

Sr. Marie of the Sacred Heart, St. Therese's sister, testified in the Process of Beatification:

I saw Therese as in an ecstasy, and I understood that she was looking, not at the statue but at the Blessed Virgin. The vision seemed to last four or five minutes...and I knew she was cured. When I was alone with her I asked her why she shed tears. She hesitated to speak of the secret, but when she saw that I guessed it, she replied, "Because she had disappeared."

Following the vision Therese was completely cured.

At the age of fifteen, Therese joined her sisters Pauline and Marie in the convent of the Discalced Carmelites in Lisieux. After spending several years in religious life Therese contracted tuberculosis of the lungs. When the hemorrhages became quite serious and frequent, Therese was removed from her cell, which was on the second floor, to the infirmary on the ground floor. Her bed was placed in the middle of the room and at its foot, against the wall, was the miraculous statue of Les Buissonnets.

On Sept. 30, 1897 (after having suffered from the disease for 18 months), Therese was at the point of death when suddenly as if called by some mysterious voice, she raised her head and fixed her radiant gaze on a point above the head of the statue. Then after a few minutes of silent gazing, in an ecstasy of love, her head fell back, and with a last sigh her soul passed on to God.

Therese's sister, Marie of the Sacred Heart, who had witnessed Therese's first ecstasy and her miraculous cure at Les Buissonnets in 1883, also witnessed this final ecstasy. She wrote:

Her gaze fixed a little above the statue vividly recalled the look which I had seen in her childhood, when the Blessed Virgin had appeared and cured her. It was impossible to describe—something heavenly. A sister passed a light before her eyes, but she did not seem to perceive it—for I am sure, she was already enjoying the light of God.

Following Therese's death, the house of the Martin family at Lisieux was restored. The room of the apparition was transformed into a small sanctuary, and an altar was placed where Therese's bed had been. When there was no further doubt about the favorable outcome of the Apostolic Process in Rome, a facsimile of the miraculous statue was also placed in the room. The copy of the miraculous statue was made by a Trappist sculptor, Pere Marie-Bernard. He made a cast of the statue in 1921. Several other copies were also made and were placed in appropriately selected places where Therese had lived and suffered. One copy is in the infirmary on the very spot it occupied when Therese had her last ecstasy. Another is in the antechamber of Therese's cell. Another was placed in the cell where Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart died in 1940.

The miraculous statue of Our Lady of the Smile is at the shrine of St. Therese at Lisieux. There it overlooks the reclining figure which contains the remains of the Saint.

*\*(excerpted from: Joan Carroll Cruz *Miraculous Images of Our Lady*)*

## ***Our Lady of the Smile***

***Lisieux, France  
1832***



***O Mary,  
Mother of Jesus and our Mother too,  
who once by a visible smile didst graciously console  
and cure thy privileged child Saint Therese of the Child Jesus,  
we beseech thee, come to us also to console us in the troubles of this life.***

***Detach our hearts from earth, give to us health of soul and body,  
make us strong in hope, and obtain for us at last,  
that we may enjoy for ever in Heaven thy maternal and  
enrapturing smile.  
Amen.***

## **OUR LADY OF THE SMILE**

\*The statue which figured prominently in the life of St. Therese of Lisieux is not the only one of its kind. The statue was sculpted about the year 1832, and there are reports that others like it can still be found encased in the walls of a few old farmhouses in parts of Flanders. In addition, exact copies were made after Saint Therese's death, as we will later relate.

The miraculous statue is made of plaster and is protected by an opaque varnish that gives it an ivory tint. Measuring 35 inches in height, it has been moved many times and, helped by several restorations, has endured the ravages of time. During one of these restorations a halo of stars was placed around the Virgin's head. A narrow band with a diamond serves Our Lady as a diadem.

The statue first enters into the life of Louis Martin, the father of St. Therese, after he completed his studies as an apprentice watchmaker in Paris. On his return to his native town of Alencon he was assisted financially in opening a jewelry and watch shop by a devout and charitable lady who also gave him the statue now known as Our Lady of the Smile. Louis Martin positioned the statue in a place of honor on his property amid flowers and shrubs. He spent his spare time before this statue, absorbed in prayer and spiritual reading.

After his marriage in July, 1858 to Zelig Guerin, the statue was enshrined indoors and was immediately established as the center of their spiritual life—and later became the center of their children's lives. The family's morning and evening prayers, as well as other devotions, were recited before the statue. The kisses of the children became so fervent at times that some of the statue's plaster fingers were broken off. They were, of course, lovingly restored. The children delighted in placing flowers and candles before the image of their Heavenly Mother, and especially in May their expressions of devotion could not be contained. Flowers, blossoms and all kinds of greenery are said to have been arranged around the statue.

The first unusual incident that took place regarding the statue involved the death of 5 1/2-year-old Marie Helene. Zelig Martin was inconsolable because of what she considered her own negligence. A short time before the little girl's death, she had told her mother a small lie. Although the mother corrected her for it, Zelig Martin forgot to bring a priest to hear her confession and administer the Last Sacraments. The idea that the child was suffering in Purgatory because of her negligence grieved Zelig terribly. One day while praying before the statue and pleading for a sign that the child had escaped Purgatory, Zelig Martin distinctly heard a voice whispering in her ear: "She is beside me in Heaven." The voice brought relief and joy to Zelig Martin's tender heart and strength for her childlike faith.

After Zelig Martin's death from cancer of the breast, the grieving father moved his five daughters to Lisieux. The statue was likewise conveyed there since it was the mother's wish that the statue always remain with the family. At their new home, *Les Buissonnets* (the Shrubberies), the statue was placed in the room of the eldest girls, Marie and Pauline. The family's usual devotions before the statue were observed here at Lisieux as they had been at Alencon.

After the death of her mother, Therese became deeply attached to her sister Pauline, who became like a second mother to her. Then, when Therese was about nine years of age, Pauline entered the Discalced Carmelite convent at Lisieux. The sacrifice of parting brought to Therese's tender nature a prolonged grief. Later that year Therese became the victim of a strange illness from which she suffered intense headaches, nervous convulsions and morbid obsessions. Therese relates in her autobiography:

**Towards the end of the year, I began to have a constant headache...I believe the devil had received an external power over me but was not allowed to approach my soul nor my mind except to inspire me with very great fear of certain things...The sickness became so grave that, according to human calculations, I wasn't to recover from it. I can't describe this strange sickness, but I'm now convinced it was the work of the devil...I often appeared to be in a faint, not making the slightest movement and yet I heard everything that was said around me...I was absolutely terrified by everything: my bed seemed to be surrounded by frightful precipices; some nails in the wall of the room took on the appearance of big, black charred fingers, making me cry out in fear. One day, while Papa was looking at me in silence, the hat in his hand was suddenly transformed into some indescribably dreadful shape...Once it happened that for a long time I was without the power to open my eyes.**

The affliction was so extreme at times that it was thought Therese would not survive. Everything revolved around her sickbed. Even though various remedies were administered, all were ineffective. Finally, Louis Martin arranged for a novena of Masses to be offered for Therese's recovery at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Victories, a church he loved and frequented during his journeys to Paris.

It was Therese who acknowledged that Our Lady had performed a great miracle in healing her on Pentecost Sunday, May 13, 1883. Therese tells in her autobiography what took place when she looked upon the statue that had been moved into the sickroom:

**All of a sudden the Blessed Virgin appeared beautiful to me, so beautiful that never had I seen anything so attractive; her face was suffused with an ineffable benevolence and tenderness, but what penetrated to the very depths of my soul was the ravishing smile of the Blessed Virgin. At that instant all my pain disappeared and two large tears glistened on my eyelashes and flowed down my cheeks silently, but they were tears of unmixed joy. Ah! I thought, the Blessed Virgin smiled at me, how happy I am...**