

# You've got a friend in St Thérèse

The Little Flower, as with all the saints, can offer support and direction in times of stress and angst



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WHEN I was a first-year university student, I made a number of lifelong friends. One in particular has been in my thoughts a great deal over these past few weeks. I first met her in the library of the Catholic chaplaincy a few months into the beginning of term. It was an exciting time, but not without its anxieties. I was living away from home for the first time, missing my family and my friends from school. I was struggling to find my place in this new environment, and also trying to sort out conflicted feelings about Faith, love and vocation.

My new friend was a few years older than me and became the big sister I never had: I would go to her with my problems and my worries, and she would always welcome me with sage advice, dispensed with a slightly mischievous smile.

She prayed for me, nurtured my priestly vocation and showed me how to live out my Faith with simplicity and with joy.

Her name is Thérèse of Lisieux. It didn't matter a bit that, in the eyes of the world, she died almost a century before I met her. The saints are, in many ways, more alive than any of us.

St John Paul II—another dear friend from those days!—once said: "It is characteristic of the saints mysteriously to remain contemporaries with every generation: this is the result of their profound rootedness in the eternal present of God."

St Thérèse's writings—not to everyone's taste—which I picked off the shelf more or less at random that day in the library, spoke to my heart, as a necessary antidote to the pretentiously intellectual religiosity towards which I was tending. I was particularly moved by a volume of letters she had written to an angst-ridden young seminarian, to whom she gave a 'dummy's guide' to her spirituality—just what the doctor ordered for me!

I'm not the only one who has found in St Thérèse a confident, intercessor and lifelong friend: Pope Francis attributes a miracle he received

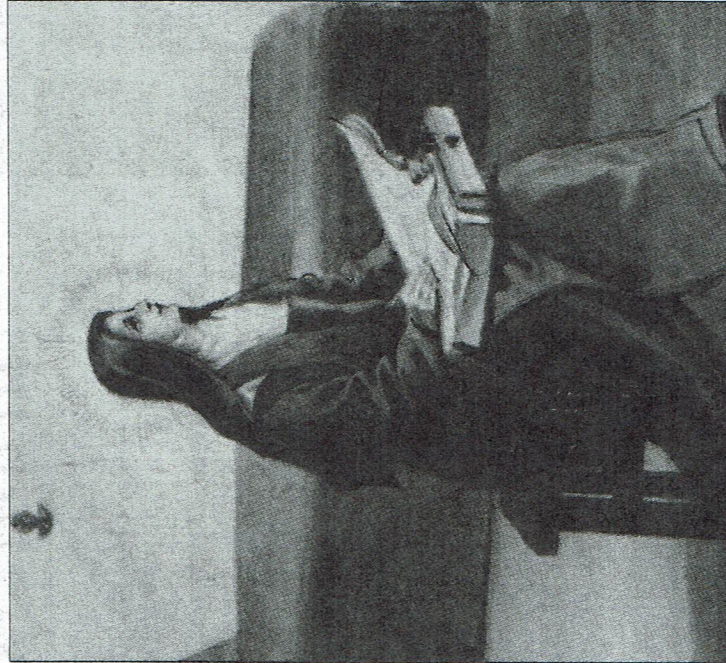
as a young bishop to her intercession and still today he goes to the Little Flower with the thorny issues of his daily life. As he puts it: "When I have a problem I ask St Thérèse, not to solve it, but to take it in her hands and help me accept it."

St Theresa of Calcutta is named after her, St Maximilian Kolbe offered his first Mass as a priest to pray for her canonisation and her 'little way of love' inspired Jean Vanier to found the L'Arche movement.

The novelists Jack Kerouac and George Bernard Shaw are also devotees, while the singer Edith Piaf, blind for three years as a child, regained her sight after a visit to Lisieux, and kept a picture of the saint by her bedside table until the end of her life.

If you've not met her yet yourself, you're in luck. Her relics are coming to Scotland at the end of this month and will tour around each diocese, stopping at cathedrals, parish churches, monasteries and even a prison.

In the days leading up to the visit, there will be lots of opportunities to learn about her story, from her childhood with her parents (also saints), her



An illustration of St Thérèse of Lisieux shows her with the small wooden writing case on which she penned reflections and letters

untimely death from tuberculosis at only 24.

You can also learn about her extraordinary power as an intercessor: before she died, she said that she would 'spend her Heaven doing good on earth,' bestowing favours and miracles like a 'shower of roses.'

If you have a particular intention to pray for, you could make use of the 'novena' prayer written especially for the visit, asking for her help in problems big and small.

St Thérèse had a special love for the priesthood and wrote that it was primarily to pray for priests that she had entered the Carmel. Her great desire was to have a priest brother, and although none of her natural brothers survived infancy, she became a 'little sister' to two priests who wrote to her and, through her prayers, she was proud to work alongside them for the salvation of souls.

When I met Thérèse, she was in her mid-twenties and I was an anxious teenager thinking about the priesthood. I'm convinced that the prayers of St Thérèse helped me on my way to ordination and although she's now my 'little sister' I still go to her for advice and count on her prayers more than ever.

I hope that in the weeks ahead many more people will come to know her and to love her, and that from her place in Heaven she will 'let fall a shower of roses' on our land, bringing about an increase in holiness wherever she goes. St Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for Scotland!