

PRESS KIT



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Thérèse de Lisieux

Femme de culture, d'éducation et de paix



On 11 November 2021, the General Conference of UNESCO member countries validated the inclusion of Thérèse of Lisieux in the anniversaries with which UNESCO will be associated for the years 2022/2023, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary in 2023 of the birth of Thérèse Martin in Alençon, on 2 January 1873.

A young French woman known throughout the world, a woman of culture, education and science, Thérèse of Lisieux, through her personality and her work, scans the depths of the human heart and opens up possible answers to the men and women of this world in search of meaning, in search of personal and universal peace.

UNESCO's recognition of Thérèse of Lisieux at the suggestion of France opens up new prospects for the spread of her message of life, peace and love to "the remotest islands", as Thérèse of Lisieux herself put it, to the "peripheries", according to the expression of Pope Francis.

The official reception of this recognition took place on Saturday 4 December 2021 at 3.30 pm in Lisieux at the Halle Saint-Jacques, rue au Char.

*Father Olivier Ruffray
Rector of the Shrine of Lisieux*

Every two years, Unesco honours personalities who, in their own way, have worked and continue to work in the fields of education, the advancement of women, culture, science and peace-building

Known throughout the world, Thérèse, through her works and her testimony, contributes to the promotion of universal values. Through the quality and depth of her life, she speaks a language that transcends borders; that of Love.

*Father Thierry Hénault-Morel
Rector of the Shrine of Alençon*





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Thérèse of Lisieux honoured by UNESCO in 2022 and 2023



UNESCO has decided to select Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) as one of the anniversaries commemorated by UNESCO in 2022-2023.

Every two years, UNESCO associates itself with the anniversary of personalities or institutions who, through their figures and shared works, promote the same values of humanity in the service of peace and understanding between peoples that the organisation defends.

Each Member State of UNESCO may then nominate one man and one woman for inclusion in the list of anniversaries with which UNESCO could be associated for the next two years. This is referred to as a "biennium" or "biennial", which takes into account the time span of two years.

At the suggestion of the Shrine of Lisieux, France has chosen to present the figure of Thérèse of Lisieux, born in 1873, with the support of Belgium and Italy. France also presented Gustave Eiffel, who died in 1923.

After an internal selection process, UNESCO has chosen to include Thérèse of Lisieux in its final list of anniversaries commemorated during its 2022/2023 biennial, motivated by her universal personality:

Extract from the presentation of Thérèse de Lisieux to the Executive Council of 25 March 2021

*"Thérèse of Lisieux was a nun who died at the age of 24 and is best known for her posthumous publications, including *Histoire d'une âme*. This celebration will contribute to bringing greater visibility and justice to women who have promoted the values of peace through their actions. Given the fame of Thérèse of Lisieux in the Catholic community (the city of Lisieux being the second most popular place of pilgrimage in France after Lourdes), the celebration of her birthday can be an opportunity to highlight the role of women within religions in the fight against poverty and the promotion of inclusion, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 16¹. It can also reinforce UNESCO's message on the importance of culture (poems and written plays) in promoting universal values and as a vehicle for inter-religious dialogue."*

¹ MDG 1: Inclusive quality education for all as a key factor in poverty eradication.

MDG 16: Foster peaceful inclusive societies through education, including peace and human rights education and the provision of education in emergencies. Encourage dialogue between cultures, the culture of peace and non-violence... Strengthen governance systems for culture and fundamental freedoms.



Thérèse de Lisieux

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Therese of Lisieux, universal figure and ambassador of France

Thérèse of Lisieux, known throughout the world, was born Thérèse Martin on 2 January 1873 in Alençon and died on 30 September 1897 in the Carmelite convent in Lisieux, where she was a nun for nine years. In only 24 years of existence, this young woman will understand what is essential to her life and her relationship with the world, a particular itinerary that opens up to the universal.

Thérèse of Lisieux contributes to France's influence in the world. Through her work, she looks at society and our humanity from a woman's perspective. A French woman of culture, in the audacity of her youth, she carries like a standard the torch of universal love and peace offered to all people.

Her intellectual approach can be seen as a bold spiritual revolution in favour of the primacy of universal love for all people. During her long journey through France, Switzerland and Italy, she broadened her horizons to other cultures. She supports young missionaries and looks towards Africa and Asia. She herself wants to go to Vietnam.

France and communities abroad keep the spirit of Thérèse of Lisieux alive. The bells of the Basilica of Lisieux ring out their melodies in accordance with their mottos, such as the bumblebee with the name "Therese, Protector of Peoples" and the motto "I ring the call of people to unity in Love". The Sanctuary of Lisieux is visited by more than one million people from all over the world every year. The bell tower is like a beacon to the world.

On the 5 continents, many establishments in the field of education and health bear her name, such as in India, the great hospital "Lisie" in Kerala for Lisieux! There are countless religious buildings dedicated to her. Many people around the world are named after her as well. The millions of statues of Thérèse of Lisieux scattered around the world make one look to France.

The thought of Thérèse of Lisieux continues to inspire researchers and scholars around the world. It is the subject of colloquia, dissertations, and doctoral theses. Thérèse of Lisieux was made Doctor Honoris Causa of the University of Cuenca in Ecuador. She was granted permanent residence in the Galapagos Islands! She has been made an honorary citizen of many cities around the world and has been given the keys to each one.



Thérèse de Lisieux
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Thérèse of Lisieux at the heart of political developments

The political tradition of Thérèse of Lisieux's "involvement" with the people appeared very soon after her death. Her reputation grew in the trenches on both sides of the war during the First World War. Thérèse of Lisieux becomes a sign of peace, comfort, encouragement and consolation for these men torn from their lives.

On 3 May 1944, Thérèse of Lisieux became the secondary patron saint of France, while the Allied landings were taking place. On 6 June 1944, the long march to liberate France and Europe in the service of peace began... **From 1944 to 1947, the relics of Thérèse of Lisieux, symbols of her presence and radiance, travelled throughout France to restore confidence and courage to a whole people wounded by the war,** in the effort to rebuild and reconcile men and people.

In recent years, the universal scope of his message has been widely expressed in the world:

Philippines: In January 2000, at the request of the prison authorities in Manila, Thérèse of Lisieux and her message were welcomed in the death row. No further executions would take place after this memorable moment. The death penalty would be abolished in 2006.

Lebanon: From September to November 2002, all of Lebanon, regardless of religion, honoured Thérèse of Lisieux. On 17 October, in Beirut, President Jacques Chirac participated in the Francophonie summit, supported peace efforts throughout the region and reaffirmed the need for the withdrawal of non-Lebanese military troops, which had been underway for several months, as provided for in the Taif agreements in 1989.

Iraq: on 16 November 2002, the 8 o'clock news in France simultaneously showed the arrival of the UN Delegation on the tarmac in Baghdad and the tribute paid to Thérèse of Lisieux.

Colombia: In 2004, a Colombian initiative around Thérèse of Lisieux, had as its objective a "Peace Mission for Colombia" under the protection of the Army, in the midst of the conflict with FARC.

Thérèse of Lisieux is also an advisor to political figures, whose testimony remains personal most of the time.



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The works of Thérèse of Lisieux

Despite her short life, the literary work of Thérèse of Lisieux is considerable. Thérèse of Lisieux entered the teeming cultural movement of the 19th century, which she described as "a century of inventions". It was the time of Zola and Maupassant. In 1989, the publication of the critical edition of her work was honoured by the Académie Française with the Grand Prix du Cardinal Grete.

His seminal work is *Histoire d'une Âme*, or *Autobiographical Manuscripts*, published a year after her death and which has spread in a meteoric fashion, with many publications still in print today. This story has been published in more than 80 languages and dialects worldwide, with millions of copies published, making it the second most popular book after the Bible. Thérèse of Lisieux shares her personal journey with readers and at the same time immerses them in the life of a bourgeois family and a convent in 19th century France. Through her work, Thérèse of Lisieux, in her own way, depicts the society of her time like other writers.

The General Correspondence contains 266 letters from Thérèse of Lisieux and 199 letters from her correspondents. These letters depict a state of mind, the interplay of relationships between their authors, the search for that deep and lasting peace which reveals the heart of man and allows him to find the reasons for existing...

A collection of 54 poems reveals the soul of Thérèse of Lisieux, poetess. Composed to the melodies of her time, they are conceived as odes to life, and to Love. Universal in scope, they are still attempts to respond to the spiritual quest of their addressees, for whom they are primarily intended.

Her work is enriched by *8 plays* composed to delight and entertain her community. The young nun wrote, directed and performed them herself as an actress with other sisters. If these plays are performed during major festivals, Thérèse of Lisieux is truly an author, and each time she distils the universal message that lives within her, in favour of Love, Peace, Life and Reconciliation.

As an artist, she loved to paint and would have liked to know how to do it better. Art is like an extension of her thoughts, allowing her to say and communicate more.

A woman of conviction, she is at the junction of different worlds, at the crossroads of religious, political, economic and social paths, in the middle of the industrial revolution. Her thought inspires social doctrine, it is an integral humanism and solidarity in favour of justice and peace between peoples, at the service of this call to universal love.



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Thérèse of Lisieux, "Doctor of the Science of Love"

John Paul II named Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the Church on 19 October 1997 and dubbed her "Doctor of the Science of Love". The question of a "Doctorate" had been raised as early as 1932! Thérèse of Lisieux is today the only French woman to be a Doctor of the Church among the 36 Doctors recognised in the world. This means that her doctrine, teaching, and the path she traced is addressed to all humanity. This Love is universal. It transcends all times and all places and can be found in every culture. This "science of love" unites all the men and women of this world because it corresponds to the quest for meaning in our world, to the search for man's deepest self, which is to love. This "science of love" is revealed to be at the service of a world of solidarity.

She entered religion at the age of 15 and was novice mistress at the age of 22. A teacher and educator at heart, she maintained a relationship of trust, self-esteem and respect for the personal development with those entrusted to her, which allowed her novices, sometimes older than herself, to grow in inner freedom, to assert themselves, to find their way and thus to emancipate themselves. **By her attitude, her words, her silence, her example, St. Therese reveals herself as a teacher of life.**

Many schools in France and around the world bear her name which, beyond the name, represents a certain way of educating children and young people.

Even today, the spiritual closeness of Thérèse allows so many people on the five continents to benefit from this same invitation to follow this path of inner freedom, which is quite simply the path of spiritual childhood that Saint Thérèse discovered and whose experience she shares with those of our contemporaries who receive her message and let themselves be touched.

The way of Thérèse of Lisieux contributes to inner and personal peace of mind. It builds up the human person and develops a spirit of peace.

Since the year of her doctorate, religious and cultural initiatives around Thérèse of Lisieux have grown exponentially, with over 120 initiatives in more than 60 countries to date, from the northern to the southern hemisphere. Her message was spread more and more widely.



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A nature lover and sustainable development activist taken up by Pope Francis

The contemplation of nature made Thérèse of Lisieux aware of the depth of the human person. It encourages humanity to care for creation, whose development also serves the good of man.

Thérèse of Lisieux's relationship with nature, from her earliest years, through the elements such as the sun, animals, flowers, the sea, the countryside, trees and the earth, gives root to her universal message of love and reconciliation. She places it in a global economy, an ecology at the service of man, a society that takes into account the integral man. The education Thérèse of Lisieux received from her parents, in the family, opened her to these principles of life.

The question of sustainable development refers in the Bible to the Book of Genesis, to the question of Creation, and opens the way to the integral ecology of which Pope Francis speaks in his second encyclical entitled "Laudato si'" ("Praise be to you"). It invites men and women of good will to take care of our earth, our common home, and ultimately to correspond to God's plan in his work of creation that he continues to instil day by day throughout the world.

Taking care of the common home also means taking care of the people we are (or are not) in a relationship with. A common house is made for the meeting of those who live in it.

Pope Francis, in "Laudato si'", draws on the example of "Thérèse of Lisieux" ([n. 230](#), *editor's note*) and says in substance that integral ecology begins here and now, precisely with a smile, a benevolent attention, a smile, an outstretched hand, which bring men and women of good will into contact with one another and awaken in them the desire for a common house where it is good to live, respecting the traditions and cultures of those who inhabit it.

It is the missionary desire of Thérèse of Lisieux, expressed here, to go out to meet the world in order to share with as many people as possible what makes her live and desire to continue to "do good on earth".

UNESCO



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization was founded on 16 November 1945 in the aftermath of the Second World War, in a world that was in turmoil, undergoing reconstruction and seeking to chart new paths for peace among peoples.

Member States of the United Nations have the right to be part of UNESCO. Some non-Member States of the UN may also be admitted to UNESCO; others are received as Associate Members.

Today, UNESCO has 198 member countries and 11 associate members.

The internal UNESCO biennial nomination process

Once the Member States' proposals have been collected:

- At the beginning of the calendar year, the Director-General of UNESCO draws up a first list of candidates proposed by the Member States. Here, 60 names were selected out of 78 proposed.
- The Executive Board of UNESCO validates or refines the list.
- In November, the General Assembly of Member States validates the final list of anniversaries with which UNESCO will henceforth be associated for the following biennium. This validation took place on 11 November 2021 for the years 2022/2023.



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Sainte-Thérèse of Lisieux Sanctuary



In 1898, the publication of *Histoire d'une âme* made the young nun from Lisieux, who had died a year earlier, better known. Thanks to this publication in French, and then very quickly in many other languages, the message of Thérèse of Lisieux went out to conquer the world. At the same time, pilgrims flocked to the Lisieux cemetery, and the small size of the Carmelite chapel required the construction of another building.

The idea gained ground and in 1925, at the time of the canonisation of Saint Thérèse, the project of a basilica was born. The architect Louis-Marie Cordonnier was chosen in 1927; the structural work lasted from 1929 to 1939, mobilising 400 workers and engineers all week long on the hill overlooking Lisieux. In 1937, the Basilica was blessed by the legate of Pope Pius XI, Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII.

After the 1944 bombings, which spared the newly built Basilica, work began again. The Basilica was consecrated in 1954.

Pilgrimage in the footsteps of the saints of Lisieux

From 1897 to the present day, pilgrims and visitors from all over the world have flocked to Lisieux to follow in the footsteps of Thérèse of Lisieux, who came to join them in their lives and in their daily concerns. They visit in turn the Basilica, the Carmelite convent, the "Buissonnets", the family home of Saint Thérèse, and the Cathedral.

The effigy of Saint Thérèse, present on the five continents in the most remote chapels as well as in the greatest cathedrals, allows us to make a diversion to the Basilica of Lisieux, erected in the land of Auger in her honour in the 20th century, where an insignificant reliquary is kept. Thérèse's recumbent statue, otherwise known as a shrine, can be seen in the Carmel Chapel in the city centre where Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face spent the nine years of her religious life. Finally, the walk to the Buissonnets house, inhabited by Louis Martin and his five daughters in November 1877 after the death of his wife, allows us to measure the youth of Thérèse from the age of 4 to 15.

Since 19 October 2008, the Basilica of Lisieux contains the shrine of Louis and Zélie Martin, declared saints by Pope Francis on 18 October 2015. This recognition thus offers Lisieux the presence of three saints from the same family.

Today, the various places of the Shrine of Lisieux receive more than one million people a year. The reputation of the Sanctuary of Lisieux places it second only to Lourdes as a sanctuary in France.

Visitors come from all five continents: America (United States, Brazil, Canada, etc.), Europe (Italy, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Spain, etc.), Asia (Philippines, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, India, etc.), Africa (Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Senegal, etc.) and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand).



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Partners

In particular:

- Diocese of Bayeux and Lisieux
- Diocese of Séez
- Shrine of Alençon
- City of Lisieux
- Lisieux-Normandie agglomeration
- Department of Calvados
- Normandy Region
- Tourist offices
- Normandy Regional Tourism Committee
- Urban Community of Alençon
- City of Alençon
- Department of Orne



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The Louis and Zélie Martin Sanctuary in Alençon



SANCTUAIRE LOUIS ET ZÉLIE D'ALENÇON

Thérèse of Lisieux was born in the town of Alençon (61) on 2 January 1873. It was here that her parents met, married and lived most of their lives until the death of Zélie, the mother, in August 1877. The following November, Louis Martin, Thérèse, and her four older sisters moved to Lisieux, and became close to the family of Zélie's brother, Isidore. The family house in Alençon was sold several times until it was acquired in 1924 by the Société des pèlerinages de Lisieux and then by the diocese of Séez in 1967.

As the birthplace of Thérèse, it has attracted visitors and pilgrims since 1910. Between 1925 and 1928, a finely crafted chapel was built alongside the house, allowing a large opening towards the birth chamber through the wall. Following the beatification of his parents (2008) and their canonisation as a Christian couple (2015), a shrine to Louis and Zélie Martin was erected on the site of their lives in 2015 by the Bishop of Séez.

If Thérèse is today honoured by Unesco for her work for peace, education, and the promotion of women, she owes it in large part to the family home in which she received an education based on respect, listening and dialogue. She benefited from the testimony of her parents in the field of the promotion of women, both through the relationship between them and through Louis Martin's choice to give up his job to support his wife in hers, but also in the field of culture, if only through the production of Alençon lace, as well as in the field of peace, through a real family commitment in the service of the most deprived and of a more just society.

Of her life in Alençon, Thérèse writes: "*Ah, how quickly the sunny years of my early childhood passed, but what a sweet imprint they left on my soul! I remember with happiness the days when dad took us to the pavilion, (NHA 128) the smallest details are engraved in my heart... I remember especially the Sunday walks where mum always accompanied us... I can still feel the deep and poetic impressions that were born in my soul at the sight of the wheat fields dotted with bluets and country flowers. Already I loved the distant ...*" (Autobiographical Manuscripts 10v°)

Visitors

A young and growing sanctuary, the Alençon sanctuary offers visitors the opportunity to discover, not a place of Marian apparition, but a family home, that of the Martins, a place of life, a place where Zélie and Louis, the makers of Alençon lace, are now listed as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO in 2010. Around the house and the chapel dedicated to Thérèse, you will discover Louis Martin's pavilion, the "bridge of the meeting" over the Sarthe, the Notre-Dame basilica and the Saint-Pierre church, Thérèse's foster home in Semallé, not to mention the cultural, economic and social life of the Martin family in the town of Alençon and its countryside.

Each year the number of visitors and pilgrims increases, approaching 30,000 in 2019. They come from all five continents and represent 85 nationalities.