

# The Tablet

## A Life of St. Therese

### Father Anthony Casey Felt Saint's Guidance as He Wrote Her Story

By Marie Elena Giossi

February 28, 2009

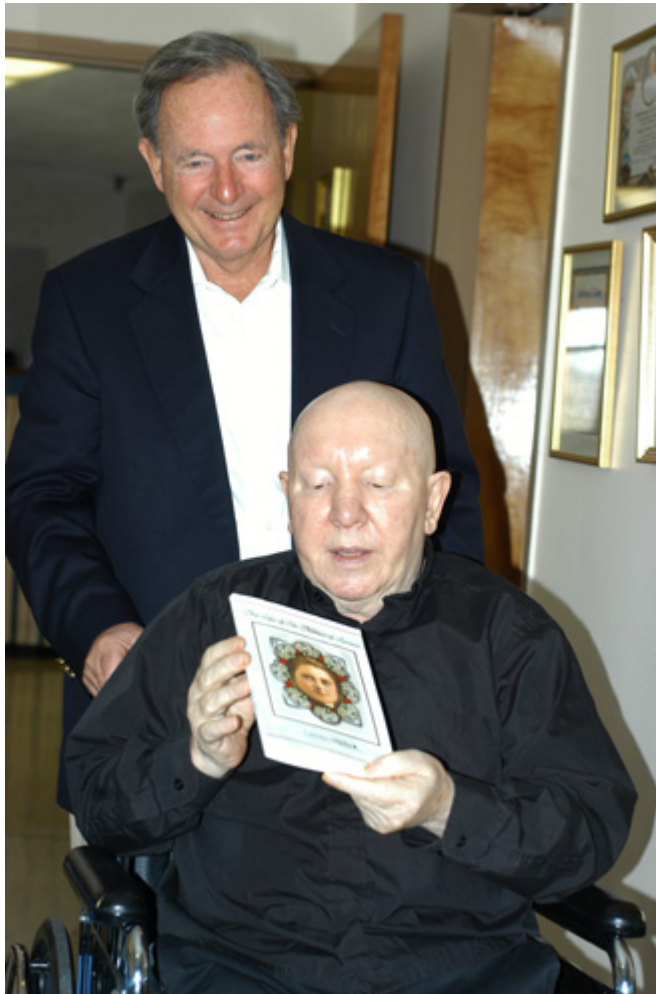
A lifelong dream has come to fruition for Father Anthony Casey, Ph.D., with the recent publication of his book, "The Life of St. Therese of Lisieux."

Long anticipated by the 74-year-old priest's family and friends, the 111-page paperback is a biography that reads like a novel, offering an insightful glimpse into the brief earthly life of "a young girl, Therese Martin ... destined to teach the world again the need for love."

What may seem unusual to the reader is that the story begins a century prior to the saint's birth in the time of the French Revolution. Before meeting Marie Francoise Therese Martin, readers meet her grandfathers, Catholic family men and "soldiers in the great Norman tradition," whose lives are used to paint an historical backdrop.

In the pages that follow, readers journey into the heart of the Martin family through the narrator's third-person omniscient perspective and occasionally Therese's own words from her autobiography "The Story of a Soul."

Photos © Marie Elena Giossi



The publication of "The Life of St. Therese of Lisieux" is the culmination of a lifelong dream for Father Anthony Casey, seated above, made possible by good friends, like Tom Reynolds, at left.

They're invited into intimate moments, such as when Therese's mother discovers a lump in her breast, and are privy to conversations between Therese and her father, her sisters, and even Pope Leo XIII.

Vivid descriptions give readers the sense that they're alongside Therese, witnessing each moment, seeing how her "luminous eyes sparkled" and watching her endure physical and spiritual agonies, even writing the Creed in her own blood.

Since his youngest years, Father Casey has enjoyed a spiritual friendship with Therese whose story he's been writing, piece by piece, for "50, maybe 100 years," he said with an impish grin on a recent morning at Queen of Peace Residence, an assisted living and nursing home facility run by the Little Sisters of the Poor in Queens Village.

Various health issues including debilitating diabetes, Parkinson's disease and neuropathy necessitated his move there two years ago.

While his health has deteriorated through the years, his will to finish the book grew.

"I had no trouble writing it at all. Actually, it came very easy to me," Father Casey shared. "The story itself had a magnificent effect on me. I tried to work on it the best I could," he said, given his physical limitations.

"I had Therese in mind all the time. She tried very hard to assure me it would be all right.



"I've always had a relationship with Therese.... It's had ups and downs. ... I understood that as long as I continued on with the story, she would help me finish it. I felt that she was helping me all the time," he said.

He dedicated the book in memory of his parents, William and Nora, whose faded black-and-white images hang on his bedroom wall.

The Caseys, much like Blessed Louis and Zelig Martin, Therese's parents, had nine children in whom they fostered a deep devotion to Jesus, which bore fruit in the form of religious vocations. The Caseys and the Martins each had five children enter religious life.

Born near the small, rural town of Bruff in Limerick, Ireland, Father Casey was the youngest of the nine Casey children. Ordained to the priesthood in 1958, he came to the Brooklyn Diocese for post-ordination studies at Iona College, New Rochelle, and earned a doctorate in clinical psychology at **St. John's University**, Jamaica.

He served as an assistant at Holy Innocents, Flatbush; St. Joan of Arc, Jackson Heights; Holy Family, Flatlands; St. Columba, Marine Park; and St. Rose of Lima, Rockaway Beach.

It was during his last assignment that Father Casey met Tom Reynolds, the man whom he chose to edit and publish his book on Therese's life.

A parishioner at St. Francis de Sales, Belle Harbor, Reynolds occasionally attends Mass at St. Rose, where he met Father Casey seven years ago. A mutual love of literature gave rise to a great friendship.

One day Father Casey told Reynolds of the book he was writing about Therese, which he wanted published before he died.

"He came to me and asked if I would edit it for him," recalled Reynolds, a retired social worker who liked to write but had no editing experience. He forgot about the conversation until last spring, when, a week after completing a writing and editing course at NYU to advance his own writing career, he received an original manuscript of Father Casey's book.

Feeling that the timing was no coincidence, Reynolds took on the project, sorting through years of notes and weaving pieces together during the summer and autumn months. As Father Casey was too ill to complete the book, Reynolds wrote the final two chapters, which he subsequently lost on his computer.

Unable to retrieve the file, he ultimately rewrote the chapters, after doing more research, and admits the second version is "much better than the original."

He attributes the missing file to St. Therese, whom he believes "had a hand in the book. Things happened that were too providential to think otherwise."

Others who have had a hand in the publication of this book are Father Casey's longtime friends Msgr. James Kelly, pastor of St. Brigid Church, Bushwick, who had the original manuscript typed by his staff; Lucie McEntee, who typed the final manuscript; and Anne Byrne, who assisted Reynolds in having the book produced by Bookmasters, Inc., a publishing company based in Ashland, Ohio. Reynolds' son Daniel created the cover artwork which includes a photo of Father Casey at a gala celebrating his 50th anniversary of ordination last fall.

"This really was a devotion of his," Msgr. Kelly said of his friend's work. After years of hearing about the book, Msgr. Kelly marveled at the final product, which he read "all in one sitting." He was most impressed by how Father Casey used his background in psychology to offer "interesting insights" into the mindset of the saint. Copies of Father Casey's book may be obtained by contacting Reynolds at [Mysterium4@aol.com](mailto:Mysterium4@aol.com).