

TO SOW
IS TO
LOVE.

Leaflet - 6

**Missionary Novena with St. Therese of
the Child Jesus and St. Francis Xavier**



To sow is to love: Grow in love! (Mk 4:1-20)

In preparation of World Mission Sunday

Introduction

Jesus established the missionary vocation on Ascension Day, when he asked his disciples to become missionaries.

"The eleven disciples went to the hill in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him, even though some of them doubted. Jesus drew near and said to them, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.'" (Mt 28:16-20)

The same idea is resumed in the Acts of the Apostles.

"When the apostles met together with Jesus, they asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time give the Kingdom back to Israel?' Jesus said to them, 'The times and occasions are set by my Father's own authority, and it is not for you to know when they will be. But when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'" (Acts 1:6-8)

The first thing that the Apostles did after their meeting with Jesus was to gather together in **prayer** with Mary, the mother of Jesus, as reported in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Only later, prompted by the Spirit, did Peter and the others start to **preach** and eventually left in order to **proclaim** the Good News in every corner of the known world.

In order to make clear those parts of the missionary vocation, the Church (in 1927) gave us two Patron Saints that are extraordinary models in each of those aspects. Francis Xavier left to the world's end with the purpose of making Christ known while Therese of the Child Jesus prayed within her monastery so that the love of God be spread throughout the world.

During this novena, we will pray and think about that same zeal that encouraged our Patron Saints to sow the love of God.

This year's theme for World Mission Sunday is LOVE. If one had to define God in one word, one must say that he is LOVE. Therese already understood that it was what was essential. Herewith, I will cite a short extract of her biography: "On June 9, 1895, during the mass of the Trinity, Therese feels inspired to offer herself **in sacrifice to the Merciful Love of the Good Lord** (and not to the justice of God, as it was back then) because she discovered the depths of mercy that fall upon the small, the poor and the miserable. Here, she reaches the peak of her spiritual life. She will suggest this action to her sisters and her novices. The Church will suggest it to all the baptized people."

Have a good novena!

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Day 1 The call

"As Jesus walked along the shore of Lake Galilee, he saw two brothers who were fishermen, Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew, catching fish in the lake with a net. Jesus said to them, 'Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people.' At once they left their nets and went with him. He went on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat with their father Zebedee, getting their nets ready. Jesus called them, and at once they left the boat and their father, and went with him." (Mt 4:18-22)

Like the first disciples, Francis and Therese gave up everything to follow Jesus.

Francis was seduced by Saint Ignatius of Loyola's project and he committed himself to make Christ known as far as life's circumstances would allow him to.

Therese was 15 when she entered the Carmelite order with the purpose of living a life of prayer and sacrifice, by having within her heart the desire to make Jesus known throughout the world. She would pray for the missionaries daily.

And me : Whether I'm committed to pastoral action or dedicate myself to prayer, as a duty or as an act of contemplation, I must answer that call and be a missionary.

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, call us to your mission.

Mary, show us how to answer the call of Christ.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

Day 2 Answering the call should be our priority

"Jesus answered, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' Then he pointed to his disciples and said, 'Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants is my brother, my sister, and my mother.'" (Mt 12:48-50)

In order to be a missionary, it is necessary to consider Jesus as the most important person in our lives. It is not necessary to abandon others, but to be able to draw away from them to serve the Lord.

Therese was only 14 when she started the process of becoming a nun and attending the monastery of the Carmelite order. She wasn't able to wait any longer, as she stated. She would be admitted on April 15, 1888, at the age of 15.

Francis answered many calls during his life. Not only did he join Ignatius and many others who founded the Society of Jesus, but all his life, he answered successive calls that lead him to India and Japan.

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And me: Where and how does God call me? What do I have to do in order to follow Christ's call? What is my India, what is my Japan?

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, hasten to call us to your service.

Mary, teach us to leave in haste in order to answer the call of Christ.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

Day 3 Removing from our lives what prevents the Gospel to grow within us.

"And the seeds sown in the good soil stand for those who hear the message and understand it: they bear fruit, some as much as one hundred, others sixty, and others thirty." (Mt 13:23)

In order to be a good soil, it is necessary to stay away from the brambles and everything that prevents the Gospel's seeds to grow within us.

In 1549, **Francis Xavier** wrote from Goa to a fellow Jesuit: "First and foremost, be attentive to yourself and to your relationship with God, because it is from it that your power to be useful to others depends. (...) Worry about and take care of your own conscience, as much as any other, because he who doesn't wish to be good and saintly himself, how can he make others do so?"

The mother of **Therese** died when she was only four. The young child became sad and felt sorry for her. For almost 10 years, she lived in sadness until, suddenly, she recovered her joy. She said: "Charity entered my heart; I forgot myself in order to please, and I was happy from then on."

Me: In my life, I search for everything that may keep me from performing an act of love towards God and my neighbor. I try my best to avoid those obstacles. In order to be a good soil, it is necessary to stay away from the brambles and everything that prevents the Gospel's seeds to grow within us.

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, with your help, I would like to clear my heart of any ties that prevent me from fully loving you.

Mary, show us how to desire only God's will.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

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Day 4 Cultivating generosity, compassion and comprehension

“Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands—all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you.” (Lk 6:36-38)

Every missionary must be generous. He must know how to find joy and happiness in altruism.

Therese said that she wanted to spend her heaven doing good on earth. For her, to love God is to love her brothers and sisters on earth.

On the boat that took him to India, **Francis** transformed his cabin into an infirmary in which he would care for sick people.

And me : How can I show compassion towards those who suffer around me?

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, with your help, we wish to be good to others.

Mary, show us how to answer as you did to the angel, in order to always be at the service of the Lord.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

Day 5 It is necessary to be clever and simple

“Listen! I am sending you out just like sheep to a pack of wolves. You must be as cautious as snakes and as gentle as doves.” (Mt 10:16)

The missionary must accept a simple life and at the same time, he must be able to avoid the cleverness of bad persons.

Despite the numerous dangers that exist in every country where he preaches, **Francis** gains the population's sympathy through his simple life. It was said of him: “It is that man who prays God with such faith and intensity! It is that man who shares the life of everyone, who sleeps on the ground, who eats dried fish and drinks curdled milk. It is that man who gives himself and gets exhausted for his master.”

Therese keeps her sense of humor until her last breath. During her last illness, as she suffered from tuberculosis, her sisters said: “The health of Sister Therese is deteriorating. She suffers a lot, but she laughs at herself: she says that she coughs as hard as a locomotive!”

And me: Do I take myself too seriously? Do I seek greatness or am I capable of considering myself an ordinary person?

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, you were considered as a simple Nazarene. Grant us the capacity of accepting to live a simple life as you did.

Mary, show us how to accept what is humble and simple as you did when you gave birth in a stable.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

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Day 6 Christians and missionaries must be living pages of the Gospel.

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah is a child of God; and whoever loves a father loves his child also. This is how we know that we love God's children: it is by loving God and obeying his commands. For our love for God means that we obey his commands. And his commands are not too hard for us, because every child of God is able to defeat the world. And we win the victory over the world by means of our faith.” (1 Jn 5:1-4)

Therese, Through her simple life, she was an inspiring model for many people. Orthodox and Lutherans, for example, like the way she sees God's love which they consider to be the source of our salvation, unlike our own virtues.

Francis : He encountered many difficulties in Goa (India) because the Christians that came from Europe lived like Lords and had slaves. How could he invite the locals to embrace the Christian faith if the European Christians were exploiting them shamelessly?

And me : When people see me acting, do they see a living page from the Gospel? Or, do they need to ignore me in order to understand the Gospel?

The Gospel is nothing else than love developing itself; it is God's love for us and the love of our brothers and sisters for Him.

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, we want to be living pages of your Gospel.

Mary, show us how to experience the Gospel as you did, so that people feel attracted by your Son when they see us.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

Day 7 Plowing and looking back

“Jesus said to him, 'Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God.'” (Lk 9:62)

It is relatively easy to commit oneself to follow Jesus on a generous impulse. It is often more difficult to persevere as a disciple despite the difficulties that one may encounter.

Testimony of Cardinal Albino Luciani (who later became John Paul the first) on **Therese**: “I was 17 when I read your biography. I was thunderstruck by it. You called it: 'Springtime story of a Little White Flower'. It appeared to me as the story of a steel bar, because of the willpower, the courage and the decision that it revealed. The moment you chose the path towards a deep consecration to God, nothing stopped you: neither the illness, nor the external opposition, neither the clouds, nor the inner darkness.”

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Francis preaches at the Sultan's Court in Ternate (Indonesia) and he succeeds in obtaining the conversion of a few important people. As for the Sultan, he is hesitant because one must give up many things to become a Christian.

And me: Am I ready to give up everything and follow Christ? Comfort, security and tranquility are often some of the things that one must be able to give up in order to follow Christ. These are things that we must leave behind. We cannot always go back and recover them.

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, we want to follow you to the very end, without looking back.

Mary, show us how to be servants of the Lord as you were, from the Annunciation to your Assumption.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

Day 8 Forgiveness and generosity

"And if someone takes you to court to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. And if one of the occupation troops forces you to carry his pack one mile, carry it two miles. When someone asks you for something, give it to him; when someone wants to borrow something, lend it to him." (Mt 5:40-42)

In order to be a missionary, it is necessary to know how to forgive and be generous. Christianity proclaims love of enemies.

Don Alvaro, a Portuguese captain, caused many problems to **Francis**. Before leaving the city of Malacca (Indonesia) and heading to China, Francis kneels near the captain's house and, with his arms outstretched in a form of a cross, he prays for him.

In the Carmelite convent of Lisieux, there was an old Sister that particularly annoyed Therese. She had a bad temper. **Therese** understands that loving others is the path that leads to Jesus. She decides then to love that Sister and to be particularly nice to her. "I would do to that Sister what I would have done to the person that I love the most!" Therese will even tell her that she was glad to see her.

And me: Do I pray for those who harm me and who are unjust to me? Am I waiting for the opportunity to seek vengeance or am I looking for reconciliation?

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, you forgave the persons who killed you. Grant us the courage to forgive those who harm us.

Mary, you were standing near the Cross and you accepted to offer your Son. Help us to accept everything that God will ask from us.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.

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Day 9 Love is what matters

"I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains - but if I have no love, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned - but if I have no love, this does me no good." (1 Cor 13:1-3)

This year's theme for World Mission Day is: **To sow is to love: Grow in love!** (Mk 4:1-20)

Therese would have wanted to be a priest and at the same time, a prophet, a doctor of the Church, a missionary, a martyr... She wrote in her "Story of a soul": "I understood that love holds all vocations; that it was everything and that it embraced all times and all places. Thus, I exclaimed: I found my place within the Church, I will be love."

Francis' life has no human sense. He suffers, he lives in poverty, he rejects richness and he even defies death several times. Yet, he's far from being crazy. What could possibly explain that way of life other than the love for Christ and our brothers?

And me : How far am I ready to commit myself to for love? Is it the love for God and my neighbor that gives meaning to my life?

Let us pray

Our Father/ Hail Mary.

Jesus, show us how to love Jesus as you do.

Mary, show us how to be servants of the Lord as you were, from the Annunciation to your Assumption.

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, pray for us.