



Harvie, J. (2020) St Theresa of Lisieux in Scotland 2019; St Therese of Lisieux in Scotland 2019: Liturgical Resources. *Innes Review*, 71(2), pp. 297-299. (doi: [10.3366/inr.2020.0274](https://doi.org/10.3366/inr.2020.0274)) [Book Review]

The material cannot be used for any other purpose without further permission of the publisher and is for private use only.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/227173/>

Deposited on 15 December 2020

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of  
Glasgow

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

## St Thérèse of Lisieux in Scotland 2019

St Thérèse of Lisieux or the ‘Little Flower’ as she is often referred to, lived a short, cloistered life as a Carmelite nun and yet her ‘little way’ of living has touched millions of lives across the globe. The book entitled ‘*St Thérèse of Lisieux in Scotland 2019*’, which comes with a companion of ‘*Liturgical Resources*’, commemorates the visit of her relics to Scotland from August to September of that year. Like the ‘little’ saint herself, this is a ‘little’ book, deceptive in its compactness and brevity. While the title promises that it will provide an account of the historic visit, in fact the book goes far beyond this as the chapters come together like, small pieces or tesserae of a mosaic to form a beautiful work of art which cleverly reveal not only of the life and character of St Thérèse but also her connectedness to Scotland and the Scottish people.

This is a multi-authored text which is beautifully punctuated with pictures of the saint at different stages of her life together with people and places significant to her story. It begins with a message expressed by St Thérèse in a letter she wrote to Christ in 1896 when she declared “I would like to proclaim the Gospel all over the world” (p1). This is followed by a series of affectionate messages from the Scottish bishops in anticipation of the relics who describe the saint in terms such as, “a profound inspiration” (Cushley, p3), “a tireless intercessor, spending her heaven doing good on earth” (Gilbert, p4), “patron saint of the missions” (Tartaglia, p4), and “a popular saint” (Nolan, p7). The words of the bishops and the hymns penned especially for the occasion convey the sense of excitement and hope which was generated by this extraordinary event amongst the Catholic population of Scotland. However, readers unfamiliar with the life of St Thérèse may be left wondering what was special about this woman. What made the life of a cloistered nun inspirational or have popular appeal? With each chapter, a piece of her story is told.

The first tessera in the mosaic of St Thérèse is offered in a chapter penned by Sr Marie Helen and it pertains to the saint's interior spirituality. We are given two perspectives from practising Carmelites about their way of life, one from a nun and the second from a lay person. Both attest that Carmelite spirituality is founded on the premise that to know God, there is a need to look inwards because God resides in one's being. Sr Marie Helen draws on the work of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Carmelite nun, St Teresa of Avila a Doctor of the Church, to illustrate this point. This pioneering Spanish mystic compared the soul to a beautiful castle containing many mansions with God dwelling at the centre. She advocated spending time in silent prayer and meditation in order to find and be able to develop a personal relationship with God and this very much reflects the Carmelite way of life which places great emphasis on interiority. According to Sr Marie Helen, St Thérèse of Lisieux exemplified this life of prayer and spirituality with a simplicity that is described as her 'special gift'. Thinking about this contemplative approach to life it strikes me that within our secular society, increased popularity of movements such as 'mindfulness' reflect perhaps the growing need human beings have to connect with their inner selves in today's challenging world. In this sense, much can be learned from St Thérèse of Lisieux.

The second brush stroke in the picture this book paints of St Thérèse, shows us something of her humanity and ordinariness. We read about a child who lost her beloved mother when she was only four years old and who was bullied by jealous classmates at school. She endured both mental and physical suffering throughout her short life and was enveloped for many years by an inner darkness which meant she felt little joy in her prayer life and experienced constant thoughts of disbelief and doubts. These things undoubtedly make her relatable to anyone who has undergone or is undergoing similar trials and crisis. In spite of all these things Thérèse clung to her faith and attested that her mission was to teach people her 'little

way' and help bring them to a love of God. Her ambition was to reach out to souls across the world, something that was made possible only after her death when her writings and her relics began to travel and gain widespread notability.

The book continues on to provide some very moving accounts of how St Thérèse has affected the lives of modern-day individuals and this gives us another lens through which to view the saint. We hear about the Scottish priest Fr Thomas Taylor who after reading Thérèse's autobiography acquired a great devotion to her and became instrumental in her Canonisation process and eventual Beatification. He is responsible for a Grotto in honour of The Little Flower which stands in St Francis Xavier's Parish in Carfin today. The miraculous cure of a lady from Glasgow (Mrs Dorans) through the intercession of St Thérèse is also well documented by Fr James Grant. She was suffering from a tumour which had spread to all her internal organs but made a miraculous recovery after she and her family and friends invoked the help of the saint.

Another intriguing aspect of St Thérèse's life which is presented is the fact that she was committed to aiding those who are incarcerated. Testimonies from a prison officer and a prisoner reveal the influence she still has today in helping to reinvigorate and strengthen the faith of those who are outcast from society. Details about her dedication to this cause are also discussed in an earlier part of the book. 'The Story of a Rose' is another touching chapter which gives a narration from an anonymous priest. He describes his feelings of being 'instructed' by St Thérèse to place a red rose on a coffin of someone he didn't even know had died only to find that the deceased had considered the Little Flower one of the great loves of

his life. All of these stories combine to paint a portrait of a saint whose influence is strongly felt in the lives of many people today.

The companion to this text is a book of liturgical resources which contains prayers, hymns and meditations from the various services which took place across Scotland during the visit of the saint's relics. These books combine to produce, not only a charming memorial of the rare event, but also a very informative account of The Little Flower herself. For those who know something of her already, these books will almost certainly be able to offer some new insights. For those who know nothing of her, they are a very readable introduction to the life and person of St Thérèse of Lisieux.

Dr Julie Harvie – University of Glasgow