

- Most of us have a natural affinity for those saints who accomplished mighty and wonderful works for God and His Church – saints who even changed the course of world history.
- As we ponder the lives of apostles such as St. Peter or St. Paul, popes like St. Leo the Great or St. Gregory the Great, and the founders of religious orders like St. Francis or St. Ignatius, we are rightly impressed by the mighty deeds God worked through them.
- When we turn our minds to the great sufferings of the martyrs like St. Lawrence or St. Lucy, or benefit from the writings of incredible intellects like St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas, we are both edified and amazed at what grace can accomplish through our weak and broken humanity.
- But while the Church's history is full of larger-than-life saints whose holiness was well known during their lifetimes, most of us can probably relate better to those saints who lived quiet, hidden lives, sequestered away and unknown to the world at large during their lifetimes.
- There are saints who, like a tender shoot of a great tree that is torn away and planted alone on a high and lofty mountain, have quietly put forth lofty branches and born fruit.
- The best example of this type of saint is probably St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, who, though unknown to anyone outside of her family, friends, and the other nuns in her monastery, is now one of the most well-known and best loved of saints.
- Yet, as her popularity amongst the Catholic faithful attests, her hidden life in the Carmel of Lisieux and the holiness she attained there is no less compelling than the very public holiness of saints like St. Paul, St. Gregory the Great, or St. Catherine of Siena.
- Though hidden from the public eye and unknown to the world during her earthly life, St. Thérèse of Lisieux is every bit as great a saint as those saints who lived very public lives, changed the course of history, or died a martyr's death for the Faith.
- Indeed, St. Thérèse shows us that saintliness does not always get expressed in great and mighty deeds – but that it is often expressed simply in living out one's vocation with heroic courage. She shows us that any of us can become a saint!
- And if St. Thérèse was anything, she was saintly in the courage she showed in the face of the terrible physical and spiritual sufferings she endured the last 18 months of her life.
- While she suffered through 18 agonizing months of tuberculosis without the aid of any type of painkiller, slowly being deprived of her ability to breathe, her worst suffering was the dark night of the soul she suffered at the same time.
- Keep in mind that the experience of a dark night of the soul is not depression; it's not a mental or emotional problem. A dark night of the soul is a process of purification by which all that is not of God within us is spiritually purged so that we grow in love, humility, and all the virtues.
- The dark nights of the soul detach us from worldly things so we can be fully attached to God. And they are unbelievably painful and capable of causing terrible temptations.
- In her dark night St. Thérèse was tempted toward blasphemy, suicide, and a complete loss of faith in God, but nonetheless she courageously held on to her faith, willing herself to believe in God's love and mercy, even though she felt abandoned by Him.
- It's this heroic courage and steadfast faith in the face of such terrible physical and spiritual sufferings that made St. Thérèse the magnificent saint we know her to be!
- In our second reading today St. Paul speaks of the virtue of courage that comes from walking by faith rather than by sight.

- Because of our faith in God's love, mercy, and goodness, we Christians have every reason to be heroic and courageous in the way that we live out our Christianity.
- If we really and truly believe that God is all powerful and all knowing; if we really and truly believe He will save us from our sins if we are sorry for them; if we really and truly believe that our faith in Him has the power to save our souls, then what is there to fear in this earthly life?
- While the sufferings of this life can certainly be terrible, earthly sufferings cannot be eternal. All suffering in this life will eventually come to an end.
- And if we have the courage to hold out with Christ to the end, bearing our sufferings in union with His suffering on the Cross, then we will gain an eternal reward beyond all measure! That's what our Faith teaches us!
- Yet, even though we may have this knowledge, living courageously in the face of suffering is not always that simple, is it? When terrible sufferings enter our lives, it can be easy to lose faith quickly.
- And in those terrible moments of suffering when our faith in God's goodness and love becomes a bit shaky, we need to remind ourselves not only of God's promises to those who love and believe in Him, but also that He actually dwells within us to strengthen us.
- You see, my brothers and sisters, God desires to be glorified and manifested in all people. There is nothing more beautiful and more glorifying of God than a soul in a state of grace, laden with virtue and adorned with holiness – a soul that is godly.
- For most of us, who live quiet and rather unassuming lives, our holiness is primarily found in living out the demands of our vocation. But in order to test our virtue and increase our holiness, God often allows suffering to enter into our lives.
- None of us will ever escape suffering. While some people suffer more than others, we all have to climb our own personal Calvary from time to time. But as painful as our sufferings may be, we must see in them an opportunity to become saints.
- During their lifetimes each of the saints gave great glory to God because they were living, breathing, manifestations of Him! Their lives gave glory to God because they walked by faith and not by sight and allowed His glory to shine through them!
- Each of the saints is like a window to Heaven, for in their courageous living out of the virtues in the face of suffering, we can see God alive and active in their souls. It must be the same way with us!
- So we must strive to be courageous in every situation in which we find ourselves, having faith that God is not only with us in our sufferings, but that He is within us, strengthening with the graces necessary to grow in holiness through our suffering.
- We must walk according to our faithful belief that our God is a loving God, that He is a God Who always desires what is best for us – even as it requires suffering.
- Therefore, with our Lady, St. Thérèse, and with all the saints who have already passed through this vale of tears faithfully and courageously, let us abandon ourselves completely and entirely to God's will.
- Let us thank Him today for all the many blessings He has so lovingly bestowed upon us. But let us thank Him for our sufferings, too, trusting that the crosses He allows to come into our lives will strengthen and sanctify us, if we are courageous in bearing them.