

PASTORAL LETTER: God Moves in Marvelous Ways

My dear Little Flower,

When Gina Ferraioli and I sent Flat St. Thérèse into the world this summer, I hoped that she would accompany our families on vacations, visits, and small adventures. I hoped that children would remember their parish while they were away and that the presence of our little saint might open a simple conversation about faith. What I did not anticipate was how deeply St. Thérèse would touch the heart of someone who was initially skeptical about taking her along.

Linda, our parishioner, recently shared a wonderful testimony with me. Her niece Christina had come from Texas to NJ for the summer. Since Linda and her family were not traveling anywhere this summer, she asked Christina to bring Flat St. Thérèse on the journey to Texas with her. Christina was a little skeptical, although her sister Nicole was more receptive. The journey to Texas would take four days by car, with the usual concerns about traffic, changing weather, and whatever obstacles might arise along the way.

Christina and Nicole took Flat St. Thérèse with them and sent photographs to Linda from different stops during their journey. They traveled safely, encountered no serious difficulties, and somehow avoided two dangerous weather systems, including a hurricane. They did not experience rain during the entire four-day drive.

When they arrived home in Katy, Texas, Christina told Linda something she had never expected to say: “I would never travel without St. Thérèse again.” She later visited a St. Thérèse of the Little Flower gift shop and purchased a prayer card for her car, so that the Little Flower could continue traveling with her.

We should understand this beautiful experience in the right way. An image of a saint is not a charm that guarantees an easy road or protection from every storm along the paths of life. Christians will still encounter difficult roads, unexpected suffering, and prayers whose answers we cannot immediately understand. Yet the saints remind us that we never travel alone. Their images turn our thoughts toward heaven, encourage us to pray, and help us recognize the quiet ways in which God is already accompanying us.

That was the deeper grace of Flat St. Thérèse. A simple picture, carried somewhat reluctantly at first, became an invitation to trust. The road did not merely bring Christina home to Texas. It brought St. Thérèse into her heart and prayer into her car. God used something small to accomplish something beautiful. That is precisely the spirituality of St. Thérèse. She believed that no gesture offered with love is ever too small for God to use.

Flat St. Thérèse continued her travels when Linda and Tom brought her to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, where she was photographed beside the statue of St. Teresa of Calcutta. How fitting that these two saints should meet through our summer project. Both women taught the Church that holiness begins with loving God in the ordinary circumstances placed before us.

Thank you, Linda, for sharing this testimony. Thank you to every family who welcomed Flat St. Thérèse into a car, a suitcase, a vacation, or a family gathering this summer. Your photographs have been delightful, but the stories behind them are the true gift. They remind us that faith travels through families. It passes from one person to another through invitations, conversations, photographs, prayer cards, and small acts of trust.

As I prepare to travel with our pilgrims to Poland, this story speaks to me personally. Every journey carries uncertainties. We make our plans, pack what we need, and entrust the road to God. St. Thérèse reminds us that we do not need to see the whole road before taking the next faithful step.

God works in marvelous ways. Sometimes he begins with a great miracle. Sometimes he begins with a small picture of a saint placed inside a car.

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, continue to travel with our families throughout our journey. Teach us your Little Way, watch over those who journey, and help us recognize the quiet wonders of God along every road.

Your parish priest,
Fr. JC Merino