

Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux

Thérèse de Lisieux, John Clarke (Translator)

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This book, first published in 1898 in a highly edited version, quickly became a modern spiritual classic, read by millions and translated into over fifty-five languages. John Clarke's acclaimed translation, first published in 1975, is now accepted as the standard throughout the English-speaking world.

Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux Details

Date : Published January 1st 1996 by ICS Publications (first published September 30th 1898)

ISBN : 9780935216585

Author : Thérèse de Lisieux , John Clarke (Translator)

Format : Paperback 306 pages

Genre : Religion, Biography, Christianity, Catholic, Nonfiction, Spirituality

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Emma says

I am not finishing this book. Now that I have switched English classes, I do not plan on reading this again. As you can see, my feelings for this book have not changed. Everyone says how they admire Thérèse so much. I just don't get it. She is extremely full of herself, and she is always crying at every little thing. She seems really spoiled, and it drives me crazy. Even when she says that she "did it for Jesus" she is still obsessed with herself. I just don't know what people like about her.

Ok. I do not like this book. Yet, I must read it. I continue to try and like it, but it is just not happening. I have to admit that reading the introduction (the first edition introduction) out loud is a little bit fun, but I am not really liking this book. I am reading this book for my English class, just my friend Madi and I. I have to say that I like how she used her mother's letters, it makes it sound less like bragging. And all of the details that she remembers are quite fascinating. All of the books that I have read this year for English have been true/based off a true story, which I find slightly intriguing. I would really love it if someone could actually convince me that this is an amazing book.

Wayne says

I first read this book as a young monk.

And then EVERYTHING about her I could lay my hands on!!!

Later as a Retired Catholic I visited Lisieux and the convent where Therese lived and died.

Revisiting this book after so many years fills me with curiosity and is something I'd like to do before the lights go out. I am interested in my response, now, when I have done some 180 degree turns in some areas of my life.

I hesitate to award any star rating yet - not fair to me or the book.

But I do recall two things Therese said.

To a nun who defended the rights of Divine Justice:

"My sister, you want God's justice, you will get God's justice.

The soul receives exactly what it expects from God."

And asked by her sister, Celine, also a Carmelite nun, about the validity of her Little Way (of Spirituality)

Therese responded:

"Do not doubt my teaching, even if the Pope should disapprove of it.

I myself will return to tell you if I have erred."

(Recorded in Celine's memoir "Conseils et Souvenirs".)

No wonder I lived a monastic life of such Confidence!!!!

Nicola Mansfield says

Reason for Reading: Our church has been run by the Carmelites for over 100 years. Our priests are

Carmelites and we have a statutory of St. Therese in the building. I was much intrigued about her "little way" and after watching the recent 2004 movie about her life was ready to read her autobiography.

In truth, the book is really not an autobiography but more of a snippet of memoirs. It is divided into three pieces, the first, being the longest, was commissioned by her Mother Superior who also happened to be her sister. This is where Therese tells of her childhood up until she is accepted into Carmel. Therese was a sheltered child, raised along with 4 other sisters who also became nuns and devout Catholic parents who kept them from the worldly ways of life but raised them within a deeply loving family atmosphere. Therese was very much childlike her entire life of 24 years, never having experienced any of life's degradations and was a complete innocent in so many matters. Yet her soul belonged to the Lord from a very early age (three) and she knew she wanted to be a saint. Even though her mother died while she was still young her childhood seems to have been happy enough, with Therese preparing herself for a Religious life and a holy, saintly, Heavenly eternal life which may have taken some of the childhood fun out of her but her soul was content with this and she yearned to suffer for Jesus while she was exiled here on earth.

The second piece is a much shorter memoir written for another Mother of the Abbey who had requested Therese write of life at Carmel. Here we see Therese grow-up though she will always retain her childlike innocence. Here for the first time she will actually suffer from things the reader is more able to relate to rather than the childish sufferings in the first part. Therese met fellow Sisters who did not care for her because of her young age and the nepotism that seemed to be going on with her family within the Abbey. She was treated harshly by some, worked hard at back breaking chores, and never let her faith slip. She learned to put into practice what she called her "little way", making small, little efforts to please to the Lord. Over time these little things will add up to a greater good in the end.

Finally, the last piece is more of a letter written to Sister Marie (again her actual sister) who has asked for a small piece from her as she now lays on her deathbed dying of Tuberculosis. Here she writes of her most secret thoughts and desires and requests of Jesus. Her visions, dreams and then glories that await her when she reaches Heaven as she knows she will be going straight there to continue her work of saving earthly souls from her place in Heaven.

A beautiful little book, with a powerful message between its deceptively short pages. St. Therese was not writing for anyone to read other than her intended singular audience and perhaps she knew other sisters would read her words. Thus she writes simply and childlike and again this can be deceptive to the reader especially as one goes through the first half of the book about her childhood but there are some very wise lessons about living, love and the pursuit of eternal life that came from this dear soul who died at the age of 24. She actually gives us a way to live our lives according to the Gospels, her "Little Way" is an inspiring way to lead one's life. She was not made a Doctor of the Church without reason. This is one of those books that every Catholic should read.

I will be finishing my study of St. Therese with one more book which is a fairly recent autobiographical book written about her life and her way.

Therese says

I wanted to read a book that had been translated for my Better World Books 2016 Reading Challenge, and since I already had this, I thought I would check it out. After all she has my name, or rather I have hers, and I like little things. Other than that, I really wasted my time.

Therese and her 4 sisters who survived to adulthood all became nuns after an extremely religious, pious, and sheltered upbringing. First I have to say, I'm not a Catholic, and reading this certainly does not sway me in that direction. I found that she seemed to be rather full of herself, and while she speaks about her trials, she never tells us what they are except that she has suffered greatly. She and this book seem very one-dimensional, and I know I'm in the minority of how I feel about this. I kept reading hoping for more of the story, but she would get off on her tangents quoting Scripture when not explaining how she put up with fellow nuns and their annoying little habits. She didn't think she had any? I guess not since she became a saint after dying at such a young age, but when someone wants to suffer and die all the time in order to be closer to God, it doesn't seem that they are living the life he has given them (just my opinion).

The editor in the final half of the book explains a little bit more about her life, and that was a little more understandable and readable.

In summary this book reminded me of a quotation that said some people are so heavenly that they are of no earthly good. I don't know what she did as a nun other than pray, and perhaps I would be better off finding a biography written by someone else about her. On the other hand, I don't think I will bother.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

I have always heard of her and didn't know what to make of her. I read quotes here and there and didn't catch my attention much. Since I have begun reading her autobiography, I have been completely absorbed and taken by every words she writes and I feel like she is sitting in front of me like a bosom friend telling me her story in all purity, in all simplicity, in an extremely natural manner. Sometimes you read the Saints and you end up feeling they are way up there but not so with our beloved Thérèse who is every bit as human as she can be. I read a part of the book and I feel like I really miss her and I want to go back to her to hear her talking some more to me. Reading just excerpts of her quotes will not do her justice or help you know and meet the real Thérèse. You HAVE to read the Autobiography first and then you would hear her heartbeat in what she is saying in every word she is writing. Reading her I feel like I am getting a letter from a pen-pal living in France and sharing in full transparency how she really feels and what she longs for.

Since the Lord has called me to missionary work reaching out to Muslims, it delighted me to know that my little friend Thérèse also had real longing for proclaiming the Gospel in foreign lands, to the infidels, i.e. those who are still living in darkness and Christ has yet to open their eyes. I adore her missionary, evangelistic zeal. On p. 216 she talks about how since her entrance into the blessed ark, she has always thought that if Jesus did not bring her swiftly to heaven, her lot would be the same as that of Noah's little dove: the Lord would open window of the ark one day, telling Thérèse to fly very far, very far, towards infidel shores, carrying with her the little olive branch. Now, this is true evangelist at heart, and can she preach!

She often talks about realizing her vocation for the foreign missions. As a convert from Islam into Christianity, I had to leave my family and was exiled from my homeland, Egypt. I feel Thérèse can relate to my situation as she says in a child-like manner that He, i.e. Jesus, has given her the attraction for a complete exile (p.218). In her heart, she knew that she is not to make lodging here but her real home is, indeed, heaven. We leave our homelands, where we have had roots all along, and then for the sake of the cross we have to be pulled out of all this be called to a different kind of citizenship, to be a citizen of Heaven, my real home where my ultimate loyalty rests.

I loved her honesty as she, like some of us, struggled with concepts of faith and how she wondered if heaven was real. She was evidently intelligent and she struggled with the realness of some Christian concepts while she herself was full of heaven and her focus was heaven-ward all along. That is one thing I love about the saints: they are not ashamed to express struggles and doubts, and this helps us in many ways to relate to them and take them for close friends. Her littleness was the secret of her spiritual uniqueness and I believe she got her inspiration from the mouth of Eternal Wisdom speaking in the Holy Bible: "Whoever is a LITTLE ONE let him come to me" (Proverbs 9: 4).

What about people who aggravate us and keep giving us a hard time? Does Thérèse have something to say to us from her own experience? Well, she share that in her Community there was a Sister who had the faculty of displeasing her in everything, in her ways, in her words, her character, everything seemed disagreeable to her. Yet, despite all that, Thérèse insists, she must be very pleasing to God, and this should count for a lot. Everytime Thérèse met her she prayed to God for her, offering Him all her virtues and merits. Thérèse says: I felt this was pleasing to Jesus, for there is no artist who doesn't love to receive praise for his works, and Jesus the Artist of souls is happy when we don't stop at the exterior, but, penetrating into the inner sanctuary where He chooses to dwell, we admire its beauty. Whenever Thérèse was tempted to answer her back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her the most friendly smile, and with changing the subject of the conversation as it says in the Imitation: It is better to love each one in his own opinion than to enter into arguments (The Imitation of Christ III, 44: 1). Finally this Sister got curious and one day at recreation she asked Thérèse in almost these words: "Would you tell me Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus, what attracts you so much toward me; every time you look at me, I see you smile?" Thérèse explains that what attracted her was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus who makes sweet what is most bitter. Then she answered her that she was smiling because she was so happy to see her.

While we hope to do great things for the Lord and be "mightily used" by Him, as the cliché phrase goes, and we should give our best for the Lord and His work, Thérèse teaches us that she is just delighted to be a "little brush" in the hands of the great Artist (p. 235). The brush can't boast of the masterpiece produced with it. She explains: An artist doesn't use only one brush, but needs at least two; the first is the more useful and with it he applies the general tints and covers the canvas entirely in a very short time; the other, the smaller one, he uses for details. Then she tells her mother that she is the precious brush the hand of Jesus lovingly holds when He wishes to do a great work in the soul of her children while she, Thérèse, is the very small brush He deigns to use afterward for the smallest details.

I will always fondly remember her, she who was a soul winner, and believed in her effective role as a Christian in praying people into the Kingdom. Her intercessory prayers never go in vain. She believed in a God who draws all people to Himself and we are actively involved in His work and she could boldly pray as Jesus pray and see her role in the mission of the Father.

Many a friend of mine who have told me how she has impacted them greatly in the beginning of their monastic vocation and she is so indispensable to their spiritual growth. What sheer joy and sheer delight!!

Marne says

I have to confess, that this was the most difficult book to read that I have read in a long while. It doesn't usually take me several days to finish a book of only 241 pages, even taking into account that I don't have a great deal of time to read every day.

Overall, it was a worthwhile read. I found her experiences, her outlook, her very nature to be almost completely foreign to me. For a while, I read almost in disbelief, thinking to myself that nobody could possibly be this humble, or rejoice so much in suffering, or even have faith that is so strong as to look forward, joyfully, to death, which she often refers to as, "the end of exile."

I never really got over that feeling of disorientation -- her life being completely different than mine. But I found that I could connect with her in many small ways. I enjoyed her metaphors. I found the way that she took the opportunity to make the most of small sacrifices in her life very compelling, to guard her tongue, for instance, or to allow someone else to do something she would have liked to do. Her humility certainly gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own lack of the same virtue.

There were a couple of passages that really uplifted me. I posted one the other day, regarding allowing the light of Christ to illuminate our souls like the sunshine on the treetops on a beautiful night. At another point, in a letter to a Seminarian, she writes, "It is so consoling to think that Jesus...has felt all our weaknesses and shuddered at the sight of the bitter chalice..." I too, find this consoling. I fear death, and for me it is a great comfort to know that the end even Christ asked for the cup to pass by him. St. Therese too, goes through a period of darkness, where she fears that she will not go to heaven, and this, at least, was something to which I could relate!

So overall, I'm glad to have read it. What an amazing person! I hope that I can consider ways in which I can use her example to draw closer to Christ.

Sheila says

As a non-Catholic, I was very interested in this autobiography and writings of Saint Therese of Lisieux, the young Catholic nun who lived in the late 1800's and died at age 24.

The variations of her thoughts were fascinating to me. Things such as *"I am most thankful to Our Lord that He let me find only bitterness in earthly friendships."* and how she looked forward to her death and being with her Lord and spouse, *"That day everything was little except the graces received - except my peace and joy in gazing upon the beautiful star-lit sky at night, and thinking that soon I should fly away to Heaven and be united to my Divine Spouse amid eternal bliss."*

Yet when someone asked her *"How comes it that you can be so patient? You are ever the same - calm and full of joy."* Her answer was, *"It was not always the case with me, but since I have abandoned all thought of self-seeking, I live the happiest life possible."*

Some of her thoughts on the scriptures were also interesting: *"In Heaven only shall we be in possession of the clear truth. On earth, even in matters of Holy Scripture, our vision is dim. It distresses me to see the differences in its translations, and had I been a Priest I would have learned Hebrew, so as to read the Word of God as He deigned to utter it in human speech."*

Even her thoughts about nuns themselves were interesting: *"The Apostles murmured against Magdalen. This still happens, for so do men murmur against us. Even some fervent Catholics think our ways are exaggerated, and that - with Martha- we ought to wait upon Jesus, instead of pouring out on Him the odorous ointment of our lives. Yet what does it matter if these ointment jars - our lives - be broken, since Our Lord is consoled, and the world in spite of itself is forced to inhale the perfumes they give forth?"*

She seemed to desire, even cherish, suffering: *"I give thanks to my Jesus for making me walk in darkness, and in this darkness I enjoy profound peace. Willingly to I consent to remain through all my religious life in this gloomy passage into which He has led me. I desire only that my darkness may obtain light for sinners. I am content, nay, full of joy, to be without all consolation."*

And as her death at a young age appeared to be approaching, she wrote to another *"Brother, I am so happy to die! Yes, happy...not because I shall be free from suffering: on the contrary, suffering, combined with love seems the one thing worth of desire in this vale of tears: but happy to die because far more than on earth I shall help the souls I hold dear."*

Yet in the end, her motto was *"Love is Repaid by Love Alone."*

Christian Engler says

To have a veritably sacred and loving bond with God is a wonderful and unexplainable sensation, an ecstasy that no degree of hyperbole can befittingly describe, for, it is an experience that is transcendent above all things earthly. When one searches to have a holy unification with the Lord, when they utter, "I love God," they are seized by the ethereal clasp of the Divine. And it is good. Sometimes that celestial grip is so wonderfully strong, what emanates from the soul into the sanctified cup is overflowing, leaving copious amounts of blessed spillage. But 'spillage' is often deemed as a mess, the useless and unwanted remnants of our material gains, the wastes of humanity, the 'useless eaters' of society whom the public (myself included) at large, without flinching, tenaciously, soullessly, ignore. But in the case of Saint Therese of Lisieux, her spillage, quite simply, are her very words, loving pledges and unutterances that resound with unadulterated esoteric wisdom that is normally relegated to those who have lived well beyond their years. And even in old age-through a conscientious process of living and observing-it is very doubtful that one could possibly have attained, achieved the indefinite caliber of grace, purity and intelligence that she was obviously endowed with. Her words remind one and all that in the ugly there is beauty, in the hopelessness, there is hope, in the gravity, there is grace, in the challenged (mentally, physically), there is profound depth and courage, but it all derives from a glowing source: God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit. Her words teach, for she herself says on page 124: "...any small good deed I do can be mistaken for a fault, the mistake of calling a fault a virtue can be made just as easily." When something moral is made to appear immoral and something immoral is made to appear moral, a blunt mental crash may easily occur, destroying that which was once soiled and good: the innocence of youth a prime example, the weapon, one of many: social politics. Her autobiography, written with some reticence, brings forth (not fully) the story of how she came to be a Carmelite nun, but the stark affect God had over her: "One Sunday when I was looking at a picture of Our Lord on the Cross, I saw the blood coming from one of his hands, and I felt terribly sad to think that it was falling to the earth and that no one was rushing forward to catch it. I determined to stay continually at the foot of the cross and receive it. I knew that I should then have to spread it among other souls. The cry of Jesus on the cross--'I am thirsty'--rang continually in my heart and set me burning with a new, intense longing. I wanted to quench the thirst of my Well Beloved and I myself was consumed with a thirst for souls. I was concerned not with the souls of priests but with those of great sinners which I wanted to snatch from the flames of hell." P. X. In time, Saint Therese also worked for the souls of priests. It's a shame she's not here now. Her simple little book is not, true, a literary magnum opus, but its direct simplicity offers something of far better value; it is a work that led to her canonization by Pius XI in 1925, led to her being declared the principal patron (along with St. Francis Xavier) of all missionaries and missions and later, declared the secondary patron of France (with St. Joan of Arc). The book-like the Bible-has an inarguable power to move and clense: "I am only a weak and helpless child, yet it is in my very weakness which has made me daring enough to offer myself to You, Jesus,

as the victim of your love. Long ago only pure and spotless victims were accepted by the almighty God. The divine justice could be satisfied only by immaculate victims, but the law of love has replaced that of fear, and love has chosen me as a victim-feeble and imperfect creature that I am. Is the choice of me worthy of love? Yes, it is, because in order for love to be fully satisfied it must descend to nothingness and transform that nothingness to living fire. I know, Lord, that 'love is repaid by love alone.' And so I have sought and I have found the way to ease my heart-by giving You love for love." P. 162. If that is not what we're here for, the human race will never survive.

Cathy says

Began reading this book a little begrudgingly as St. Therese of Lisieux just never really appealed to me. My opinion was that she was spoiled and had an easy life, so what would she have to offer me?

Well, this is one of my favorite books. The first few chapters I had to drag myself through, after that it was smooth sailing. She had such a practical and 'easy' outlook on life and holiness, very much like St. Josemaria Escriva - that it's through the small, every day events in our lives that we can grow as people and attain holiness and eventually union with God.

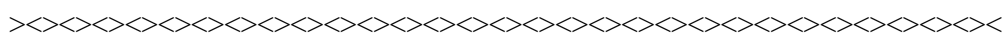
Just very practical guidance.

booklady says

I can't remember the first time I read this but I think it was in high school. Dear St. Thérèse was my Confirmation saint so I wanted to read her autobiography. I remember being blown away by her simple and yet powerful approach to sanctity. It IS the Gospel -- so gentle, humble, meek and Christian -- and not even difficult in a way except that I kept forgetting to live it!

Then as I got older, I confess I sort of forgot about this book and my patron saint. I even came to think that she was too 'young' for me. She died in her mid-twenties so what could she have known or written which could be of help to a wife and mother, someone living the active life out in our modern world? Everything. I reread her book a few years ago and it spoke to my heart a million times more than it did when I was younger.

Here are some of my observations from my 2010 reading: I have so much to learn from her! In many ways I envy her that quiet, solitary life behind the walls of Carmel. So much crowds in on my life and seems to stand between me and simplicity, between me and the love of God. Then I read some more and know that all the 'things' don't matter, whether they be physical, emotional or mental. It is only a matter of a willing heart. Is this heart open to Him? Am I willing to give it all away in a second and run to Him when He calls? Am I following Him now ... or trying to anyway? Little Flower, please continue to be my guide! Dear gentle mentor saint, help this sinner follow Him Whom we both love.



Special note: My oldest daughter, Meg, was born on St. Thérèse's feast day, October 1st! That has always

felt like such a special gift to me from her! A further 'rose' from her was the gift of my present job, as Director of Religious Education at my parish. Coincidentally (and of course there are **no** coincidents with God!) my first day on the job was her feast day as well ... the 1st of October, 2009. Thank you again dear St. Thérèse!

Just found out one of the dates/times I actually read this, so I'm recording it now.

Leslie says

Well this book has been such an emotional experience for me. I guess I have now come full circle from my early childhood version of God (magical nice fatherly fellow who granted wishes and protection from evil) to my early adulthood (and also completely wrong notion of) God (angry father who didn't love me, but seemed to reward evildoers) to my later notion of their not being a God at all. That was the only way I could explain the horrors of the modern world, the evils I learned of on the nightly news that broke my heart and cost me my faith. How surprising to learn that this great saint had the same low spots as me, the same doubts! She pulled thru and so have I! It's a shame that it's mostly just catholics who read of the lives of saints. We can learn so much by being open to others' experiences. I am also pleased to read in this autobio that so much of the methods I learned from the Buddha were helpful to her too! The most important one being, "Do not dwell in the past. Do not worry about the future. Concentrate the mind on the present moment." the version I read was a freebie from Amazon for Kindle that didn't say so, but also contained many of her letters, prayers and poems. What a treasure.

Bob says

I take personal retreats regularly at a center named after Saint Therese. So it seemed only right that at some point I should read her autobiography.

It is personal narrative with a single thread throughout: Therese's intense love for Jesus that was a consequence of her great confidence that she was greatly loved by Jesus. It is this love, even more than the fact that two of her sisters had preceded her in entering the monastery, that moved her from an early age to long to be "wed" to Christ.

She confesses at times that her writing is "muddled" and indeed it has something of a "stream of consciousness" flow to it moving from an event in her family to reflections to a narrative on caring for novitiates. Yet the theme of the love of Christ and her love for Christ weaves throughout and gives the narrative an underlying coherence.

The book speaks of her earliest spiritual memories in her awareness of the love of God for her manifest both in nature and in the Catholic mass. She describes her confirmation and chrismation and the joy of knowing herself sealed by Christ's Spirit. She recounts her pleas with her priest, bishop, and finally on pilgrimage, the Pope to be allowed to enter the Carmelite order early. At last, all relented and she entered at age 15.

She describes the vicissitudes of monastic life and how she learns through each of these to see them as loving gifts from God to form her more deeply in the love of Christ. She discovers that this is a love that is greater than all her weaknesses. We see her embrace of caring for others in her novitiate beginning with her prayers.

With that love, we see a growing passion for "lost souls" expressed in prayer both for missionary priests and the people they sought to win.

We hear this love burning more brightly as her death at age 24 approaches. Toward the end of this narrative (and her life) she wrote this, which expresses well the recurring theme of this narrative:

"O eternal Word, my Saviour, You are the Eagle I love and the One who fascinates me. You swept down to this land of exile and suffered and died so that you could bear away every soul and plunge them into the heart of the Blessed Trinity, that inextinguishable furnace of love. You re-entered the splendours of heaven, yet stayed in our vale of tears hidden under the appearance of a white Host so that You can feed me with Your own substance. O Jesus, do not be angry if I tell you that Your love is a mad love...and how can you expect my heart, when confronted with this folly, not to soar up to You? How can there be any limit to my trust?(p. 158).

The Catholic context in which this love is expressed may seem foreign to the non-Catholics like me who read this account. But one cannot help but ask oneself in reading Therese's narrative, "do I love Jesus with anything like the longing of this woman who died so young?" As one who believes in the grace of God in Christ, I must ask whether I have anything like the confidence of Therese in the greatness of God's love to overcome my lesser and greater sins?

Good questions for my next retreat, it seems.

Wanda says

A sweet story!

I didn't like the book as well as I thought I would, though. I think I just can't relate to someone as doted on as Therese was. I kept thinking what a wuss she was and then feeling bad that I thought such a thing about someone who became a saint! I'll admit that in the end she was not a wuss at all.

The best thing I got out of the book is that God gives everyone the ability to be a saint in his/her own way, and doesn't expect anyone to be a saint in the way that anyone else did. Which is a great relief, actually.

Ahmed says

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St. Theresa of the Child Jesus

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Pat says

I am torn in my reaction to this book. With all of our knowledge of psychiatric illnesses today, we would probably medicate Therese and send her to therapy due to her hallucinations, visions and, at least from the tone of Manuscript A, her self-absorption. I only became interested in the book and St. Therese when I started reading Manuscript B which is almost 2/3 of the way through the book. Manuscript C and the Epilogue were the sections that really moved me and brought home the true scope of her devotion and inner strength. I should probably have cut her more slack in that she was only 25 years old when she died. I can't imagine a 25 year old these days with the same level of piety and grace under the extreme pain and discomfort that accompanied her final months.

By all means read this book, but be prepared to see what at first blush seems to be a self-absorbed brat turn into a devote and beautiful person.
