

SINGING THE MERCIES OF GOD: ENCOUNTERING SAINT TERESA IN OUR WORLD TODAY

Stage set: Small, old fashioned table desk on Left; very modern one on right. Center table holding symbolic items, esp quill pen, cross, and computer. Propanels on either side of the stage to hide the actors and HT Lizard when they are not on stage.

Sounds of traffic noise, etc. sirens, jackhammer, pots & pans, soft > loud until the audience settles down and becomes attentive.

Narrator, Seeker, and Teresa walk in together, taking their respective places.

Seeker walks to the center table, and picks up the Way of Perfection. She turns to the audience and speaks: I don't really even understand why I came to this celebration. I don't know anything about St. Teresa. [trusting her friend, with wonder and curiosity:] A friend recommended this book called the Way of Perfection, where St. Teresa writes about prayer for her nuns. She leafs through the book, then picks up a laptop from the center table, takes it to her desk, sits down and opens it, alternately looking at it intently, looking at the book, and staring thoughtfully into space, changing position occasionally.

Narrator: Well, then, let's begin by putting ourselves in God's presence, recalling Who He is, who we are, and all that we ask of Him. A brief pause.

Voice of God: Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am.

Teresa, seated at her writing table, speaks: All my longing was and still is that since He has so *many* enemies and so *few* friends that these few friends be *good* ones. As a result I resolved to do the *little* that was in my power... What I am saying is so important that I want

you to remember it after my death – and that’s why I’m leaving it for you in writing.

At this point St. Teresa walks to the center table, picks up a quill pen and a sheet of parchment. Teresa’s desk already holds a bottle of ink and a statue of Christ at the pillar.

TERESA’S PERSONALITY

Seeker: I wonder what sort of person St. Teresa was? I always thought she was just for nuns. You hardly ever even see a statue of her.

Narrator: St. Teresa was multi-faceted. From her mother she acquired a deep love of God and of adventure. At an early age, she persuaded her older brother Rodrigo to run away with her to the land of the Moors to be martyred. Fortunately their uncle found them just outside the city gates and brought them home. (Flash a picture of the four posts and the city walls on the screens). At thirteen, her mother died. She turned to Our Lady to provide the mothering she needed.

As a young girl and later as a young religious, Teresa felt powerfully drawn to human friendship. She was a friend: she wrote letters, gave gifts, she wasn’t afraid to flatter, she valued tact and never talked behind people’s backs. **Life 7:2.**

Seeker: Boy! I could use a friend like that. I wonder if she would be *my* friend?

Voice of God [Jn 13:34]: Love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you.

Narrator: As a very social young woman with an extremely strong will, when it was time to make decisions about her future, young Teresa actively resisted God’s call, but rejected marriage as well. Deciding what to do was a real battle for her. Ultimately, over her father’s objection, she entered the Carmelite monastery of the Incarnation, where a good friend had already entered. At this point in

her life, she was not drawn by love, but made her decision because she reasoned that it was the safest course of action. Lacking love, she was not fully committed.

Seeker, thoughtfully: That sounds familiar! Sometimes I feel so strong I'd be willing to die for Our Lord, but as soon as my virtue is challenged, I do what I want, without even thinking about what's right. I need help. What draws me to God? Am I running from something, or toward Him? Do I want to love and be loved, or am I just playing it safe? What is this battle inside me? Where is it coming from? How can I calm the storm?

Narrator: Weakened by her interior battle, the adjustment to religious life was a difficult one for Teresa, who had always had poor health. The stress was too much for her; she became gravely ill and was in a coma for several days. She continued to struggle, and at one point she even gave up prayer altogether. She was inconstant.

Still, after she recovered her health somewhat, and resumed a normal religious life, she felt drawn to give herself more fully to God than was typical at the Incarnation, but circumstances there made a deep interior life very difficult.

The nuns had to leave the overcrowded and impoverished monastery to beg for alms, or to console wealthy patrons in their times of trouble. Additionally, the nuns were expected to receive visitors in the parlors, to encourage donations. The friendships that naturally developed there were a real distraction for Teresa. She felt God calling her, but she also felt a strong attraction to human friendship.

Seeker: This is just what I experience! No matter how hard I try, circumstances get in the way of a good prayer life.

Narrator, chuckling: Yes. I see our Seeker is not yet ready to be canonized! I started to say, St. Teresa was highly talented in the art of conversation. But she also experienced that too much conversation, serious or frivolous, weakened the life of the Spirit.

Seeker, turning, and addressing Teresa directly: Well, if too much conversation was harming you, why didn't you just give it up?

Teresa: "For more than eighteen of the twenty-eight years since I began prayer, I suffered this battle and conflict between friendship with God and friendship with the world" (Life 8:3)

[During the next paragraph, a large H.T. Lizard on a stick moves across the room, in front of the stage, and all the characters shrink from it, expressing surprised fright.]

Narrator: Teresa knew that God was calling her to give up her parlor visits, but she was too weak to do so. One day, while visiting with a special male friend, she saw an enormous toad scuttle across the room, moving much more quickly than such creatures usually do. Since reptiles and other vermin symbolized evil and temptation for her, it frightened her, [The lizard approaches St. Teresa closely, and she squeals slightly and jumps or pulls back in fright.] and confirmed what she already knew: that this friendship was not pleasing to God. [Life 7:8] But she still struggled.

St. Teresa: Well, my soul now was tired; and, in spite of its desire, my wretched habits would not allow it rest. ... one day entering the oratory I saw a statue It represented the much wounded Christ and was very devotional so that beholding it I was utterly distressed in seeing Him that way, for it well represented what He suffered for us. I felt so keenly aware of how poorly I thanked Him for those wounds that, it seems to me, my heart broke. Beseeching Him to strengthen me once and for all that I might not offend Him, I threw myself down before Him with the greatest outpouring of tears. [Life 9:1]

...I was very distrustful of myself and placed all my trust in God. I think I then said that I would not rise from there until He granted what I was begging Him for. I believe certainly this was beneficial to me, because from that time I went on improving." [Life 9:3]

Narrator: Notice: she asked for something specific, He gave it to her, and it was wonderful.

Seeker: Maybe I should ask God for the grace I need more often than I do. Then I wouldn't depend so much on myself.

Teresa Life 16:2]: "Oh, help me God! What is the soul like when it is in this state! It would want to be all tongues so as to praise the Lord ... I know a person who though not a poet suddenly composed some deeply-felt verses well expressing her pain. They were not composed by the use of her intellect; rather, in order that she enjoy the glory so delightful a distress gave to her, she complained of it in this way to God" (ch. 16, no. 4).

If the love You have for me,
Is like the love I have for You,
My God, what detains me?
Oh, what is delaying You?

Voice of God: --Soul, what is it you desire of me?

Teresa:--My God, nothing other than to see You.

Voice of God:--What is it that you fear more than self?

Teresa:--What I fear most is the loss of You.

A soul hidden in God,
What has it to desire
Save to love more and more,
And, in love all hidden
Again and again to love You?

One all possessing love I ask
My God, my soul centered in You,
Making a delightful nest,
A resting place most pleasing. [Poetry: 4]

Seeker: Wow. That sounds like she's asking to die, but she sure doesn't sound depressed!

Narrator: Eventually, in a demonstration of the holy daring and audacity for which St. Teresa is famous, and with the support of a few friends, inside and outside the monastery, she obtained permission to

open a new house where recollection and a deep interior life could be more easily fostered. With that, Teresa's renewal of Carmelite life really took off!

Teresa: We should fix our eyes on the true and everlasting kingdom which we are trying to gain. It is very important to keep this kingdom always in mind, especially in the beginning. ...Rather than striving to keep remembering the short time everything lasts and how everything is nothing and how rest should be considered no more than a trifle, ***it is necessary to forget these things in order to live.*** [Life 15:11]
The presumption I would like to see, ... for it always makes humility grow, is to have a holy daring; for God helps the strong and He shows no partiality. [Way 16:12]

THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST

Seeker, addressing Teresa: I noticed, while reading about your life, that you spiritually matured and remained faithful to living in the presence of God. I was surprised that your whole method of prayer was to focus on the person of Jesus, and you seem to have done it all the time. How did that come about?

During the next exchange, H.T. Lizard makes another pass through the room, lingering for the whole length of St. Teresa's words, playing a little with audience members, and exiting precisely as she finishes speaking the line ending "although in ignorance".

Teresa: I had no master and was reading these books in which I thought I was gradually coming to understand something. (And afterward I understood that if the Lord didn't show me, I was able to learn little from books, because there was nothing I understood until His Majesty gave me understanding through experience, nor did I know what I was doing). As a result, when I began to experience something of supernatural prayer, I mean of the prayer of quiet, I strove to turn aside from everything corporeal, although I did not dare lift up the soul -- since I was always so wretched, I saw that doing so would be boldness. But it seemed to me that I felt the presence of God, as was so, and I strove to recollect myself in His presence. This

is a pleasing prayer, if God helps in it, and the delight is great. Since I felt that benefit and consolation, there was no one who could have made me return to the humanity of Christ; as a matter of fact, I thought the humanity was an impediment. [Life 22:3]

Narrator: Popular books of the time about spirituality advised readers to turn away from everything bodily and lift up the soul to heaven.

Teresa [Life 22:3]: O Lord of my soul and my Good, Jesus Christ crucified! At no time do I recall this opinion I had without feeling pain; it seems to me I became a dreadful traitor -- although in ignorance.

H.T. departs.

Voice of God: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching.

Seeker: St. Teresa is so right -- I have way too many distractions in my life. No wonder I can't seem to find a quiet place and allow myself to be drawn into the Lord's Presence.

Narrator: With continued divine favors which Teresa was unable to resist, she returned to her deep appreciation for the humanity of Christ.

Teresa: I started again to love the most sacred humanity. Prayer began to take shape as an edifice that now had a foundation; I grew fond of more penance, for I had been negligent on account of the severity of my illnesses. Life 24:2(2)

Narrator: This was a real friendship between two persons, Jesus and Teresa, with everything that implies. She was talking to him about the nitty, gritty nuts and bolts of her life, and he was talking about them with her, too.

Seeker picks up the Bible on her desk, and begins to read silently.

Teresa: The soul can place itself in the presence of Christ and grow accustomed to being inflamed with love for His sacred humanity. It can keep Him ever present and speak with Him, asking for its needs

and complaining of its labors, being glad with Him in its enjoyments and not forgetting Him because of them, trying to speak to Him, not through written prayers but with words that conform to its desires and needs. **Life 12.2.**

Seeker, thoughtfully, then with growing enthusiasm: Yes, sacred scripture is filled with examples of the human interactions Jesus had with people. Each one provides insight into the depth of his thoughtfulness, delicate feeling and practical love for those around him, not to mention the close friendships he formed with the disciples. Just think of his concern for the daughter of Jairus after he raised her from the dead, when he asked her parents to give her something to eat. Or the woman caught in adultery. Or again, the hunger of the crowds who followed him, when he multiplied the loaves and fishes.

Voice of God: No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. Your love must be sincere. Love one another as I have loved you. [Jn. 15:13-14; Rom. 12:9; Jn. 15:12]

Narrator: And think of his own need for human companionship, expressed in his invitation to the disciples to “Come, watch with me, and pray”, and his sorrow at the death of his friend Lazarus. St. Teresa, who achieved her own human integration at the cost of so many trials, found in Jesus the model she could follow in her own dealings with others.

She really sings the mercies of God in the *Way of Perfection* when she talks about the Eucharist in her famous meditation on the Lord’s Prayer. It gives us real insights into her intimate friendship with God, and into what she means when she talks about the humanity of Christ. I just love the way she moves from talking to God the Father to talking to her spiritual daughters, and to us. It’s a fabulous example of how to have this intimate conversation with the One who we know loves us.

The quote from the *Way of Perfection*, should now be projected onto the large screen. [“I shall enlarge on only three things ... The first of

these is love for one another; the second is detachment from all created things; the third is true humility...”]

Voice of God [Phil. 2:6-8]: Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave coming in human likeness, and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

A moment of silence follows the proclamation of the scripture quotation, to enable the audience to read in silence the quotation
Way of Perfection projected on the screen: Way, 4:4.

Narrator: St. Teresa speaks, or sings, if you will, of the relationship between the words “Thy will be done on earth” and “Give us this day our daily bread.” He spoke the words on our behalf to the Father, because we could not speak them on our own.

Seeker: Hmm. You're right. By ourselves, we are not capable of doing the Father's will on earth as Jesus did. He loved us so much that He gave us the example of how to do it, and the Eucharist is a remedy for our own inability to either understand what the Father's will for us is, or to carry it out when we do. It's our daily bread. I guess that's why I'm so drawn to going to Mass every day.

Narrator: Yes, and St. Teresa recognizes Christ's great humility in choosing to be our daily bread.

Teresa: Now I think – unless one has a better opinion – that Jesus observed what He had given for us, how important it was that we in turn give this, and the great difficulty there is in our doing so, as was said, since we are the way we are.... He must have resolved to remain with us here below. Since to do this was something so serious and important, He desired that it come from the hand of the Eternal Father. For even though they are one and He knew that what He did on earth God would do in heaven and consider good – since His will and that of His Father were one – the humility of Jesus was such that He wanted, as it were, to ask permission. ...He well

understood that He was asking for more in this request than He was in the others ... [Way 33:2]

O Eternal Father! How much this humility deserves! What treasure do we have that could buy Your Son? The sale of Him, we already know, was for thirty pieces of silver.[5] But to buy Him, no price is sufficient. Since by sharing in our nature He has become one with us here below -- and as Lord of His own will -- He reminds the Father that because He belongs to Him the Father in turn can give Him to us. And so He says, "our bread." He doesn't make any difference between Himself and us, but we make one by not giving ourselves up each day for His Majesty. [Way 33:5]

Seeker: St. Teresa, you want me to cultivate the same close friendship with Jesus that you have. Will you teach me how to overcome my difficulties and weaknesses?

Teresa: Behold Him here in the Eucharist without suffering, full of glory, before ascending into heaven, strengthening some, encouraging others, our companion in the most Blessed Sacrament; it doesn't seem it was in His power to leave us for even a moment. [Life 22:6; "in the Eucharist" added.]

Seeker: Now that's a song I want to sing!

Teresa: If it pains you not to see Him with your bodily eyes, consider that seeing Him so is not fitting for us. To see Him in His glorified state is different from seeing Him as He was when he walked through this world. On account of our natural weakness there is no person capable of enduring such a glorious sight. In seeing this Eternal Truth one would see that all the things we pay attention to here below are lies and jokes. And in beholding such great Majesty, how would a little sinner like myself who has so much offended Him remain so close to Him? Beneath that bread He is easy to deal with. If a king were disguised it wouldn't matter to us at all if we conversed with him without so many gestures of awe and respect. It seems he would be obliged to put up with this lack since he is the one who disguised himself. Who would otherwise dare approach so unworthily, with so much lukewarmness, and with so many imperfections! [Way 34:9]

Be with Him willingly; don't lose so good an occasion for conversing with Him as is the hour after having received Communion. [Way 34:10]

After a slight pause, St. Teresa continues: Once after receiving Communion I was given understanding of how the Father receives within our soul the most holy Body of Christ, and of how I know and have seen that these divine Persons are present, and of how pleasing to the Father this offering of His Son is, because He delights and rejoices with Him here -- let us say -- on earth. For His humanity is not present with us in the soul, but His divinity is. Thus the humanity is so welcome and pleasing to the Father and bestows on us so many favors. [Spiritual Testimonies 52.]

Seeker: I will never think of the Eucharist so lightly again! I want to use that hour of prayer to be with Him in my heart.

Narrator: St. Teresa wrote a very daring meditation on the Song of Songs [1:10; 2:16], and began with the quote, "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth."

Teresa: O my Lord and my God, and what words are these that a worm speaks them to its Creator! May You be blessed, Lord, for in so many ways have You taught us! But who will dare, my King, utter these words without Your permission? The thought is frightening, and so it will be frightening that I tell anyone to utter them. People will say I am a fool, that the words don't mean this, that they have many meanings, that obviously we must not speak such words to God, that for this reason it is good that simple people do not read these things. I confess that the passage has many meanings. But the soul that is enkindled with a love that makes it mad desires nothing else than to say these words. Indeed, the Lord does not forbid her to say them.

God help me! Why are we surprised? Isn't the deed more admirable? Do we not approach the most Blessed Sacrament? [Added:] Doesn't that amount to being kissed with the kiss of His mouth? [Song 1:10]

Isn't it clear that the soul to whom God grants so great a favor as to join it with Himself in a friendship like this will be left truly rich in His

blessings? [Song, 3:9] Hence, my Lord, I do not ask You for anything else in life but that You kiss me with the kiss of Your mouth, and that You do so in such a way that although I may want to withdraw from this friendship and union, my will may always, Lord of my life, be subject to Your will and not depart from it... [Song, 3:15]

FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

Narrator: This theme of intimate friendship with Jesus is a favorite with St. Teresa, and it is intimately connected to her emphasis on the humanity of Christ. For many of us, in our prayer there is a great distance between us and God, or us and Jesus. We talk to him, but we continually invent ways to keep him at some remove. St. Teresa talked with Jesus, and with His Father, in the same way we might talk to our husband or our best friend. That's who he is for her, and who she wants him to be for us, too. Over and over again in her writings we witness her loving exchanges with Him. What Father Provincial has said is true: Teresa is so human when at the highest stages of perfection: the humanity of Christ brings us to our highest humanity! [Fr. Stephen Watson, OCD]

Teresa: Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. In order that love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord. Life 8:5

Seeker, with dawning awareness, and still aware of the Eucharist: Oh! I only need to think of Him as my intimate friend and share my thoughts with him as friends do. This will help me.

Teresa [Song 5:5.]: It seems to me the Holy Spirit must be a mediator between the soul and God, the One who moves it with such ardent desires, for He enkindles it in a supreme fire, which is so near. O Lord, how great are these mercies You show to the soul here! May You be blessed and praised forever, for You are so good a Lover. O my God and my Creator! Is it possible that there is no one who loves You? Oh, alas, and how often it is I who do not love You!

The soul must be moved because of who its God is and out of love for Him, since He never ceases to commune with it in so many ways... as One who is Wisdom itself.

Seeker gets up and faces the audience, excited about a new insight: The life of prayer is this friendship with Jesus! I want to have the love that St. Teresa has for God. I want to be a lover, too.

Teresa: [Letter 69.] Friendship doesn't always mean that passionate happy wonderful feeling, ... sometimes he isn't even there; sometimes prayer is just the desire to pray, sometimes we can't wait to get out of the chapel. **Life 9:5:** [A] book can be a help for recollecting oneself quickly. It helped me also to look at fields, or water, or flowers. In these things I found a remembrance of the Creator. I mean that they awakened and recollected me and served as a book and reminded me of my ingratitude and sins. Going outside, taking a walk, refreshes us.

Seeker: You know, I find the whole idea of a real friendship with God a little intimidating, no, more than a little intimidating. I mean, He's God, and I'm just, just [trails off and sinks into the chair] ... a worm!

Stage hand (Peter) brings chair to the side of Seeker's desk, if it isn't already there.

Teresa walks over to Seeker and sits down: Certain little worms feed on mulberry leaves, till afterwards they become bigger, and then on the boughs they go spinning silk with their little mouths, and making little cells very close, in which they are enclosed. From this cell or bag, which contains a large, but ugly worm that dies, there afterwards rises a white and very beautiful butterfly. If we had not seen this but had only heard of it as an old legend, who would believe it? Could we persuade ourselves that insects so utterly without the use of reason as a silkworm...should be so diligent and so industrious in toiling for our benefit? [IC5:2:2]

Narrator: For St. Teresa, the silkworm comes as close to a natural representation of the human soul as possible: it is utterly without reason (akin to our total lack of capacity to contemplate the Divine

unless God permits it), and is destined to emerge beautiful only through its own apparent death.

Teresa, placing her hand on Seeker's shoulder: [Life 13:2.] Have great confidence, for it is necessary not to hold back one's desires, but to believe in God that if we try we shall little by little, even though it may not be soon, reach the state the saints did with His help. For if they had never determined to desire and seek this state little by little in practice they would never have mounted so high. His Majesty wants this determination, and He is a friend of courageous souls if they walk in humility and without trusting in self. ... I marvel at how important it is to be courageous in striving for great things along this path. For though the soul is not yet strong enough, it nonetheless takes flight and goes very high although like a little fledgling it soon tires and stops.

[13.3:] These first acts of determination are very important, although in this initial stage it is necessary to hold back a little and be bound by discretion and the opinion of a spiritual master. But souls should be careful that he isn't the kind that will teach them to be toads or that will be satisfied in merely showing them how to catch little lizards.

Peter appears, holding small H.T. Lizards, that he makes jump around just off stage in front of the audience. Let humility always go first so as to understand that this strength does not come from ourselves.

Seeker, wondering, as they walk together as far as the center table: St. Teresa, you experienced extraordinary favors from God, intense prayer experiences of a sort that left the senses behind. I would be frightened if this happened to me. How could I handle this if it should happen?

Teresa [IC6:4-5]: With respect to the King of heaven, I tell you there is need for more courage than you think. Our nature is very timid and lowly when it comes to something so great, and I am certain that if God were not to give the courage, no matter how much you might see that the favor is good for us, it would be impossible for you to receive that favor.

Seeker, obviously moved by what St. Teresa has said: I see that I need to take my interior life very seriously. I'd better give up that vanity of telling jokes and comic stories with my friends, so they'll be edified by my conduct.

Teresa: My God! What have we come to? As if we weren't stupid enough by nature! Here, we are wanting to become that way by grace! [*The Plays of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Pious Recreations: Gen. Intro. By Guy Gaucher, OCD, quoting Gicquel, 90.*]

After the audience laughter dies down, Seeker takes a few steps forward, and says with determination (and bursts into a radiant smile when she reaches the words "with joy"): I will pray for the courage to develop the virtues I need to receive everything God wants to give me, with joy!

Teresa [IC 6:4:7]: I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me, and that was my way of prayer. If I reflected upon some phase of His Passion, I represented Him to myself interiorly. But most of the time I spent reading good books, which was my whole recreation. For God didn't give me talent for discursive thought or for a profitable use of the imagination. In fact, my imagination is so dull that I never succeeded even to think about and represent in my mind -- as hard as I tried -- the humanity of the Lord. And although, if one perseveres, one reaches contemplation more quickly along this way of inability to work discursively with the intellect, this way is nonetheless most laborious and painful. For if the will is not occupied and love has nothing present with which to be engaged, the soul is left as though without support or exercise, and the solitude and dryness is very troublesome, and the battle with one's thoughts extraordinary.

Seeker: What should I do when this happens to me?

Teresa [Life 7:20]: I would counsel those who practice prayer to seek, at least in the beginning, friendship and association with other persons having the same interest, even though the association may be only to help one another with prayers. The more of these prayers there are, the greater the gain. ... I believe that they who discuss

these joys and trials for the sake of this friendship with God will benefit themselves and those who hear them, and they will come away instructed; even without understanding how, they will have instructed their friends.

Teresa and Seeker return to their respective desks.

POTS AND PANS

Narrator, to Seeker and audience: We have been singing about the blessings of deep friendship with Christ. Of how relating to His humanity cultivates and awakens an intense desire for deep friendship with Him. May He be blessed forever!

Seeker, to Narrator: It's a little like being on Mt. Tabor and experiencing the Transfiguration. And it *is* tempting to build a booth and try to live there, but every homily I've ever heard about it said you can't stay there. Yet St. Teresa writes and acts as if she has taken up residence there. How is this possible?

Seeker, to Narrator and to audience: I am fascinated by the fact that although St. Teresa founded the Discalced Carmelite Order, and seventeen monasteries in her own lifetime, at all times she had superiors in the Order whom she was obliged to obey. This is a real paradox. Do you think Steve Jobs or Warren Buffet ever considered themselves under obedience to anybody?

Narrator: Interestingly, her superiors instructed her to write a treatise on how *they* should make the annual visitations of each monastery. She had to obey them, so they could obey her. That's God for you!

Seeker: In a setting like a retreat, or a conference or event like this, it's pretty easy for me to sing along this way, but when I go home to the hum-drum of everyday life, after a very short time, I start to sing to a different tune – one that sounds a lot like the racket we heard at the beginning of this hour, or worse.

Umm, Sta. Teresa, I am learning so much from you, and I want to give you my full attention, but can you excuse me? I really need to use the facilities.

Teresa, laughing sympathetically at the question, puts the seeker at ease and gestures: Sure, it's just outside, on the right.

Seeker heads off, but immediately returns, and says: Eeuw! Boy am I glad I live now and not then! I sure am grateful for running water and indoor plumbing. Seeker returns to her desk and sits.

St. Teresa, smiling: You had a pressing question for me, daughter. What's on your mind?

Seeker, sitting at her desk: Oh, yes... a really important question for me is how can I structure my life in a way that supports my life with God instead of undermining it?

Teresa: It seems an inappropriate thing to begin with temporal matters. Yet I think that these are most important for the promotion of the spiritual good.... It is necessary to have good order and attend to matters concerning government and the harmonious organization of everything. [Visitation 2]

Narrator: You all know that when she talks about 'temporal matters,' she's talking about life on earth, right? She's not talking about our interior lives!

Teresa, as H.T. Lizard creeps in [IC5:3:11]: When I see souls very earnest in trying to understand the prayer they have and very sullen when they are in it ... it makes me realize how little they understand of the way by which union is attained; they think the whole matter lies in these things. At these words, Peter makes the toad jump up and down, back and forth, grinning and gesturing at the audience. As he finishes, St. Teresa begins again: No, Sisters, absolutely not; works are what the Lord wants! He desires that if you see a Sister who is sick to whom you can bring some relief, you have compassion on her and not worry about losing this devotion; and that if she is suffering

pain, you also feel it; and that, if necessary, you fast so that she might eat -- not so much for her sake as because you know it is your Lord's desire. This is true union with His will.

Voice of God: Love one another as I have loved you.

Teresa: If we fail in love of neighbor we are lost When you see yourselves lacking in love, even though you have devotion, believe me, you have not reached union. Beg our Lord to give you this perfect love of neighbor, force your will to do the will of your sisters. Strive to accept work yourself so as to relieve your neighbor of it. Don't think that it won't cost you anything or that you will find everything done for you. Look at what our Spouse's love for us cost Him; in order to free us from death, He died that most painful death of the cross. [IC5:3:12]

Seeker: My first reaction to hearing those words is that I should just pack up and go home. Here, H.T. Lizard slips in again, grinning smugly, facing the audience, and nodding, as Seeker continues: I fail in love of neighbor all the time! And I'm not good at forcing myself to do anything. The lizard's joy grows visibly, until he can't contain himself anymore when she reaches the line, 'the prospect of doing something about it is overwhelming.' My house is in complete disarray and getting worse, I can't keep my priorities straight, or follow through on any good intention; my life is just in shambles. And the prospect of doing anything about it is overwhelming. At this point, H.T. Lizard grabs the Seeker by the shoulders, (Seeker takes hold of the stick so he can use both hands) and spins her around a couple of times before taking the placard and leaving, even symbolically beating her over the head with the "lizard on a stick". She stumbles back to her chair and sits down.

Narrator: Hmm. I have a devout friend who home-schooled her four children, was active in her parish, and held leadership roles in the community. I thought she really had her act together, until the first time I visited her home. Like me, she really struggled with this question of how to structure her life in such a way that it was of a piece, and wouldn't tear her apart. It's been a real trial for both of us. I'm still struggling, but she seems to have figured out how to tie all her

temporal concerns directly to a deep interior life with God, by writing and following a Rule of Life specifically addressed to her own circumstances. Discernment and time management are both involved, but the key she found is to relate everything in the day to fostering friendship with God.

Seeker: My life is spinning out of control. Maybe I should try that. Like St. Teresa just said, it seems inappropriate to begin with temporal matters, but they are foundational for the promotion of spiritual good. And God's will for me has to be found through the fulfillment of the major obligations I've undertaken: my family, work, even money management.

Narrator: Part of St. Teresa's genius is in the common sense she brings to all of the everyday situations we encounter in our lives. She makes it clear that while lofty thoughts and aspirations may help us, the place we actually encounter God in our lives is in the messy, nitty gritty choices to do the right thing that we make every day.

One author I read said, "I understood that Jesus is perfectly willing to bless my efforts, but first he had to have efforts to bless." In other words, works are what the Lord wants! **Narrator withdraws.**

Seeker stands and walks forward.

Seeker: You know, I want to serve the Lord, but I am afraid sometimes even to try. It all seems so overwhelming! And when I do try, half the time, everything goes wrong. Sometimes I react badly to people, or they react badly to me, and I think it's because I'm afraid of them. And I have other fears, too.

Voice of God: Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. ...God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control." [Jn, 14:27; 2 Tim. 1:7]

Seeker, standing and looking up, exasperated, in response to the Voice of God: I know that's true, but that's not my experience.

Teresa stands and takes a few steps toward Seeker: I want to speak to you about those fears you have; they only make you waste time, and for want of humility you don't believe me. [Letters 61]

Voice of God [1 John 4:18]: There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.

Seeker, annoyed: Well, if I had fewer obligations in the day, and more time to spend in prayer...

Teresa, interrupting: Don't think that if you had more time your prayer would go better, for time well spent, like looking after your children, does not hurt prayer. God often gives more in a short moment than in a long time. His works are not measured by time. We have to serve God as He wishes and not as we wish. [Letters 172]

Teresa and Seeker return to their desks.

THE CROSS

Seeker: Oh St. Teresa, I had the worst day! I was running to catch the bus so I could go to adoration, and I tripped over the curb. I fell flat on my face! I broke my glasses, and banged up my face and knees. My heart is still racing, and I think my nose may be broken. Why did God allow this to happen to me?

Teresa, laughing at Seeker: Something like that happened to me once. I was in one of those carts, and it overturned, dumping me in the mud. That's how God treats his friends.

Seeker, emphatically: Well, no wonder he has so few!

Narrator: Like all of us, Teresa suffered a lot of pain, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Her life was marked by trial and suffering at every turn. Her health was so poor that when she first entered the monastery, her overzealous efforts to embrace religious life led to fainting spells, and heart pains. She was forced to leave the monastery to seek medical treatment, and at one point was given up

for dead. After that she was paralyzed, but she did not let that deter her from what she understood to be God's will for her to do: she had a very determined determination. [Life, Ch 4:2, P. 64.] [Seeker stands up and starts walking to the middle table, where she picks up a plain wooden cross and returns to her desk and open laptop. She sits there, contemplating the Cross and her own griefs in the 21st century until Narrator finishes speaking. St. Teresa, in the 16th century, answers her correspondence. That determination gave her a remarkable ability to overcome herself amid trials and obstacles, throughout all the sufferings in her life.

Because she saw all trials and sufferings as somehow coming from the hand of God, St. Teresa was quick to find and focus on the potential good to come out of them, which enabled her to bear them with grace and patience. Because she could see things from this higher vantage point, she rarely lost her compassion for those who weren't quite there yet.

Scripture voice: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." John 14:2-3.

Seeker: Oh, I'm suffering so much grief over the death of my sister! St. Teresa, won't you help me with this?

Teresa, writing at her desk: May the grace of the Holy Spirit be with your ladyship, Dona Luisa. I share so much in your trials! May our Lord be blessed for everything, for it truly seems that you are among those who will enjoy his kingdom since he gives you to drink from the chalice through so many illnesses, both your own and of those you love.

I was sorry to learn of the death of the good Doña Juana. May God take her to himself, and indeed he will for she was most worthy.

Shaking her head and speaking as if thinking aloud: I really don't know why we should feel sorry about those who depart for a safe

haven, whom God draws out of this world with its dangers and instability. We are loving ourselves rather than those who go to enjoy a greater good. **And now coming back to her present:** I commend myself to the prayers of my ladies. ...May our Lord give you eternal happiness and rest because for some time now you have given up happiness and rest in this life, though you do not yet appreciate the value of suffering. The day will come when you will understand what you have gained and that for nothing in the world should you ever want to lose it. May our Lord lead you by his hand. May you be given the strength to please His Majesty in everything, as I beg of him, amen. **[Letters 38]**

Voice of God: Your sorrow will turn to joy... and that joy no one shall take from you. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am. Love one another just as I have loved you. **[Jn. 16:20, 22; 17:24; 15:12]**

Narrator, addressing Seeker: We have reached the end of the hour, and it's time to let our friends go and get dressed for the concert. What do you think, shall we let them go?

Seeker: With St. Teresa we have sung in our hearts the mercies of God, and I feel like I've made a friend for life, and have a plan for moving forward. But I don't want to leave. Don't you have one last word for me?

St. Teresa: Happy the enamored heart,
Thought centered on God alone,
Renouncing every creature for Him,
Finding in Him glory and contentment.
Living forgetful of self,
In God is all its intention,
Happy and so joyfully it journeys
Through waves of this stormy sea. **[Poetry: 5]**

As St. Teresa recites the poem, the “actors” come together on the stage, with the Voice of God and the Horned Toad Lizard joining them. She keeps her gaze on the audience until everyone is onstage, then looks down. The lights go out briefly

and come back on. Then everyone takes a step forward and bows. The audience claps – or not!