

Introduction

Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

Is 41:10

Recently I began posing this question to new subscribers to my blog: “What’s the main thing in your life that is holding you back from God?” Here are some of the answers I have received:

“Anger and time management.”

“Lack of focus in my spiritual life.”

“Inconsistency.”

“Fear and a lack of trust.”

“I feel guilty and sad about leaving Lay Carmelites.”

“I don’t trust God completely.”

“I get bored, tired, distracted, and overwhelmed by my daily life.”

One new reader wrote, “I made a huge spiritual jump about five to seven years ago, but now I feel stagnant. I want to take another leap.”

And then another reader answered, “Nothing.”

This book is for people who want to be holy, but find their spiritual life stagnating. My hope is to help you move from stagnation to the place where “nothing” is holding you back from God. Not your fears or your guilt or your weakness or your anger.

Trusting God with St. Therese is different from the spiritual books you have read before. It is practical and specific. It is geared toward people who are already doing the basics of following God, but who want something more. People who want to be saints. And it is written with the average reader in mind, not scholars or theologians.

Until a short time ago, I too was overwhelmed by the number of things I had to think about in my vocation and in my spiritual life. I was angry, fearful, disappointed, and distraught. I expected my way to be smoother. I expected to reach higher stages of spirituality more quickly. I did not know how to get out of my rut.

Then I began to focus intently on trusting God. What did St. Therese teach about trust? More than that, how did she live it out? How could I take her example, the example of a nineteenth century Carmelite nun, and apply it to my life as a twenty-first century wife and mother?

I had started blogging just a couple of months before this. I blogged about my reflections on trust, my efforts—and sometimes my failures—to follow the little way of spiritual childhood. And my life began to change.

Now I invite you more deeply into my struggles. I want to share with you my lifetime struggle to trust God, starting with my earliest days. I will show you how, reflecting on each stage of St. Therese's life, I found an echo in mine.

Our cultures, our families, our vocations were different. But our human nature and our purpose in life were the same. I found surprising help through such things as Therese's petitioning the pope to enter the cloister early. I realized her role as assistant novice mistress in Carmel was similar to my role as mother and teacher of my sons. We both had to deal with childhood tragedies, waiting for God's plan to be fulfilled, fears for our loved ones, and

questions about death and eternity.

As a writer and a teacher, I know the power of stories. Stories inspire us. They move our hearts. Each chapter begins with a true story from the life of St. Therese, told in narrative form, sticking as closely to known facts as possible. The chapters progress more or less sequentially from her birth to her death. Each chapter includes a corresponding story from my life as well. I have changed some people's names in my memoirs, but the stories are true.

Woven among the stories are insights from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Sacred Scripture, other spiritual writings, and psychology. These insights help you dig deeper, to grasp the meaning of St. Therese's example.

Finally, questions for reflection and practical suggestions move you to apply the lessons to your life. They can form the groundwork of your road to trusting God.

At the end of the book you'll find A Brief Timeline of the Life of St. Therese, as well as Who's Who in the Life of St. Therese. These additions should help you keep the characters and events in her life straight so they don't hinder your understanding of her message.

As you read this book, remember that you are trusting God *with* St. Therese—not just according to her teaching. In heaven she cheers you on. She prays for you. As she promised, she showers roses down upon you. She wants you to succeed. And so does God.

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? . . . We are more than conquerors. . . . For I am sure that

neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:31–32, 37, 38–39)

You can conquer your fear, anger, and anxiety with the help of God's grace. You can learn to trust God perfectly. Someday, when someone asks you what is holding you back from following God whole heartedly, you too can answer, "Nothing."