

Yes, you can judge 'Lenten Journey' by its cover

BY MSGR. JAMES CAFONE

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Father John "Jack" F. Russell is a Carmelite priest who was ordained in 1960 and has served on the faculty of Immaculate Conception Seminary, South Orange, for more than 25 years. He is a familiar figure to many of the younger priests of the archdiocese and is well loved as a gifted preacher, inspiring teacher and insightful spiritual director.

"A Lenten Journey with Jesus Christ and St. Therese of Lisieux" (Christus Publishing), written by Fr. Russell, is a book distinguished by an exceptionally attractive cover portrait of this beloved saint, which captures both her inner beauty and the childlike quality of her soul. This is one of those rare instances when the wisdom of the old adage is disproved, because despite the beauty of its cover, the reader will not be disappointed by the content of this book. Instead, the text will serve as a marvelous companion for the Lenten season.

Too often, the prayers and penances that we promise for the duration of Lent fare no better than our New Years' resolutions and disappear under the daily pressure of our obligations and responsibilities. Fr. Russell's work is an antidote to spiritual indifference and a tonic for the soul who desires to develop or restore an intimacy with the Lord. It is arranged in a format that uses the Gospel reading from the Mass for each day of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday and continuing through Easter Sunday.

The author offers the reader a very appealing but simple structure for prayer and reflection on each day of the penitential season. The Gospel passage is followed by a paragraph or two taken from the writings of Therese, many of which are excerpts from her "Story of a Soul," her letters and poems. After the words of Saint Therese, Fr. Russell provides the reader a brief but pointed reflection and a simple prayer.

Fr. Russell has a profound appreciation for this saint world-renowned authority on the life and teachings of Carmelite order for more than 50 years and his words saint's personal innocence and the depth of her spirit.

One of the reasons for her never-fading popularity across in her work, making her an attractive model to ertheless, despite the childlike qualities that her conviction whose faith and hope and love were tested close to the abyss of despair.



Fr. John Russell

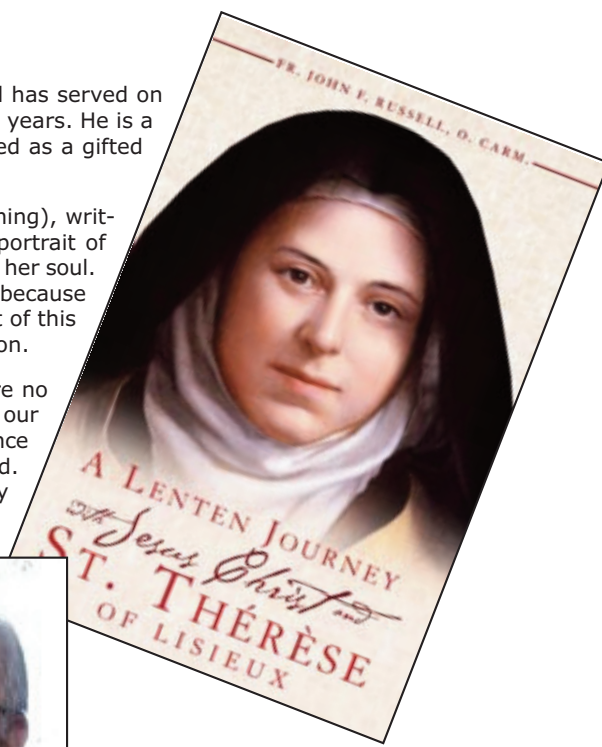
The genius of this doctor of the Church was intuitive rather than intellectual. Therese did not attempt to analyze her experience but went straight to the heart of it, reaching to the depths of our human condition and clarifying our understanding of the dark night of the senses and the dark night of the soul that the great mystics have attempted to communicate to generations of Christian believers. Fr. Russell's reflections express the essence of her thought, shedding a bright light on the implications that her direct and simple words have for those who want to follow Jesus in their daily lives.

There is a tradition in the Church that traces its origin to the Gospel of John and the Pauline Epistles. Rather than placing the hope for salvation on the strict observance of the law, this ancient tradition emphasizes the unconditional love that the Father has for us. The early Fathers of the Church often have this same focus so clearly expressed in Saint Augustine's famous reminder that God has made us for Himself and our hearts will be restless until we rest in Him.

Such has been the primary theme in the lives of so many holy souls in Christian history—Blessed Julian of Norwich, Saint Aelred, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic to name but a few—flowing down the centuries through the work of Saint Therese of Lisieux, right up to Saint Kowalska in our own day with her emphasis on Divine Mercy. My Jesus, I trust in you. Thank you for loving me. Help me to share your loving goodness with all those I meet in this world.

In the spring of 2009, Fr. Russell received papal recognition for his many years of exceptional service to the Church and her people when Pope Benedict XVI awarded him the Benemerenti Medal. This newly published text continues this Carmelite priest's history of generous and loving work for the people of God.

(Rev. Msgr. James M. Cafone, S.T.D., is a member of the Religious Studies Department of Seton Hall University, South Orange. Fr. Russell's book is available through Christus Publishing, Wellesley, MA; Web site: www.christuspublishing.com.)



and her "little way" of sanctity. He is himself a this Carmelite saint. He has been a member of the convey the deep connection between the beloved

among Catholics is the warm humanity that comes one generation after another of the faithful. Nevings convey so well, Therese was a woman of deep in a crucible of anguish that often hovered very