

## SAINT THÉRÈSE AS A MODEL FOR OUR INSTITUTE

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The first thing you see as you climb up the stairs to the ITI office is a large picture of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. When you turn the corner, you come across another of the famous photographs of the saint, this time the one taken when she was eight years old. Why does the Little Flower enjoy such prominence in a graduate school of theology, this young girl who died without degrees or diplomas? As I see it, there are two reasons. First, St. Thérèse presides over us at the Institute, because she is herself a theologian, one of the greatest of the Tradition, the newest Doctor of the Church. Our Grand Chancellor, Cardinal Schönborn, has many times pointed out that *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* regularly gives the saints the last word. In a certain way, all the saints, not just the scholars among them, were theologians. What a St. Thérèse or a St. Joan may have lacked in the acquired wisdom of scientific theology, they more than made up for in the infused wisdom that is a Gift of the Holy Spirit. According to St. Thomas, through charity and the Gift of Wisdom, the saints have a first-hand, almost experimental knowledge of the things of God, that is, the revealed realities that scientific theology tries to understand. For us who study in order to acquire theological wisdom, it is humbling, and therefore in the strict sense salutary, for us to remember the theology of the saints. It points us to the final goal of all our thinking and striving. It guards us from the temptations of intellectual pride and curiosity.

But there is a second reason why St. Thérèse's presence in our midst is so appropriate. The ITI tries to follow St. Thérèse's 'little way' in the sphere of academic theology. Our Institute is very small, very young. We are limited in our resources, dependent on the generosity of benefactors in Europe and North America. Our school lies far from the academic and political centres of power, lost amidst the mountains and forests of Lower Austria. Our pedagogy is simple, too, almost childlike: we present no grand syntheses, propagate no 'original' opinions. We just place ourselves with St. Thérèse at the heart of the Church, at the feet of the Masters of the Tradition, the Fathers and St. Thomas above all. With the help of their writings and their prayers, we seek to contemplate Catholic truth in all its splendour, Christ the Truth in all His splendour, and to hand on that splendid truth to our fellow human beings. This is scientific theology according to the 'little way.'

The ITI is still a small mustard seed, but I am convinced that from it will grow the great tree of a renewed Christendom. In the words of an old member of my undergraduate college in Oxford, St. Edmund Campion: 'Thus was the faith planted, so will it be restored.' I thank God for the privilege of being part of this adventure. St. Thérèse, pray for us!