

**150** years  
**se livrer**

*The  
Self-Surrendered  
soul has found  
heaven on earth,  
since she enjoys  
that sweet peace  
which is part  
of the elect.*



1864 > 2014

Treasures from the Archives

Congregation of Our Lady of the Cenacle - Generalate - Rome





*“A holy life is preferable to a long one and virtue better than health”*

Mother Thérèse<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> June 1864, the bells of Montpellier invite Mother Thérèse to consider the means of progressing along the path of holiness. She writes down her thoughts on a piece of paper, the title of which contains the idea she develops as *Self Surrender*. 150 years later, this founding text of the spirituality of the Congregation has kept all its freshness and flavour.

The objects and quotations presented here evoke the way in which Mother Thérèse practised “self-surrender”. An important place is given to the reproduction of objects, signs of this in themselves. Their meaning is accentuated by Mother Thérèse’s own words. The choice has been made to privilege quotations taken from the statements of witnesses presented during the canonisation process which led to Mother Thérèse being proposed as a model of holiness.

This booklet has been conceived as an accompaniment to the display cases set out in the Generalate Archives. It can also be read on its own. Its objective will be realised in so far as it allows each of our Sisters and members of the Cenacle Family today to become better acquainted with Mother Thérèse and her charism.

Finally, I’d like to express my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Wandrille de F., whose wonderful work, undertaken with such great care and enthusiasm, enables us to discover these treasures from the archives.

Sister Patricia Byrne

Superior General



*Poverty is the guardian  
of the communities*

**Cardigan, stockings and  
thimble belonging to Mère Thérèse.**

### **Work and spirit of poverty**

3 Mother Thérèse was responsible for mending the community's clothing in the house in Lyon. In this service she demonstrated "the same zeal as if it were a very lofty employment: It was 'a duty'<sup>2</sup>". Her spirit of poverty made her "[take] for herself always the least good and the most threadbare in the way of clothing<sup>3</sup>". She displayed the same spirit in her work. "She taught the Sisters the practice of poverty. She collected everything so it could be of use. She was forever carefully mending items of clothing. She used to recommend treating 'God's possessions' with care<sup>4</sup>. Mother Félicie Rostaing, in charge of the wardrobe, learnt this at her own expense: "As she had the job of mending the underskirts, she used to ask for pieces of material that she could use for this. She refused the pieces I sent her saying: 'This little nun has no idea of the meaning of poverty: give her pieces back to her and get her to send me others'. The Sisters dreaded seeing their clothes go off to be mended by Mother Thérèse, coming back as they did with all the hallmarks of poverty<sup>5</sup>".

"We were told we must change our shoes to prevent them wearing out. Mother Thérèse said to us: 'I don't just change my shoes, I change my stockings too because one foot becomes more worn than the other, I try every evening to change my stockings as well as my shoes'. It was an exercise in poverty known only to God."

Sr Madeleine Ruffiner, process instructed by the  
Local Ordinary, Malines.

Mother Amélie du Pavillon remembered that in the Community Room "silently, in the embrasure of a window, the holy Mother used to ply her needle without raising her eyes. From time to time, a sigh, an ejaculatory prayer revealed her union with God. [...] In a spirit of poverty, she collected up all the little bits of thread and material which would be used one day or

another. After her death, the examination of her work basket alone bore witness to these little practices counted by the Angels and whose inspiration was drawn from the painstaking meditation of our holy rules. We were very moved by the discovery of a little bag made of old indian cloth containing little rolled up pieces of paper indicating their long service. On each one of them written by the hand of our venerated Mother was an invocation from the litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus, that she probably pulled out as she was working. [...] Mother Thérèse appeared to be a living image of that rule which recommends that professed Sisters who, due to age and diminishing energy, withdraw from outside activities to apply themselves to manual work sanctified by prayer and by union with God<sup>6</sup>”.

### **Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus**

“You have to get used to using Our Lord, she said to a Sister. [...] [Picking invocations] will help you, she told her, to think of the Good God, I am greatly helped in this way to stay united to Him<sup>7</sup>”.

Contemporaries of Mother Thérèse are unanimous in their insistence of her constant state of contemplation. She took particular advantage of the time given to her work, during which she was able to meditate. Mother Césarine de Ferrari: “The presence of God was constant to her; and from this, came the facility of being in conversation with Him, which was so familiar to her, and despite this, she used her ingenuity... during her long [hours] of manual work; thus, to give but one example, she had written the Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus separately on little pieces of paper and placed them in a bag which hung on the chair she used for her work. From time to time she pulled out one of them, meditating on it at leisure; then she went on to the next one, seeming to draw much fruit from this practice<sup>8</sup>”.

One Sister also remembered how she got the coadjutor Sisters to pick an invocation from the litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus, giving them afterwards “some practical reflections<sup>9</sup>”.

In a letter to Mother de Larochenégly dated 27th May 1862, Mother Thérèse “deeply regrets the removal of the Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus from the morning prayer said in common” by the Chapter which had just taken place. “I find so much sweetness and consolation in saying the Holy Name that I often spend part of my meditation and thanksgiving repeating it, meditating on it, tasting it, invoking it, blessing it. Jesus, my life, Jesus, my love, Jesus, my all... In ones great poverty, one feels such a great hunger for this sovereign good, for this unique good, source of all goods and without which all other goods are but ills, that one feels inclined to call Him with all the strength of one’s soul”.

*To surrender oneself, finally,  
is to die to everything and to self*



**Mother Thérèse's cilice.**

“in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.” (Col. 1, 24).

The cilice is this instrument covered with iron spikes and worn against the skin as an act of mortification. The one belonging to Mother Thérèse was probably worn on the arm. Using a cilice wasn't unusual in the 19th century. The

Mother Thérèse, “who was not repelled by any sort of mortification but was for what seemed to her too refined and delicate. ‘Expensive remedies, she said, are not for the poor.’”

Very Reverend Mother Marie Aimée Lautier, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1920)

Curé d'Ars for example wore one. It was used in particular to control the urges of the flesh.

Mother Thérèse owned a copy of the Introduction to the Devout Life by Saint Francis de Sales (Lyons, Molin, 1708). The cilice is mentioned in this book of

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spirituality: “The hair shirt [or cilice] powerfully subdues the body; but its use is not suitable for everyone, married people or people of a delicate disposition, or people who have to bear other kinds of great pain. It is true that on [the] days that are more appropriate for doing penance, it can be used on the advice of a discrete confessor” (III, 23).

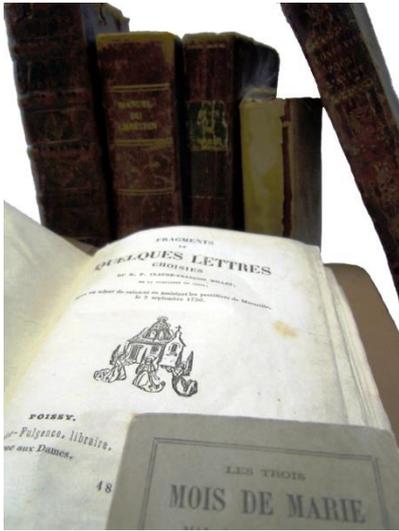
*Anathema, anathema to anyone who  
would break away from the chair of  
Saint Peter !*

Father Terme

Mother Thérèse seems to have made her own this cry of Father Terme, recounted by Mother Joséphine Grégoire<sup>10</sup>. Mother Marie Aimée Lautier reported that “she trusted in God alone, she abandoned to his Heart and infinite goodness, the interests of what was dearer to her than her own self: the Church and our Society<sup>11</sup>”. “She had a great veneration for everything that came from the Church. She prayed a lot for the Supreme Pontiff<sup>12</sup>”.



**Medal of Leo XIII given to her nephew the Rev. Léon Couderc by Mother Thérèse who had received it from her superior.**



**Books belonging to Mother Thérèse displayed in the glass cabinet:**

[Saint Francis de Sales], [*Introduction to the Devout Life*], [Lyons, Molin], [1708]

Inside the Reverend Léon Couderc has written: “This book belonged to the venerated Mother Thérèse. She gave it to her brother Jean Couderc. He kept it in his library. It’s there that I found it together with other works which belonged to the venerated Servant of God.”

***The Roman Divine Office for use on Sundays and feasts days during the year, for lay people who visit their parish*, Lyons, Rusand, 1825**

This book was given by Mother Caroline de Saint-Privat as having been used by Mother Thérèse. An Office Book is also mentioned by Mother de Gaudin in the list of objects she found in Mother Thérèse’s room when she died<sup>13</sup>.

**A Christian’s Handbook..., Lyons, Perisse frères, 1838**

Mentioned in Mother de Gaudin’s list.

***The Three Months of Mary. May, August, September. Followed by an exercise for hearing Mass in union with Mary and the Office of the Immaculate Conception***

**Lyons, Librairie de Félix Girard, 1869**

The list drawn up by Mother de Gaudin mentions “a little month of Mary”. The Archives also have a copy of *The Month of Mary or the Month of May...* by Saint A.-M. de Liguory (Baratier frères et fils, 1832) used by Mother Thérèse.

***Fragments of some letters chosen by Fr Claude-François Milley, of the Society of Jesus*, Poissy, Olivier-Fulgence, 1845**

“A precious book amongst all those coming to us from our Mother Thérèse and in which O.V.R.M. [Our Very Reverend Mother] delighted”.

As I was the librarian, she sent me a note one day asking me for a book [perhaps *The sufferings of Our Lord* by Fr Allaume], on this note were these words: "You won't have to think of me anymore for a year, one book is enough for me".

Mother Félicie Rostaing, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1921), and apostolic process, Lyons (1929).

*I was preparing to begin my meditation*



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*Self Surrender, pens, prescription glasses and their leather case, Fragments of some letters chosen by R.P. Claude-François Milley, A Christian's Manual..., and The Divine Office... where the sheets of "My Today" and "Extract" were inserted.*

The text of *Self Surrender* is written on three pages of a sheet of paper folded in two. Mother Thérèse judged it to be so important that she wrote 'To keep' on top of the page. It is dated Sunday 26th June, and two letters written to Mother de Larothenégly in 1864 display the same disposition of self-surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"I might say that this sums up all I did in retreat, *surrender myself*, the good God did all the rest."

Letter to Mother de Larothenégly, 13th February 1864

"My soul possessed its full liberty and my will all its power to surrender itself and to desire to be continually united to the Sovereign Good, which is God Himself."

Letter to Mother de Larothenégly, 5th October 1864

## Mon Aujourd'hui.

Patience Aujourd'hui mon  
âme!....

Demain sera ce que Dieu sou-  
dra... En attendant faisons la  
volonté du Seigneur.

Hier est passé... Et de ce que  
j'ai enduré hier il ne me reste  
plus la souffrance Il m'en reste  
vain le mérite si je l'avais offerte  
à Dieu.

Aujourd'hui je veux souffrir avec  
mérite. Mon Dieu, puis-je faire  
moins que de vous offrir les peines  
les souffrances, les fatigues d'un  
seul jour!....

Mother Thérèse seems to have liked to insert some prayer cards into her Office Book.

“My Today” is an abridged version of a popular prayer usually said in the morning.

This little booklet has a certain penitential tone to it coming from the first week of the *Spiritual Exercises* and a spirituality which is typical of the 19th century. It is interesting to note that this is not the case with regard to *Self Surrender*.

### Extrait.

Mon livre d'office.  
L'estimer, l'aimer, ne le tou-  
cher qu'avec respect.

Mon office  
Imposé par l'Eglise, par ma  
règle;  
Œuvre de zèle, fonction des An-  
ges et des saints:  
Gloire, bénie Dieu.

Office divin  
Ayant Dieu pour auteur, le  
Saint-Esprit devant y prier  
en moi; divin par l'intention

## Mother Thérèse's vows



Picture of the dates of Mère Thérèse's vows (both sides)

In her Office book I found the dates of her first vows: 31st July 1828, and her final vows: 6<sup>th</sup> January 1837. She discreetly said to me one day that she had her dates in her desk.

Letter from Mother Gaudin to Very Reverend Mother Lautier, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1885<sup>14</sup>

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Marie Victoire Couderc received the habit and her religious name on 27th March 1826. The date she considers to be that of her first vows is 31st July 1828. Only this picture mentions this date. On 1st November 1830, Sister Thérèse and a few others made their first vows as Sisters of Saint

Régis. These are the first vows in the Society. It was decided that Sister Thérèse, the superior, would take the name of Mother and that Mr Terme – which was the title given to diocesan priests in 19th century France – would be called

*My Sister, to be a good religious,*

*You must eat well, pray well and devote yourself well to others.*

Mother Thérèse to the novices<sup>15</sup>

Father Terme. On 16th June 1836, the community changed its habit, and on 31st July of the same year, the feast of Saint Ignatius, the choir Sisters made their vows. Mother Thérèse made her final vows on 6th January 1837. She was also part of the the group of Sisters who made perpetual vows on 19th November 1856.

## Religious Life according to Mother Thérèse

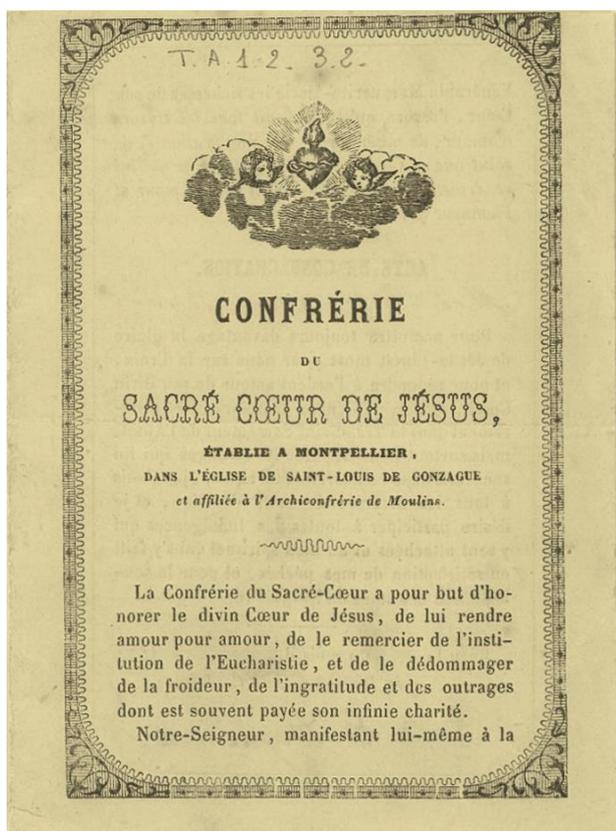
“ ‘The will of our Good Master before our own’ This was expression very familiar to her. ‘I don’t see anything more gentle, she added, than holy abandonment into the hands of the One who is Almighty in his commands, and Who only wants our greater good in all He directs or allows.’ [...] To her, nothing seemed too big or too generous when it was a question of pleasing Him, of obeying his orders, of working for his glory. ‘Religious should be entirely given to God, without division, without restriction, without reservation of any kind. For that, devotion, sacrifice, renouncement, death to one’s nature, to the senses, to the satisfactions of self love: in short, death to everything that is not of God. One does not love God if one does not love his Cross... [...]’. [...] She didn’t understand religious life other than resting on these two foundations: ‘Religious life cannot be without subjugation, or renouncement’ as she was fond of saying<sup>16</sup>”. This testimony given by Mother Marie Aimée Lautier shows the demands of religious life as it was understood by Mother Thérèse.

Courage then, dearest Sister, religious life is such a great grace that it is worth paying for with a few sacrifices, even if our poor nature finds it costly.

Letter to Mother Stéphanie du Plessis, then a novice,  
18th May 1880

Religious life is not exempt from suffering, as is shown in what she said to the future Mother de Montgrand when she entered the congregation: “You have chosen religious life, you must know that you will suffer greatly. [...] [But] When you love the Good God, this suffering is nothing<sup>17</sup>”.

One choice that Mother Thérèse did not regret: “I have been asked what enjoyment I have found spending my life between four walls? One so great that all eternity does not seem to me to be too long to give thanks to the Good God. I often say to him: My God, I don’t know how to thank You enough, but if You would like to place me in Your Paradise, I shall thank You for all Eternity!<sup>18</sup>”



**Picture of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Church of Saint Louis Gonzaga, Montpellier with an Act of Consecration in the**

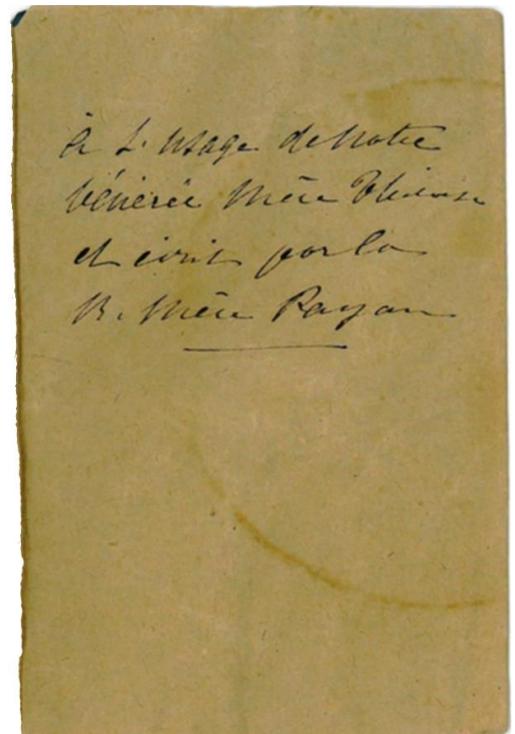
name of Thérèse Victoire Couderc received 19th October 1860 (front).

*I have only one need, one thought:  
pray, pray always*

## Constant prayer

“She is consumed by the love of God. It is almost alarming, her physical strength is not able to match the vehemence of her soul. But it is beautiful, it is a great and rare example of virtue that we see in her. Her selflessness reaches the point of heroism<sup>19</sup>”. This also worries Mother Zoé de Chamon, her superior in Montpellier in 1863.

The Sisters who knew her were unanimous in their insistence that Mother Thérèse was in a continuous state of prayer. Another of her superiors related that: “In the Spring of 1866, whilst Mother Thérèse was giving me an account of the time she spent on her Spiritual Exercises, she said to me: “When I have received [Holy] Communion, it is impossible for me to leave the Chapel as on the other days; the time allowed for one’s thanksgiving [by the Community] seems to me so short that I have to do myself violence in following them to the Refectory. I go and I eat there without knowing what I am doing and without being distracted for one moment from the presence of Our Lord. When I return to the Chapel and I am alone, I can surrender myself to the impressions that I had to hide until then, and frequently I am overcome by floods of tears. This is a nervous weakness, the holy Mother added humbly, there are days when just the thought of God moves my heart so much that I can no longer contain myself [...]”



**Prayer book written by Mother Payan for Mother Thérèse.**

In August 1866, after a day of Recollection Mère Thérèse said to me: “I have only one need, one thought: to pray, pray always. This is so strong in me that on Sundays I am like a soul in pain for all the time I spend

[Mother] Thérèse is killing herself with love of God, would you believe that yesterday she stayed in the chapel from 5.00 am until about 10.00am taking only during this time a little time for breakfast.

Letter from Mother Caroline de Saint Privat to Mother Dambuent, General Assistant, 17th June 1866

outside the Chapel, (because on that day, she felt freed from the manual work she did so conscientiously during the week.)<sup>20</sup>”

## Simplicity in prayer

«“Her holiness was simple, not complicated nor sophisticated. For the feast of the Seven Sorrows, she was asked if she might indicate a particular prayer in honour of this mystery. "The Pater and the Ave, she replied, what better prayer!" A Sister asked her one day to write a prayer on the back of a holy picture. She agreed, and wrote these words: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As there was surprise that she hadn't written a prayer she herself had composed, she replied: 'is that not the most beautiful of all prayers?'<sup>21</sup>”

My prayer is very simple, I place myself in the Presence of God and I tell Him everything I have in my heart.

Mère Thérèse<sup>22</sup>

## The Presence of God

“Sometimes Mother Thérèse scolded me for sleeping in the chapel. She used to say: Look at that little lamp, it shines brightly to honour the Good God and you, you cannot be attentive to His Holy Presence<sup>23</sup>”.

A Sister asks her one day why it is that we are so easily overcome by sleep during the exercises in the chapel. “Probably, she replied, it's due in part to our human fragility our tiredness: but it's also because we haven't a strong

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**Holy picture with writing and relic of Mother Thérèse (both sides).**

Written by Mother Thérèse Couderc at the end of 1884. Before leaving the Cenacle in Lyons to live in Cenacle of Paris and Versailles, and saying goodbye to Our Mother Foundress, Mère Thérèse, I asked her to write me a word on this picture; she said ‘no I am nothing, I don't know how to write. Then she said to me, I'll write you a word which isn't mine; but from Saint Francis. *My God and my all*'. There in pencil, on her knees, she wrote my God and my all. I took this little piece of wool from one of her oldest stockings whilst mending them. She blessed me with the cross worn on her habit, giving me back the picture I had given her: It was [Reverend] Mother de Laroquenégly who had given it to me in Paray-le-Monial, telling me that I would find in Lyon an elderly Mother Thérèse who had greatly suffered and worked for the Congregation.

Note written by Sister Elisabeth Pacriaud, 16th July 1922 (extract)

One comes across this sentence in the conclusions of a retreat (without a date) made by Mother Thérèse: “(...) In the 1st [meditation] on the end for which man is created I don't know what happened within me, but it seemed like a greater detachment occurred in me and that I was so surrounded and filled with the Spirit of God that I found myself invested with all the powers of my soul and generally throughout my being. I said then, aware of a very great feeling of happiness and consolation, *my God and my all*: The rest, nothing, *nothing, nothing...*(...)”



The Rosary Mother Thérèse used at night, that she had around her neck when she died.

We had put on her bed all the pictures of her Saints, her Book of Rules, the cross received at her vows, the rosary beads worn on her habit, her crucifix that I made her kiss from time to time as she renewed her vows. From the beginning of her last agony her cries ceased, and we heard only this shallow breathing.

Letter from Mother de Gaudin to Very Reverend Mother Lautier, 26th September 1885<sup>25</sup>

Two objects linked to Mère Thérèse’s last moments have been preserved: her rosary beads and a little statue of Saint Teresa.

Mother Thérèse had a great devotion to Saint Teresa of Avila, whose Way of Perfection figures in one of her two handwritten lists of books we have in our possession.

Mother Marie Louise Courbon de Saint Genest witnesses to the fact that she had no hesitation about calling on her intercession. “The love of God consumed her. On the feast of Saint Teresa she said to me: ‘This morning, I prayed to ask Our Lord, through the intercession of Saint Teresa – because it is good to pray through the intermediary of the Saints who are more pleasing to God than us – to pierce the souls of all the Sisters of the Cenacle, from the first to the last, with the same dart of God’s love that had pierced Saint Teresa’<sup>26</sup>”.

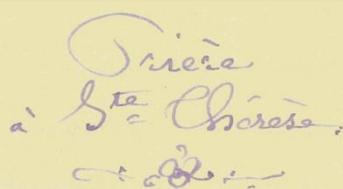
“Devoted to her holy and illustrious Patron Saint for whom she had composed a novena of the nine principal graces of her life, she made me a gift of them, saying: ‘Take them, little Sister’, as if to stir me into



Mother Thérèse’s death mask and bonnet.



Bone statuette of Saint Teresa of Avila that Mother Thérèse “kissed lovingly the last days of her life”

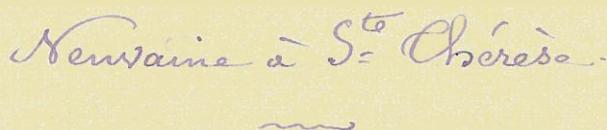


Prière  
à S<sup>te</sup> Thérèse.

C'est avec une confiance sans réserve, que je m'adresse à vous, généreuse amante de Jésus-Christ, pour vous exposer mes misères et pour vous prier d'en avoir pitié.

Vous qui avez souhaité, avec tant d'ardeur, que Dieu fut connu et aimé, priez-le qu'Il se fasse connaître à moi et m'embrase de son divin amour. Vous qui aviez une charité si ardente pour les personnes qui voulaient se donner à Dieu, lisez dans mon âme le désir sincère que j'ai d'être tout à Lui, et faites qu'Il rende ce désir efficace ; qu'Il me donne un cœur tendre pour Lui, un cœur grand et généreux ; un cœur qui ne cherche que Lui et qui ne s'attache qu'à Lui. Ne permettez pas que j'ignore les voies dans lesquelles il faut que je marche, soyez avec moi dans les peines et tentations que je rencontrerai dans ces voies. Obtenez-moi la force pour résister, la Patience pour souffrir et la constance pour persévérer. Faites pour moi, dans le Ciel, ô grande sainte, ce que vous auriez fait sur la terre si j'avais eu le bonheur de vous y voir et de vous y consulter sur les besoins de mon âme : afin que changée par votre puissante intercession, je me joigne aux personnes que vous avez sanctifiées par vos conseils, pour bénir à jamais le Dieu qui vous a fait sainte et qui m'aura rendue meilleure par votre moyen.

Ainsi soit-il.



Neuvaine à S<sup>te</sup> Thérèse.

Réciter 9 *Pater, Ave* et *Gloria Patri*, en l'honneur de s<sup>te</sup> Thérèse et pour remercier Dieu des neuf grâces spéciales que Notre-Seigneur lui accorda, et qui peuvent servir de sujet de Méditations pendant la semaine.

1<sup>ère</sup> grâce. Le désir ardent qu'elle eut toujours de mourir pour Jésus-Christ, désir qui lui fit chercher le martyre ; ainsi qu'on le voit dans sa vie.

2<sup>ème</sup>. Dieu lui fit connaître qu'elle faisait du progrès dans la divine charité et dans son amour pour les souffrances.

3<sup>ème</sup>. Elle eut le cœur percé par le ministère d'un séraphin.

4<sup>ème</sup>. Notre-Seigneur lui donne le clou de sa main droite, en signe de l'alliance qu'Il faisait avec elle, et la reçoit pour son Epouse.

5<sup>ème</sup>. Sainte Thérèse fut inspirée, et fit le vœu de faire toujours ce qu'elle croirait être le plus parfait.

6<sup>ème</sup>. Son grand courage à souffrir, pour Dieu, toute sorte de peines et de travaux.

7<sup>ème</sup>. Sa parfaite pureté de corps et d'âme.

8<sup>ème</sup>. La grâce que J.C. lui fit un jour après la S<sup>te</sup> Communion où elle se trouva la bouche remplie de Son précieux sang.

9<sup>ème</sup>. Les grâces qu'elle reçut à sa mort.

1<sup>ère</sup> La vue de son divin Epoux Jésus-Christ, accompagné d'une troupe d'Ange.

La seconde, qu'elle mourut plutôt par la véhémence de son amour que par la violence de la maladie.

*At 4.15, finally she breathed her last,  
having opened her eyes for a moment with a very gentle  
expression which no longer belonged to this world.*

The Lyon House Journal, 26th September 1885



**Daguerreotype and  
death mask (details).**

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“Our holy Mother reposes on her bed surrounded by flowers, with a peaceful air which is good for the soul. Never would I have believed that this face, so contorted with suffering could have relaxed in this way. Last night, even a few hours after her death, she didn’t have the good facial appearance that she has since this morning. Also when I saw this beatific appearance I found it a great pity not to preserve the features of this Venerated Mother on her bed, and I sent for a photographer”.

Letter from Mother de Gaudin, superior in Lyon, to Mother Lautier, 27th Sept. 1885<sup>28</sup>

On Saturday 26th September 1885, Mother Thérèse breathed her last in her room in Lyon. The Sisters present recited the De Profundis and twice, the Magnificat. On the following day, they took it in turns to pray by her coffin in the choir. On the 29th, after Mass, the coffin left for the station to continue its journey to La Louvesc where it was placed in the choir of the chapel. During the vigil, “we had however to pray for the venerated deceased, and, as if in spite of ourselves, we found ourselves praying to her<sup>29</sup>”. After the funeral Mass in the morning, the coadjutor Sisters accompanied Mother Thérèse to the cemetery.

However Mother Thérèse's body did not stay long in the burial vault belonging to the community in the parish cemetery of La Louvesc. On 14th May 1909, Doctor Vincent, a friend of the Congregation, had it discreetly taken from there to the chapel in the house where a burial vault had been made at the foot of the altar.

Due to the demands of the cause for beatification, the body was exhumed on two occasions. On 19th September 1929 during the first exhumation of her mortal remains, the Sisters were authorised to see the body: "We contemplated our mother foundress mummified. She had her bonnet displaced but with its frills still in place. The headband was still white, then her forehead was still very good and her eyes deep-set and covered by her eyelids. So far she was in really good condition – the shape of her face is exactly the one we always see in pictures of her<sup>30</sup>". When her eyelids are open we see her blue eyes intact<sup>31</sup>. A second inspection of the remains, on 9th April 1951, made mention of her thick head of hair devoid of any grey hairs<sup>32</sup>.

In June 1951, Mother Thérèse's body was placed under an altar in a casket shrine, that is to say in a coffin-reliquary, which was unveiled on 4th November, the day of her beatification. Her hands and face were covered with wax masks. The one on the face could have been made from the death mask, given the traces of yellow wax on the white plaster of the mask.

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A little anecdote recounts a visit to the tomb on 8th August 1949 by Monsignor Roncalli (the future Pope John XXIII), then Apostolic Nuncio, on a pilgrimage to La Louvesc in the company of Monsignor Alfred Couderc, Bishop of Viviers.



**Small wooden stool**

(26, 5 x 16, 5 x 10, 5 cm).

This little stool could have served as Mother Thérèse's footrest. The footrest on her armchair by the desk in her room in Lyon shows in fact that her feet didn't touch the ground when she was sitting in it.

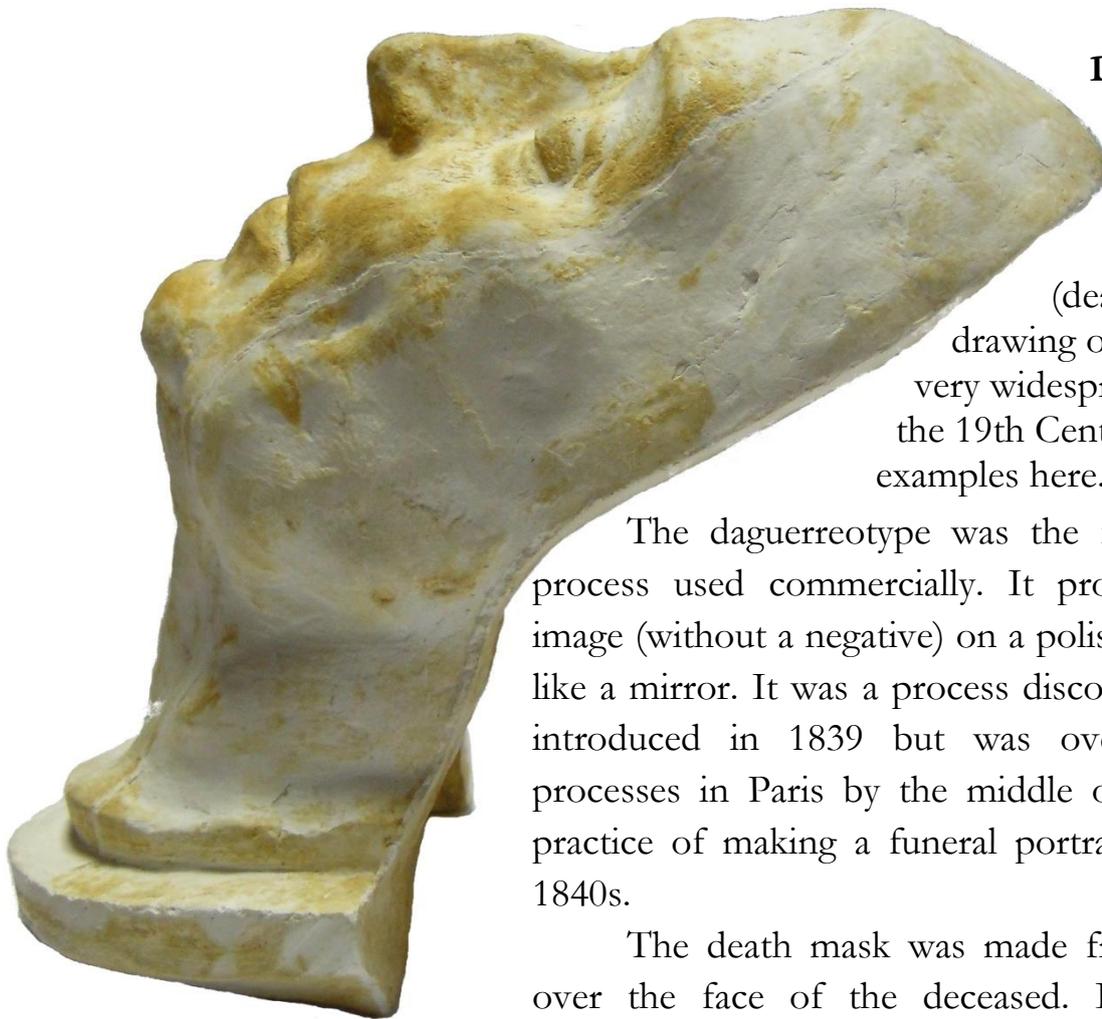
To give an idea of how tall she was, one has to refer to the report on the state of her body during the inspection of her remains on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1951: she was 1 m 45 tall, without taking into account the curving of the spine due to aging<sup>33</sup>.

### Death mask.

The “last portrait” (death mask, painting, drawing or photograph) was very widespread in the West in the 19th Century. We have two examples here.

The daguerreotype was the first photographic process used commercially. It produced a positive image (without a negative) on a polished silver surface, like a mirror. It was a process discovered in 1835 and introduced in 1839 but was overtaken by other processes in Paris by the middle of the 1850s. The practice of making a funeral portrait dates from the 1840s.

The death mask was made from a cast placed over the face of the deceased. It enabled the preservation of a faithful three-dimensional portrait.



Daguerreotype.



This morning Mother Sommesson drew this pencil sketch of Mother Thérèse in the half-light, I don't know if she suspected anything because she had asked for her curtains to be closed.

Letter from Mother de Gaudin to Very Reverend Mother Lautier, 4th September 1885

**Portrait of Mère Thérèse drawn by Mother Sommesson, her nurse, the morning of 4th September 1885.**



**Mother Thérèse's room in Lyon.**

*Beatam Theresiam Couderc Sanctam esse decernimus et definimus,  
ac Sanctorum Catalogo adscribimus*

In the beginning, the causes for the beatification and canonisation of the two “venerated Founders” were envisaged jointly. Steps were taken from 1877 as regards Father Terme and from 1887 for Mother Thérèse. However, because of the financial cost and human investment demanded by a canonisation process, the Congregation only presented the cause for Mother Thérèse.

The cause had as its first Postulator Mgr Virili, succeeded in turn by Mgr Hertzog, the Rev. Jeuné, Mgr Fontenelle and Mgr Federici, and as Vice-Postulateurs Canon Choublier in Lyon and Mgr Simoni in the United States.

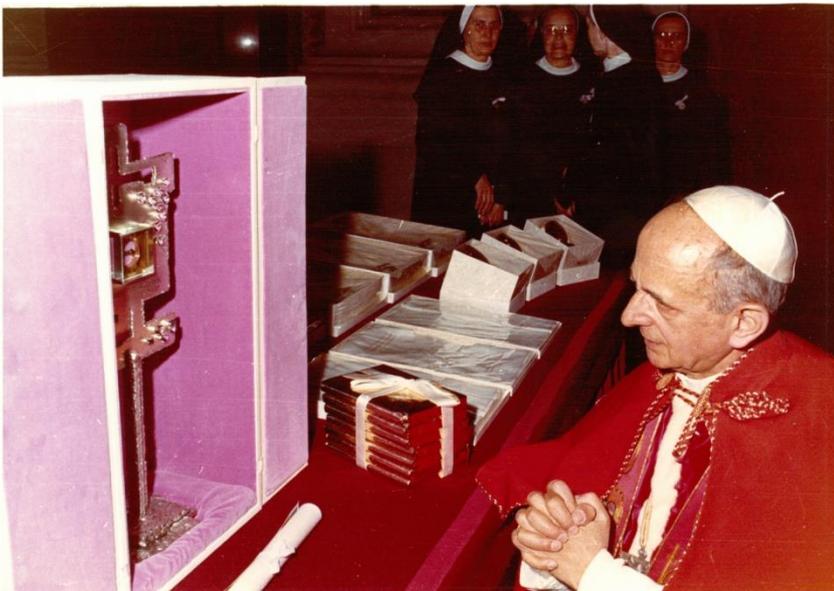
The ordinary process took place in Lyon from 1920 to 1922, with the auxiliary processes taking place in Malines (Belgium) and Viviers. The apostolic process in Lyon opened in 1929. The apostolic processes concerning the miracles were implemented in 1949, followed by the medical studies of the cures which lasted from 1954 to 1967. There are 11 volumes of manuscripts recording the proceedings of these different processes.

12th May 1935: Venerable  
4th Nov. 1951: Blessed  
10th May 1970: Saint

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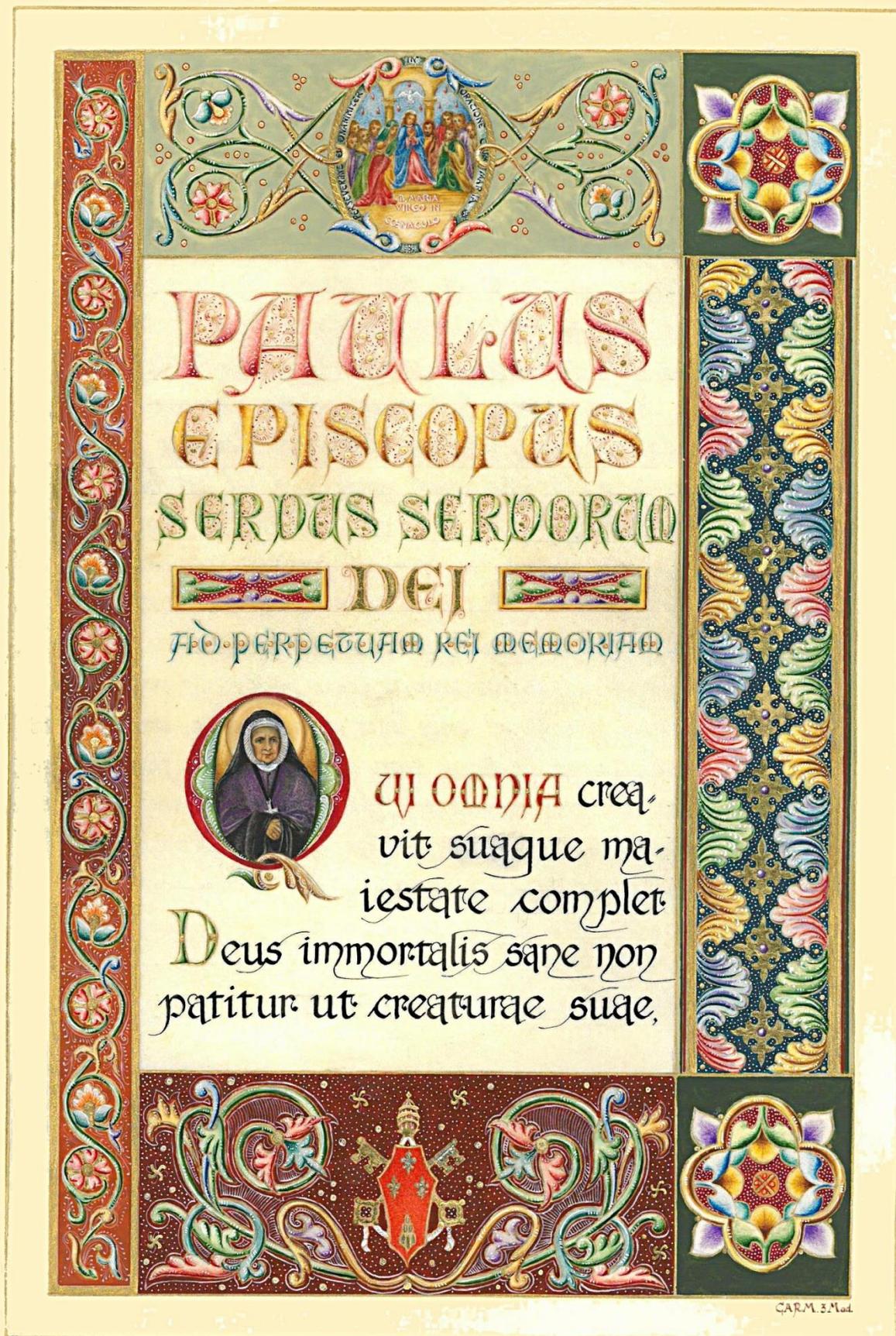
In 1953, the Office of Blessed Thérèse Couderc was approved. The lessons for it were written by Dom Gaillard o.s.b.

Mother Thérèse was canonised by Paul VI in St Peter’s Basilica on 10th May 1970 in the presence of many Sisters of the Congregation. After Mass, “the members of the general government were presented to the Pope as well as some of Mother Thérèse’s relatives. He then paused for a moment of recollection in front of the reliquary of the new saint<sup>34</sup>”.



Here she displayed greatness: greatness above all in humility. In the act of *self-surrender*, as she repeated it. Silence, Obedience, Patience, in a conscious and continual interior sacrifice, were her way of being[...] In this aspect Thérèse Couderc seems to us a heroic soul, an extraordinary teacher, and seems to us a Saint.

Homily of the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, Sunday 10th May 1970 (translated from the Italian)



Decretal Letter of Pope Paul VI for the canonisation of Mother Thérèse (first page).

## **Mother Thérèse in Bethlehem**

*The interior life.* She possessed it to a high degree, if it is to be judged by her union with the Mysteries of the life of O[ur] L[ord] in the following tract: to such a point that each Vigil of the Nativity was for her a real *labour*, so perfectly did she identify with the two [holy] travellers: Joseph and Mary, arriving in Bethlehem, going with them from door to door, and seeing the inns refuse them, that we heard her say at the end of the day: that it was high time there was an end to it and the joys of Christmas finally commence as soon as midnight struck, to compensate herself with these [holy] people, for those tiring journeys through the streets of the small Judaeen town that was so *inhospitable* for her King and Saviour!

“Memories of our venerated Mother Thérèse” by Mother Césarine de Ferrari de Romans (extract). Document produced at the process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyon (1922).

## **Happy New Year to the Good God**

One 31st December evening, Mother Thérèse came down to the community to join in the greetings for a happy new year. Afterwards, going up to her bedroom, she said to the Sister who was infirmarian: In the world we think to wish each other a happy new year, it's a day for gifts, new year gifts, we think only of having fun. But who thinks of wishing God a happy new year? We mustn't act like that. The Sister replied: But how do you wish God a happy new year, what do you say to Him? She continued: Oh! This is very easy to do. The first thought I have tomorrow must be for him. I have found nothing better to say to God than what Our Lord taught us: I say my Our Father: hallowed be thy name, that thy kingdom come, that thy will be done. Are those not best wishes? Then I ask God for my new year gift: Give us today our daily bread and she continued reciting the Pater up to the end.

Testimony of Sister Pauline (extract) reported by Mother Irène Maranzana, archivist, at the apostolic process in Lyons (1929).

## The Nightingale

A nightingale had taken up residence in a tree in the garden, quite close to the chapel; and from there each morning it strove to modulate its chords at exactly the same time as our meditation. One day, during recreation, we were speaking of this bird's songs, and one of us said they brought her to devotion. "For my part, said Mother Thérèse, I fear that in wanting to listen to the nightingale, we might not hear the Good God anymore". The following morning the nightingale had flown away, and we never heard him again at that time. Mother, a young Sister said to her, you advised him of course to leave? And the holy Mother merely smiled without adding another word.

"Notes on our venerated Mother Thérèse" by Mother Emilie de Roatis (extract). Document produced by Mother Irène Maranzana at the apostolic process in Lyons (1929).

## Mother Thérèse's witty comments

Good and indulgent towards young people, she is our joy in the little witty comments with which she enlivens our recreation from time to time. It must be said that we are a little noisy sometimes; [when] we have been in silence for several hours, there is a necessary moment of relaxation... the other day, [Sister] de Krenznach, with a somewhat untimely enthusiasm, hurried towards the foot warmers, and bang bang, turned them over with great hoots of laughter familiar to you. Mother Thérèse arrived from behind, controlling herself in the Lord, and gave herself immediately the job of covering the glowing fire. Taking the bucket from the hands of the poor contrite Sister, she uttered the sorrowful exclamation: "Oh! How rowdy you are!" "It's true Mother, and I'm sure you don't like me when I make such a row?" And as if our Holy Mother regretted her sharp retort, she stood up and looked at her with great goodness and a slight smile: "Oh! I always like you, what I don't like is your rowdiness." Isn't that just delightful?

Letter from Mother Amélie du Pavillon to Mother d'Esparbès, Superior in Paris, 28th November 1879 (extract). Document produced by Mother Irène Maranzana, archivist, before the apostolic process in Lyons (1929).

REFERENCES “Poverty is the guardian of the communities”: Mother Thérèse, quoted at the process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1921) by Sister Saint-Flavien (Marie Victorine) Couderc, who heard this comment from Sister Pacifique Devidal, both of them Religious of Saint-Régis; Sister Pacifique having been a member of the Congregation before the split between retreats and teaching. – <sup>1</sup> quoted by Sister Baptistine Pinon, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyon (1920). – <sup>2</sup> Marie Desgrand, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyon (1920). – <sup>3</sup> Mother Marie Dognin, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1920). – <sup>4</sup> Mother Marie Christine de Belenet, apostolic process, Lyons (1929). – <sup>5</sup> Mère Félicie Rostaing, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1921) and apostolic process, Lyons (1929). – <sup>6</sup> “Notes by Reverend Mother du Pavillon on Mère Thérèse” 2nd August 1887 produced at the process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1922). – <sup>7</sup> Sister Agarithe, quoted by Mother Irène Maranzana, archivist, apostolic process, Lyons (1929). – <sup>8</sup> “Memories of our venerated Mère Thérèse” Mother Césarine de Ferrari, produced at the process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1922). – <sup>9</sup> Sister Rose Peyrache, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1920). – <sup>10</sup> *Our Origins*, p. 72. – <sup>11</sup> Very Reverend Mother Marie Aimée Lautier, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1922). – <sup>12</sup> Sister Victoire Vallon, apostolic process, Lyons (1929). – <sup>13</sup> *Mother Thérèse in the framework of her daily life* (T.C.Q.), vol. VI, p. 256-257. – <sup>14</sup> T.C.Q., vol. VI, p. 256. – <sup>15</sup> Sister Bernadette Chaize, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1920). – <sup>16</sup> Very Rev. Mother Marie Aimée Lautier, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1920). – <sup>17</sup> Mother Isabelle de Montgrand, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1920). – <sup>18</sup> Mother Louise Courbon de Saint Genest, apostolic process, Lyons (1929). – <sup>19</sup> Letter from Mother Zoé de Chamon to Mother Dambuent, General Assistant, 31st Jan. 1863. – <sup>20</sup> “Notes by Mother Chartier on our venerated Mère Thérèse”, Nov. 1885, document produced by Mother Louise Baudot, assistant secretary, at the process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1922). – <sup>21</sup> Sœur Baptistine Pinon, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1920). – <sup>22</sup> Mother Joséphine Buisson, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Malines (1922). – <sup>23</sup> Testimony of Sister Mélanie as told by Mother Irène Maranzana, archivist, at the apostolic process, Lyons (1929). – <sup>24</sup> Mother M. L. Courbon de Saint Genest, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1920). – <sup>25</sup> T.C.Q., vol. VI, p. 235. – <sup>26</sup> Mother M. L. Courbon de Saint Genest, process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1920). Her testimony is practically the same before the apostolic process in Lyons (1929). – <sup>27</sup> Memories of Mother Césarine de Ferrari, given in evidence by Mother Baudot at the process instructed by the Local Ordinary, Lyons (1922). – <sup>28</sup> T.C.Q., vol. VI, p. 236. – <sup>29</sup> Diary, La Louvesc, 29th September 1885, T.C.Q., vol. VI, p. 249. – <sup>30</sup> FT23, Story of a Religious. – <sup>31</sup> FT23, Typed letter by a Brother of Hautecombe, 7th May 1970. – <sup>32</sup> FT23, Report of Mother Françoise Saglio and Mother M. L. Voinchet at the survey of the remains on 9th April. – <sup>33</sup> FT23, Report signed by Françoise Saglio, Superior, and M. L. Voinchet, Assistant. – <sup>34</sup> “The Family letter”, 1970 – n° 13.

To facilitate the reading of the quotations their spelling has been amended.



esign: Wandrille de Floris, archivist

Translation from French: Sr Moira McDowall RLR