

# *Brief Biography*



*Sister Françoise-Thérèse*

*(Marie Léonie Martin)*

*June 3, 1863- June 17, 1941*

*"God's Little Violet"*

*By: R. Hannan*

Entering this world on June 3, 1863, with beautiful blonde hair and beautiful blue eyes, the third-born daughter of Louis and Azélie Martin was born. The proud parents named her Marie Léonie Martin. Louis and Azélie gave each of their children the first name of Marie in honor of Our Lady and each male child was given the additional name of Joseph in honor of St. Joseph. The Martin family home was on rue du Pont-Neuf in Alençon, located in the Normandy region of France. Her father was a watchmaker and mother was a lace maker. On June 4, 1863, the Martin family brought their newly born child, Marie Léonie to the Cathedral of Saint Pierre-de-Montsort to be baptized by Father Lebouc. Mrs. Léonie (Gilbert) Tifenne, a very close friend of the family, was given the honor of being Léonie's godmother.

Azélie gave birth again a year later on October 13, 1864, to Marie Hélène who passed away on February 22, 1870, at the age of five. Louis and Azélie were blessed on September 20, 1866 with the birth of their first son, Joseph Louis Martin. It was with great sadness he too passed away a year later on February 14, 1867. On December 19, 1867 the birth of their second son, Joseph Jean Baptiste was born, however, was taken away from them, on August 25, 1868. The life of Louis and Azélie's sixth daughter, Marie Mélanie Thérèse was short from August 16, 1870 to October 8, 1870.

From the start of Léonie's life her physical health was very poor. Once Léonie reached the age of nine months old, she suffered from whooping cough. After surviving from whooping cough, she then contracted the measles with violent convulsions before her first birthday. Léonie's father and mother were very worried that their child would not survive. Azélie contacted Isidore Guérin, her brother a pharmacist in Lisieux, asking him if he had any remedies to help aid in Léonie's recovery. His ability, as a pharmacist, to help his niece was very limited and a cure for Léonie was not to be received. Azélie then contacted her sister, Sister Marie-Dosithée, who was a Visitation nun at a convent in Le Mans. Sister Marie-Dosithée wrote to Azélie and suggested that she make a novena to St. Margaret Mary, then blessed, for a cure for Léonie's illnesses. Azélie made a novena to then Blessed Margaret Mary and made this statement during her novena: "If Léonie is to become a saint one day, then cure her." (GV) Léonie's father, set out for a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame du Sées (Our Lady of the Seas) for a cure to his daughter's illness. After the novena to then Blessed Margaret Mary, Léonie was cured and no longer suffered from chronic illnesses to this degree during her infancy. Azélie describes Léonie after she was cured: "Nine days after Léonie's illness, she was able to land on her feet again, running around the house like a little rabbit." (SF) It was a year and a half before Léonie learned to walk.

In 1871, there were two changes that were taking place. The first change was that the family was moving into their new home, which was previously owned by Azélie's father, located at 36 rue Saint-Blaise in Alençon. The second change was that Léonie was going to attend the Visitation boarding school and finally become a student.

As Léonie started getting older, it became evident that it was getting more and more difficult to prepare her for school, her parents worked feverishly to tame her strong rebellious nature and to

teach her to focus on learning. By the time Léonie was now old enough to attend school, Azélie wanted to send Léonie to the Visitation boarding school in Le Mans where her older two sisters were already studying. Azélie tried twice to get Léonie enrolled at the Visitation boarding school; however, her attempts became fruitless. The Mother Superior had rejected Léonie's entrance both times. Azélie contacted her sister, Sister Marie-Dosithée, at the boarding school and asked her if she could speak to the Mother Superior about allowing Léonie to enter. The Mother Superior finally agreed, but it was only on a temporary basis to see whether or not Léonie was able to adjust to the rigors of her new surroundings.

Sister Marie-Dosithée took special care of Léonie while she was at the Visitation boarding school. She tutored Léonie in the subjects that she was being taught. One of Léonie's difficult subjects to master was math and she made every effort to resist learning this subject. Léonie was sent home again, due to her inability to control her resistant nature to learn even though she had a very loving heart. A third attempt was made to send her back to the Visitation boarding school by her mother. Azélie wanted desperately for Léonie to learn the Catechism at the boarding school for her First Holy Communion. Léonie rejoined her two older sisters, Marie and Pauline, at the boarding school in January of 1874. Azélie looked to her sister, Sister Marie-Dosithée to change Léonie's character. Sister Marie-Dosithée used her strong character to persuade Léonie to align herself with her fellow students but it was not working at all. Sister Marie-Dosithée decided to try kindness as a method to control her unruly temperament and it worked but for only two weeks. However, Léonie's stay at the school was only going to last for three months. It was difficult for Léonie to control her sudden outbursts while she was around other students as she was not able to focus all of her energy on her work.

Azélie was contacted and told to pick up her daughter at the Visitation boarding school. When Azélie arrived in Le Mans, she spoke to her sister, Sister Marie-Dosithée. Azélie's sister felt that even though it was difficult to teach her, she felt she was a "child of destiny". She also thought that one day, Léonie would join her as a nun in the Visitation convent.

After Léonie rejoined her family in Alençon, Azélie found her two retired teachers to tutor her, in her studies, at their home. The two retired teachers appeared to be on the surface very respectable and religious, however, that was not to be the case. After Azélie spoke with Léonie about an event, which occurred with the two teachers, Azélie decided to end Léonie's tutoring with the teachers. Azélie then decided to take upon the task of teaching her daughter herself and also teaching her the Catechism for her First Holy Communion.

Léonie was very receptive in learning the Catechism from her mother. Azélie took Léonie on a pilgrimage to the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in a town just outside of Alençon called Sées, in preparation for her First Holy Communion. When the day came, Léonie was ready to take her First Holy Communion. Azélie decided that one poor girl, in Léonie's Catechism class, would be given a beautiful white communion dress, as her family could not afford one for her.

The Martin family also gave her a place of honor in the festivities that the family had planned for after the event. On May 23, 1875, Léonie and her friend took their First Holy Communion at the Church of Notre-Dame (Our Lady) in Alençon. Later in life, Léonie would remark by saying: “My First Holy Communion was not the greatest day of my life because during my childhood I spent my time suffering from many trials set before me by God.” Right after Léonie took her First Holy Communion, she went to Lisieux to spend some time with her uncle and aunt.

Léonie was still a little rebellious and strong willed against her parents’ authority. However, her heart toward them was just as loving and as strong. Léonie loved to entertain and take care of her younger sister, Thérèse. She would sing to her a little lullaby until she went to sleep. Léonie did, however, spend a lot of time alone in her bedroom and a lot of time with the maid. Léonie’s family suspected something was bothering her but they could not figure out what it was. Leonie’s behavior would change drastically from being a pleasant child to being an unruly child. Azélie would bring Léonie with her to Le Mans when she went to see her sister, Sister Marie-Dosithée. She still felt that her sister had a great influence over Léonie and could possibly be able to help change her behavior. Sister Marie-Dosithée still held onto the fact that Léonie would someday become religious.

In the fall of 1876, Azélie found out that her sister had tuberculosis. In December of the same year, Azélie told her family that she had breast cancer. Léonie was devastated by the news of her mother’s illness. In January 1877, Azélie went to visit Sister Marie-Dosithée for the last time. Azélie asked her sister when she went to heaven, to please ask Our Lady for help correcting Léonie’s behavior. Léonie wanted to write a letter to her holy aunt before she died. Léonie asked her sister, Marie, to help write her letter to her aunt. Léonie wrote: “My dear Aunt, when you get to heaven, will you please ask the good God, if He pleases, to give me the grace to be converted and also to give me the vocation of becoming a true religious, for I think of that every day.” (GV) The next day, when her sister Marie reviewed her letter, Marie could not understand what she meant about being a true religious. Marie confronted Leonie asking her what she meant about being a true religious. Léonie replied: “A true religious is one who becomes a saint and I wish to become a saint.” On February 24, 1877, Sister Marie-Dosithée ended her suffering with tuberculosis and was received by the Lord. The Martin family went to Le Mans to attend her funeral and to pay their last and loving respects to their holy aunt.

Azélie held out for hope that her sister would come through for her in heaven and bring about a positive change in Léonie’s behavior. A couple of weeks had past and the secret of Léonie’s behavior was finally coming to the surface. Marie investigated the strange relationship Léonie had with Louise Marais, the maid. Marie could not understand why Léonie was very good when she was around Louise and then very bad when she was around her mother. She noticed that Louise had gained total control over Léonie and was terrorizing and beating her. The only person that Léonie was to obey was her and only her. After Marie found out what was happening to Léonie, she went straight to her mother and told her. Once Azélie was informed she became very upset and distraught. Azélie went to Louise and confronted her about her treatment towards her

daughter Léonie. Azélie ordered her to leave the premises at once and to never return. Louise begged and pleaded with Azélie to stay because she had nowhere else to go. Azélie went to speak with Louis to decide on what action was to be taken with Louise. Azélie instructed Louise that she is not to have any contact with Léonie and upon her death she was to leave.

Once the secret had surfaced, Léonie's behavior quickly changed for the better. Azélie and Léonie's relationship had blossomed beautifully. Azélie described her new relationship with Léonie to her brother, Isidore, in a letter: "I cannot help thinking that this transformation is due to the prayers of our saintly sister, for all was altered two to three weeks after her death. It is she who has obtained for me the grace to know how to act so as to win Léonie's affections, and I hope God will let me finish my task, which is far from being completed as yet." (SF)

The breast cancer, taking an even harsher effect on her health, Azélie had a lot of work ahead of her, prior to her death. Bringing an end to her lace making business and also reeducating Léonie was an enormous task for her to complete. Azélie was fearful that she would die before she finished helping Léonie to become more independent. She was also afraid that Léonie would go back to her previous behavior and there would be no one there to help her. Thankfully, Léonie was a willing and loving soul, allowed her mother to teach her everything about transforming her life for the better.

Their relationship blossomed so much that they became inseparable. Léonie helped her mother with the Point d'Alençon lace. Azélie taught Léonie about "gentleness, kindness, and then detachment from pleasure, the determination to give pleasure, no matter at what cost to the good Jesus." (CW) Léonie stayed at her mother's side all the way to the end. Azélie realizing that her life was coming to an end, she decided to make a pilgrimage to Lourdes to seek out a cure for her breast cancer. Louis made reservations for the pilgrimage to Lourdes for Azélie and her three older daughters. Louis stayed behind to take care of Céline and Thérèse. Azélie and Léonie boarded the train in Alençon to Le Mans. They quickly stopped to pick up Marie and Pauline at the Visitation boarding school. All four of them boarded the train destined to Lourdes.

On the train their bad luck began. A few passengers on the train wanted to make some coffee and placed it over a spirit lamp. The lamp fell over, douching their clothes in oil. Upon arriving in Lourdes they were forced to leave the place they were originally suppose to stay at and look for another place to lodge. The bad luck did not stop there. To Marie's dismay, her aunt's rosary was lost, which was given to her after her aunt's death.

Each day, while they were at Lourdes, Azélie was taken into the frozen waters of Lourdes to be dunked and each time a cure was not to be received. She prayed earnestly that she would receive a cure. She asked if it is not the will of God to cure her, please cure Léonie and make her a saint. Azélie felt that she would gladly give her life up to God if her daughter Léonie was cured and made a saint. To the great dismay of Azélie's daughters, at their mother's attempt at receiving a

cure for her breast cancer, they were greatly upset that she did not receive a cure. Azélie worked hard to change their minds about ever doubting God's plan for her.

It was time for them to leave Lourdes and head back home to Alençon. When the train arrived in Alençon, Louis, Céline and Thérèse were waiting there for them. When Louis saw their faces he knew a cure was not received. Azélie approached Louis with great optimism and said God did answer one of her prayers instead. Léonie was so distraught over her mother's illness that she prayed a novena to ask God to take her in her mother's place.

Up to the months leading to Azélie's death, her main concern was still over Léonie's welfare after she was gone. Who will look after her? Azélie asked Louis to move to Lisieux after her death so that he and the girls would be around her family, the Guérins. Azélie felt that by moving to Lisieux, her children would be better taken care of and looked after by Isidore and Elisa-Céline. As the end of August approached, it was a matter of hours before Azélie would be taken into God's arms. Marie promised her that she would look after and take care of Léonie. On August 28, 1877, Azélie's soul ascended to heaven. Azélie's funeral took place at the cathedral and she was buried in Cimetière Notre Dame (Our Lady's Cemetery). Honoring the wishes of his late holy wife Azélie and conceding to the advice of his brother-in-law, Isidore, Louis decided to move the family to Lisieux. It was Isidore who found the residence called "Les Buissonnets" (The Woods) where the family was to live. The family packed up their belongings and paid their last respects to Azélie, at the cemetery, before setting off for their new home.

As soon as they arrived in Lisieux, Louis went back to Alençon to finish the lace-making business that Azélie had started. Marie and Pauline started organizing their new home while Léonie, Céline, and Thérèse started school immediately at the Benedictine boarding school called Notre-Dame du Pré. (Allied bombing raids destroyed the school in June 1944). Léonie became a boarder while Céline and Thérèse went to school during the day and came home at night. Léonie did still have difficulty with her schoolwork but not to the severity that she was having when she was at the Visitation boarding school in Le Mans.

After the death of her mother, Léonie's heart was developing into a greater love for herself and for her family; changes were taking place in all parts of her life. Everyone in the family saw this positive change in her and especially Marie. She felt that it was their mother who was helping Léonie's heart evolve into a beautiful young lady. Louis commonly referred to her as his "Good Léonie". One of Léonie's teachers was surprised by how delicate her thoughts were when she wrote her compositions for class. She was very impressed by the love and compassion she put into her writings. Léonie made every effort to express her love for others and to continue to make small sacrifices on their behalf. Léonie completed her studies at the Benedictine boarding school on October 1, 1881. Later on, Léonie would return to the Benedictine boarding school to visit her former teachers who nicknamed her "The Abbey Lover".



Léonie's older sister, Pauline, took a big step in devoting herself fully to God and entered the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux, in October 1882. Léonie and her sisters went to visit Pauline often at the monastery.

In May of 1883, Thérèse, Léonie's youngest sister, became extremely ill. The doctor was called and he was not able to diagnose her illness. Expecting that Thérèse was going to die, Léonie and her sisters stayed with her day and night. On May 13, 1883, as Marie, Léonie, and Céline were praying at the foot of the bed, a miracle happened. An apparition of Our Lady appeared before Thérèse and she was cured. Léonie, praying with her eyes full of tears, was not able to see the apparition of Our Lady. However, she did notice that Thérèse was cured when she saw a major change in her physical appearance.

The family dedicated themselves to serving the poor at Les Buissonnets. Shelters for the homeless were very scarce so the family would invite the poor into their home and receive food, clothing and money. They gave special care to those who needed their help the most. Léonie took care of an old dying woman who had no family of her own. She would bathe her, clothe her, feed her, and comfort her in her final days. Upon the death of the poor old woman, Léonie prepared her body for her funeral. Léonie and her family continued to make small sacrifices for everyone around them and were not afraid to show their love to strangers in need. Léonie also made small sacrifices for her sisters. Realizing she was too old to play with dolls, gave her two youngest sisters Céline and Thérèse her dolls and their clothes.

On June 14, 1884, it was time for Thérèse's confirmation. Léonie was given the special honor of becoming Thérèse's sponsor. It was a wonderful day for both of them.

In October of 1886, Marie decided also to devote herself to God alone and enter the same Carmelite monastery as Pauline. The family went back to Alençon to visit their mother's grave before Marie entered into the monastery. During this same time, on October 7, 1886, Léonie went to visit the Poor Clare monastery on rue de la Demi-Lune. She spoke with the Mother Superior and both of them agreed that she would enter the Poor Clare monastery at once. To the dismay and shock of the family and especially to Marie, Louis granted permission for Léonie to enter. Léonie told her family, as she made her first attempt at religious life, look at my eyes for this will be last time you will ever see them. Unfortunately, Léonie was not able to stay there for long, for the rigors of the rule of the Poor Clare's was too much for her physical body to handle. Léonie was forced to surrender to her weak body and leave the Poor Clares on December 1st of the same year. After Léonie's first failed attempt at religious life, Pauline instilled hope in their father's eyes that one day Léonie would be a religious and that God would find a place for her.

In the first few weeks of July 1887, Louis and his daughters, Léonie, Céline, and Thérèse went to La Havre for the International Maritime Exhibition. From La Havre they went to Honfleur. Visiting the chapel of Notre-Dame de Grace (Our Lady of Grace), Leonie prayed to God again about her vocation. Following in the footsteps of her beloved aunt Sister Marie Dosithée, Léonie

made a second attempt at religious life. Leading up to Léonie's departure, Céline, helped Léonie organize her things. On July 16, 1887, Léonie entered the Visitation Order in the city of Caen at Monastère de la Visitation (Visitation Monastery). Léonie's goals were to have a closer relationship with God and ultimately to become a saint. One of her biggest trials was releasing any relevance to any material things and her poor health. Unfortunately, things did not work out as she planned; Léonie's health prevented her from continuing her vocation as a nun any further. Once again, Léonie was forced to leave the religious life. On January 6, 1888, Léonie returned home broken hearted. In the same year on April 9th, Léonie's youngest sister Thérèse entered the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux.

In June, a devastating fire erupted in the adjoining home next to the Martins. Léonie and the maid were the only ones there and barely escaped. Their roof had caught on fire but luckily the firemen were able to put it out.

During the end of 1888 and into the beginning of 1889, Louis's health was deteriorating. He had suffered a couple of minor strokes and also he started to wander off. One day, Louis had wandered off to a town called La Havre. Everyone was frantic about his disappearance and wondered where he could have gone. Finally, Louis contacted his family in Lisieux and his family went to La Havre and brought him back home. After this incident, the family was very worried that he would wander off again. On February 12, 1889, a decision was made for Louis to be sent to a psychiatric hospital called Bon-Sauveur (Holy Savior) ran by the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul in Caen. A few days later on the 19th, Léonie and Céline left Lisieux and went to Caen to be with their father. They made arrangements to stay with the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. Each day, Léonie and Céline would go to see Sister Costard and ask her about their father's condition. The sisters only allowed Léonie and Céline to see their father once a week, which was at times very difficult on both of them.

After only staying in Caen for three months, at the advice of their uncle, Isidore, Léonie and Céline returned home to Lisieux on May 14th. Each week, Léonie and Céline would leave Lisieux and travel to Caen to see their father. Léonie would also visit the sisters at the Visitation convent because her heart was still set on becoming a nun at the Visitation.

Léonie and Céline traveled with their uncle and aunt to Paris that May. There they all were entertained at the World's Fair and were present at the unveiling of the Eiffel Tower. They also visited Notre-Dame des Victoires (Our Lady of Victory) where Léonie and Céline lit a candle for their sister Thérèse and prayed for their father's well being. Traveling to Tours and Lourdes, Léonie went into to the baths at Lourdes praying to be cured. Weeks after returning to Lisieux, on June 7th, Léonie and Céline moved into their uncle Isidore and aunt Elisa-Céline's house.

The house, the entire family knew, as their beloved home, was coming to an end. The lease on Les Buissonnets came to an ended on December 25th, and it was not going to be renewed.



Isidore Guérin, the sisters' uncle, made arrangements for the furniture to be sent to his house and also to the Carmelite monastery where Marie, Pauline and Thérèse were living as nuns.

On October 17, 1890, Léonie and Céline, along with the Guérins, traveled to Paray-le-Monial to celebrate the anniversary of Saint Margaret Mary (Sacred Heart of Jesus). There she prayed to Saint Margaret Mary for intercession to be reunited with her sisters at the Visitation monastery in Caen.

During the course of three years while Louis was staying at Bon-Sauveur in Caen, he suffered another stroke. Louis became paralyzed as a result of this last stroke. So, the family decided to bring him back to Lisieux on May 10, 1892. Isidore arranged for Louis, Léonie and Céline to live in a house that was very close to his house at 7 rue Labbey (Labbey street). Léonie and Céline took very special care of their father while he was incapacitated.

On June 23, 1893, Léonie traveled to Caen to go on a retreat at the Visitation monastery. During her retreat, she approached the Mother Superior and told her she wanted to enter the Visitation monastery again. The Mother Superior agreed and Léonie's uncle, Isidore, gave her his permission. On June 24, 1893, Léonie entered into the religious life once more making it her third attempt. She became very content at her new home. It was Léonie as well as her sisters' wishes that she become a nun, because they knew that she had great virtues of humility. In February of 1894, Léonie was accepted to receive the habit; however, due to an unforeseen illness of their priest, her ceremony was delayed. On April 6th, Léonie received the habit as well as the name of Sister Thérèse-Dosithée by Bishop Hugonin who conducted the ceremony. Céline and her cousins were also in attendance.

During the latter weeks of July 1894, Louis's health took a turn for the worst; he suffered from another heart attack. The doctor came to examine him and told Céline that her father was dying. A priest was called and the last rites were given to him. On July 29th, Louis died in the presence of his daughter Céline and his soul ascended to heaven. His funeral was conducted on August 4th. After Louis's funeral, Isidore decided that the rest of the family, which was previously buried in Alençon, should be brought to Lisieux. The arrangements were made and a small ceremony took place when Azélie and the rest of the family were buried next to Louis.

Léonie was not able to attend her father's funeral because she was in the Visitation monastery. Céline did, however, visit her sister every day after their father's death when she was visiting her cousin Jeanne who also lived in Caen. These visits by Céline were to be her last to Léonie. Céline, too, sought out the religious life. On September 14th, she entered the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux.

In early spring of 1895, Sister Marie de Sales Lefrançois was elected the new mother superior for the Visitation monastery. Mother Marie de Sales viewed the rule differently than her predecessor; she felt that their monastery should be more observant to the stricter guidelines of the Rule of the Visitation. As a result, Léonie, as well as her fellow postulants, found it

increasingly difficult to follow the rigors of the rules. By late spring, Mother Marie de Sales decided to postpone Léonie's profession at the advisement of the mistress of the novices. As a result of this postponement, Léonie was seeking a transfer to the Visitation convent in Le Mans. This was the same convent where her aunt, Sister Marie-Dosithée became a nun. But based on the encouragement of her sisters, Léonie stayed at the monastery in Caen and endured. Thérèse, as well as her other sisters, were consoling and counseling her and teaching her how to endure her many hardships by bringing her further to the way of perfection. Léonie's greatest fears had turned into reality. Due to the stricter adherence to the rule of the Visitation, Léonie, as well as some of her other sisters at the monastery were asked to leave.

On July 20, 1895, Isidore went to Caen to pick-up Léonie and bring her back to Lisieux. Upon returning, Léonie went to visit her sisters at the Carmelite monastery. This was one of the saddest times of her life. She cried so much that it was difficult for her to speak to them. Léonie's aunt Elisa-Céline and uncle Isidore welcomed her back with open arms into their home. The relationship between Léonie and her aunt and uncle were very close. But the pressures of the world outside the convent were becoming very difficult for her to handle. There were more temptations for her to stray away from the religious lifestyle that she had become accustomed to when she was in the monastery.

Thérèse continued to counsel Léonie to the way of perfection even though she was no longer at the monastery. This close relationship was very common to the both of them because Thérèse had helped her before during their childhood. Thérèse was very patient with Léonie when she taught her. Léonie responded positively to Thérèse authority over her. Thérèse encouraged Léonie to continue to detach herself from worldly possessions, which obviously is difficult for anyone to overcome. Thérèse remarked: "You have no lack of small sacrifices, my dear Léonie, is not your life made up of them? I rejoice to see such a treasure before you, especially when I realize that you know how to put it to profit, not only for yourself, but even more for souls." (CL)

Sadly, Léonie's days of being counseled by Thérèse were slowly coming to a close. Thérèse had contracted tuberculosis and at that time it was seen as an incurable disease. All of the Martin sisters were greatly distressed over the thought of losing their beloved sister. Léonie looked upon Thérèse's disease, as the divine will of God. So she prepared herself for the impending loss of her sister.

On July 2, 1897, it was the last time that Léonie was able to see her sister Thérèse in person. Thérèse became too ill to do anything and she was moved into the infirmary. Due to the Carmelite Rule, Léonie was not allowed to go into the infirmary. However, Thérèse made every effort through her sisters Marie, Pauline and Céline to continue to counsel her. Everything that Thérèse said was written down and passed onto Léonie. Thérèse wrote her final letter to Léonie on July 17th stating: "If you want to become a saint, it will be easy, because in the depths of your heart the world means nothing to you, I mean that while you give yourself devotedly to external

works, you have but one goal: to give pleasure to Jesus and to be united more intimately with Him.” (CL) Léonie continued with her desire from childhood to become a great saint. She asked her sister Thérèse, that when she went to heaven, to plead her case for her to the dear Lord to lead her on the path of becoming a great saint.

Léonie would visit the Carmelite monastery on a daily basis to get an update on her sister’s condition. On September 30th, as the hours for Thérèse were drawing to a close, Léonie and her aunt Céline and uncle Isidore went to the Carmelite chapel to pray for her. Pauline wrote a small note and gave it to a lay sister, which in turn handed it to Léonie in the chapel that told her that her sister’s soul had ascended to heaven. A few days later, Léonie led the funeral procession at the Carmelite chapel. Thérèse’s body was laid to rest at the local cemetery in Lisieux.

During this course of time, Léonie continued to stay in contact with the sisters at the Visitation monastery. She would visit them periodically in Caen when she went to stay with her cousin Jeanne. Between Léonie’s second departure from the monastery and her final entrance, a lot of the sisters at the monastery had passed away. This led the Visitation monastery, in Caen, to accept a couple of sisters from the Visitation monastery in Boulogne-sur-Mer. A few months later, one of the new sisters from Boulogne-sur-Mer was elected Mother Superior. Mother Jeanne-Marguerite Decarpentry brought a different adaptation to the Visitation Rule, which in turn allowed Léonie and her fellow sisters that left previously an opportunity to come back.

Weeks prior to Thérèse's death, Thérèse had a conversation with her sister Marie. She stated that after her death, Léonie would be reunited with her sisters at the Visitation in Caen. She also stated that Léonie would be there serving God until her death. This vision that Thérèse had stated to Marie had come true years later on January 28, 1899. Léonie, escorted by her uncle Isidore, entered the doors of the Visitation monastery after her religious ceremony took place and she entered the monastery for the final time on January 30th. Léonie stated to her new Mother Superior: “I am here for always, this is my sole ambition: to hide myself like a humble violet under the leaves of perfect submission, so that my superiors can do with me whatever the wish.” (GV) On June 30, 1899, Léonie received her holy habit and took the name Sister Françoise-Thérèse. The ceremony took place under the direction of Canon Levasseur. She then continued on with her novitiate under the direction of Sister Louise Henriette Vaugeois. Léonie was very attached to her due to her humility, simplicity and gentleness towards her. Unfortunately, Sister Louise was requested to return back to her old monastery in Boulogne-sur-Mer.

Sister Marie Aimée de Songnis took over the reins of Léonie’s training. Sister Marie Aimée was much different than her predecessor. She was more stringent on following the Visitation Rule. This in return led Léonie into a depressed state of mind. It was very difficult for Léonie to learn the Rule quickly enough so that she would not fall into the dismay of her directress. Léonie’s sisters Marie, Pauline and Céline were once again alarmed and dreaded the thought of history repeating itself. They were fearful that Léonie would be forced to leave the monastery once

more. Through the encouragement of her sisters at Carmel and the intercession through her beloved aunt Sister Marie-Dosithée and her sister Thérèse, Léonie survived this trial. Léonie stated in a letter to her sisters at Carmel: “Surviving the pressures of the earth: To win heaven, it is necessary to suffer and to suffer greatly. True peace is the acceptance of each trial given. After we have completed our exile, there will be heaven eternally, while we wait, it is necessary that we attach ourselves to the cross. From the cross to heaven is only one step.” (GV)

Sister Marie Aimée decided that Léonie was ready to become a professed nun. On July 2, 1900, Léonie’s novitiate ended and she professed her final vows. The ceremony took place under the direction of Canon Levasseur. Léonie received her profession cross, the cross that cost her so many tears, however, Léonie was content on living the rest of her life as a Visitation nun.

It was decided by the Mother Superior of the community that Léonie’s jobs would be to assistant Bursar, nurse, to assistant in the refectory and assistant in the sacristy. Léonie’s duties to assistant Bursar were to ensure that everything in the convent was arranged accordingly. Her nursing duties in the infirmary were taking care of the needs of the sick and aged nuns. She assisted the sisters in the refractory who prepared the two meals that the community received daily. Léonie’s duties in the sacristy were prepping the linens, corporals, palls, and purificators for Mass. Léonie lent her support and attention to the needs of the new postulants who were, as she did, having difficulties in adhering to the Visitation Rule. Even though her duties were not always in a leadership role, she accepted her tasks joyfully. Léonie was forced to make many sacrifices in her work. With great humility, she used these opportunities to offer them to God and use them for the opportunity of saving souls, in particularity for priests.

Léonie was given a brief opportunity to see her sister Pauline in 1902. Pauline and Mother Marie de Gonzaga were traveling to a city called Valognes located in the northwestern part of Normandy on business. This was a special gift for Léonie because she thought she would never see her sister ever again after she entered the Visitation.

During the early part of the 1900’s, Thérèse had come to be well known by many people in France. The book “Story of a Soul” was widely read by many people and they had sought out her protection and intercession. The process for Thérèse’s canonization for sainthood had started. In 1910, Léonie was asked by Bishop Lemonnier of Bayeux and Lisieux to prepare a deposition on the virtues of Thérèse. On November 27th, Léonie and her Mother Superior Jeanne-Marguerite Decarpentry traveled to Bayeux to see the Bishop. Léonie testified on her account of Thérèse’s virtues. During this event they both stayed at the Benedictine Monastery.

The interest in Thérèse also brought interest in Léonie as well as her surviving sisters. People would come to the Visitation monastery and ask to see Léonie and see if she would pray to her sister Thérèse for intercession on their behalf. Léonie would always honor their requests.

As 1914 approached, the threat of war was eminent. As World War I started it had major effect on the Visitation community as well as other religious communities. The Germans advanced into

France through Belgium's border and occupied the northeastern half of the country. Even though during this time, Léonie and her sisters were miles away from the front lines, they were asked to make sacrifices for the war effort. Food was rationed for everyone as well as medicines and other much needed supplies. The majority of the supplies were sent to the front lines for the support of the French soldiers. Léonie was very concerned about the health and safety of her sisters Marie, Pauline, and Céline at the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux due to the rationing of supplies. Her sisters reassured Léonie, that they were all right. When the war came to the end, all of them survived the horrors.

On September 30, 1912, while Léonie was chanting the Holy Office, an apparition of her sister Thérèse's hands appeared to her on her book. This apparition affirmed to Léonie that her sister was always with her. Léonie and Thérèse had a very close relationship. She looked upon Thérèse as being a guiding light to the way of perfection. This experience encouraged Léonie to work harder at becoming a saint.

The canonization process for Thérèse progressed rapidly on April 9, 1915. A second examination of Thérèse's virtues was required for the Apostolic Process. The examination of these virtues would take place at the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux. To this great joy, Léonie and her Mother Superior Jeanne-Marguerite traveled to the Carmelite monastery. Léonie had not seen her sisters in seventeen years. It was an exciting eight days for Léonie and what a blessing it was to see her beloved sisters Marie, Pauline, and Céline. It was also a great joy to see where her sister Thérèse lived and worked. Léonie remarked: "As we were sitting down together on the steps of Carmel, it was like nothing had changed. It was as if we were together at Les Buissonnets once more." The time came for Léonie to depart the Carmelite monastery and the examination of Thérèse's sisters was over. Léonie, yet again, had to say her goodbyes to her sisters. This time it was to be forever until they all saw each other again in heaven. The Carmelite sisters arranged a song for Léonie's departure, which was a very touching gift for her to receive.

Once Léonie returned to the Visitation monastery in Caen, it was very difficult for her to adjust. The separation from her sisters and the challenges of practicing the "Little Way" were taking a huge toll on her emotionally. She was fearful of letting herself down as well as her sisters. Léonie remarked: "I belong to a family of saints and I must not blemish that heritage." (GV) Léonie always looked upon her sister Pauline as a saint. She revered the Carmelite prioress as a person with such great virtues. Moreover, Léonie persisted and returned to the practice of being hidden, following the footsteps of her sister Thérèse one step at a time. Léonie's main objective was to be a living example of God's love, the same love that he has for each and every one of us. She sought out her own measure of obedience to God to further her practice of humility, a virtue that was one of her favorites to practice. She devoted many of her prayers for the Pope, the Church, her communities, and others that suffered.

Léonie constantly examined the progress of her way to perfection and came to the conclusion about where she was by stating: "I am so poor, so little, so weak-but I rejoice in being so, for it

makes me more open to His consuming and transforming love and I could not be more self-abandoned. I believe I have reached the point where God wishes me to be, for I love what He does above all else; I do not want to choose anything at all.” (L) However, Léonie continued to work feverishly on her goals of becoming more humble. She made every opportunity to withdraw herself more and more from the spotlight working harder to be counted as nothing. Described by her Visitation sisters, Leonie displayed pure gentleness, exuberant joy, and great humility with much simplicity.

Reflecting back on her difficult childhood, there was one person who sought forgiveness from Léonie, Louise Marais, the maid. She had inflicted both emotional and physical abuse on Léonie when she was a child. Louise was not allowed to have any contact with Léonie. However, Louise was able to communicate to Léonie in an effort to receive Léonie’s forgiveness through Marie. Léonie thanked her for helping take care of her mother when she had breast cancer and also forgave her for the way she was treated by her. On August 10, 1917, a second exhumation of Thérèse’s remains took place. Léonie had always hoped for a relic of her sister Thérèse since her death. Thankfully, while her sister Céline was wrapping Thérèse’s relics in silk linens, a molar had fallen out of its place. It was decided that the molar would be given to Léonie. The arrival of the relic, from Thérèse to the Visitation monastery, was a joyous blessing for Léonie and her sisters in Caen.

On March 26, 1923, Thérèse’s relics were brought to the Carmelite Monastery in Lisieux. A beautifully decorated carriage carrying her relics rode from the Lisieux cemetery in a procession down the streets of Lisieux to be interned at the Carmelite chapel. Thérèse’s beatification was going to take place on April 29th. As a kind gesture to Léonie, the carriage was brought to the Visitation monastery in Caen to include her in the ceremony and to show her the beautiful carriage where her sister’s relics were placed.

Shortly after the beatification process, Thérèse’s canonization was taking place. On May 17, 1925, Léonie’s sister became St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. A beautiful ceremony took place in Rome to celebrate the newly canonized saint. Pope Pius XI extended an invitation for Thérèse’s sisters Marie, Pauline, Léonie, and Céline to attend the ceremony in Rome. The invitation was declined by all of them. The decision to decline the invitation was so that they could continue their work in the monastery as a cloistered nun thus not interfering with community life. But in the place of their absence, two Tourière sisters from the Visitation monastery went to Rome to represent them. Léonie had a special request for one of the sisters. She asked the sister if she would kiss the foot of Pope Pius XI, a demonstration to the Pontiff a sign of her faith in him.

On September 28th, Cardinal Vico, a representative of Pope XI, came to Caen to visit Léonie. Léonie knelt before him as an act of her faithfulness to him and the Pope. Léonie, like her sisters, prayed in particular for the Pope, priests and also the preservation of the sovereign Church. Cardinal Vico delivered a portrait of Pope Pius XI to celebrate Léonie’s twenty-five years as a Visitation nun. The portrait contained an inscription of a blessing for her to honor this occasion.



Pauline had sent a statue of Thérèse to the Visitation convent, which was placed in the garden. Cardinal Vico had the honor of blessing the statue while he was there.

Due to the overwhelming interest in Thérèse, many visitors came to the Visitation monastery to see Léonie. Léonie, being an assistant portress, would answer the door without acknowledging to them that it was she who they were speaking to. For Léonie, it was an opportunity for her to practice her humility. Most of them would request for her to pray to her sister Thérèse for their intentions and she would always honor their requests. Léonie never sought out intercession from her sister Thérèse for herself. She knew that all that she received was enough for what she needed. A visitor who wanted to interview Léonie approached her at the monastery. He wanted to find out more information about her mother Azélie. Léonie complied with his request and she stated that it was her mother, Azélie, who taught her humility, simplicity, and detachment from worldly things. Léonie always viewed her as a saint. Léonie was then asked to write the forward to the book: “The Little Flower’s Mother”. Léonie also wrote a message to the Little Flower Society: “If we must please the Little Flower, we must be humbled as she was, and we will be humble if we will repeat frequently every day: Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine”. (CW) Léonie vowed to pray every day for sister Thérèse to watch over them.

In her interview, she was asked why she too did not become a Carmelite nun like her sisters. Léonie replied she was where God wanted her to be and one of the graces that her sister Thérèse gave her was to preserve her devotion to the Visitation Order. Léonie's first affiliation with the Visitation Order was through her aunt, Sister Marie-Dosithée. There was a great connection and admiration between Léonie and her aunt and she looked forward to following her in her footsteps, thus initially taking the name Sister Françoise-Dosithée in one of Léonie’s early attempts at religious life. It was Léonie’s goal for herself as she explains: “I want to be little, so little! This is the example I want to follow. I can feel that this is what Jesus expects of me.” (L)

During the month of December 1930, Léonie was plagued by an acute contagious viral infection characterized by inflammation of the respiratory tract and by fever, chills, muscular pain, and prostration. It is also called grippe. This in return eventually led to her catching pneumonia. It was thought by her Visitation sisters that Léonie would not survive her illness. As a result she was given the “Last Sacraments”. Pauline sent a telegram to a Carmelite brethren in Rome about her sister’s condition. Unexpectedly, Pope Pius XI responded back to Pauline's telegram. In this telegram, he gave Léonie his papal blessing as well as asking for her sister Thérèse’s intercession. Sister Marie Aimée, who was very close to Léonie in the monastery, prayed before the statue of St. Thérèse in the monastery garden asking for Thérèse’s intercession too.

Soon after Léonie received blessings upon her, she started to recover from her illness. Many of Léonie’s Visitation sisters were impressed by Léonie’s continued devotion to the love of God and also by her ardent desire to be in His presence throughout her difficult suffering. Sister Joseph Gabriel de Formigny, Léonie’s infirmarian, stated: “What edification Léonie gave during

her days of great suffering! I had of admiring her faith, her love of the good God, her profound delicacy of sentiment; she does honor her sister Thérèse, whose virtues she reproduces..." (DL)

Throughout the rest of Léonie's life, she was plagued with a number of illnesses. Her weak immune system did not help her to fight against colds and influenza, which passed through the monastery each year. She also suffered from eczema, a non-contagious inflammation of the skin, characterized chiefly by redness, itching, and the outbreak of lesions that may discharge serous matter and become encrusted and scaly. This ravaged her entire body making it very uncomfortable for her. Like her mother Azélie, Léonie too suffered from migraine headaches. She also lost many of her teeth causing her to wear dentures. If not enough Rheumatism arthritis stayed with Léonie until her death leaving her body whittled and frail. Should Léonie never be able to walk, she would, without any hesitation; crawl on her hands and knees to receive the Blessed Sacrament. It was the true center of her religious life. (GV)

Prayer was an important part of Léonie's life. It is prayer that Léonie's heart desired constantly, because in prayer she replies: "How I love the words, the good God operates in us; there is no need to see or feel Him! Happily for me, that is true for I always have been and am increasingly a blockhead, a log, and I ask Jesus to set the log on fire with the Spirit of Love" (GV) Multiply the hours of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, Léonie states, "It is before the Blessed Sacrament that our hearts and minds are prepared to receive Him. Let us also sow many "Hail Mary's" for it is our Immaculate Mother in heaven that will be there to save us all."

In December of 1939, Léonie's sister Marie contracted a cold with a very severe cough. Her illness continued on into January and sadly her illness worsened to the point of no return. Léonie was notified, by her other sisters Pauline and Céline, that Marie's mortal life on earth was coming to an end. On January 18, 1940, Léonie's beloved sister Marie breathed her last breath on earth. As customary, two Visitandine sisters from Léonie's monastery were sent to the Carmelite monastery with flowers in hand for Marie's funeral in Lisieux.

In April of 1940, Léonie wrote a letter to her dear sisters Pauline and Céline. In this letter she describes to her sisters how she feels about herself approaching death: "I feel that I am approaching eternity. What joy! There is nothing sound in me except for my eyes, my heart, and my head, thanks be to God! Complete abandonment is what I desire most... Let us, as spouses of Christ, not fear death which we must undergo to find true life in Him." (GV)

A ruthless German dictator named Adolph Hitler decided to invade France on May 10, 1940. The French army thought that the Germans would attack them on the French and German border where they had a strong line of defense. But the Germans decided to attack France through Belgium instead. The French army made an enormous effort to stop the German army from penetrating the front lines. However, they were no match to the German arsenal of weapons. On June 22, 1940, the French and German governments signed an Armistice agreement that called for two different zones. One zone occupied by the Germans and the other zone occupied by the

French. Unfortunately, Caen and Lisieux were both positioned in the German occupied zone. Léonie and her Visitation sisters could no longer ignore what was going on outside the walls of their monastery. The Germans setup outposts in most of the major cities in France, Caen being no exception.

Léonie made every effort to comfort her sisters who were fearful of the outcome of the German existence. Léonie would pray ardently for the safety and security of their family members and ask her Sainted Sister Thérèse to protect them.

As 1940 was coming to a close, Léonie's health had become ever more deteriorated. She was no longer able to roam the halls of her beloved monastery on her own. Mother Jeanne Marguerite de Carpentry decided it was time for Léonie to be moved into the infirmary after she contracted bronchitis. Léonie helped her other sisters that were also summoned to stay in the infirmary especially the ones who were near death. Léonie was content on continuing her duties even though she was hindered by her physical impairments as she states to one of her sisters: "Yes, I suffer much, but I don't want to stop, I wish to go on until the end." (DL)

During May of 1941, Léonie contracted the grippe again. This time she was not going to be able to defeat it. She suffered severely from the physical symptoms of the grippe along with the addition of rheumatism arthritis. Léonie writes to her sisters Pauline and Céline: "I have become so little that I have the audacity to believe that I will not go to purgatory. I ask my Jesus to prepare me Himself for His coming. I, though a great sinner, can have no fear of the good God. On the contrary, it's my extreme need of Him that gives me such confidence in Him that I dream that when I leave the arms of our beloved mother (Mother Superior) that I will fall quite naturally into the arms of Jesus and of my heavenly Mother. What audacity!" (GV)

At the end of May, Léonie started to show signs of improvement in her health. It was a golden opportunity for her Visitation sisters to celebrate Léonie's birth and profession. Mother Superior took full advantage of this opportunity and they celebrated Léonie's birthday as well as her fortieth anniversary of her profession on June 3, 1941. Léonie joyfully celebrated with her Visitation sisters.

One of the gifts Léonie received was a message that Pauline obtained from Pope Pius XII. In the Pope's message he states: "We are blessed with all of our hearts, on the occasion of her 40th anniversary of religious profession, our dear daughter in Jesus Christ, Françoise-Thérèse of the Visitation of Caen, and through the intercession of her blessed sister Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, we implore for her the grace of the highest sanctification in the most fervent humility." (DL)

As the celebration came to a close, Léonie was taken back to the infirmary. Her sisters filled the halls of her beloved convent with the verses: "By thy sweet way, Guide us we pray, Thérèse to heaven, to heaven, to heaven." (DL) Léonie was filled with joy and happiness from the celebration. Mother superior took the opportunity to escort her "living relic" back to her room.

Due to the occupation of the German army in France, the message from the Pope was delayed by almost a year. Léonie's 40th anniversary was in 1940. After the celebration, Léonie sent a reply to Pope Pius XII's message and thanked him for his gift. But the greatest gift Léonie was to receive was from her beloved sister Pauline. Years ago, Pauline sent Saint Thérèse's profession cross to Léonie upon the condition that the cross would be returned after Léonie's death. Pauline decided to allow the Visitation convent to keep Saint Thérèse's profession cross. She also provided a reliquary to house the cross in so that it could be venerated.

Pauline, knowing her beloved sister was nearing an end to her life, contacted the Pope and requested permission to allow Léonie's body to be interned at the Carmel in Lisieux. It was an expression of faith for all the sisters to be buried side by side in the crypt next to their beloved sainted sister Thérèse. But Léonie wanted to be buried in the crypt of her Visitation convent. Léonie's feeling on this issue was that after her death that there would no longer be any communication between the Visitation and the Carmel. Mother superior felt this same fear because the Carmel was helping them in several ways during the German occupation of France. Pauline reassured her sister in a message sent to Léonie: "Fear nothing, my little Léonie, if you fly to heaven, I will not fail to fly often to your Visitation; besides, I myself will feel the need of it." (DL)

As the weeks in June progressed, Léonie's eyes were solely on heaven. In a conversation between her and her mother superior she said: "The divine thief is at the door, dear mother, but do not be troubled if He takes me in the middle of the night for I am ready; all is given, abandoned." (DL) It was painful for some of Léonie's sisters to see her while she was in an enormous state of agony over the complications from her illness. Léonie reassured them, "That it was necessary to suffer a lot before dying because there was still more for her to climb to Calvary." (DL) She wanted to ascend to heaven like infants do.

On June 12th, as she did each day, Léonie started to rise for Morning Prayer. She was met with a sudden weakness and numbness in her arms and legs on one side of her body, which caused her to collapse onto the floor of the infirmary. When Léonie's infirmarian arrived to help her change into her clothes, she found her lying on the floor unconscious. The infirmarian summoned other sisters to help her place her back into her bed. A doctor was called to examine her condition and a priest came to deliver her the "Last Rites". Hours after Léonie collapse, she woke up and saw her infirmarian and other sisters beside her. Léonie immediately realized that she was paralyzed on one side and was not able to speak anymore.

Mother Superior sent an urgent message to Pauline and Celine about their sister's dire condition. Later that afternoon, Pauline sent two Tourière sisters to the Visitation convent bearing flowers with prayers and blessings. When the sisters entered into the infirmary, Léonie was visibly overjoyed to see them. They went over and sat at her bedside giving the messages from her sisters Pauline and Céline. Mother Superior gave Léonie her sister Marie's rosary and her sainted

sister Thérèse's profession cross. Léonie bore each relic in both of her hands. She then took a rose, removed the petals from it and scattered them over her sister's profession cross.

Léonie's condition slowly deteriorated for the next five days. She was very weak, however, she clasped onto her sister Marie's rosary and Thérèse's cross close to her heart. Every day the priest would come and give her the "Last Rites."

On the 16th of June, Léonie held out her hands with a weak smile on her face, when her Visitation sisters brought in a replica of the statue of Our Lady of the Smile. They recited to her some verses her sainted sister Thérèse echoed: "To die of love, what martyrdom more sweet, I long for it, my heart's desire! Soon is my exile over, Oh, I entreat, Ye Cherubim, tune, tune your lire." (DL) That evening it became more evident that there were only hours left of her life, as the physical signs of death were visible. Mother Superior gave Léonie a blessed candle to hold in her hand as they prayed to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Our Lady of the Visitation and to St. Thérèse.

A few hours before she ascended to heaven, on the 17th of June, Léonie again scattered rose petals that Pauline and Céline had gathered in the Carmelite garden. She placed them over Thérèse's profession cross. Mother Superior brought Léonie up into her arms and hugged her twice, once for Pauline and once for Céline. She placed Léonie's head back on her pillow. Léonie sighs a couple of times as her soul was starting its ascension to heaven. The Lord she loved called her home.

Léonie's Visitation sisters gathered around her bed and sang the "Magnificat". They prepared her body for her funeral. Léonie's hands were placed together clutching St. Thérèse's profession cross and her head laid upon a white pillow. The sisters placed a ring of white roses around her head and wrapped a garland of flowers all around her body. Léonie's beautiful smile still encompassed her face as she lay peacefully. Her body was carried to the chapel choir where those that came to pay their respects could see her in all her splendor.

As news spread throughout the world of Léonie's Holy Ascent, people came from all over the world. As the days leading up to her funeral came, more and more people turned out to pay their respects, even though the Germans occupied Caen. Numerous letters of condolences were sent to the Visitation monastery and also to the Carmelite monastery in Lisieux where Pauline and Céline lived.

The funeral for Sister Françoise-Thérèse, Marie Leonie Martin was held on June 21, 1941 conducted by Monsignor Germain. A large crowd of mourners surrounded Léonie's coffin and followed the procession to the end, as the Visitation sisters looked on. Léonie's body was then carried into the Visitation monastery and placed in an interior crypt where her body still lies today.

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