

A Celebration Without Precedent For the Parents of Saint Thérèse

The streets of Lisieux seem calm, yet a certain agitation appears as one approaches the Basilica. Indeed, everybody here is getting ready to celebrate the Beatification of Louis and Zélie Martin. Pierre and Marie, a couple of pensioners, go up toward the building: “We pray to St. Thérèse, of course, but especially to her parents, because, you know, they are going to be beatified, and for us, this is a powerful sign: it is not only monks, nuns, and martyrs who can be examples, but also couples!” they confide in us.

All is said by this couple of quinquagenarians: for the first time in the history of the **Church: a couple who have a child who is a saint, a doctor of the Church, are beatified**. And they are not beatified because their daughter is a saint! And they are not beatified because their daughter is a saint! In a letter written to the seminarian Bellière two months before her death, Thérèse herself will say about her parents: “God gave me a father and a mother more worthy of Heaven than of earth; they asked the Lord to give them many children and to let them all be consecrated to Him.” * (July 26th, 1897, LT 261).

We know many aspects of the daily life of this family of the nineteenth century thanks to the many stories reported in the voluminous family correspondence and in the writings of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

They were at the head of a business, with all the worries and vagaries of orders and of employees. Each one had a permanent concern for justice and respect, which they exercised notably toward their employees, without forgetting the help they gave to others every day, especially to the most dispossessed.

The unprecedented event this beatification represents reflects on the universal Church and on all families, those of Calvados, of France, and of the whole world . . . the family of each of us. A crowd is expected, and it is gathering already, from the whole world.

The Actuality of Their Message

They knew disease: cancer for Zélie, a brain disease for Louis, who was confined to a psychiatric institution. Repeated griefs and the loneliness of being a widower with minor children. They were not spared the worries of educating a difficult child. Thus, they tell us that holiness is practicable, today as yesterday, in the heart of family life.