

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, 2nd January 1873 – 30th September 1897, aged 24 years.



To date the relics have visited nearly 40 countries around the world, including Brazil, Russia, Kazakhstan, the United States, Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Lebanon and Iraq. Wherever they have gone, many people have experienced conversion, healing, a renewed sense of vocation, and answers to their prayers: At the request of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and the bishops of England and Wales, the relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux are visiting our country. Dates in our area include:

Saturday 19 September. Birmingham Cathedral. St. Chad's Queensway. B4 6EU. www.stchadscathedral.org.uk Tel: 0121 2362251

Monday 21 September, Sacred Heart and St. Teresa. 67 Coventry Road, Coleshill, Birmingham. B46 3EA Tel: 01675 463939



Who was St. Thérèse? Born in Alençon, France on January 2, 1873, Thérèse Martin was the youngest of nine children, four of whom died in childhood. Her father Louis was a watchmaker and her mother Zélie ran a small lace-making business. The Martin family was a very happy one and her childhood was in many ways idyllic. Sadly tragedy struck when her mother developed breast cancer and died on August 28, 1877. After her death the family moved to Lisieux. Thérèse took to heart the deep spirituality she experienced in her home. From an early age prayer and friendship with God were very important to her. Her father was exceptionally loving and this helped her to have a deep trusting relationship with God, her Heavenly Father. However there was another side to her life. Her mother's death had quite a traumatic effect. Thérèse asked her sister Pauline to be a mother to her. When Pauline became a Carmelite nun it was as if she had lost a second mother. The two losses led to several bouts of illness which seemed to result more from her emotional state than any physical cause. She tells of a remarkable conversion of spirit on Christmas Eve 1884, which healed her childhood immaturity and led to a very strong calling to become a Carmelite nun. Thérèse considered herself stubborn but this often expressed itself in great determination, particularly in the way she followed her call. When the prioress of the Carmelites refused to take her because she was so young, the formerly shy girl went to the bishop. When the bishop did not give permission she decided to go to the Pope. In the course of an audience with Pope Leo XIII during a pilgrimage to Rome she begged him to let her enter. While the Pope's words: "If is God's will, you will enter" initially saddened her she gradually became aware of their importance. She wanted to do God's will at all costs. Thérèse's determination and spirit of prayer on that trip made an impression on the Bishop's Vicar. On April 9, 1888 Therese was admitted to the Carmelite convent. Convent life was not easy with very basic accommodation and little heat to counter the cold winters. Not all of the community warmed to her. Thérèse embraced her new life with enthusiasm and generosity. Living at close quarters with others made many demands on her but she tried to accept them with patience and love. Thérèse loved Scripture and especially the Gospels. She carried a small book of the Gospels near her heart at all times. In the Gospels she came to know Jesus and discovered what she describes as her "Little Way" of spiritual childhood - a way of confidence and trust and of total surrender to God's Merciful Love. In St Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians Thérèse found her vocation: to be love at the heart of the Church. Thérèse loved nature. As a child she remembered a visit to the beach at Deauville and the impact the waves had on her. She loved flowers. It is not surprising that she uses flowers to describe the kingdom of God. She sees herself as one of the small flowers and hence is often referred to as "The Little Flower." Suffering seemed a constant part of Thérèse's life. For her it was a way of imitating Jesus in his love for his Father and for all of humanity. One of the greatest traumas in Thérèse's life was her father's illness. A series of strokes lead to hallucinations and he had to live in a mental institution. She also experienced several periods of inner darkness. There was a particularly intense one in the eighteen months before she died, during which her faith was tested to the limit and she found it hard to believe in any spiritual reality. However a deep inner peace sustained her. In the latter part of her life she also suffered from poor health and developed tuberculosis. Her last months were extremely painful but she accepted the pain in a spirit of love. She died on September 30, 1897 at the age of twenty four. She wrote an account of her life, which she described as the "Story of a Soul." Published shortly after she died it has proved remarkably popular with people of many different faith traditions and has been translated into over fifty languages. Her dream was to spend her heaven doing good on earth, to let fall from heaven a shower of roses. That dream has been fulfilled. She was canonized in 1925. She has been proclaimed a Patroness of the Missions and in 1997 was declared a Doctor of the Church.

Quotations from St Thérèse. I am a very little soul, who can offer only very little things to the Lord. I will spend my Heaven doing good on earth. After my death I will let fall a shower of roses. Jesus, my Love, my vocation, at last I have found it ... my vocation is love! Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, O my God, who have given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love. Do you realise that Jesus is there in the tabernacle expressly for you; for you alone? He burns with the desire to come into your heart...

What is a relic? A relic is either part of the physical remains of a holy person after his or her death, or an object which has been in contact with his or her body. The most important relic is that of the Cross of Jesus Christ, which is traditionally held to have been discovered by St. Helena during her famous pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 326. The New Testament speaks of healings worked by handkerchiefs that had been in contact with St. Paul's body (Acts 19:12). The Second Council of Nicaea (787) laid down that no Church should be consecrated without relics of saints being placed in the altar stone. This was re-affirmed by the Catholic Church in the 1977 "Rite of Dedication of a Church."

Why venerate relics today? There are two main reasons for venerating relics today:

Firstly God shows his approval of the veneration of relics by granting healings and other graces. This is especially the case with St. Thérèse, where miracles began happening at her tomb soon after her death, and have continued wherever her relics have travelled. Secondly God uses a variety of physical things to strengthen our spiritual life. The creation itself helps us know something of his wisdom and love. The sacraments use bread, wine, oil, water and other physical things to give us spiritual life, provided we receive them in faith. Relics help us feel close to a holy person, thus making us more aware that the saints are our friends, and fostering in us a desire for holiness.



What actually happens? The relics are contained in a large, sealed casket, which will be taken round over 20 churches in England and Wales. They will remain in each place for between one and three days. In each venue the casket will be placed on display in a prominent place. There will be a Mass and other services each day, but most of the time will be left free for people to come and venerate the relics and pray for whatever is in their hearts. Stewards will direct you in an orderly way to come and venerate the relics. How you do that is entirely up to you. Some people like to kiss the casket, or place their hands reverently upon it, while others may prefer just to pray quietly for a few moments. There will also be plenty of priests available to hear your Confession or give spiritual advice.



What is it all about? The purpose of the visit is to deepen our relationship with God and each other. Catholics believe in something called the “Communion of Saints”, which means that holy people who have died and are now in heaven can be experienced as caring for us and helping us by their prayers. We, in our turn, show our thankfulness to God for giving them to us by honouring them and asking them to pray for us.

St. Thérèse can teach us a great deal. In 1997, the centenary of her death, Pope John Paul II proclaimed St. Thérèse one of the “Doctors of the Church.” There are currently 33 Doctors of the Church, of whom only three are women, saints whose message is seen by the Church as having a special and universal importance. Some of the things we can learn from St. Thérèse’s life and teaching are: We can and should all desire to be holy, which means placing love at the heart of all things. Prayer is the most important activity of our lives, and it can be greatly helped by a love for Scripture. We need to persevere in faith through times of darkness in prayer. Family life can be seen as a school of charity, and has a special role in helping us find our vocation.

Who is the visit for: ‘I have a special heart, entirely for everybody.’ St Thérèse has an extraordinary gift of connecting with people. She has been described as a ‘universal sister’. Her unique appeal reaches across all kinds of boundaries to people from different cultural, social and religious backgrounds. She speaks to Christians of all denominations, she speaks to young people, she speaks to the sick, she speaks to people of other faiths. She speaks to agnostics and atheists with whom she experienced a special solidarity during the last eighteen months of her life. During this time she went through a period of darkness and doubt in which she said she understood how atheists felt: ‘One must have passed through the tunnel to understand how black its darkness is.’ She speaks to the weak and sinful with her assertion that what might seem to be stumbling-blocks can be turned into stepping-stones when surrendered to God’s grace and mercy: ‘If only everyone weak and imperfect like me felt as I do, no one would ever despair of reaching the heights of love.’ In others words this visit of the relics of St Thérèse to England is intended for everyone without exception. From her to us all is extended this personal invitation: ‘I am your sister and your friend...Jesus will not disappoint you...Trust triggers miracles.’

Timetable for visit:

St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.

Saturday 19 September.

2.00pm Arrival - Service of Welcome, Relics placed before the sanctuary.

4.30pm Mass and Anointing the sick.

7.30pm Benediction and Evening Prayer.

9.00pm All night vigil - Youth emphasis.

Sunday 20 September

6.00am Mass to conclude the Vigil.

9.00am Sunday Mass.

11.00am Sunday Mass.

3.30-4.30pm Devotions - led by Religious.

4.30pm Mass with Religious (Bishop Kenney).

5.30-8.00pm Private Devotion.

8.00pm Benediction and Evening Prayer

9.00pm All Night Vigil - 3rd Order Carmelites and Ark of the Covenant.

Monday 21 September

6.30am Mass and farewell ceremony.

www.stchadscathedral.org.uk

Sacred Heart & St Teresa Church, Coleshill.

Monday 21 September

8.00am Relics leave St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.

8.30-9.30am Relics arrive at Sacred Heart & St Teresa's.

9.30am Liturgy of Welcome & Litany of St Teresa of the Child Jesus & the Holy Face.

10.00am-12.00Noon Opportunity for private prayer, veneration of the relics and Confessions.

12.00 Noon Mass - Principal Celebrant: Right Reverend David McGough, Aux. Bishop.

1.00-3.00pm Opportunity for private prayer and veneration of the relics.

3.00-4.00pm Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament with Prayers for Priests.

4.00pm Evening Prayer concluding with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament Liturgy led by Rev Fr Timothy Menezes, Preacher: Very Rev Canon John Udris.

5.00-7.00pm Confessions.

7.00pm Mass.

7.30-10.00pm Opportunity for private prayer and veneration of the relics.

10.00pm Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and All Night Vigil for Vocations to the Diaconate, Priesthood and Religious Life.

Tuesday 22 September

8.00am Morning Prayer and Litany of St Teresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

8.30-10.00am Opportunity for private prayer and veneration of the relics.

10.00am Votive Mass of St Teresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

11.00am Relics leave for Cardiff.

www.coleshillparish.co.uk

All are welcome! In a nutshell, the visit of the relics is for everyone.