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St. Therese of Lisieux reminds us that the key to being *blameless until the coming of the Lord*, and to keep the commandment *to love the lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind, and your neighbor as yourself*, and to confess that Jesus is the Christ, is to become as a little child. Jesus says that unless we *become as little children, we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven*. To Love God with all of our being requires a full and complete surrender to God and total reliance upon Him, just as a little child must rely totally upon his parents. Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, then, requires the simplicity of a child-like faith. And note that a child-like faith is not the bare-minimum, but the requirement. Let us not forget that we are commanded to love our neighbors in a new way too. We are expected to live in love and charity with all people and through loving our neighbors to love God.

St. Therese was a living example of child-like faith and of complete surrender to God. But because she was a nun, our world tends to write her off as one who never truly lived and as one who was protected and sheltered away from all the hardships of the world. Yet this was not her experience. St. Therese's early life began in hardship. Her mother died when she was a small child, and shortly after her mother's death Therese became gravely ill and nearly died herself. Her vocation as a nun also began with great difficulty. When she decided she wanted to join the Carmelite convent as a young teenager, she was mocked. Yet she persisted and begged to join the convent, even seeking an audience with the pope to be granted entrance. Upon entering the convent, she embraced a life of difficulty enduring the ridicule and bullying from her sister nuns. During Holy Week of 1896 she contracted Tuberculosis and suffered for a year with the illness, dying in 1897 at the age of 24.

St. Therese's short life was marked by tragedy and suffering. It is written that during her lifetime there were no signs that she was a Saint. Her sister nuns had no idea how extraordinary her life was, perhaps until she lay on her death bed. Yet St. Therese is among the greatest of the Church's modern saints. She has even been honored as a Doctor of the Church. She is listed among the greatest of saintly theologians for what she called her *Little Way*. *The Little Way* of St. Therese teaches that the way to heaven is through total surrender and reliance on Jesus. Holiness comes not through great acts of penance and self-denial, but by doing everything, from praying, to washing the dishes, and to helping a neighbor all for the Love of God. Through her autobiography and many letters, she gives us a glimpse into the life of a Saint. But often her words are quite surprising. *The Little*

*Flower*, as she is often called, confesses to her sister that she did not like everyone in her Convent. She writes, “*There is in Community a Sister who has the faculty of displeasing me in everything, in her ways, her words, her character, everything seems very disagreeable to me. And still she is a holy religious who must be very pleasing to God. Not wishing to give in to the natural antipathy I was experiencing, I told myself that charity must not consist in feelings but in works; then I set myself to do for this Sister what I would do for the person I loved the most. Each time I met her I prayed to God for her, offering Him all her virtues and merits...I wasn’t content simply with praying very much for this Sister who gave me so many struggles, but I took care to render her all the services possible, and when I was tempted to answer her back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her my most friendly smile, and with changing the subject of the conversation...One day at recreation she asked in almost these words: “Would you tell me, Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus, what attracts you so much towards me; every time you look at me, I see you smile?” Ah! What attracted me was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul.*”

Such a true confession coming from a nun must surprise us. Does it shatter our image of the Saint for her to confess, *there is member of the convent who displeases me in everything?* Through her words we catch a glimpse of the level to which she reached in loving God with all her heart, with all her mind, with all her soul, and her neighbor as herself. In this young soul we see a saintly maturity which goes beyond the face value of these commandments and seeks to love Christ hidden in the depths of her neighbor’s soul. St. Therese’s sense of commitment led her to a profound experience of the love of God and neighbor. And still she reminds us that while we are all called to be Saints, even those who have the honor of being called by the Church a Saint did not get along with everyone they encountered. The saints were displeased with others, they had to work to get along with others, and they endured trials and suffered. They did not lead perfect lives, but they were perfect in their desire to love God and their neighbor. As we hear in this letter from St. Therese, the Saints are ingenious at offering all to the glory of God, even the neighbors whom they must tolerate with difficulty. The Saints are messy and they are far from the pristine, white-washed portraits we see on their holy cards.

St. Therese insists that we must become as little children, to dare to love God with all of our being, and to muster up the courage to love our neighbors, and Christ in our neighbors. Christ calls us to a higher and simpler love, to love unencumbered by the brokenness of sinful lives. We are called to love each other not by “killing

with kindness," nor passive aggressively but for Christ's sake. Neither can we love others only by praying for them. The love Christ calls us to requires service and compassion, working to recognize Jesus hidden in the depths of all of our neighbors' hearts. Let us pray that God will give us the grace to be as little children in our love of God and for each other, and may we follow our Lord, like a little child, to heaven. Amen.