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SAINT TERESA AND THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

It is more than likely that when most of us read the "Story of a Soul", we felt a little thrill on seeing the name of Brother Simeon figure in it, a name referred to with affectionate gratitude by St. Teresa of the Child Jesus.

The Saint knew the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Lisieux: she would meet them in the streets, and her father would speak about them at the "Buissonnets"; and so she is part of the history of their religious family. Teresa had promised to spend her time in heaven doing good upon earth; she could hardly forget a spiritual friendship God's Providence brought about with Brother Simeon of the Lisieux community.

A meeting.

If we mention here Teresa's journey to Rome in November 1887, and her brave appeal to Leo XIII to let her join the Carmelites at the age of 15, it is because we think it is likely that the Saint met Brother Simeon in connection with this question.

In her autobiography, Teresa writes: *"My father went to visit the venerable old Brother Simeon, and there he met Father Reverony. He gently rebuked the priest for not helping me in my difficult task, and then went to tell Brother Simeon all about it. The kind old man listened with interest and even took notes, and then said with emotion "You don't see things like that in Italy".*

One may well imagine that this providential meeting with Brother Simeon changed the attitude of the intransigent Vicar General. It is what Teresa herself thought: *"I think that this meeting made a very great impression on Father Reverony: he was forever afterwards telling me how convinced he was I had a vocation".*

While this meeting was taking place, Teresa was on a trip to Naples. When Celine was asked in 1946 to describe what happened, she said that she remembered going with her father and Teresa to the school, but the Director was not there. On August 31st 1890, he wrote to her, saying: *"I have very happy memories of you and your father".* It is not too far-fetched to suppose that, at least on one occasion, he saw the two sisters who under such circumstances were inseparable.

A friend and confidant.

Even if a meeting in the parlour never took place, it is certain that these two exceptional persons had a close relationship: Saint Teresa meant a great deal to Brother Simeon;

and from this time onwards, he was the friend and confidant of the Saint, her sisters and of the Carmelite convent of Lisieux. His strong attachment to them was shown by his constant sollicitude for their needs. Writing to Celine on March 5th 1897, he says: *"If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask me. I am here to serve you and your superior".*

As for Teresa, she has respect, affection and confidence in this religious. She writes in her autobiography: *"A few hours before my profession, through the kindness of good Brother Simeon, the papal blessing arrived. This precious blessing certainly helped me to survive the most violent storm I have ever experienced in my life".* Unfortunately, the holy Carmelite's letter asking for the blessing has been lost. With a touch of humour, Teresa wrote to Pauline: *"I think I ought to thank «holy old man Simeon», and tell him I received his letter. What do you think?"*

Just like Teresa in 1890, Celine too asked Brother Simeon to obtain for her a papal blessing on the occasion of her profession on February 24th 1896. And later, she wrote to him again to ask him to do the same for Sister Stanislas who was celebrating her Golden Jubilee on February 8th 1897: *"Rest assured that your little Carmelite convent in Lisieux has a special place in its heart for you... we will always remember good Brother Simeon, our father's friend; and both of us, my sister Teresa of the Child Jesus and myself, are very proud to know you... We are both trying to become saints and want to go to heaven soon. She is on her way there. She is an angel. Her life is consumed by love. I enclose a short piece of verse written by her".* It is her favourite piece and her best: *«Living by Love».*

Brother Simeon answered on January 25th 1897: *"I have just re-read your sister's lovely poem. It is a sublime song that is worthy of the great St. Teresa herself. All the Brothers here wish to read it and make copies... Our Holy Father Leo XIII is in good health: his secretary, a very good friend of mine, thinks the poem is very good... Tell your holy sister that I am praying she will recover her health".* He was able to obtain the blessing. The Prioress, Mother Mary Gonzaga, wrote to him *"joining her two little angels in expressing her most respectful gratitude".* Later both Teresa and Celine wrote. Celine described the celebrations in minute detail as one would to a very close friend, ending with: *"it was a perfect day, and without doubt the best present of all was that of our dear, venerable Brother Simeon".*

Brother Martino, the headmaster of St. Joseph's College in Rome, has been good enough to send us a photocopy of a letter which the Saint had enclosed with that of her sister. We reproduce here the complete text which Brother Martino's predecessor had the foresight to keep:

*Carmelite Convent, Lisieux
January 27th 1897*

Dear Headmaster,

I am happy to join my sister Genevieve in thanking you for the very valuable service you rendered our Carmelite convent.

Not knowing any other way to show you my gratitude, I kneel at the feet of our Blessed Lord, and through my poor prayers wish to show you how much your kindness to us has touched me...

My joy, however, is tinged with sadness, for I have heard your health has been weakened: I beg Jesus with all my heart to spare your life which has been so precious to the Church, for as long as possible.

I know that our Divine Master must be eager to give you your crown in heaven, but I hope he will leave you a little longer in exile, to continue working for his glory, as you have done all your life, so that the immense store of merits you have amassed may make up for those souls that come to God with empty hands.

I dare to hope, dear Brother, to be one of those fortunate souls that will share in your merits, as I do not think my life in this world will be very long... When I come face to face with my Beloved Spouse, I will have only my good intentions to offer him; but if you reach our Heavenly Country before me, I hope you will come to meet me and offer on my behalf the merits won by your devoted life. As you can see, your little Carmelites can never write to you without begging for some favour and taking advantage of your generosity!!!

Dear Headmaster, you are so powerful on our behalf in this life; you have obtained for us the blessing of our Holy Father Leo XIII so many times already, that I can't help thinking that the Good Lord will give you great power over his heart in heaven. I beg you not to forget me in his presence if you have the happiness of seeing him before me. The only thing I beg you to ask for my soul is the grace to love Jesus and to make him loved as much as it is possible.

If Our Lord comes for me first, I promise to pray for your intentions and for all the people who are dear to you. I am not waiting till I get to heaven, of course, before I begin praying for you: I am happy to do so now and so prove my deep gratitude to you.

I shall always be happy, dear Headmaster, to be your grateful little Carmelite in the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

*Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Family,
Carmelite*

Celine's name in religion was Sister Genevieve. Our reproduction of this letter is faithful to the original in its punctuation: the underlined words are the Saint's emphasis in the original.

The limited scope offered by an article forces us to be too brief. We cannot quote in full all the letters we have in our possession which were exchanged between Celine and Brother Simeon who, with her closest family, was the first to become aware of this person whom the whole world would soon acclaim as "the greatest saint of modern times". On July 7th 1897, Celine wrote to ask him to obtain a papal blessing and an indulgence "in articulo mortis" for Teresa: "*Our dear little Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus is dying... she is slipping away quietly. Her illness is love. She is not dying of anything but love just as she wished so much*".

And so a Brother of the Christian Schools was one of the first to share the intimate feelings and thoughts which revealed the secret of the outstanding holiness of one who would be the inspiration of a unique spiritual movement in the Church. And this Brother realised the importance of this message. He says so in his reply on July 12th: "*The sad news you sent in your letter about the sad situation of your admirable sister is a source of both sorrow and consolation. To die of love for Jesus who died for love of us, what is there more sublime, more heroic and more worthy of our longings!*" In spite of a few difficulties, he obtained what she had asked

for: "*I asked for the papal blessing and the "in articulo mortis" indulgence for your sister. The Holy Father has agreed to everything*". Finally, a letter dated October 10th 1897 informs him of Teresa's departure for heaven.

A heritage.

On September 30th 1898, the autobiography of Sister Teresa of the Child Jesus was published, 2,000 copies in all. In the Carmelite convent they were worried. Would they sell even 100? Celine wrote to Brother Simeon immediately and sent him three copies. In her letter dated October 4th which was included in the parcel, she suggests timidly: "*Of course, I don't think the Holy Father will read this book, but couldn't one offer him a copy for his blessing?*" She thinks that his "special friend" might possibly be able to arrange it.

Brother Simeon read the book he had been given and "*thought it would do a lot of good*" and "*all the other Brothers were eager to read it*". He sent the second copy to the Pope's private secretary, asking him, as Celine had asked, for "his impressions of the book in writing". On November 6th a letter arrived at the Carmelite convent from the Brother Director: "*The third copy I am returning to you has been blessed by the Holy Father*".

The Brothers are still working in Lisieux, and are bound by deep bonds of friendship with the Carmelites: the gentle saint has continued to help them as her father had before her, and she extends her kindness to all the Brothers.

A spiritual relationship.

Is the relationship, then, between St. Teresa and our Institute one that is based on chance meetings and on her heavenly protection? Can one not speak of a true spiritual relationship which goes beyond the confines of time and space?

Many Lasallians have been inspired by her ideal which has led them to the only true greatness, that of evangelical insignificance, taught by both saints. Can one not say that it is on this level that the close ties that bind us are most obvious?

Saint Benildus surely followed "the way of the Little Flower" without knowing it by that name and unaware of its lyrical dimension. He surely illustrated the value of even the smallest gesture made through love.

Brother Gabriel Emonnet.

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The author of this article has written a book which was very highly praised by a variety of reviews. It was written with the Brothers especially in mind, and what makes it original is a comparative study – to first to date – between the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle and that of St. Teresa of Lisieux. "*Educateurs et spiritualité Thérésienne*", By **Gabriel Emonnet**. Apostolat des Editions, 46 rue du Four. 75006 Paris. 256 Pages.