in part by Fr Matt (to set our hearts aflame and know what awaits us in the days to come!)

‘in this interior union God communicates himself to the soul with such genuine love that neither the affection of a mother, with whom she so tenderly caresses her child, nor a brother’s love, nor any friendship is comparable to it. The tenderness and truth of love by which the immense Father favours and exalts this humble and loving soul reaches such a degree.... ‘

In this communication of love, he exercises in some way that very service that he says in the Gospel he will render to his elect in heaven; that is girding himself and passing from one to another, he will minister to them (Luke 12:37). He is occupied here in favouring and caressing the soul like a mother who ministers to her child and nurses it at her own breasts. The soul thereby comes to know the truth of Isaiah’s words: *you shall be carried at the breast of God and upon his knees you will be caressed (Is.66:12)*

In this stanza the bride tells of the mutual surrender made in this spiritual espousal between the soul and God, saying that in the interior wine cellar of loved they were joined by the communication he made of himself to her, by freely offering her the breast of his love in which he taught her wisdom and secrets, and by the complete surrender she made of herself to him, keeping nothing back for herself or for any other...

The sweet and loving knowledge that she says he taught her is mystical theology, the secret knowledge of God that spiritual persons call contemplation. This knowledge is very delightful because it is a knowledge acquired through love. Love is the master of this knowledge and what makes it wholly agreeable. Since God communicates this knowledge and understanding in the love with which he communicates himself to the soul, it is very delightful to the intellect, and it is delightful to the will since it is communicated in love which pertains to the will. Then she says: and I gave myself to him, keeping nothing back’.

As Carmelites preparing for the visit of Therese’s relics we recognise that this psalm was lived by her, as was the Spiritual Canticle – which she loved dearly (she copied much of this and other extracts from the writings of John of the Cross into various notebooks during her short life) her delight was in God – during this Retreat we will spend time in prayer and focus our hearts on God – the One who loves us – Therese delighted in everything that came her way – it was a discovery of what God was doing in her life.

## **TUESDAY 28<sup>th</sup> July morning talk**

Visit of Therese – we need to reflect on the deeper significance of her visit and her message – how might we prepare ourselves – our spiritual preparation – if we look at the Gospel of John from last Sunday Chapter 6 verses 1-15: we get some insights.

‘Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee-or of Tiberias-and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave by curing the sick....looking up Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip: ‘where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?’ he only said this to test Philip: he himself knew exactly what he was going to do’....

Every place visited by the relics has brought many more people than expected. In this Gospel incident we have five thousand householders, with their wives, children and others, probably more than twenty thousand. It is a big moment for them all – they have left work, home and their everyday lives for a good reason. When Jesus saw them coming, they were like sheep without a shepherd – he feeds but their hunger was not really for bread or fish but for something deeper. This

hunger had been awakened by the disciples – indirectly stories and rumours were going around about Jesus – here too we have a deep spiritual hunger which is awakened by the visit of the Relics. Unexpected people come for unexpected reasons – this phenomenon of the Relics Visit helps people to become aware of their inner hunger – not easy to become aware of spiritual hunger, we try to cover it over – some touch, glimpse or experience of God makes people aware – a heightened awareness becomes a decision to leave home – not like going to a football match – the people are all there before Jesus arrives – they were propelled by an inner call – curiosity, the lure of love – force within brought them there. People’s inner hunger awoken – why are you here, something, some urge, some impulse brings them to Therese too. She awakens a spiritual hunger. In the Gospel, the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus had compassion on them and taught them all day – what he taught them we are not told – deliberately left out – what matters is that Jesus understood – more important than ideas, words, philosophy – Jesus understands his people’s hunger and Therese too understands – we can see from Therese’s writings, from her letters that she understands the person she is writing to. Jesus had compassion, he sees the pain, hears their cry. The disciples flounder, don’t know how to cope or what to do next. “Give them something to eat” says Jesus, “We cannot, say the disciples!” Jesus provides – with a few loaves and fishes – the human contribution is so inadequate and poor. Therese too, so little, she had nothing great to give, yet gave what she had totally – everyone received so much more. The visit of the Relics in the Light of the Gospel is a Gospel event. Therese lived the Gospel. Her visit is the Gospel alive, at work, experienced. What that crowd experienced that day, innumerable people have received from the visits of Therese – it is a Gospel happening, a Gospel phenomenon – we get a glimpse of the power and the effectiveness of the Gospel – we get a sense of where the Gospel can reach – there is in everyone, a hunger for the Gospel. Therese gave herself so completely to the Gospel, her story, her life, her person is the Gospel, therefore her presence wherever she goes is the GOOD NEWS. Those who have experienced this reality can affirm this.

### HOMILY from Mass

First reading Exodus 33:7-11, 34:5-9. 28

‘Moses.. called it the tent of meeting... The Lord would speak with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend...Moses stood with the Lord on the mountain. ..the Lord passes before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness; for thousands he maintains his kindness, forgives faults, transgression, sin, yet he lets nothing go unchecked....he stayed there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights’.... Moses at prayer – he spoke with God as one friend to another - what we do when we pray. The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us that God spoke to us through our ancestors in many and varied ways – now we have Jesus Christ and we can speak to Him, any time, anywhere, in any and every circumstance – listen anyone who has ears – He is constantly speaking to us – the mountain, the tent of meeting we have with us all the time with Jesus. Let us listen to Him in this Theophany, this Eucharist, this coming into His presence – a moment filled with God’s wonder, God’s love, and God’s presence.

### TALK 8pm

Therese – all that has been written, said about her -so well known, yet do we *really* know her? Who is she?

We will have the visit, yet in the midst of all the crowds and ‘hype’ there is a person. We must listen to Therese and take inspiration from her first and foremost.

See how she begins her autobiography – the Story of a Soul: ‘besides I am going to be doing only one thing: I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: *‘the mercies of the Lord’*. Before taking

up my pen, I knelt before the statue of Mary... and I begged her to guide my hand that it trace no line displeasing to her. Then opening the Holy Gospels my eyes fell on these words: 'and going up a mountain, he called to him men of HIS OWN CHOOSING, and they came to him' (Mk 3:v.13) This is the mystery of my vocation, my whole life, and especially the mystery of the privileges Jesus showered on my soul. He does not call those who are worthy but those whom he PLEASES or as St Paul says: God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and he will show pity to whom he will show pity. So then, 'it depends not on human will or exertion but on God showing mercy' (Romans 9:15, 16)

Here is someone sacred, eternal, the dwelling place of God. Here is the story of a person in whom God dwells, the story of a relationship. How she begins her story is very revealing – it is how she would like to be seen by us. It was written for her sister, Mother Agnes, giving us a way of how she sees herself and her life. Sing of the mercies of the Lord – 'I will have mercy and compassion on those I wish'. The word 'Mercy' jumps out at us – 'I will sing forever of the mercies of God'. Her whole life is a song of His mercy (Psalm 89). The essential human condition, 'have mercy on me a sinner'. But Therese puts her slant on it 'I will have mercy and compassion'. It is God's choice, everything is God's choice to be merciful to her. She is steeped in Scripture, she picks up the Gospels before writing and her eyes fell on the line 'Jesus went up on the mountainside and called those He wanted'. Jesus at prayer, place of meeting with God, where He communes with the Father, where his choice of those who would lead his people in future generations.

Therese begins to write this story because she is asked to and she sees the danger immediately – she is afraid that she will turn in on herself, afraid that her heart will contract, but she finds the way out through *obedience*. If this is the will of God, then she will do it – no longer dangerous – it is the work of God. This is one of the keys to Therese's growth – obedience- only doing what is pleasing to God. Her story is that of God's mercy to her, what *he* wants her to write – not an act of self-exaltation or self-praise. It is a song of worship and prayer, the turning of her whole life into an act of worship, singing of the mercies of God. Whatever happens in her story, she has been chosen by Jesus, everything thereafter is a coming to Him, completely and totally at his service, whatever that may mean or imply.

This calling is her relationship with Jesus, the mystery of her entire life – the mystery of Jesus – his privileges and rights over her soul. Her entire being is for Him, that was His choice – she gives of herself totally, not because she is worthy – she is the little one, the one who comes with nothing to offer but the little she gives is everything. If you ask Therese what she wants, it is to sing the mercies of the Lord, to do something pleasing for Jesus, to make people aware of God's mercy and compassion.

This visit is a reminder that this is a mystery; the mystery of God here in our midst and what matters is what God wants to do when Therese visits, it is not for us to see, control or have our own agenda. We must have the attitude of Therese's obedience – something for God – detachment and freedom before the work of God.

We are invited to turn to prayer and the scriptures to prepare for this visit. Therese's profound self-knowledge and humility set her free to do God's work – without this humility we will get in God's way but with it, we can do what God is calling us to do.

Tuesday, 29th July

**First Talk** - We must have greater trust and be more open to the work of Grace in our lives.

For Therese, everything is grace, everything is a gift of God, all is given. She had a great capacity to receive – she was aware of God's mercy and her writings tell us so much about what she has received. One incident in particular stands out – the grace of Christmas in 1886 (grace of

conversion years before she entered Carmel). She keeps coming back to this for the rest of her life. It was the day she grew up, the day she let go of childish ways – she declares that without it she would not have entered Carmel. Ten years later she says in October 1896, writing to Fr. Roland a missionary priest in China, that everything she has done or achieved was dependent on that experience. It led to a deeper level, to a change of direction, turning round from an excessive preoccupation with her self and an over-sensitivity, towards God. Her struggle with this had now been achieved by the grace of God – it was not some sort of magic as she still had to struggle but it had given her the strength to struggle. Conversion is never an instant grace once and for all, it is a grace to convert daily and to live a life of turning away from self and self-interest and outwards to God. Putting God before the self. She describes herself as armed for battle, clothed with divine strength, a warrior, a crusader, a Joan of Arc, not engaged in an outer war but with the war with self which requires far more strength.

The extract read about this conversion (p98 Manuscript A 3<sup>rd</sup> edition by John Clark OCD) is something that we could spend years reflecting on and we could not find a better description of conversion ‘on that night of light began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven. The work I had been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant, contenting himself with my good will which was never lacking. I could say to Him like His apostles: ‘Master, I fished all night and caught nothing. More merciful to me than he was to his disciples, Jesus took the net himself, cast it, and drew it in filled with fish. He made me a fisher of souls. I experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a desire I hadn’t felt so intensely before. I felt charity enter into my soul and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I have been happy’. ....’The cry of Jesus on the Cross sounded continually in my heart: I THIRST! These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls. As yet it was not the souls of priests that attracted me, but those of great sinners; I burned with the desire to snatch them from the eternal flames. To awaken my zeal God showed me my desires were pleasing to Him. I heard talk of a great criminal just condemned to death for some horrible crimes, everything pointed to the fact that he would die impenitent. ... I offered to God all the infinite merits of Our Lord, the treasures of the Church, and finally I begged Celine to have a Mass offered for my intentions. I didn’t dare ask this myself for fear of being obliged to say it was for Pranzini, the great criminal ... I asked God for a sign and ... ‘he took hold of the crucifix the priest was holding out to him and kissed the sacred wounds three times’ I had obtained the sign I had requested... what an unspeakably sweet response...after this grace I seemed to hear what he said to the Samaritan woman ‘give me to drink’... (this is a total embracing of the Gospel, the Beatitudes) ‘forever afterwards I was happy’ - blessed are the poor in spirit’. She shows us what true happiness means for us human beings.

We might look at her life and say what a lot of pain she experienced both inner and outer, but she had a profound sense that this was right, ‘I felt charity enter my heart – the need to forget myself in order to please others’. She learnt where true love lay. After her mother died she could not grow out of this self-centred, spoilt child but in an instant this Christmas time she grew up, turned away from self and went out to others. This was totally the work of Jesus in her. She goes to the Gospels and finds there Jesus hauling in the net of fish for her – Jesus has done it all ‘He made me into a fisher of souls and I had a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners.’ Therese becomes a great missionary because of this experience. So often our lives are spinning around in little circles and we don’t know how to get out. Therese points out that she was given the means to get rid of this scrupulosity and over-sensitivity – her spirit developed and the sign of the condemned prisoner Pranzini whom she prayed for and who asked for a crucifix before he died, told her that she was on the right path. Her deep desire to do the work of God, to be a missionary, to be every vocation there

is; this inner conversion was the means to take on the Gospel and to being set free for God and for others. Therese has been freed and she set out on the road to human and spiritual maturity.

Therese shows us the power of the Gospel, of the Beatitudes and what Jesus gives to us – how he sets us free and helps us to grow. We are a very self-centred, selfish and inward looking society, both individually and corporately – we need to reach out beyond ourselves to the needs around us and to the infinite mercy and grace of God, so close to us. We need to reflect on Therese's Visit in our time and in our own situation and how we should bring her message to those around us.

HOMILY at Mass St Martha (John 11:19-27) I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE, if anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? 'Yes, Lord, she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who has to come into this world.'

Martha is one of the Gospel's most attractive figures – a personal friend of Jesus. He regularly stayed at her house – his second home in Judea. Martha had become not only a friend, but also a believer – story of her faith – Jesus reveals Himself to her 'I am the Resurrection and the life, do you believe this?' Do you believe in the Resurrection? that is what it means to be a Christian. We are Christians if we believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes has Eternal Life. Martha is the one to whom He made this most exalted revelation, and he made it in the context of the very emotional and personal conversation after the death of her brother Lazarus.

### **Evening Talk**

The proposed visit of Therese is an opportunity to make her message better known – she is a Doctor of the Church – what is this message? What is the core of this message? What is it that we would like to make known, or is so important that it should be made known?

Celine writing years later (see the 'Last Conversations in Sr Genevieve's Memoirs' recalls HER LITTLE WAY. She herself was not converted to this Way till after Therese's death. The particular road Therese was travelling on, her road to union with God was shown in her practice of the virtue of humility and spiritual childhood, as expressed by Jesus in the Gospel, 'unless you become as little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven'. This was the view of John Paul II who raised her to be a Doctor of the Church – it was because of her sublime understanding of these two traits.

The difficulty is that Therese never set this 'Little Way' down in so many words – she did not give clear definitions, or a map or a method. For Therese it was an *attitude*, a *way of thinking*, a *way of relating* – relating to God and to others. Looking at her correspondence, we see that she shares it differently with each person – there are nuances because each one's relationship with God is unique, just as each human relationship is unique.

Therese's source for her 'Little Way' comes from the Gospel – her insight into the heart of the Gospel: God so loved the world that He sent His Only Son. The revelation of a Father who loves us – parenting, childhood, trust and love in the Gospels, that is the Little Way 'let the little children come to me' The language, imagery and edifice learnt in her own home, through her family and above all with her beloved father.

The Little Way is the Gospel as it is seen through the eyes, ears, thoughts and life experience of Therese. She never speaks in abstract terms, always personal, always in relation to someone. She knew what it was to be loved, but she also knew sorrow, pain and struggles. Suffering was an essential part of the road. Her life is living proof of how effective her Little Way is. The elevator image is used a lot, this was a new invention in her time as a symbol for spirituality. This was radical in the context of the time in which she was living when the prevailing spirituality was very laborious, negative and difficult. God was very far away and out of reach for most people. For Therese it is the Jesus of the Gospel, someone to whom she runs, sits on his knee, and puts her arm

around him. She had the courage and faith to stick to this way in spite of inner turmoil and difficulties and particularly during the last eighteen months of her life when she was tested to the limit. Had she got it wrong? But no but she clung to the love of God as He revealed Himself in the Gospel, someone whom sinfulness cannot keep away.

Her letters to a Fr. Maurice reveal much. This priest was burdened by a serious sin he had committed but Therese very gently and strongly showed him that this was not an obstacle – he can tread her Little Way – suffering joined to love, abandonment and love of a child who knows his father cherishes him, the tenderness of the heart of Jesus. An ‘Elevator of Love’, as opposed to the hard stairway of fear. She helped him to trust in familiarity with Jesus and to go by the elevator of love, with suffering, yes, but love will win out. Child puts arms around father - not in the corner, cowering with fear.

It is a ‘Little Way’ of seeing God, knowing the God of infinite forgiveness, a God that wants us to be close to Him – that is the essential part of her teaching. We need her attitude, the way of humility and of childhood, an inner attitude, a disposition that is not simplistic or childish – it is a whole way of life but it is not learnt in one day; it needs time, perseverance, courage, trust, humility, faithfulness and the openness of a child, ultimately leading to the freedom and maturity that Therese demonstrated in her own life.

### **WEDNESDAY 30<sup>th</sup>** (YEAR FOR PRIESTS June 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 – June 19<sup>th</sup> 2010)

It is not a coincidence that the visit of Therese to our country should be during the year given over to **Prayer for Priests** in fact the bishops did not expect their invitation to come about until 2111 - 2112. Therese will see this as the providence of God, a work of the Holy Spirit – she saw prayer for priests as a very important dimension of her vocation.

While in Rome, Therese saw many priests. She learnt a lot from the latter to inspire her in her vocation to be ‘apostle to the apostles’ apostle to priests, not just praying for them, but on a deeper level which comes through in her writings. We are fortunate to have the correspondence that she had with two priests (see Letters) which open up for us what she meant by being an apostle for priests. Therese gradually drew them into her own vocation, into her own spiritual programme. These letters are an exposition of her Little Way, an outline and a pointer to her own spiritual journey. The Little Way speaks very personally to each person; even the way she relates to the two priests is so different. She never wrote in general terms because God does not operate like that. There is a lovely passage in the Story of the Soul, p14, about the different flowers which each reflect the sunlight in their own way. ‘I understood how all the flowers he has created are beautiful, how the splendour of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not take away the perfume of the little violet or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with little wild flowers...just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so our Lord is occupied with each soul as though there were no others like it.’

She has a programme of formation which reaches out to God and to others. Therese adapted her Little Way to each person she met or wrote to. In her letter to Fr Roland in 1897 she shares her own spiritual journey. Her missionary vocation is revealed too in her correspondence and writings, and how it relates to priests and the church – apostle to apostles – their mission and their lives are one with hers. She enters very deeply into the ideals, goals, visions and sacrifices of priests. She becomes their apostle. Writing months before she died, she sees this continuing after her death and we can see her influence today; her passion for helping build up the church’s mission.

Therese says her vocation embraces *all* vocations. She had a deep understanding of being all vocations, priest, martyr and above all love at the heart of the church, this is what gives salt its

taste. Priesthood is at the heart of her vocation, she also sees it as her calling from God and the responsibility she has for priests and for their care - their spiritual formation. She does it in her unique way, in fidelity to her own vocation and out of the depths of her own vocation.

When we study Therese and the Priesthood, we find there a call to a deeper understanding and appreciation of priesthood and the relationship between priesthood and all vocations in the church's life and mission. A vocation is never limiting. It is not a pigeonhole, a slot, but a stepping stone, a door that opens onto infinite horizons, onto the entire mission of the church. Every vocation embraces all vocations. Every vocation is a responsibility to live out the church's universal vocation, to be apostles, to be witnesses to the Gospel.

**HOMILY at Mass 30th July** (First reading from Exodus 40:16-21, 34-38) 'the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle'

The story of Moses continues – God revealing himself to his people – a journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, a journey to a deeper knowledge of God and to a greater dependence on him. The building of the Ark, such details given because it is so sacred and is a symbol of God's presence – a holy and sacred place. God, who journeys with his people in every detail of their lives, day and night, through all their challenges and adventures. The story of Exodus is the story of slavery to freedom, from being away from God to being close to Him – the journey of faith and as we reflect on this, let us enter more deeply into the mystery of God, that same God who is concerned with us, that same God, whose holiness and sacredness is with us, holding our hands as we continue on our journey, on the 'Exodus' that we are all in.

## **EVENING TALK**

*'For me, PRAYER is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus' (SS. P242)*

Invitation to prayer – a cry of gratitude and love, something great, expanding the heart and uniting us to Jesus. The church's official definition of prayer is that of Therese in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

What is the essence of Christian prayer? It is utterly simple and childlike – the child knows how to speak to God – Therese's description is a beautiful definition, the upward rising of the heart, the simple glance towards heaven, of love in the midst of trials. It is the heart that matters, no words, no formula – where our heart is. Therese admitted that prayer was not easy and she would say the Our Father or Hail Mary very slowly on those occasions when she could do nothing else. She found the rosary very difficult too – she found it hard to be attentive in prayer and she was courageous to share her difficulties in prayer but it is an act of faith in what she is doing because she knows her Little Way will win through.

This was so contrary to the spirituality of the time but Therese comes across as someone willing and courageous enough to follow the instincts of her heart – her heart is her spiritual guide and it is with her heart that she loves, that she prays.

Prayer is an act of love and trust. No matter how much Therese is tested or questioned or criticised, she is prepared to stake everything on it and make it the heart of her teaching, which for her is the heart of the Gospel. The Gospel is the revelation of God's Heart, God's Love – that of a loving parent reaching out and inviting his children to respond to Him. Christian prayer is prayer of the heart, a glance towards heaven. This is the hope that we take with us to this visit of Therese to our country, that it will be a rediscovery of prayer, of prayer as Therese understood and expressed it. So simple and yet so challenging. Prayer is this great act of trust in God. As a doctor of the church,

Therese's experience and teaching on prayer has enlightened the church's understanding of prayer and hence it takes central place in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Friday morning – from the **HOMILY at Mass (Feast of Ignatius Loyola)**

First Reading: Leviticus 23:1, 4 – 11, 15-16, 27, 34-37

This reading outlines for us the main Jewish feasts which are celebrated today and which are still the centre of the Judaic tradition. Jesus in the Gospel of John celebrates these feasts in the main events of the Gospel and in the Synagogues. This episode like so much else, points out that it is not celebrations, rituals or outer conformity but the inner attitude of faith and of the heart that is at stake. In the Gospel (Matthew 13:54-58) Jesus could not work many miracles in his home town because of the lack of inner faith. Jesus looks at the heart and wants us to look at the deeper meaning behind our rituals, celebrations and customs. These are empty or routine activities unless our hearts are engaged at their most profound level.

### **ST THERESE OF LISIEUX'S PRAYER FOR PRIESTS**

*O Jesus,  
I pray for your faithful and fervent priests;  
For your unfaithful and tepid priests;  
For your priests labouring at home or abroad in distant mission fields.  
For your tempted priests;  
For your lonely and desolate priests;  
For your young priests;  
For your dying priests;  
For the souls of your priests in Purgatory.  
But above all, I recommend to you  
The priests dearest to me;  
The priest who baptised me;  
The priests who absolved me from my sins;  
The priests at whose Masses I assisted and who  
gave me your Body and Blood in Holy Communion;  
The priests who taught and instructed me;  
All the priests to whom I am indebted in any other way.  
O Jesus, keep them all close to your heart,  
and bless them abundantly in time and in eternity.  
Amen.*

Notes by Caroline Dawnay OCDS