

**Homily for the Mass for the
Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women Convention
Saint Paul Church, Highland, Illinois**

**Memorial of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Virgin and Doctor of the Church
(Isaiah 66:10-14c, Psalm 131, Matthew 18:1-4)**

October 1, 2025

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we gather to celebrate Mass for the Annual Convention of the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. From my perspective, the Council of Catholic Women is an organization which is especially effective in putting into action two Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship that were adopted at our 2017 diocesan synod: Prayer and Formation. First, Prayer is a sign of hope and path of grace to heaven. Second, Formation is about studying the Word of God and learning more about Jesus and our Catholic Faith. As disciples of Christ, our process of conversion and formation does not end at a certain point, but rather continues to deepen as we grow closer to God through a life of prayer. Days of prayer and formation like this convention are excellent opportunities to grow in community and in faith.

It is fitting that our Saint for today is one of the most beloved Catholic women in recent centuries. Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus is better known as Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, or as the nickname she gave to herself, the Little Flower. Before she died of tuberculosis at the young age of 24, Saint Thérèse wrote her simple spiritual testimony, out of obedience to her Mother Superior in her Carmelite Convent who was actually her older sister. In this spiritual autobiography, Saint Thérèse recounts that she grew up in a devout and loving Catholic family in France, where her family was supported by her mother's lace-making business. They enjoyed going for walks on Sunday afternoons, and the children would give alms to the poor people they met along the way.

As a little girl, Thérèse would innocently tell her mother and father that she wished they would die, so that they could go to heaven and be with Jesus. Such innocent love shows how at a young age, Saint Thérèse was already deeply aware of the reality of heaven. Sadly, this did happen, when Thérèse's mother Zélie died of breast cancer when Thérèse was just four-and-a-half years old. This was the beginning of a deep sadness and interior darkness that Thérèse would experience for nearly a decade. Thérèse, by her own description, became overly sensitive and emotionally unstable, given to

bouts of weeping and isolation. However, when Thérèse was fourteen years old, she experienced a profound inner healing. She had just attended midnight Mass on Christmas with her father and sisters, and they had returned home. Thérèse knelt by the fireplace and wept as she opened her Christmas presents. Thérèse stated, "The work I had been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant, contenting himself with my good will which was never lacking." From that point on, Thérèse had rediscovered her happiness and gained the capacity to channel her great emotional energy into love and care for others. Her mind turned towards her vocation.

Saint Thérèse entered the Carmelite Convent in Lisieux when she was only fifteen years old. Here, her experience of God and his never-ending love began to deepen more than ever. In the convent, Thérèse often wondered why God seemed to give different measures of grace to different people. Some great sinners such as Saint Augustine and Saint Mary Magdalene had grace showered upon them by God, while others might die without even hearing the name of God. Thérèse began to understand this mystery by remembering her Sunday afternoon walks with her family. She remembered that "the brilliance of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not lessen the

perfume of the violet or the sweet simplicity of the daisy.” If every flower wished to be a rose, nature would lose its beauty. The same is true regarding our souls. No two souls are exactly the same, and the great variety of souls is what gives beauty to the Church. Jesus loves both the tallest cedar tree, and the simplest flower of the field.

Perhaps we have been challenged by the same question as Saint Thérèse. Why do some people seem to have such an easy life, while others face great challenges? Why do some Catholics find it so easy to pray, while others struggle for years to relate to God in prayer? Saint Thérèse teaches us that we should not compare our abilities in life, or the amount of sufferings that we experience, but rather we should learn to trust in Jesus. In the Gospel today, we heard the Apostles ask Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?” Jesus gives the unexpected answer that only those who humble themselves like a little child are the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Thérèse learned what it meant to be deeply loved during the happy days of her childhood with her mother, father, and four sisters living a joyous Catholic life. Later, Thérèse also had to learn that she was deeply loved during the sad days of her adolescence after her mother’s death.

Our own souls, too, each have their own story. We can look back on our lives and remember times of blissful happiness, and periods of intense darkness and sadness. But we know that God's love for us does not waver, even when we experience weakness and sin.

Saint Thérèse's parents, Louis and Zélie, were canonized in 2015, and all four of Saint Thérèse's sisters also became nuns. Amazingly, Saint Thérèse was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1997. This means that even though she attended school for only five years, Saint Thérèse became one of the greatest teachers in the history of the Church because her "little way" of trust in God. The lives of Thérèse' and the entire Martin family are a reminder that a Catholic family life rooted in prayer and service of others will bear great fruit for the entire Church. May Saint Thérèse pray for us today and help us to understand better that in God's garden, He cares for each of his flowers with a deep love and personal care.

May God give us this grace. Amen.