

Prayer of the Last Elders

Ekklesia Project keynote, July 9, 2022

The centuries-old Optina monastery 160 miles south of Moscow was a spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It produced many *startsy*, or holy elders, men of great wisdom who fed a revival of Christian practice in the Orthodox world. It was the model for the monastery that Alyosha joins in *The Brothers Karamazov*; the character of Father Zossima was—to at least some extent—based on Optina’s Father Ambrose, whom Dostoevsky met on a visit to the monastery.

For some years I have ended my morning prayers with Jim Forest’s version of the Prayer of the Elders of Optina: Lord, grant that I may meet the coming day with spiritual tranquility. Grant that in all things I may rely upon your holy will. In each hour of the day, reveal your will to me. Whatever news may reach me this day, teach me to accept it with a calm soul, knowing that all is subject to your holy will. Direct my thoughts and feelings in all my words and actions. In all unexpected occurrences, do not let me forget that all is sent down by you. Grant that I may deal firmly and wisely with every member of my family and all who are in my care, neither embarrassing nor saddening anyone. Give me the strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day with all that it shall bring. Direct my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive, and to love. Amen.

This prayer is often called the Prayer of the *Last* Elders of Optina, because it was prayed when “Whatever news may reach me this day” could include their fellow

Christians being arrested, tortured, and killed. After the Russian Revolution the monks were violently removed and the monastery turned into a forced labor camp for political prisoners. The last hegumen, or abbot, was executed in 1938, and the church was turned into a museum.

How does one accept such news with a calm soul? Under such circumstances, how can one trust that all is subject to God's holy will, and all is sent down by God? How can one worry about embarrassing and saddening the people around us, when great-souled people are being taken out and shot? If we listen to the news today, we might feel that we are in a similar position to the last elders of Optina. There is ecological disaster, war in Ukraine and Yemen, famine in East Africa, gun violence, racism, and the ruin of democracy in the US, all while the church in the West shrinks at an alarming rate. Accepting such news with spiritual tranquility seems like a luxury for the privileged, and seeing it as God's will conveniently excuses us from responsibility. The little way seems naïve at best when the problems are so big.

I have nevertheless structured my talk today around the last line of the Prayer of the Last Elders: "teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive, and to love." When I first started praying this prayer, I regarded this line as a more or less random list of good practices. As I prayed it, however, I came to see that there is a logic to the sequence; each one follows the one before it. I will use this sequence to reflect on the little way, and pay particular attention to St. Therese of Lisieux, with whom the little way is most commonly associated, and especially to Dorothy Day's reading of St. Therese.

I. To pray

For St. Therese of Lisieux, the little way began and ended with prayer. She was a Carmelite, a member of a cloistered convent in which the nuns had very little contact with the outside world. Their austere life—no heat in the winter and one meal a day for much of the year—was centered around seven hours of prayer a day. Most of the rest of their time was spent doing the manual chores that kept the house running. Therese had a strong attraction to that life. She went to Rome and begged the pope for permission to enter the Carmel at age 14; she had to be removed from the pope's leg by a guard. The old saying about monastic life applies here: for those who don't believe in the power of prayer, no explanation is possible; for those who do believe in the power of prayer, no explanation is necessary.

I believe, but still... seven hours a day? "Thoughts and prayers" has become a punchline, a term of derision, a synonym for doing nothing at all. Even people on the right end of the political spectrum are trying to find new catchphrases with which to respond to mass shootings, since all their thoughts and prayers seem to have no effect whatsoever. Dorothy Day admits that she at first found Therese and her little way hard to swallow. Day was an activist and a new convert to Catholicism when her spiritual director gave her Therese's *The Story of a Soul*, a collection of the Little Flower's autobiographical manuscripts published a year after her death at age 24. At the time, Day was still working for the Anti-Imperialist League, a Communist Party affiliate. Her job was to raise awareness and funds for Augusto Sandino, who was fighting American aggression in Nicaragua. In contrast, she found *The Story of a Soul* "colorless, monotonous, too small in fact for my notice" (viii). The "young nun with a sweet insipid

face” (vii) considered it a “mortification” to be splashed with dirty water by a careless sister, while Day preferred tales of martyrs stretched on the rack. Day felt insulted that her spiritual director had given her this “pious pap.” “Living as we were, in a time of world revolution, when, as I felt, the people of the world were rising to make a better world for themselves, I wondered what this new saint had to offer” (viii).

By the time she published her biography of Therese in 1960, Dorothy Day had seen what world revolution had accomplished, what had become of the people of the world rising to make a better world for themselves. The revolution had executed the last elder of Optina. Day retained some respect for the ideals of communism, but came to see that the harsh reality of life under Stalin and his successors was not unrelated to the atheism that underlay it (x). She was, of course, equally critical of the practical atheism of Western societies that put faith in their own material wealth and the weapons needed to protect it. The basic problem is a reliance on human effort rather than on God. She came to see that “In these days of fear and trembling of what man has wrought on earth in destructiveness and hate, Therese is the saint we need.”

This spring I attended two different college graduations for two of my sons. Both were filled with exhortations to the graduates to go out and change the world, as if the world hadn’t already had enough of Americans trying to change it. A university, as the name implies, seeks to form universal subjects. We take a student from their small town in Iowa and give them the world. Universities tend to encourage what we could call the Big Way: the assumption that we know enough about what needs changing, are good enough to promote positive change, and are powerful enough to make positive change happen. When we read the autobiography of a Guatemalan peasant woman,

my students and I assume that we can step into her shoes and empathize, but the hard truth is that most of us are much closer—economically, historically, racially, and culturally—to the oppressors in the story. Perhaps we need to begin with the humility to confess that we don't really have the slightest idea what it is like to be a peasant woman in the global South, and step back from the notion that we are universal selves who can swoop down on anyone in the world and understand their problems.

What I mean by the Big Way is akin to what anthropologist James Scott calls “seeing like a state,” that is, the attempt to survey complex social realities from above. Large-scale change imposed from above requires simplifying the reality on the ground; the point is not just to read reality from above but to change it so that it is more legible. Both the state and large-scale capitalism are agents of change and legibility. Such schemes for large-scale change are always sold on the basis of greater efficiency, but as Scott shows in case after case, from Soviet collectivization to the promotion of large-scale corporate farming in Ethiopia and the United States, the results are often disastrous for the local people and for the environment. Such well-meaning schemes to improve the human condition often fail because they ignore the practical knowledge of the local people, but they are favored by those in power because they enhance their power in ways that listening to the locals does not.

Scott does not think that all large-scale projects to improve the human condition are bad. But he warns of the dangers of the displacement of God in modernity. In Zygmunt Bauman's words, secularization “created a vacancy; the office of the supreme legislator-cum-manager, of the designer and administrator of the world order, was now

horribly empty. It had to be filled or else..." It was filled by the human desire to manage the world.

To begin with prayer is to begin with the acknowledgement that we are not in control. To pray, in other words, is to be realistic. Prayer is sometimes regarded as mere wishful thinking, an ineffectual kind of escapism from the real world of hard choices and human effort. A Carmelite convent like the one Therese joined is seen as the ultimate flight from the real world, a neurotic waste of potentially productive lives. As Therese wrote, however, "the kind of holiness I want" is one that is "free from illusions." Dorothy Day comments, "Always she was praying that she would see things as they were, that she would live in reality, not in dreams" (141). Prayer is the enormously difficult work of trying to see things—especially ourselves—as they are. Prayer is crucial to the exercise of humility. Rather than seeing like a state and putting ourselves in God's position, we hold out our begging bowl in prayer and ask that God free us from the primordial sin, which Genesis 3:5 identifies with wanting to be "like God."

II. To believe

Prayer, then, leads to belief. We don't generally come to believe in God at the end of a syllogistic process of reasoning about God's existence. We believe in God because we have an experience of God in prayer. Paul's word for faith, *pistis* in Greek, is not just the abstract belief in the existence of something, as one would believe that the capital of North Dakota is Bismarck, but rather signifies trust and confidence in God.

At the root of the Big Way is the belief that God will not act so we must, either because God is distant and inscrutable or because God does not exist at all. I suspect that Christian activism is sometimes motivated by fear that there really is no God. If there is no God, then at least we can make ourselves useful to the world by throwing our energy behind various social causes. If, on the other hand, God is who we say God is—good and powerful—then we may adopt the little way of “boundless confidence in God’s infinite mercy and love,” in Day’s words (xii). We may trust that God is in control of history, not us. As Mary Frohlich writes in her commentary on Therese’s writings, “In essence, the little way is simply total trust in God. Regardless of one’s weaknesses, imperfections, sins, or failures, complete trust will gain all things from God.”

There are two related disciplines at work here in the little way. The first is the refusal to take credit for the good. Therese constantly emphasized her own weakness and sin, and declined to take credit. Therese writes, “To be little is not attributing to oneself the virtues that one practices, believing oneself capable of anything, but to recognize that God places this treasure in the hand of His little child to be used when necessary; but it remains always God’s treasure.” This discipline is a key to avoiding idolatry, especially the idolatry of the church. To believe in God is not to believe in our own efforts, even those aimed at spreading the word of God.

The second related discipline of belief in God is the refusal to blame God for evil; this is the refusal to despair, in other words. This discipline is difficult. To acknowledge with the last elders of Optina that “all is subject to your holy will” and “all is sent down by you” seems like a recipe for despair, a sure sign amidst all the evil and injustice of the world either that God is not good and does not care for us, or that God can do nothing

to stop the carnage. As I understand the elders, however, their prayer is the antidote to despair, an acknowledgement that, despite setbacks—even terrible violence—in the short term, God has not abandoned us, and the great arc of history is ultimately a comedy and not a tragedy. Even though the church be destroyed—by communism in the Soviet Union, by abuse and apathy in the West—the church is not God, and God still reigns. The Cross makes clear that we are not promised a world free of suffering. The Resurrection makes clear that suffering does not have the final word, that God is not absent from the suffering world. Amidst the suffering of her short life, Therese, as Day says, “practiced the presence of God” in all things (174).

III. To hope

To believe in God, then, leads directly to hope, the opposite of despair. Hope is not the same as optimism. The elders of Optina knew they would not fare well under the Soviet regime, and Therese knew that her tuberculosis would kill her sooner rather than later. The optimism of political campaign promises quickly turns into pessimism and despair that anything will ever change. Hope is something different from both optimism and despair. Against despair, hope recognizes that the way things currently are is not the way things are meant to be, or really are in God’s eyes. The little way is not quietism, not the notion that a Christian does nothing about the world’s ills except pray to be whisked off to heaven when they die. Salvation history works toward a new heavens and a new earth, not just plucking a few survivors from the wreckage of the world and installing them in an afterlife somewhere else. Against shallow optimism,

however, hope does not promise a quick fix by human hands. Hope invests in what is small, and finds God at work in what is hidden.

The widespread appeal of St. Therese of Lisieux has always been the accessibility of the little way to anyone; holiness is not reserved to great and heroic figures. Therese herself said that all are called to holiness, and the little way is a simple path for all to follow. "Our Lord made me understand that the only true glory is the glory which lasts forever; and that to attain it there is no necessity to do brilliant deeds." What is needed is ordinary holiness, ordinary people enacting the works of mercy, but doing so against the backdrop of the dramatic cosmic story of the creation, fall, and redemption of the world by God. Day describes how the mundane chores of the Carmelite convent were "lit up by the glory of the Office" (148) of daily prayer. Thus, writes Day, "On the one hand Therese was 'the little grain of sand' and on the other 'her name was written in heaven'; she was beloved by her heavenly Father, she was the bride of Christ, she was little less than the angels. And so are we all" (xii).

Hope is found in doing simple things in the light of eternity. Day says she writes her biography of the Little Flower "to overcome a sense of futility in Catholics, men, women, and youths, married and single, who feel hopeless and useless, less than the dust, ineffectual, wasted, powerless" (xii). She notes "With governments becoming stronger and more centralized, the common man feels his ineffectiveness" (174). The process of concentrating power and agency in the hands of the few has only accelerated since she wrote. In politics, participation is reduced to voting every couple of years for one or another wealthy person. In economic matters, as Wendell Berry writes, we give "proxies to corporations or governments to provide entertainment,

education, child care, care of the sick and the elderly, and many other kinds of ‘service’ that once were carried on informally and inexpensively by individuals or households or communities. Our major economic practice, in short, is to delegate the practice to others.” The goal of management continues to be the transfer of knowledge, skill, and decision-making from employee to manager, even in white-collar work. Consumer culture simultaneously diminishes our agency: what we once made, we now buy, and what we once fixed ourselves we now either hire someone else to fix or we throw the item out and buy a new one. Cars and appliances are increasingly engineered to hide their inner workings from the curious. As a result, we have a more passive and dependent relationship with things. As workers, as consumers, as citizens, we feel subject to vast impersonal forces over which we have no control.

The little way is a practice of hope in this landscape of futility and despair. We do not have to be in control in order to act. The Kingdom of God does not depend on our favored political party being in power. We are all capable of actions that, however small, sow seeds of the Kingdom in the present. Again, however, hope is not the same as optimism; the little way is a way of the Cross, a way that goes through and not around suffering. The little way can be understood as a response to a modern world in which God has been banished from public life. As Fritz Bauerschmidt puts it, “Therese now seeks God, no longer at the top of the great chain of being, in the mundane details of everyday life, in the small sacrifices entailed by living in a community of unexceptional human beings... It is a mistake to think that the Little Way is a matter of adding up these little sacrifices so as to equal a heroic life of martyrdom... or piling them on top of each other so as to reach up to God. Rather, through the sufferings of Christ

on the Cross, *each one* of those small sacrifices is a point of contact with the infinite love of Christ which he takes up and offers to the Father in union with his own sacrifice.”

IV. To be patient

Because it is not mere optimism, hope requires and makes possible patience in its turn. Precisely because we have put our hope in God, we do not need to try to force the world to conform to our vision of what the world should be. We are enabled by hope to wait on the Lord.

Such patience can be deeply problematic. As Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote in his letter from the Birmingham jail, “I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say ‘wait.’” To white moderate churchmen who counseled patience, in the conviction that equal rights would eventually come to African-Americans, King responds that there is nothing about time itself that heals. Change comes only through breaking silence and lining up on God’s side. Those who stand by and wait for time to heal the wound only deny justice by their silence and inaction. “This ‘wait’ has almost always meant ‘never.’”

At the same time, King’s refusal to use violence exhibits another kind of patience that is crucial to the little way. Violence is so often the preferred means of those trying to move the lethargic masses toward a good end. Dorothy Day describes her own early revolutionary stance as “wanting to do good by violence” (x). The little way includes the patience to refrain from violence even in the service of a good cause. She writes,

“When the whole world seems given over to preparedness for war and the show of force, the message of Therese is quite a different one” (174).

The problem is not that Day was a revolutionary. God is a revolutionary. The history of salvation promises a new heavens *and a new earth*. God is not indifferent to the suffering of the world, and God does desire the radical alteration of the whole of society. But as scripture scholar Gerhard Lohfink points out, God is different from other revolutionaries. Human revolutionaries are short on time: lifetimes are short, and the masses are inert. If you want to effect massive change in society in a short period of time, the only way to do so is through coercion. Karl Marx, for example, thought that humanity needed to be saved in one grand overthrow of oppression, and violence is the only way to accomplish this. Capitalism is similarly impatient, and has been defined as “creative destruction.”

God, on the other hand, is not short on time. God wants to change the world without taking away human freedom. How? In Lohfink’s words “It can only be that God begins in a small way, at one single place in the world. There must be a place, visible, tangible, where the salvation of the world can begin... Beginning at that place, the new thing can spread abroad, but not through persuasion, not through indoctrination, not through violence. Everyone must have the opportunity to come and see....Then, if they want to, they can allow themselves to be drawn into the history of salvation that God is creating...What drives them to the new thing cannot be force, not even more pressure, but only the fascination of a world that is changed.”

The changed world that one can see can only be a space in which the power to change the world looks very different from our usual expectations. God comes not as a conquering Messiah, but rather pours himself out, taking the form of a slave whose crucifixion, as Paul says, redefines foolishness as the power of God (I Cor. 1:18). God is out to change the world, but shockingly God does so through humility, because humility is what a changed world looks like. In the face of false promises that politics, technology, or the market is going to usher in a painless utopia, a changed world according to the little way is one in which we share in each other's sufferings. Both Therese and Dorothy Day put great emphasis on the willingness to take suffering upon oneself rather than inflict it on others. A changed world is one in which we participate in the body of Christ in which, as Paul says, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (I Cor. 12:26).

It is this emphasis on suffering that keeps the little way from devolving into a bourgeois attempt to make ourselves feel better by only performing small actions: I have bought a package of LED light bulbs, and so I have done my little part to save the environment. Socially-conscious purchases, though often good in themselves, can lull us into self-satisfaction and complacency, into thinking that we are feeding others through our own consumption. Therese, on the other hand, insists on the importance of suffering; shortly before her death, she thinks about heaven and writes "I even ask myself at times how it will be possible to be happy without any suffering." This kind of morbid sentiment seems inexplicable and perverse unless it is seen in the light of the interconnection between Christ's suffering and the suffering of people here and now on earth. Dorothy Day explains "The mystery of suffering has a different aspect under the

New Covenant, since Christ died on the Cross and took on Himself men's sins. Now St. Paul teaches that we can full up the sufferings of Christ, that we must share in the sufferings of the world to lessen them, to show our love for our brothers" (175). This is surely why Martin Luther King and his fellow activists shared in the suffering of others: to lessen them by exposing the injustice of the current system by absorbing its violence, without resorting to violence themselves. This kind of patient enduring of suffering does not say "Let's just wait and see what happens" but rather embodies Christ's suffering love in the present, witnessing to a changed world that is capable of compassion, of preferring to suffer violence rather than inflict it.

V. To forgive

In order to be able patiently to endure suffering inflicted by others, however, one must be able to forgive them. Hardheartedness against one's enemies will increase the tendency to forsake nonviolence and reach for coercion. Even nonviolence, however, can be subject to the temptation to self-regard and self-righteousness. The little way can become the narrow way, with its practitioners an elite of the pure. What is little about the little way can be seen as the number of its practitioners, a righteous remnant in a world of corruption. Monasteries like the one Therese belonged to are considered by Ernst Troeltsch to be the classic example of the "sect" type of Christianity, the withdrawal of the pure from the rest of society. Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement are likewise often accused of sectarianism and perfectionism, advocating impossibly high standards that only the saintly few can live up to. For such

a spiritual elite, offering forgiveness becomes just another way of proving superiority over the riffraff.

Therese, however, had a strong sense of her own sinfulness, and as death approached, she had an experience of solidarity with nonbelievers that lasted for months. She describes the way that God took away God's own presence and allowed her to share in the despair of those bereft of faith. She refused to ask for consolation from anyone, including God, and resolved to "sit at the table of bitterness where these poor sinners take their food and... not rise from it till Thou givest the sign." Therese did not want her sacrifice to be rewarded, and she gave up all pleasant thoughts of heaven. As Day comments, Therese "wanted her suffering to be hidden even from God, if that were possible, in order to atone for lack of faith in the world" (161). For Therese, the little way included losing even her sense of separation from those who turned their backs on God.

Day likewise emphasized the collective guilt of all people, especially herself. If Day emphasized the sharing of suffering in the Body of Christ, she also emphasized the sharing of guilt. When the Germans invaded Poland in September of 1939, the headline of the Catholic Worker newspaper read "We Are to Blame for New War in Europe." In the face of war, Day called not for retaliation but for penance for our own sins of greed, materialism, militarism, and self-righteousness that led to war. As all people are members or potential members of the Mystical Body of Christ, war should be as unthinkable as the hand of a body sawing off its own foot. But this interconnectedness also means the commutability of guilt. Day quotes Fr. Zossima from *Brothers Karamazov* telling his monks "Love God's people. Because we have

come here and shut ourselves within these walls, we are no holier than those that are outside, but on the contrary, from the very fact of coming here, each of us has confessed to himself that he is worse than others, than all men on earth... When he realizes that he is not only worse than others, but that he is responsible to all men and for all and everything, for all human sins, national and individual, only then the aim of our seclusion is attained.” The quote continues on in the same vein. At the end, Dorothy Day adds in her own voice, “I quote this because that accusation ‘holier than thou’ is also made against us. And we must all admit our guilt, our participation in the social order which has resulted in this monstrous crime of war.”

For the little way, forgiving others is less like a gesture of benevolence to the less worthy—a presidential pardon—and more like relieving the guilt of the other by sharing in it. The Big Way operates on the assumption that we are good enough to use coercive power well. The little way abandons that assumption, and tries to root out the violence in our own hearts first. The revolution is not a matter of killing all the right people so justice can finally be won. Change comes when we ask God for forgiveness for ourselves and others in the recognition that all lives are inextricably intertwined. We avoid violence not in an attempt to make ourselves pure, but from a humble and utterly realistic recognition that we are not good enough to use violence well.

VI. To love

Finally, then, forgiveness leads to love, because it relativizes the borders between me and you, between us and them. We become finally capable of fulfilling the

commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:39), because we become one with others. Therese died saying “Love alone matters,” and she referred to the little way as the “science of love.” Love for Therese is not a mere emotion; she declares that she has learned above all that love “must not remain shut up in the heart.” As a virtue, love is a habit that needs to be strengthened through practice. Like a runner pushing herself in training for a marathon, Therese describes how she set out to love the sister in her convent who was most annoying and disagreeable to her. Love was not a feeling; indeed her feelings had to be overcome through the hard work of daily words and gestures and acts of kindness toward the sister she disliked.

Even if love is understood as acts and not mere feelings, however, it is still easy to assimilate the little way to a middle class lifestyle that leaves the injustices of the world mostly untouched. Therese came from a bourgeois family and her little way—understood superficially—appeals to comfortable Christians for whom gospel love can be reduced to being extra nice to the cleaning lady. Dorothy Day, on the other hand, saw the potential for the little way to be much more revolutionary. She compares the little way to the atom, a small thing that has tremendous power. The little way “has all the power of the spirit of Christianity behind it. It is an explosive force that can transform our lives and the life of the world, once put into effect” (175). If the comparison seems distorted, Day makes clear that, although “one impulse of grace is of infinitely more power than a cobalt bomb,” the effects of grace and nuclear weapons are opposite. The little way is a spiritual force that counteracts the fear and disaster that the Big Way threatens us with. The little way spreads seeds; they are “to be watered by our blood, perhaps”—a reference to martyrdom—but God, not us, will provide the harvest.

We are simply called to take our place in “that *mighty army of little ones* that St. Therese has promised us and which is present now among us” (176).

The military metaphors remind us that Day is not a quietist, not interested in reducing the Gospel to charitable acts done in the private sphere. Bauerschmidt writes about her “politics of the little way.” It is surely not politics in the way we often think of it, as what political parties do. We generally assume that politics means doing what is necessary to gain power within the apparatus of the state, so that we may use coercive means to achieve good ends. Day understands politics more broadly as people organizing themselves to achieve common goods, and she rejects the use of the state’s violence. Day writes that, when dealing with questions of war or poverty, we must “study the little way, which is all that is available to the poor, and the only alternative to the mass approach of the State. Missionaries throughout the world recognize the little way of cooperatives and credit unions, small industry, village commune, and cottage economy” (Fritz 88). She continues on to mention the striking farmers of Mississippi. In a society in which power and wealth are increasingly concentrated, the little way gives agency to those excluded from the halls of power. Such agency changes things not only on the local level, but can break the hold of the Big Way from within. Day was fond of quoting William James: “I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny, invisible, loving, human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monuments of human pride.”

The little way is no mere tactic, however, a means to our eventual accession to power so that we can finally impose our good agenda. The little way can only be love. Love is both the end and the means. We cannot achieve peace through war, we cannot coerce people into being free. We cannot solve big problems with the Big Way because the Big Way is what caused the big problems in the first place. Humility is not just the way to change the world; humility is what a changed world looks like. The Big Way can be easier because it demands that others change, not ourselves. The little way is hard because it requires us to abandon our ambitions to change the world and to change ourselves first. This is how the first Christians in the book of Acts lived, sharing their goods with all who had need and praising God together with joyful hearts. The only evidence they could give that the Messiah had come was to allow their own lives to be changed first. The only way to change the world is to live as if God has already changed the world, which God has. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). The little way is finally to participate in that self-sacrificing love, and to let God be God.