

CANONISATION OF THE LITTLE FLOWER

(By REV. L. RUMBLE, M.S.C.)



The whole world wanted it!

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus had whispered before she died that she was going to spend her heaven doing good upon earth, and it was not very long before the news was spreading like wildfire through the whole world—civilised and uncivilised. All that was best in France was on its knees before this new girl-Saint; Ireland was invoking her; proud England held up suppliant hands to her; the peasant of Germany, the wealthy of America, the children of Australia and Africa and China and Papua, and all the world joined in laying before "The Little Flower" their deepest and most far-reaching desires. And for them all this wonderful little Saint had *something*.

And so, of course, the whole world wanted her canonised!

She was declared "Venerable." It was not enough. She was "Beatified." The faithful were not satisfied. Petitions still poured into Rome. The Holy Father hesitated. It all seemed too rapid . . . too soon. . . . But the Little Flower went on showering down her roses . . . and her grateful clients continued to publish her praises . . . and then the Holy Year came . . . and the Cause was won. This new little Saint, whom we all seem to have known, must be raised to the Altars of the Church.

So the whole world was told that in this Holy Year of 1925, on Sunday, 17th of May, the canonisation would take place of Sœur Thérèse of Lisieux—the Little Flower of Jesus. And to us in Rome it seemed that the faithful were not yet satisfied. They wanted her canonised—but they all wanted to be there!

Weeks before the ceremony we were told of the thousands who would flock to Rome. There were stories of 25,000 from France; of great pilgrimages preparing in America; of trainloads from Germany. There were rumors that the pilgrims would have first claim, and that we of Rome were to be asked to stay away!

Let me confess that I owe the Little Flower quite a lot—more than one first-class mir-

acle! But then, too, I am here from Kensington—the Kensington for which the Little Friends of the Little Flower have done so much—ah, it was impossible—I *had* to be there. It meant an early application for tickets—alas! without fruit. Everyone had the same story to tell—"more visitors than St. Peter's will hold."

So it meant a Novena to Sœur Thérèse herself.

On the sixth day came a ticket. It was not a very good position, but at least inside the Basilica, present at the ceremony!

The Novena continued. On the eighth day came a better ticket contrary to all expectations—this time in sight of the very altar where the Holy Father himself was to say the Canonisation Mass. Could I do less than let you share all that grace brought to me? Come, then, and take your place too in the mighty crowd—and see, and hear, and pray, with these thousands from the ends of the earth!

It meant getting up at 3 o'clock—because the ceremony was to begin at 8 am. I said my Mass at four and was at St. Peter's at six—but I think the crowd must have been waiting all night!

However, there was a spare seat right opposite the High Altar, where every word the Holy Father spoke could be heard, and every action seen. Two hours of waiting! But there was Office to be said, and the Rosary, and friends to be thought of—and intentions to be formed—and all the bright scene to be enjoyed.

The Basilica was again a vision of red velvet and white marble, with its vaulted roof of golden mosaics. Again the shadowy haze floated up into the fathomless dome. But, ah, what a difference in radiance! The very walls were draped with garlands of glittering candles and glass clusters—climbing the great columns, lining the capitals, spanning the great arches.

And still more candles came as the procession commenced to enter the Cathedral of the world, with the great banner of the Little Flower at its head—a banner 20 feet high and almost as wide, which was carried across to the platform of brown habits and cream mantles that told of the Carmelite rule. Then the bishops came, more than 150 they say, and the cardinals, more than 30 all told—but eyes, ears, and hearts were hungry still, hungry, till down the vast spaces from above floated the strains of the Papal March. It is ever new, this coming of the Holy Father among his people—but when "his people" are from abroad and are seeing Christ's Vicar for the first time in their lives, the pen does not exist which could convey a true impression of the scene.

Clapping, cries of welcome, of reverence, of love; deep appeals for special blessings; and benedictions from thousands of throats in all the languages of the civilised world echo and re-echo from wall to wall.

There are tears . . . and long-drawn breaths . . . for the human heart is too

small for all that then floods upon it . . . the brain will not act . . . thought just stops. The whole being seems to have reached the limit of its powers before the arresting experience. One is not on earth; nor yet in purgatory; nor yet again in heaven. It can only be accounted for by a sort of "fourth dimension" . . . so that for us Catholics there are four great realities—earth, purgatory and heaven—and St. Peter's in the presence of the Vicar of Christ. . . .

The Pope was passing. Under the wonderful silk canopy, between the waving fans, he sat enthroned, blessing gently, beautifully, reverently, sincerely—till he was gone by to bless yet others of that 80,000 crowd.

A sound broke in upon the silence of prayer. A single voice rang out clearly . . . strongly. It seemed incredible, yet already the Pope was enthroned, the Cardinals had paid their homage, and the Cause had begun.

"Most Holy Father," the voice was saying, "the Very Reverend Cardinal Procurator earnestly begs your Holiness to insert in the list of the Saints the name of the Blessed Thérèse."

"Ah," replied the Sovereign Pontiff, "I am indeed edified by her virtues and miracles, but before I pass judgment we must pray." And the Litany of Saints was intoned. It was an impossibility that heaven would not listen to those 80,000 voices in reply!

"Pray for us, spare us, be propitious have mercy on us," rang out before the vast assembly of the Saints, ran through to Our Blessed Lady and cried to the very Lamb of God.

"Most Holy Father," the voice was encouraged to say again: "the Very Reverend Cardinal Procurator more earnestly begs . . ."

"Stay," said the Pope, once more: "Let us first appeal to the Holy Spirit"—and he intoned the *Veni Creator*. Again 80,000 voices took up the appeal. "Come, Mighty Spirit; come, Fount of Life, Fire of Charity, enkindle light in our hearts and minds."

"Holy Father, most earnestly . . ."

"Yes, yes, it is pleasing to God," replied the Vicar of Christ. . . . And the event of their lifetime was experienced by all those present in St. Peter's that day. Seated on the Cathedral as Doctor and Infallible Head of the Church, solemnly the Pope uttered these words:—

"In honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith and the spread of the Christian religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and of Ourselves . . . we decree that the Blessed Teresa of the Child Jesus is a Saint and enrol her in the list of the Saints, ordering that her anniversary be devoutly celebrated by the Universal Church, in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

The enthusiasm rang from end to end of the Basilica, and never *Te Deum* was so heartily meant. So, too, the amen to the

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