

she ran to me and said: 'Don't be sad, Mother, when I earn money, I promise you I will buy you another.' As you see it will be a while before I get it!"

St. Therese was an oversensitive little girl. Her eyes would easily fill with tears. One day Celine accused her of "bringing up her dolls badly and letting them have their way." That was enough to make Therese cry. Yet she did not have a weak character, on the contrary she had a very strong will and could even be stubborn. Referring to her two main "weaknesses", i.e. her oversensitiveness and her strong will, St. Therese wrote: "With such dispositions, I feel sure that, had I been brought up by careless parents, I would have become very wicked, and would maybe even have lost my soul." Such a statement should arouse in parents a salutary fear and make them realize their responsibility. Try to imagine what St. Therese would have become if she had spent most of her time sprawled on the carpet watching TV or listening to rock music, if she had been free to indulge all her whims...A good form of examination for parents would be the answer to the following question: "Would St. Therese have become a Saint if she had been brought up the way I bring my children up?!" If the answer is "no", then think of the account Mrs. Martin would have had to render to God if, through a careless upbringing, she had deprived God and the world of St. Therese... We are sure you will then lose no time in reforming your method of education, for the greater good of your soul and of your children's souls.

Let us place ourselves at Mrs. Martin's school. The first thing to bear in mind is that, by baptism, any child is God's child. Several times a day, Mrs. Martin would put on her little girl's lips this little prayer: "My God, I give You my heart; Take it, please, so that no creature may possess it, but You alone, Jesus." St. Therese was taught to do everything to please God, and for love of Jesus. One day, Therese could not open the door of the room where Celine was having her lessons. In her frustration, she lay down in front of the door. Her mother told her that she should not behave like this. But the next day, when she found herself before the closed door, she lay down on the floor again. Her sister Mary told her: "Little Therese, you hurt the little Jesus very much when you do this." Therese looked up at her sister. She had understood and she never did it again. Her mother initiated her from a very early age in the art of making sacrifices and when St. Therese wrote that since the age of three she had never refused anything to the Good God, it was a tribute not only to her personal holiness but also to Mrs. Martin's method of education.

There is no cry-room in France and St. Therese had to behave herself in church. She loved to go to Mass and at two and a half she would cry if she could not go not only to Mass but also to Vespers. Even though she was very intelligent, she nevertheless surprised her parents when she declared one day: "The sermon was better than usual, but it was long all the same"!! Cry-rooms are not bad in themselves, but alas, too often parents use them as nurseries. It is certainly easier to let your little ones cry, play and eat in the cry-room than to discipline them and teach them how to behave in the House of God. But how many children are drastically retarded in their spiritual growth because up to the age of three, four, or five they have never attended Mass outside of a cry-room, playing eating, etc... Parents must apply to themselves the words of St. Paul (I Cor. 3:9). They are "God's helpers", and their children are "God's tillage, God's building".

God found in Mrs. Martin a faithful collaborator. To be the mother of a Saint was her happiness on earth and it is her glory in Heaven. This happiness and this glory are meant to be yours too, if you cooperate with God in the work of the sanctification of your children.



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Mrs. Martin (Mother of St. Therese)



Zelie Martin and her daughter Therese

*... "I have never spoiled her,
and **LITTLE THOUGH SHE WAS,**
I never let anything pass unchecked.
I nevertheless made her obey" ...*

The Rearing of Children

by the Carmelites of the Holy Trinity, Washington

More than a century ago, on April 9th, 1888, Therese Martin entered the Carmel of Lisieux where she was to die 9 years later in the odor of sanctity. But we should make no mistake: St. Therese did not become a Saint in 9 years. The young girl of 15 who crossed the threshold of Carmel that day had already advanced quite far on the “straight way that leads to Heaven”. Her parents were her first “Novice Masters” and their own holiness strongly influenced the future Saint. It is certainly worth noting that both Mr. and Mrs. Martin are candidates for beatification. They have already passed the first step towards canonization by being declared Venerable. Many of the letters written by St. Therese’s mother are still extant and, besides giving us many details about the Martin family, they form almost a treatise on Catholic education.

Mrs. Martin understood very well that Catholic education means much more than morning and evening prayer, attendance at Mass and sending the children to a good Catholic school. After bestowing natural life, parents must see to it that their children receive also supernatural life through Baptism. And then, they have to foster the development both of the body and of the soul. Mrs. Martin, as a truly Catholic mother, always gave priority to the soul. She considered her children as a sacred trust received from God and never lost sight of this important truth: a child is not a plaything.

If baptism removes original sin, it nevertheless leaves in the soul the four wounds of malice, infirmity, ignorance and concupiscence. Anyone who has been around little children knows that this is no mere theory. Very soon little ones begin to manifest evil tendencies. Too often, parents smile at these childish outbursts of anger, jealousy, stubbornness, pride, etc...which they even consider “cute”. No, a child is NEVER CUTE when he is stubborn, proud, etc...Vices are like weeds. If you uproot them as soon as they show up, you will pull the whole thing out without difficulty. But, do not weed your garden for a few weeks...and you will see the result! If children are corrected from their early childhood, the whole task of education will be much easier. MRS. Martin never showed any weakness. She never allowed stubbornness or childish whims. Writing to her brother about Pauline (the future Mother Agnes of Jesus), she could say: “I have never spoiled her, and LITTLE THOUGH SHE WAS, I never let anything pass unchecked. Without making a martyr of her, I nevertheless made her obey.” Children can easily be “fussy” at table.

St. Therese’s parents never gave way on this point. At table, children had to behave themselves and no grumbles at dishes they did not like much, were ever tolerated. This may seem trivial matter, and how often parents take the easy way out by just yielding to their children. No one will deny that it is a trying task to train children to eat everything, but it is of much greater importance than it may seem at first sight. In fact, you do not only train your children’s eating habits, you also train their will, and they will need a strong will to remain Catholic in our apostate world. In Lent, Mrs. Martin would subject the menu to some restrictions and all the fasts of the Church were scrupulously observed, which is an example all Catholic

families should follow. It proves to be a great means of promoting a true spirit of mortification in the children.

You may raise the objection: “What a dull life for children!” Oh, no! The Martin family was happy and cheerful and the five girls were very lively. Mrs. Martin had a real gift for stimulating the generosity of her children. She always used supernatural motives to persuade them to fulfill their duties: a sinner to convert, to console Our Lord, etc...In a letter, she reports that her eldest daughter, Marie, valiantly faced the dentist--remember, they did not put your mouth to sleep in those days! -- to obtain graces for her grandfather who had died recently. Marie was only 9 years old then, and she even felt sorry when the dentist did not pull out her tooth. “It is a pity”, she exclaimed, “Grandpa would have left Purgatory!” Later on, when her eldest daughters had reached their teens, Mrs. Martin knew how to let them talk freely with her. She deemed it very important that the girls could express their mind fully so that, with much tact and kindness, she could rectify her daughters’ judgment and teach them how to look at everything from the standpoint of Faith. The best praise of her “educational system” was given her by her own daughters at the process of beatification of St. Therese: “We were not spoiled. Our mother watched very carefully over her children’s souls, and not the smallest fault ever went unreprieved. Her training was kind and loving, but attentive and thorough.”

St. Therese of the Child Jesus is probably the only Saint about whose childhood we have so many details. In the first four and a half years of St. Therese’s life, Mrs. Martin wrote over 120 letters, mainly to her brother and to her daughter Pauline. These letters are an invaluable source of information. They reveal to us the dawn of sanctity in a soul as well as the important part played by the parents in the formation of a Saint. In spite of all her good qualities, St. Therese was not born a Saint. Like the rest of us, she had been wounded by original sin and if her defects were small, they were nevertheless real. There is, for instance, the delightful incident of the two sugar rings, a treasure for a little girl. St. Therese, who had a heart of gold, resolved to give one of the rings to her sister Celine. Alas, on the way home she lost one of the precious rings. What was she to do? Should she give the only ring left to Celine or keep it for herself? The shrewd little girl soon found the solution to this dilemma and declared that, unfortunately, it was Celine’s ring that got lost! And the Saint comments: “See, how from childhood we instinctively safeguard our own interests!” And who will not see the “daughter of Eve” in the little Therese who thought she would have looked much nicer with her arms bare when her mother had her wear a pretty dress but with long sleeves?! St. Therese had remarkable qualities too, especially her crystal-clear honesty. Mrs. Martin could write, with some legitimate parental pride: “The little one would not tell a lie for all the gold in the world.” Little Therese would always avow her baby faults to her parents without seeking any excuse and would then ask for forgiveness and await her punishment. There is something very charming in this innocent child and it is best expressed in Mrs. Martin’s own words, in a letter to Pauline: “She (Therese) had broken a small vase, the size of my thumb, which I had given to her that morning. As usual when she has any accident, she came at once to show it to me. I showed some displeasure. Her little heart swelled...A moment later