

Finding God in the Ordinary: Exposition of the Little Flower's Spirituality

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Abstract - *One of the most influential saints of the modern times was St. Therese of Lisieux or the Little Flower as she is known by many. This is due to her little way which emphasized that man does not need to be a spiritual master in order to connect and relate with the Divine, instead she exemplified that life in its simplicity can be a sure way towards sanctity. Such little ways was clearly reflected in her autobiography "The story of a soul". Through the saint's autobiography, this study aimed to explore how did the Little Flower discover and find God in the ordinary and in particular how can it address the realities and challenges of the modern day spirituality. By applying Martin Buber's principle of "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationship and doing a thematic analysis on the saint's autobiography the researchers were able to discover that St. Therese was able to find God in the ordinary by relating to the world in its wholeness and not as a material object. In the same way the saint was also able to address the modern day trend of spirituality of religious indifference and unbelief. Specifically this "I-Thou" relationship portrayed by St. Therese was actualized by her acceptance of the realities of her humanity, the Divine and the primacy of love.*

Keywords – little way, modern day spirituality, ordinary, spirituality, St. Therese of Lisieux

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality is generally defined as man's quest for life's integration in his search for purpose through the transcendent [1]. In today's world people relates to spirituality in different contexts, some relates it in terms of religion and some in the presence of the secular world [1]. In relating spirituality in the presence of the secular world, two dangers can be encountered. First of these dangers is man's subjectivity which can make spirituality grounded in the authority of the self and may lead to narcissism [1]. Second, is the emergence of confusion regarding the source of one's spirituality because of the different trends of the times that may result to a popular and shallow view of spirituality [1]. Some of these trends in understanding spirituality were due to the quest for power like ideologies of communism, patriotism due to colonialism, and even capitalism [2], which does not possess a firm foundation in terms of spirituality. With the presence of these dangers, this research paper will engage with a more specific kind of spirituality particularly the Catholic Christian spirituality. The traditional understanding of Catholic spirituality as declared by St. Paul is "living in the spirit" [3]. In this context the Church, in order to attain such kind of spirituality provided religious rituals grounded in scriptures and tradition that

connects the soul or spirit towards the divine. But in the 1950's Catholicism was not immune to the effects of the modern world due to the downgrade of Catholics participation in religious rituals such as benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, parish novenas and Stations of the Cross [3]. This downgrade resulted to the creation of activities in parishes that were experiential in nature like bible studies, marriage encounters, pilgrimages and charismatic prayer groups [3]. But in the midst of these particular initiatives many are still thirsty towards their connection with God. It is for the reason that not all Catholics are active in the parish and some are just attending to the rituals due to situational reasons. Additionally, many are living under the circumstances of the human ordinary life and here the question arises: How can man find God in the ordinary?

"I-Thou and I-It"

For Martin Buber a Jewish philosopher and theologian the answer lies on how a person relates to those who are around him. His philosophical principle of "I-It" and "I-Thou" explains such relationship. The "I-It" concept states that man has the tendency to relate to other people as a material object of the world [4] this is the reason why it is referred with the word

"It". It implies that a person can manipulate the other like a material object [5]. This in turn makes it egocentric and subjective because the person (I) only relies on his past knowledge about the other (It) which limits the dignity of the other (It) [6]. On the other hand the "I-Thou" concept postulates that a person relates to other people in their wholeness, meaning it is a relationship not limited in the past, not ego-centric and focused in the present moment [6]. In other words the other is treated as a human being and not a material object [5]. For Buber [4] the basis of this "I-Thou" relationship is the cosmic love, a love that is not a mere feeling and is momentary but eternal. In this case God enters the picture [6] which he refers as the "eternal Thou" Who is imprinted in the nature of man's awareness [4]. He also states that every "I-Thou" moments with other human beings can lead to indirect reference to the "eternal Thou" [5]. Buber [4] also indicates that man has the power to see God in others for God grants to him such grace [5] it is only dependent on him if he will utilize that given grace. In today's society Buber [4] emphasizes that man is too much immersed in the "I-It" relationship and must break free with it and evolve in the "I-thou" relationship particularly with God where man finds his fulfilment. Furthermore, for Buber [4] God can be found not in the ways of the world but only through faith [6]. In Catholicism saints are those people who were recognized by the Church because they were able to find fulfilment in God through their lives. In particular, one of the modern day saints who was able to find such fulfilment specifically in the ordinary was St. Therese of Lisieux. In this research paper Martin Buber's "I-Thou" and "I-It" principle was used as a theoretical framework in understanding St. Therese's discovery of God in the ordinary.

Ordinariness of the Little Flower

On October 19, 1997 Pope St. John Paul II declared St. Therese of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church [7]. Being a Doctor of the Church is one of the highest recognition given to a person by the Catholic Church for his works and teachings that had greatly contributed in understanding the Catholic Faith. Some may think that being a Doctor of the Church entails a marvellous life, a life that is beyond the human capacity, this notion can be right but it was different in the case of St. Therese. It was different because it is in her ordinariness or her "little way" as many calls it, that her sanctity and great teachings were rooted. Her very life was rooted in her authentic love for Jesus

which transformed her little ways to sure ways towards sanctity which she herself affirmed after her death.

St. Therese's life on earth was very short for at the age of 24 she already reunited with the heavenly Father. But within that short lived life was a life well lived and this was portrayed in her autobiography *The story of a soul*. *The story of a soul* comprises of her childhood stories, her early sufferings because of her mother's death and later on because of the departure of her sisters as they enter Carmel to become nuns. It also comprises of her childhood faults, simple joys, her love for her father and her father's love for their family. At the later portions of the autobiography she had written things about her great desire to enter Carmel, to serve Jesus with all her life. She also had written about her sufferings and the realities of the spiritual and earthly life as a Carmelite nun. St. Therese's autobiography was very human in nature; in fact she honestly admitted her own faults while writing it. As John Beevers [8] comments, the little way of spiritual childhood is not originally from St. Therese it was from Jesus Himself as he added "God chose Therese to dramatize this truth anew, reminding us that great love, not great deeds is the essence of sanctity".

Today St. Therese of Lisieux is known around the world as one of the great saints of the modern times. Many books and initiatives were written to explain her kind of spirituality. Two of which are: *The Spirituality of St. Therese (an Introduction)* by L'Abbe Andre Combes written in 1950 and *The Complete Spiritual doctrine of St. Therese of Lisieux* by Rev. Francois Jamart, OCD in 1989. These books discussed what comprises the saint's spirituality.

The Little Flower's spirituality

Spiritual childhood

In his book, *Complete Spiritual Doctrine of St. Therese of Lisieux*, Fr. Francois Jamart, OCD [9] indicated that the spirituality of St. Therese of Lisieux is composed of six different fundamental characteristics namely: littleness or humility, poverty, confidence, love, abandonment, and simplicity. The message of St. Therese can be compared with a little child. Like a little child one must recognize his littleness, his limitations, that he cannot do everything, and in such situation he also recognizes his own poverty that he is dependent to his parents and thus this dependence requires confidence, confidence that his parents will sustain his needs and will not neglect

it [9]. In a child love is always present and more deeply this love leads to abandon oneself to his parents [9]. Lastly, all these characteristics are expressed by a child through simplicity because he is too little and he can only express himself through little ways [9].

Littleness

Littleness or humility entails acceptance of one's nothingness, it indicates that a person must acknowledge his nothingness before God [9]. It also comprises the acceptance of one's faults and limitations because with such acceptance a person leads himself towards his true identity where God is pleased because it leads him more closely to the truth of His love [9]. St. Therese's sufferings both her illness and the sorrows she experienced in life were also instrumental in the development of such characteristic of her spirituality [10]. Like her faults and limitations she had seen them as windows and bridges that opened her towards the truth of her identity particularly her nothingness and her weakness, and those truths connected her very much to Jesus. St. Therese strongly stated that a person must not be afraid to acknowledge his littleness because it is both an avenue and opportunity for God to bestow His grace towards perfection [9].

Poverty

Poverty is related to littleness, if littleness indicates a person's weakness, poverty on the other hand indicates a person's dependence to God [9]. St. Therese explains that littleness and poverty pleases God: "the thing that pleases Him is that I love my littleness and poverty and have a blind hope in His mercy". She also added that a person cannot obtain the richness of God's merciful love if he himself does not accept his own poverty and littleness [9]. For St. Therese everything is from God, she sees herself dependent on God's grace this was the reason why she was able to see her own imperfections and littleness because she knows and acknowledges that everything that is good is from God and all merits are to Him alone [9].

Confidence

It is in confidence that St. Therese was able to proclaim that she can be a saint despite of her littleness [10]. This confidence was always rooted in God. It is because of her littleness and poverty that St. Therese was able to discover the truth that God is

always present to sustain her needs. That she has nothing to be anxious of because God will not neglect her [9]. St. Therese's message was clear, that in the face of human limitations God's assistance is abundant and this reality must be the confidence of the human person.

Love

Love is the core of St. Therese's message, and it is the merciful love of God [9]. It is in God's love that St. Therese realized that however little a person is, however imperfect a person is, God in His merciful love can transform him and he can become a saint. This is the reason why she wants to offer herself to God like a paschal lamb for those who reject such abundance of great love; it is by loving God through "His own love" [9]. St. Therese insisted that in sanctity love is always of great importance as she declared: "Merit does not consist in doing or giving much. It consists in loving much." She said that this truth is from Jesus Himself and it is He Who taught her such truth [9]. Thus, it is fitting to say that love itself is not only the core of her spirituality but also the core of her life. In her great love for the Lord she was able to show true charity in the face of unpleasant situations in Carmel especially for those who judge and does not understand her ways and wants to ruin her reputation. It was her response to the merciful love of God that she was able to make her little ways sure ways towards sanctity.

Abandonment

In her autobiography St. Therese compared herself to a little ball that belongs to the infant Jesus [10] implicating that she is a property of Jesus and whatever Jesus wants to do with her she accepts it gratefully. This is the kind of abandonment that St. Therese possessed in her relationship with God. Her abandonment is comprised of letting her personal will be conformed to God's will; making God's will her own personal will [9]. She had reached this kind of abandonment because she acknowledges her own littleness that she is poor without God; and in the discovery of His merciful love she was able to gain confidence in Him and lead her to abandon her own will for the sake of His will. St. Therese's abandonment also entails a worry free abandonment as she declared: "He wants me to practice abandonment, like a little child which does not worry about what others might do with him". For her abandonment always come with the personal

cooperation with God, it does not mean that a person must be stagnant in one's life because everything is surrendered to God instead it includes necessary action and cooperation with God's grace [9], because God's will is always fruitful and not stagnant in itself.

Simplicity

Simplicity is one of the characteristics of the spirituality of St. Therese that is very human in nature because it connects to the ordinary, although all the characteristics can be related to the ordinary life simplicity stands out as one of the fundamentals in understanding her spirituality in the contemporary period. The simplicity of the saint is understood as seeing God in everyday events may it be joyful, sorrowful and glorious everything is attributed to God [9]. It is a view wherein God is present not in the complicated but in the ordinary, in the simple things of everyday life with its joys and sorrows. As St. Therese stated "God loves simplicity". Simplicity also implies littleness because children can only express themselves in simple ways [9]. This simplicity was very evident in the life of St. Therese because when she prays she tells directly to God what she wants to express, and she is not too much technical when it comes to formulated prayers [9]. When she was ill, on the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, one novice remarked that if she was to die that day after receiving Holy Communion it would lessen her suffering then she answered:

that would not be like my little way at all. It would mean that I am abandoning that way in my own death! To die of love after my communion! Little souls would be unable to imitate me in this. In my little way all things are common and ordinary. It is necessary that all that I do, little souls should be able to do also.

Fr. Francois Jamart, OCD [9] remarked that St. Therese's spirituality is grounded in three main sources. First is the Holy Scriptures. It was on the book of Proverbs chapter nine verse four where she found God's calling to spiritual childhood which indicated that God calls even the children, the little one to come to Him. This grew much deeper when she read verses twelve and thirteen in chapter sixty-six in the book of Isaiah which proclaims God's immediate motherly care for His children [10]. This was a clear sign for her that spiritual childhood is the way she was looking for, because it is by being a child that God's

motherly care could be experienced [10]. Second is her Carmelite training particularly through the inspirations of St. Therese of Jesus and St. John of the cross their teachings served fundamental basis of her spirituality's characteristics on humility, poverty, confidence and love [9]. Lastly is the inspiration from the Holy Family. She saw the Holy Family as a model of holiness in the ordinary everyday life [9] and through them God was able to present to humanity that in the ordinary family life sanctity is possible.

St. Therese's spiritual childhood is accompanied by God's fatherhood. Her notion of God as father is different from what the world perceives a father is, as a ruler, as a punisher, and as a disciplinarian. St. Therese views God's fatherhood in the light of His merciful love [9]. It is the love that as a child she leaned on all her life. It is the love that she discovered and was able to share its richness by being a child. And she knew very well that it is the love that will lift her to sanctity through the reality of her spiritual childhood [9].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study is to examine the spirituality of St. Therese of Lisieux through her autobiography *The story of a soul* on how to see God in the ordinary circumstances of life and how can it address the realities and challenges of the modern day spirituality.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This research is a simple qualitative study. The main source of data was St. Therese's autobiography *The story of a soul* translated by John Beevers [8]. Then thematic analysis was used in order to generate themes from the autobiography. These themes served as bridges in understanding that God is present in the ordinary through the saint's life and spirituality. The use of related literature was also observed in order to present the realities of contemporary man in dealing with spirituality.

Thematic Analysis

Seeing God in the ordinary was very evident in the life of St. Therese of Lisieux and this truth was known by the world through her autobiography *The story of a soul*. To understand more clearly this truth in the saint's life the researchers were able to generate three major themes from her autobiography namely: (A) Human reality with two sub-themes, (B) Divine reality with four sub-themes and lastly (C) Primacy of

love with three sub-themes. The explanation behind these themes is the premise that St. Therese of Lisieux found God in the ordinary because she was able to acknowledge these three realities namely the human reality, the Divine reality and the reality of the primacy of love. And these realities served as her bridges towards sanctity that was actualized through her little way.

A. Human reality

This major theme indicates that the life of St. Therese was a clear reflection of the human reality itself. It is for like all ordinary humans her life comprises of the reality of suffering and the importance of the role of the family in one's life. Thus, the sub-themes are the following: the reality of suffering and the role of the family.

In addition this major theme can be connected to Buber's [4] concept of "I-Thou" relationship. He stated that in this relationship God's love is always present but it cannot be acknowledged by man because of his tendency to objectify everything around him including God which is the very principle of his "I-It" concept. In the case of St. Therese, she was able to overcome this tendency of the "I-It" principle by accepting the realities of her humanity that can be reflected in the sub-themes: of her sufferings and the role of her family.

A.1 The reality of suffering

Like Christ St. Therese was able to accept the reality of the cross. This cross signifies the sufferings and the sorrows she had experienced in life. One of the earliest sorrows that she experienced was the death of her mother. Her sorrow was deeply expressed through these words:

"The moment mommy died my happy disposition changed completely. I had been lively and cheerful, but I became timid and quiet and bundle of nerves. A glance was often enough to make me burst into tears."

Another suffering that she had encountered in her childhood was her unpleasant schooling experience. She experienced being bullied by those students who were jealous at her because she was at the top of her class. In addition, the decision of her elder sisters Marie and Pauline to enter Carmel was one of the heaviest cross she had carried. This event was too heavy for a child who lost her mother in an early age

and looks up to her elder sisters as her little mothers. One afternoon St. Therese was accompanied by her aunt to visit Carmel and when she saw her sister Pauline she exclaimed with deep sorrow:

"I saw you, my darling Pauline, behind the grille. That I suffered during that first meeting! I swear that all the distress I endured before your entry was nothing in comparison with the anguish I suffered afterwards."

Within the transition of her life to early adolescence she discovered her vocation which made her cross heavier. She wanted to enter Carmel not because she wants to be with her elder sisters but because of her great love for Jesus. In her family St. Therese was able to get the approval of her father but her uncle was against it. She was deeply hurt by this because her uncle was like a father to her. Another factor that made her cross heavier was the fact that the order was not accepting applicants below sixteen years of age, and because of this she felt deeply anxious. After all her trials towards her vocation, in her life at Carmel St. Therese received a much heavier cross. The Mother prioress changed her attitude towards the saint. At their first meeting when they discussed St. Therese's eagerness to enter Carmel the Mother prioress was kind to her but when she entered Carmel the Mother prioress became strict towards the saint's duties and sometimes she was being humiliated in front of all the nuns. Additional burden was added to her cross in the reality of those nuns who does not understand her ways and sometimes makes false judgments of her. St. Therese also experienced physical suffering due to illness during her childhood and her tuberculosis that caused her death.

Every saint had their sufferings here on earth. Some were martyrs and some were like St. Therese dealing with the sufferings of any ordinary human; the death of parents, being bullied in class, separation anxiety for a loved one who will go to another place, experiencing the struggles for the attainment of one's career, humiliation by superiors, rejection by peers and the suffering due to physical illness. The life of the saint is a reminder for contemporary man that sanctity or an encounter with God is not experienced here on earth with the absence of suffering. But it is the other way around making suffering a bridge towards sanctity which is clearly reflected on the reality of the cross because Christ did not save humanity without it but through it.

Buber [4] asserted that suffering is always included in every relationship. He explained that like a child a person cannot establish a relationship just by merely looking at the other but instead he himself must take an action and be willing to take risk in order to reach out to the other in which sufferings can be present. He also added that the modern man must accept the reality of suffering because he himself is not a material object that is foreign to suffering. Additionally this can also be supported by the idea of Maslow [11] of a self-actualized person. He stated that self-actualized persons are not immune to human problems but can also experience sadness, anxiety, hurt, and frustration.

A.2 *The role of the family*

The family of St. Therese played an important role towards her holistic development in attaining sainthood and encountering God in the ordinary.

Even though she was only four when her mother died St. Therese stated that her mother was one of her first teachers about God's love:

"I loved God intensely and very often I offered Him my heart in words taught to me by mommy."

In the loss of her mother her elder sisters were the one who acted as little mothers in the family. In her gratitude to her sister Marie she remarked in her autobiography:

"I consider I was most fortunate in my being taught by you to overcome my fears. Sometimes, for example, you sent me to fetch something from a room at the other end of the house. If I hadn't been so well trained, I should have become very timid. As it is it's very hard to frighten me. I've often wondered how you were able to bring me up with so much love and yet not spoil me. You never passed over a single fault, but you never reproached me without good cause, and I knew that you never changed any of your decisions."

Her elder sister Marie did not only became a mother to her but also served as her first mentor regarding spirituality as she stated:

"She showed me how one could achieve sanctity in the smallest matters"

Their father Louis Martin treats St. Therese like a queen. It was from him that St. Therese learned her early love for the sacraments like the Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation. It was also from their walks together going to different churches that St. Therese developed her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. They also enjoyed things together like gardening, fishing, and looking at beautiful flowers. Her Father also taught her how to be helpful to others especially the less fortunate because when they have walks together her father teaches her to give alms to the poor. St. Therese deeply loved her father, which was written in her autobiography as she expressed:

"I can't put into words how much I loved daddy. I admired everything about him. He would discuss his ideas with me as if I were a grownup"

And in the death of her father she herself declared that he is a saint:

"On July 29 last year God took to Himself our sorely tried and saintly father"

In her autobiography St. Therese was able to portray the importance of the role of the family. In her life a family served as pillars of the human experience. This is because they served as the first teachers of earthly and spiritual realities of life; they are the people who cares for an individual's needs; they are the people who accompanies their family members in times of sorrows and joy and lastly it is in the family where a person learns how to love and how to be loved.

In his "I-Thou" principle Buber [4] stated that being able to apply this principle to the relationship of a human person with others is only possible if the person treats others not as a material object but as a human person. In her case St. Therese was able to acknowledge the role of her family in her own life because in a manner she have acknowledged them as human persons and they have also acknowledged her as a human person. And as a result St. Therese attributed all that she had become to her mother, father, sisters and even relatives.

B. Divine reality

This major theme pertains to the discovery of St. Therese towards the reality of what God's merciful love is. And such reality can be manifested through the sacraments and prayer. Thus, the sub-themes

would be God's love, love for the sacraments, and prayer.

The saint's realization and acceptance of such reality can be connected to Buber's [4] conception of the "eternal Thou" Who is God Himself and he postulated that it is natural for man to recognize his relationship to the "eternal Thou" for it is imbedded in his natural instinct.

B.1 God's love

In the first chapter of her autobiography St. Therese had declared God's love is for all particularly to those who she calls simple souls:

"I also understood that God's love shows itself just as well in the simplest soul which puts up no resistance to His grace as it does in the loftiest soul."

In this discovery of God's love St. Therese was able to see her littleness as God's avenue to express His merciful love as she declared:

"As He wished to make His mercy evident through me and as I was small and weak, He stooped down to me and secretly taught me the secrets of His love. If scholars who had spent their lives in study had questioned me, I'm sure they'd have been amazed to come across a fourteen-year-old child who understood the secrets of perfection, secrets which all their learning couldn't reveal to them, for one has to be poor in spirit to understand them".

St. Therese deepens her reflection of God's love, and refers to it as man's refuge in the face of his despairs of being deeply wounded by sin. She recommends that a person must not be afraid, and must cooperate with God because His justice is clothed in His love, as she stated:

"To me He has revealed His infinite mercy, and I see all His other attributes in the light of that. Thus they all seem glowing with love: His justice, perhaps even more than the others, is clothed with love, for how sweet a joy it is to think that God is just; that, in other words, He makes allowances for our weaknesses and understands perfectly the frailty of our humanity. So what have I to be afraid of? If God, Who is perfectly, just, shows such mercy in forgiving the prodigal son"

St. Therese herself attested to her mother prioress this truth of God's love present in her own life as she stated:

"You, Mother, let me make this offering of myself to God, and you know what flames or greater oceans of grace flooded my soul immediately after I gave myself on June 9, 1985. Ah, since that day I have been soaked and engulfed in love. There is not a second when this merciful love does not renew and cleanse me, sweeping every trace of sin in my heart."

As St. Therese stated how great God's loving mercy is, she also indicated that God is also thirsty for love, thirsty for the love of those He created. And she also accepted the sad reality of man's indifference and ingratitude to their Creator. This moved her to offer herself like a paschal lamb like what Jesus did for those who rejects God's love but in a manner she did it through her little ways.

For St. Therese God's love is open to all particularly to the little ones, those wounded by sin. It is a love that is manifested through His mercy that can transform littleness to holiness. But as St. Therese insisted in such kind of love human cooperation is needed, it must not be stagnant and that makes it fruitful [9].

In connection to St. Therese's discovery of God's thirst for love, Buber [4] remarked that in God's relationship with man there is also something that He needs from him which in this case is love. In relation to God's openness to all in His love Buber also reiterated that God is always present and open to the human person and sadly it is the human person who is always absent. Moreover, he also insisted like St. Therese that man's cooperation in such relationship is important because for him God grants man the freedom to relate to Him it is just a matter of man's discretion if he wanted to.

B.2 Love for the sacraments

In her childhood days St. Therese have an early devotion to the Eucharist. In her autobiography she told a story about this devotion. Whenever her sister, Celine will attend Mass the saint will make a request to give her unleavened bread which is being given during the Holy Communion. Because she was then too young to attend Mass this was not possible, so her sister will give her a piece from a bread loaf accompanied by the prayer of Hail Mary then give it to her. In return after receiving it she will make the

sign of the cross and for her it was exactly like the consecrated bread.

Upon her first confession she experienced a festive mood that brought her a great deal of happiness as she remarked:

"I left the confessional happier and more lighthearted than I'd ever been before. After that I went to confession on every big feast day, and every time I went it was a real feast for me."

St. Therese also loved the feast days celebrated in the Church calendar for her it was like spending one's day in heaven. What she loves most was when the Blessed Sacrament was carried during procession, for her scattering flowers in front of the Monstrance was like scattering flowers in front of God Himself.

The saint was also very inspired during her first communion for her it was an encounter with Jesus, her Master as she remarked:

"Oh, how sweet the first kiss of Jesus was! It was a kiss of love. I knew that I was loved and I declared: "I love You and I give myself to You forever!"

After her first communion she also had experienced great joy as she received the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation. This joy became more inflamed because her one day retreat became longer in which she compared herself to the apostles in the story of the descent of the Holy Spirit as she declared:

"How happy I was! Like the apostles, I waited with joy the coming of the Holy Ghost. I rejoiced that I should be a full Christian, with my forehead marked forever with the mystic cross drawn there by the bishop as he administers this Sacrament."

In her Carmelite life, when she had experienced influenza she was very delighted because each day she receives the Holy Communion and for her it was like being united with her beloved every day.

The life of St. Therese is a reminder that God knows the longing of His people for Him and His love and she was able to portray God is present through the Sacraments, that Christ through His Church has instituted the Sacraments to satisfy human longing. In the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist St. Therese was

able to indicate that a person who receives the bread in the Holy Communion must be filled with joy for it is not only a plain bread that he will be receiving but it is Jesus Himself. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, St. Therese asserts that a person can achieved forgiveness which results to a festive mood. Lastly in the Sacrament of Confirmation St. Therese reminds that a person is protected and guided by the Holy Spirit as he does his daily mission like the apostles.

This can be related to Buber's [4] concept of dialogue in his study Kramer [12] stated that Buber pointed out that an effective dialogue must be sacramental, meaning it must have four elements namely turning, addressing, listening and responding. And these elements can be clearly seen in the saint's relationship with the sacraments because as stated in the discussions earlier she was able to respond to God in all sacraments with joy.

B.3 Prayer

In times of sorrows and problems St. Therese main weapon is prayer. This was evidenced by her struggle in encouraging his uncle to permit her to enter Carmel. She referred to prayer in those times as her *only comfort* and after four days her prayers were answered her uncle permitted her to enter Carmel. Another instance was her willingness to save a criminal from hell who was sentenced by death penalty and she wanted him to convert before his death. She knows she cannot do anything about it and as a response she believed that through her prayers God will forgive the prisoner. What she only asks for God, is a sign of the prisoner's repentance. As she read the newspaper about the prisoner's execution it was stated that before the execution proper the prisoner turned towards the crucifix offered by a priest and kissed it three times. For her it was the sign she was praying for.

St. Therese also believed that it is in prayer that her strength lies and it is her invincible weapon that can soften hearts greater than outward speeches. Additionally, for her:

"The power of prayer is really tremendous. It makes one like a queen who can approach the king and get whatever she asks for. To be sure of an answer, there is no need to recite from a book a formula composed for the occasion. If there were, I should have to be pitied."

In the statement it is clear that St. Therese encourages the simplicity of praying because most of

people today are too much technical and strict when it comes to prayer. For her a person must not limit himself to formulated prayers for he can connect to God in simple terms.

Lastly St. Therese understands prayer as an individual's connection with the Divine both in times of sorrows and joy as she remarked:

"For me, prayer is an upward leap of the heart, an untroubled glance towards heaven, a cry of gratitude and love which I utter in the depths of sorrow as well as from the heights of joy. It has a supernatural grandeur which expands the soul and unites it with God."

Such power of prayer in the saint's life can be compared to Buber's [4] idea about prayer: "The man who prays pours himself out in unrestrained dependence". In addition, St. Therese simplicity in prayer can be also connected to Maslow's [13] idea of peak-experiences in relation to religion. Peak-experiences refer to the self-actualized person's experience of the transcendent and the mysterious. In such experiences Maslow [13] stated that a person who has these experiences tend to regard formalities of rituals as secondary because for them what is essential is the intrinsic experience of the transcendent.

C. Primacy of love

This major theme indicates that it is in the abundance of the reality of God's love that St. Therese saw the reality of her humanity and moved her to love God with His own love through her way of littleness and through her true charity. Thus, the sub-themes are: way of littleness, and true charity.

Primacy of love is comparable to Buber's [4] notion of love. He remarked that love is the connection between the "I" and the "Thou" and in this perspective the "eternal Thou", God Himself. He also remarked that if a person does not accept the reality of love between the "I" and the "Thou" even if the person feels love it is not authentic but just a mere feeling because authentic love is eternal. In the case of St. Therese she was able to accept such love through her responses of her way of littleness, and true charity.

C.1 Way of littleness

St. Therese's discovery of God's love enabled her to discover her ways of littleness as a response to such love. This littleness is expressed through her complete surrender to God. This was due to her spiritual

poverty and abandonment rooted in confidence which also led her to attribute God in simplicity [9].

Early on in her childhood quest for holiness St. Therese was able to depend on God's love. She exclaimed that it is God Who is the source of sanctity and she is too little to claim such merit which clearly reflects God's fatherhood [9]:

"I'm nothing relying on my own merits, as I have none, but I put my hope in him who is goodness and holiness Himself. It is He alone Who, satisfied with my feeble efforts, will raise me to Him, will clothe me with this infinite merits, and will make me a saint"

St. Therese was also able to portray this abandonment when her profession was moved from its original date. She always looks forward to her profession because for her it is her wedding with Christ. And she was very downhearted when she knew that it will be moved from its original date. But in her love and total surrender to God she was able to view it as God's way of purifying her, which makes her a more beautiful bride in her wedding day.

She also further clarifies that when a person surrenders his all to God because of the awareness of his poverty it must be taken into account that it is not only surrendering the things that he cannot handle on his own but also what he possessed even his own ideas. The saint's poverty and dependence in God was also always rooted in her confidence.

In her expression of her littleness out of her love for God through poverty, abandonment and confidence she was also able to discover that a person can respond to God's love through simplicity [9]. One early expressions of St. Therese's love for God was doing household chores in her childhood:

"But after Marie entered Carmel, I sometimes used to make our beds to please God. Sometimes too, when Celine was away, I looked after her plants. As I did this for no other reason than to please God, I shouldn't have expected any thanks for it."

St. Therese, in her autobiography also described her view of mortification which is quite different from the traditional mortification of the saints:

"When I speak of mortification, I don't mean the kind of penance practiced by the saints. There are great souls who practice every sort of mortification from childhood, but I am not like them. All I did was to

break my self-will, check a hasty reply, and do little kindness without making a fuss about them and lots of other similar things."

At the last chapter of her autobiography St. Therese stated that the foundation of her little way is the love of Jesus like a shepherd and mother:

"Jesus has shown me the only path which leads to this divine furnace of love. It is the complete abandonment of a baby sleeping without a fear in its father's arms.

"Whoever is a little one, let him come to Me," the Holy Ghost has said through Solomon's mouth. In His name the prophet Isaias reveals that on the last day the Lord "shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather together the lambs with His arm, and shall take them up in His bosom". And if this is not enough, the same prophet cries in the name of the Lord: "You shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they shall caress you. As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you."

St. Therese littleness is reflected in Martin Buber's [4] idea of relating to "Thou" in terms of poverty and dependence to God. He stated that when relating to "Thou" material possessions are not included in the picture but what is important is the presence of those who are relating with each other. The saint's simplicity in her little ways can be also supported by Buber's statement: "The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou". Moreover, Buber's idea of love can have a direct connection to the Christian notion of love which reflects St. Therese little ways as he remarked:

Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou. In this lies the likeness-impossible in any feeling whatsoever -of all who love, from the smallest to the greatest and from the blessedly protected man, whose life is rounded in that of a loved being, to him Who is all his life nailed to the cross of the world, and Who ventures to bring himself to the dreadful point-to love all men.

C.2 True charity

To complete her response towards God's love St. Therese was able to follow what Jesus taught about the way of truly loving God which is to love God through neighbor. And in loving her neighbor the saint was able to portray true charity.

Remembering her memory regarding their diocesan pilgrimage in Rome St. Therese indicated the start of her charitable work through prayer. She narrated that she met different kinds of people in Rome and inevitably she met priests. She was able to encounter Holy priests and on other hand she was also awakened to the reality weak priests. In such encounter, early on she was able to discover the importance of praying not only for devout priests but most importantly for those priests who are weakened by their humanity.

In the midst of her suffering due to her illness her charity grew deeper. It is for she did not concentrate to the pains she was experiencing but focused more on how she can turn her sufferings as an offering for those who does not accept the light of Christ. For her true charity consist of accepting the wholeness of the person of the other despite all of its wretchedness.

St. Therese saw such principle grounded in the commandment of Jesus to His disciples to love one another as He had loved them. And she also applied this charity in her relationship towards the nuns at Carmel. One of its manifestations was not being judgmental. That whenever she sees another Carmelite nun who did something wrong she will not dwell in that wrong doing but will look at her in a manner that even though she sinned she has still goodness within her. Another manifestation was her lesser concentration on her pride whenever a nun will humiliate her for having a slow progress in their sewing activity. She stated that in such moments she learned to be more understanding particularly to those nuns who makes false judgments of her, because for her anyone has the tendency to judge easily without seeing the whole context of the situation. Loving one's enemy is also included in these acts of charity and St. Therese was able to portray this by praying for those sisters who dislikes her. Another way was by treating them nicely even they were not nice to her, because for her in this way a person can attain peace; one example was having a true and unpretending smile in front of a nun who she dislikes.

At the end of the last chapter of her autobiography she concludes with the fundamental spirit of true charity portrayed through love and grounded in God's love:

"But why do I want to tell the secrets of Your love, my Beloved? You alone have taught me them and surely You can reveal them to others. I know You can and I implore You to: I beseech You to cast Your divine

glance upon a vast number of little souls. I beg You to choose in this world a multitude of little victims worthy of Your LOVE!!!"

St. Therese was able to love God back through her charity because it was authentic. Authentic in a sense that it was selfless, for it endures all things against the egoistic self, for it concerns not only for one's welfare but of the other even one's enemies. It was also authentic because it was anchored in the charity of Christ towards His love for sinners.

In this subtheme it can be stated that one of its components is the sense of sacrifice because of its selfless manner. In such sense St. Therese was able to portray one of the risks mentioned by Buber [4] in relation to sacrifice in the "I-Thou" relationship. He remarked that one risk of sacrifice is a risk of not gaining anything from the self because the self is not anymore rooted in itself but to the very fact that God is present in others. Thus, this is also supported by Buber's [4] assertion that it is in love that the "I" can see the "Thou" even in those people who hates the "I".

Realities and Challenges Of Modern Day Spirituality

Spiritual but not religious

In today's modern world one of the intriguing issues about spirituality is the claim of being spiritual but not religious. Those people who have such kind of perception tend to believe in a variety of spiritual perspectives from different religions but does not engage and commit oneself in an institutional or organized religion, in a manner they can be called as "spiritual shoppers" [14].

Diarmuid O'Murchu [15] stated that people in the modern world has this inclination to postulate that "spiritual yearnings" is not directly rooted in formalized religion instead it can be only one of its accidental attributes. O'Murchu [15] also believes that the modern day spiritual seekers are not aiming to destroy anything from the old instead they only want to make sense and adjust to the fast evolving pace of human reality. Additionally, according to Wolpe [16] this perception may be caused by people's feeling of being controlled in terms of the hierarchy of leaders who must be followed in a certain religion.

The Catholic perspective

In Roman Catholicism this spiritual kind of phenomenon can be associated with the term religious

indifference. In their concluding document at their plenary assembly the Pontifical Council for Culture discussed the causes of religious indifference that is happening in the present times, namely cultural phenomenon, new and old causes of unbelief, secularization of belief and the new religiosity [17].

Cultural phenomenon

The council asserts that due to poor evangelization among cultures such religious indifference happens. In a manner it is through the lack of religious experience and formal teaching that the people of today have the tendency to be persuaded by the prevailing ideology of the times. The main hypothesis is that in the midst of people's lack of knowledge and proper formation they are forced to conform to the belief of the majority [17]. This can be supported by Brechon's [18] findings in his measurement of religious indifference for he remarked that being a part of a religion is a result of a social norm which is the same with being not part of any religion.

New and old causes of unbelief

Secondly, the council postulated that another cause of the phenomenon is composed of the new and old causes that had been attributed to unbelief. One is the all-encompassing presumptions of modern science. The council stated that man has resorted to scientific explanations and principles towards the explanation of life itself affecting his perception about God's existence. And through the persuasion of mass media the people became more convinced. Second is the absolutization of man as the center of the universe, this is due to the communist ideology of a society without God [17]. The council reiterated this cause of unbelief quoting the late Pope St. John Paul II's statement, that communism promotes man as the center of absolute reality by making him perceive that it is he who creates the divine reality and alienating oneself from the reality that it is God Who created man, and as a result man resorts to the abandonment of God. Moreover, this is evidenced by the ideology of humanism in the secularized west which promotes narcissism, egoism, and self-centeredness [17]. Third is the problem of evil, unbelief resonates in this cause because with the presence of evil, suffering and injustice, man tends to rebel against the reality of God and goodness, and resorts to justify their unbelief, reasoning the presence of evil in the midst of their belief in God [17]-[19]. The council also pertained to the historical limits of Christians and the Church in

the world as a cause for the phenomenon of religious indifference. It indicated that due to the misbehaviors, scandals, issues that Christians and the Church officials committed in the past and in present, people becomes intrigued and confused which leads to their unbelief. The fifth is in relation to the family. Due to the secularized structure of the family parents have lesser time for their children due to work related reasons. Grandparents who can transmit the faith to their grandchildren are secluded in homecare centers. Moreover, with the emergence of secular marriages the exemplification of faith modeled by parents towards their children is being weakened [17]. Lastly, is the Globalization of behavior. The council remarked that due to the trends of globalization man is immersed in the ideology of consumerism which promotes materialism as the standard of living and the only way to satisfy his enjoyment causing him to be foreign to the reality and experience of the transcendent.

Secularization of beliefs

The third major cause discussed by the council for religious indifference is the secularization of beliefs. The council clarifies that the real problem is not secularization but the principle of secularism that puts aside to the reality of God by overemphasizing the materiality of the world. This in turn causes a superficial identity of Christians who proclaim themselves Catholics but does not live-out their being Catholic; instead they only regard religion as an affiliation which in the latter will contribute to religious indifference [17]. Moreover the council remarked that due to this perception of a less need for God these superficial Catholics will have the tendency to forget the importance and observance of the sacraments and prayer in their lives.

New religiosity

The last major reason indicated by the council is the emergence of the new religiosity. The council describes new religiosity as a narcissistic view of spirituality, it is a spirituality grounded and anchored only in the self. This subjective spirituality also results to an erroneous mindset of an individual's accountability towards his actions in portraying the spirituality he practices due to a loss of structure of not being grounded in history and objectivity [17]. Like the new and old causes of unbelief this major cause also comprises of subcomponents, the first one is the faceless God. The council stated that this new

religiosity leads man to the idea of pantheism where God is identified as the universe which may lead to the disapproval of the reality of man's communion with God. For God is not identified as someone to relate and commune with. Second would be the religion of the self. The council stated that the new religion comprises of the idea that the center of attention is the self; it is only based on personal success and the attainment of one's goal. It also results into a "do-it-yourself" religion where the individual can have a spiritual shopping, mixing different perspectives from different religions in order to come-up with his own spirituality [17]. Third is the question of truth, in this new religion the question of truth arises from the very fact that its only reference is the self. In such manner truth is not dealt here as authentic one because of its subjectivity to the self [17]. This shallowness of those people in the new religion with regards to truth is evidenced by Brechon's [18] study of measuring religious indifference, for he concluded that people who have this indifference with religion acknowledges the transcendent but for them it is not a very important question. Lastly, is for the reason that this new religion is outside history. The council stated that this new religion is basically only rooted in the mere feeling of being in a state of spirituality, because it does not consists directedness in reference to history.

Integration

This section of the study will discuss how the spirituality of St. Therese of Lisieux can be integrated with the realities and challenges of modern day spirituality.

Human reality

The modern day spirituality can be associated with Buber's [4] "I-It" principle. This is because of the emergence of a self-centered and secularized notion of spirituality [17]. Where man tends to materialize even spiritual principles by his "spiritual shopping" [14] just to please what he wants and disconnect himself from organized religion. Another manifestation of this materialism is man's dislike of religion because of the flaws of its members from the past until the present. This corresponds to Buber's "I-It" principle where the "I" treats the other as a material object by focusing only in his past [6]. This is the same way with the problem of evil [17], because in this manner man perceives that like a perfect a mechanistic object a

society with a religious institution in its background is perfectly free from the presence of evil and suffering.

On the other hand St. Therese's response to these problems in modern day spirituality is the acceptance of the reality of her being human, which comprises of the reality of her suffering and the role of the family. St. Therese's "I-Thou" relationship to her family challenges those who are practicing religious indifference to relate to others (and in this case members of the Church) as human persons and not as material objects. Not to see them as persons of the past but of the present who are capable of change. This can be supported by Marrin's [20] position that through faith man can see God in the ordinary setting of family life, friendship and other human relationship. Lastly, in her humanity St. Therese's challenges those people who are indifferent to religion to accept the reality of suffering and not make it as an excuse for unbelief. This is supported by Buber's [4] statement about modern man, that he must accept the reality of suffering for he is not a material object that is foreign to suffering. Additionally, the Catechism of the Catholic Church [21] also stresses that one of man's expression in his quest for God is through suffering.

Divine reality

If the modern day trend in spirituality secludes God in the realm of spirituality because of man's self-centeredness through science, ideologies of economics and secularism, St. Therese on the other hand counters it by acknowledging the Divine reality in her very life. In such manner the saint portrayed that God is present through the sacraments and prayer, thus, He must not be secluded. In line with this Buber [4] stated that God or the "eternal Thou" cannot be separated from man for He is imbedded in the man's nature. Additionally, this is strengthened by both Buber [4] and St. Therese who asserted that God is always present in the midst of the world and is always ready to relate to man but there is also the sad reality that it is man who is not always present. Furthermore, Marrin [20] remarked that if a person entrusted himself to God he will be able to understand a wider part of himself in relation to the universe. Moreover, the ecofeminist theology of Rosemary Ruether posits that man in the realization of his deep kinship to the cosmic reality must demolish his arrogance towards his manipulation of the environment [22] and in this case the world.

If science declares the absence of God is evidenced by empirical data and the secularization of belief makes a Catholic perceive his religion just an

affiliation, until he forget the importance of prayer and sacraments in his life [17], the spirituality of St. Therese portrays otherwise. St. Therese through her experience regarded the sacraments as a source of joy, in receiving Christ Himself in the Eucharist, being empowered by the Holy Spirit in Confirmation and experiencing a festive mood due to confession. Also rooted from her experience, prayer on the other hand served as St. Therese's strength in the struggles she encountered in life. As Buber [4] remarked: "The man who prays pours himself out in unrestrained dependence". Additionally, St. Therese is not a person who is very particular with formulated prayers instead she portrayed that prayer can be simple and direct to the point. This notion of prayer was also regarded by Peter Kreeft [23], he stated that in ordinary prayer a person can learn more about God compared to those who stays in the library. Although it may be a surprise because they do not acknowledge the existence of God even atheists prays in their own ways, this was evidenced by a Pew report mentioned by Christine Wicker [24]. In her article in *Psychology Today*, the report showed that six percent of them actually prays, moreover, eleven percent of them prays weekly or monthly. In dealing with experience as an evidence of God's existence Kreeft [23] stated that experience reveals God's loving providence.

Primacy of love

The Pontifical council for culture summarizes the root cause of religious indifference with the emergence of a new form of religiosity. A religion that consist of only the self as a point of reference and perceives God as beyond reach and impersonal, which lacks truth it is just a mere feeling of the spiritual [17]. In general the spirituality of St. Therese can address this problem by one of its component in particular is the primacy of love. It is identified to be realized as the result of accepting the reality of her humanity and of God which resulted to her way of littleness and true charity. In such results of the primacy of love all are directed to combat self-centeredness. In the saint's way of littleness; self-abandonment, dependence, poverty and confidence to God were the foundations which made her attribute God even in the simple things and not based on her own subjectivity. Lastly, in charity the saint was able to suppress her own subjective judgments and her egoistic self in order to show to others what is meant by an authentic encounter with God even to the point of loving one's enemy. In these two, love is the major component, a

love that is selfless. In relation to truth the love of Christ serves as the credibility of Christianity [17] which was reflected in the saint's life and spirituality. It is the love rejected by the new religion which postulates the reason why they cannot accept the reality of God even in religion because according to Buber [4] love is the connection of the "I" and "Thou". Moreover, this is strengthened by his idea that this kind of love may be rejected by the world but in the face of this rejection it is he who acts and lives in such love that truly lives in being.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the spirituality of St. Therese of Lisieux in reference to the findings of the study indicates two perspectives about spirituality. First, is the perspective that in the ordinary God can be found by being able to accept the human reality, the Divine reality and the reality of the primacy of love. Anchoring from Martin Buber's [4] principle of "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationship the answer can be attributed in the way man relates to the world and in this study it was the principle of the "I-Thou" relationship. St. Therese was able to find God in the ordinary because she was able to relate to the world around her not as a material object but as a whole in its truest essence particularly in its connection to God the "eternal Thou". This was evidenced by the acceptance of her own humanity, that she is not like a material object who is built for perfection but is a human being who faces the reality of suffering and is molded and reared holistically by a family. Another manifestation of this relationship is her acceptance of the Divine reality or recognizing the reality of the "eternal Thou" in His love, through the sacraments and through prayer. As a result she was able to recognize the primacy of love. The reality that propelled her to the formulation of her way of littleness grounded in her dependence and confidence in God's love portrayed through simplicity and in her acts of true charity. All of these were rooted in her desire to repay God with the same love He had given her.

The second perspective is that St. Therese's spirituality can be used to address the challenges and realities of the modern day spirituality. Due to her acceptance of the realities of her humanity, the Divine and the primacy of love she was able to challenge the modern day spirituality's notion of self-centeredness and unbelief in God. This is in congruence with what Buber [4] reminds about the modern man to evolve

from the "I-It" relationship to the "I-Thou" relationship particularly to the "eternal Thou" where he can only find fulfilment. Furthermore, in the study it was discussed that what was lacking and absent in the present trend in spirituality which makes it unbelieving and practice religious indifference was authentic love, which was according to Buber [4] the connection between the "I" and "Thou". And from the saint's spirituality in order to attain that love man must first accept the reality of his humanity which gives way to the acknowledgement of the divine reality and in turn to the primacy of love responded through faith. In support Buber [4] stated that man cannot relate to the "eternal Thou" through the ways of the world but only through faith.

Limitations of the Study

The researchers recommend two aspects that address the limitations of the study and can further validate its claims. First, future researchers can focus studying other lives of saints using the same theory which can further strengthen the claim of the study that man can find God in the ordinary experiences of life. Perhaps it is highly recommended to study lives of lay saints to have comparison with the life of St. Therese of Lisieux, who is a religious contemplative nun. Lastly, in order to strengthen the claim that the spirituality of St. Therese can address the contemporary issues in spirituality, future researchers may study the saint's spirituality towards the different forms of Atheism.

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