

Little Way Week Assembly Notes



SLIDE ONE – HOLDING SLIDE

TEACHER'S NOTES

Welcome to your **Little Way Week** Assembly. This resource is based on the life of St Thérèse of Lisieux and her philosophy of doing great things for God through small acts of love. Use the notes on each slide to present this assembly to your class or school.



This presentation lasts up to 20 minutes. **Though we'd recommend you deliver the whole assembly, please feel free to use the material as time and circumstances allow.**

Little Way Week is an initiative started by Clare Ward following the visit of the relics of St Thérèse to England and Wales in 2009.

This assembly has been prepared by **Missio**, Pope Francis' official charity for overseas mission.

START OF PRESENTATION

SLIDE TWO

Tell the class that this week we are thinking about St Thérèse of Lisieux, who died in 1897 at the age of 24 and whose feast day falls on the **1st October**.

Thérèse is one of the best-loved-saints internationally. She is also the patron saint of overseas missionaries.

The title 'missionary' comes from the Latin word *missio*, which means 'to send'. Missionaries then, are **sent to deliver** the message God's love to all.

God calls all of us to be missionaries in our own communities, but some individuals dedicate their lives to sharing the message of God's love with others across the world. These missionaries are



usually priests and nuns, but some lay people become overseas missionaries too. Pope Francis' charity, **Missio**, supports missionaries working in countries across the world.

It seems very odd that Thérèse became patron of missionaries, because she never travelled anywhere. In fact, as this photo reveals, for the last nine years of her short life she lived in an enclosed convent as a Carmelite nun. Thérèse only left the convent in extreme emergencies (you can see the tall brick wall behind Thérèse).

So how did this very ordinary young woman, unknown to the world outside the convent, become patron of overseas missionaries and be so loved to have her statue in almost every Catholic Church across the world?

SLIDE THREE

From the time she was a young girl Thérèse longed to be a missionary. She knew of the work they undertook in impoverished and dangerous places and would imagine herself travelling into foreign lands, providing practical and spiritual support.

Thérèse had been a member of the children's branch of Missio*, a charity that supports overseas missionaries. Inspired by Missio, Thérèse regularly prayed for missionaries and would send her pocketmoney in support of their work.



However, Thérèse's dreams of becoming a missionary herself were crushed through a series of personal challenges.

From her birth Thérèse's was a very sickly baby and her health remained poor throughout her life. This affected her ability to do many things.

In addition when she was just four, Thérèse's mother died. This loss had a massive impact on Thérèse. Following her mother's death she would often become anxious and sad. These feelings worsened during her time at school, as she was bullied there for being shy and studious.

But in spite of these many challenges, Thérèse's faith stayed strong. She trusted that God would help her cope. She was resilient, praying for the strength to recover from setbacks and determined to make her mark in life and make the world a better place.

* *Thérèse was a supporter of Holy Childhood, now known in the England and Wales as **Mission Together**. Holy Childhood was the children's branch of APF, now known in England and Wales as **Missio**.*

SLIDE FOUR

Prayer was really important to Thérèse. Through prayer and reading the Gospel, she came to know Jesus like a friend. In the same way, we deepen our own friendships when we give them time and attention, and trust that we can be our true selves.

Thérèse came to realise even if some bullied or misunderstood her, being true to the person God made her to be and continuing to follow Jesus' Gospel of love would bring her and others true happiness and freedom.

Thérèse's friendship with Jesus deepened her desire to spread his message of mercy and love to all. When she was 14, Thérèse decided that if she couldn't do this as a missionary, she would do so as an enclosed nun.

Enclosed nuns live permanently inside a convent. They spend most of their day praying for others and the needs of the world. Thérèse firmly believed in the power of prayer: that our prayers, combined with God's grace, change situations for the better. If Thérèse could not travel and work alongside missionaries, she would support them and their work through prayer.



SLIDE FIVE

A life spent praying in the convent might sound easy. But in fact, it was really hard.

The long hours spent in prayer required perseverance. Everyday tasks allotted to Thérèse, such as scrubbing the floor or handwashing the laundry, required dedication. And, as not all the nuns who lived in the convent were easy to get on with, Thérèse had to practise tolerance and patience.

All this, coupled with her poor health, could have worn Thérèse down. But she saw it differently.

Thérèse had dreamed that as a missionary she would perform great and heroic acts that would reveal God's love to the whole world. But as her knowledge of Jesus increased, she understood that just as important, if not more so, were small acts of kindness. These she learned, really change the world. Even from inside the walls of a convent.

Thérèse decided that everything she did each day – especially the small tasks – she would do with **great** love. She called this her 'Little Way'.



SLIDE SIX

Thérèse continued to follow her Little Way for the rest of her life. But she followed it so humbly that the other nuns never noticed. One of the nuns who lived alongside Thérèse said, 'I cannot understand why people speak of Sister Thérèse as if she were a saint. She never does anything notable.'

But that is just why Thérèse became a saint. Not by seeking to be great and much-loved, but by seeking to love much through her littleness.

Sadly, Thérèse didn't have a long life. She was only 24 when she died of tuberculosis in the convent. Following her death the nuns couldn't think of anything much to say about her. She just seemed to them quiet and ordinary. Then they remembered that she had kept a diary, and it was on reading this that they realised how extraordinary she had been.

The nuns decided to share her ideas with others and soon Thérèse's Little Way became known throughout the world. Millions of people chose to follow it – most famously Mother Teresa of Kolkata (Calcutta), who changed her name to Teresa in honour of little Thérèse. Thérèse's diary has become a well-known book, *Story of a Soul*.

Because of Thérèse's influence, a few years after her death, the Pope made ordinary Thérèse the extraordinary St Thérèse of Lisieux.



SLIDE SEVEN

Thérèse's life and example are largely known to us through the words she recorded in her diary. For Thérèse, words were incredibly important, particularly those she read in the Gospels.

It is by reading the Gospels that Thérèse developed her love and understanding of God through the words and actions of Christ Jesus. We can do this too, so it's right that we finish this assembly with words that guided Thérèse and which can guide us too. Listen carefully to what God might be saying to you through these words.

(Gospel passage)

Jesus called a little child to him. He stood the child before the followers. Then he said, 'I tell you the truth. You must change and become like little children... The greatest person in the kingdom of heaven is the one who makes himself humble like this child.' (Matthew 18:2-5)



SLIDE EIGHT

Two years after being made a saint, the Pope appointed Thérèse as the Patron of Missionaries, because of her commitment to pray and support missionaries and their work.

You can follow her example by praying and fundraising for Missio and so help today's missionaries provide practical care and spiritual support to those living in poverty overseas.

Or try following Thérèse's Little Way, missing no opportunity however small to be missionaries of God's love.

Or inspired by Thérèse, get to know Jesus yourself through reflecting on the Gospel and through prayer. Who knows what plans God has for you?

Your own influence... **missio**



Pray and fundraise for Missio - helping today's missionaries support those living in poverty overseas.

Follow Thérèse's *Little Way* - missing no opportunity to be missionaries of God's love.

Get to know Jesus yourself - through reflecting on the Gospel and through prayer.

SLIDE NINE – HOLDING SLIDE

LITTLE WAY WEEK
is offered in partnership by Missio,
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
and Wednesday Word.

