

St Therese

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Original Date: December 9, 2006

Revised: December 14, 2011

Words: 1183

I originally wrote this for a Theology class I was taking at Seton Hall in 2006. Reviewing all my filed documents a few weeks back, I realized this is way too beautiful to keep it a secret from you. All I am updating are the timelines.

Scripture tells us a thousand years is like a day to God. I believe His will for all of us was scripted long ago.

Allow me to tell you a beautiful story that goes back at least one hundred and thirty years.

Our mentally retarded son Robert is thirty-five years old. On the day he was sent, Jesus informed a certain Saint that Robert's progress would be very slow, his accomplishments may never show. Jesus' Father would select a very special Mommy, a very special Daddy and was planning to build for him a very special school. It would be Catholic and it would be called "The Seton Foundation for Learning." Jesus was smiling. He and His Father had so many plans including so many people. They must love sitting together making perfect plans like these.

In eighteen hundred and seventy three, a baby was born in France. Her name was Therese. At fifteen she entered the convent and would die just nine years later. Her mission on earth had been accomplished at twenty-four. Or so we thought. Hardly anyone knew she was ordered by her superiors to write a book about her love of Jesus. But God did. It is now amusing to think her other sisters in the convent worried she would leave no legacy.

So God chose Saint Therese to be His Project Manager. "You make it sound like she gave You a choice," Jesus lovingly stated to His Father. Therese knew how to pray over the details.

Ninety-three years ago in Manhattan, a baby boy was born. His name was Patrick. Jesus would have him grow up and become an Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of New York. "Follow Me," is all He had to say.

Yet, Bishop Ahern never imagined that Jesus would choose him to shepherd the Seton Foundation for Learning at age sixty-six.

At age seventy-nine Bishop Ahern would write "Maurice and Therese - A Story of a Love" when many are retired, dead, frail and tired. It was to be Bishop's second legacy past the age of sixty-five.

Forty-seven years ago two young priests would join a then Fr Ahern and purchase a house right on the beach on Long Beach Island. It would cost fifteen thousand dollars. One of the men would go on to become NY's beloved Terrence Cardinal Cooke, who is himself a candidate for canonization. It would be a house where two of Jesus' Apostles vacationed. The deal was simple. Whoever lived the longest got the house free and clear. Bishop Ahern became that person.

Twenty-eight years ago, a Staten Island family was walking along the beach in Ocean City, MD. They encountered another family with a developmentally disabled daughter much like their own. They hailed from Scranton, PA. Jesus had just selected a new Apostle by the name of John O'Connor and he blessed a Catholic special education school there. Therese's enthusiasm was making Jesus happy. They knew what was about to happen.

Robert became the seventh student in what was God's "very special school." It had no money, two classes and it was one year old. It would be modeled after the Scranton school and blessed by NY's newly named Archbishop John O'Connor.

Jesus loves the mentally retarded because he loves truth. Their places in heaven are already reserved as they do not know how to sin. We have Robert getting up from the dinner table telling his Mother his brother cooks the ham better. Yes . . . Jesus and Therese smile along with us.

Bishop always tells me God needed a fundraiser, so He blessed us with Robert.

Today, Seton educates one hundred and twenty kids, ages three to twenty-one and has three campuses. One of the seven petitions from the "Our Father," the prayer Jesus taught us is "give us our daily bread." Miracles happen daily.

Six years ago, Jesus asked Therese to create a fourth Seton school. "The Therese Program for Children with Autism." Autism is at epidemic proportions. Much

like my son Robert entering a school twenty years ago with seven kids and no money, this program had eight kids and no money.

Everyone fretted how they would pull it off, much like they did twenty-five years ago.

It was then that Therese had Jesus remind Bishop Ahern in prayer that the beachfront house would easily sell for a million dollars. Now they needed daily operational expenses.

Therese checked God's plan for the day of April 17, 2006. "Bring Robert's Daddy back, Bishop Ahern needs his fundraiser, money needs to be raised for Therese's School on Staten Island," You may be aware I had been estranged from the Catholic Church for five years. I was away from Seton. It was time for me to come home.

A book had been sitting on my shelf for six years. The day after Easter I picked it up and read it. It was Bishop Ahern's book on Therese. That book has led me back to into the Catholic faith in ways I never thought imaginable. Within days, I was receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation – for the first time in more than thirty-five years. I didn't know it at the time, but the church I visited was one of the first American churches named after Therese more than eighty years ago. Builders had chiseled in Teresa.

Amazing things have happened: a bountiful prayer life, this wonderful gathering each week, daily mass, communion, confession, forgiveness, visits to Jesus for silent adoration where His radiance glows onto you and me once again raising money for Bishop and Therese's new school.

My studies at Seton hall have helped me understand something I never realized before. Over nineteen years, Seton has raised more than two million dollars, doing it ten dollars at a time. A brief talk is given after communion at all parishes once a year. More than ten thousand parishioners have bought a raffle ticket, all because we are truly one in Christ at that time. Jesus makes it so easy.

One Saturday morning in late September five years ago, I attended Mass at a neighboring parish. It was the parish where Bishop Ahern had been a pastor years ago. Therese sits in an alcove. Like a bolt of lightning, the inspiration to write what I am delivering today flew into my heart.

A week later, on Therese's feast day, I learned another story behind my new parish. Within walking distance is the old hospital (Seaview) where the cure for Tuberculosis was found, the very same disease she died from.

Jesus told Therese a disabled son would come into my life and do some really special things. Jesus never lets us down. Never!

It was quite a plan.