

Three parishes join in
special Easter walk
- Page 3



Teens, parents work
on communicating
- Pages 8-9



Holy Family Parish
honors all families
- Page 13



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16 PAGES

Appreciation grows for 'Little Flower'

Rose Grossi was a teenager when she discovered St. Thérèse of Lisieux. "When I was 13, I read a life of St. Thérèse," recalled Grossi, a parishioner of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Brighton. "I was so impressed by it, I just fell in love with her."

She was so inspired by the Carmelite nun that she joined the lay Carmelites in 1954. By the early 1980s, however, she felt she had to do more.

"I began to feel that something should be done for the poor," Grossi said. So she and her husband Raoul began to look at what needs were unmet. "The need for the dying was about as crucial as any need at that time," Grossi said.

In light of that realization, the two founded Mt. Carmel House, the first home for the dying in Rochester, in 1984.

But Grossi is clear about who is really responsible for the opening of that house — and the homes for the dying that came later: St. Thérèse.

"You can really give her credit for Mt. Carmel House," Grossi declared. The woman responsible for inspiring Grossi to reach out to the dying might herself have benefited from an institution like Mt. Carmel House.

Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face died on Sept. 30, 1897, after a long battle with tuberculosis.

As far as the world was concerned, that could have been the end of the story for the former Thérèse Martin, who had spent nine of her 24 years living in a Carmelite convent.

But when she died, she left behind three manuscripts. Those manuscripts, written separately at the request of two superiors (Mother Agnes of Jesus, who was her sister by blood as well, and Mother Marie de Gonzague) and a second of her blood sisters (Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart), told about her life and her spirituality of the "Little Way" that was to inspire millions of people like Grossi.

In 1898, the manuscripts were compiled and published as the *Story of a Soul* by the congregation. The book rapidly spread around the world, prompting a flood of pilgrims to Lisieux and claims of miracles and conversions through the intervention of the self-described "little flower."

Meanwhile, the "Little Way," her spiritual path emphasizing love, acceptance of one's weakness and God's mercy, and the seeking of holiness through ordinary activities, found wide acceptance.

On May 17, 1925 — less than 28 years after she died — Pope Pius XI waived the customary 50-year wait and canonized St. Thérèse.

And it is widely speculated that this year, the centenary year of her death, Pope John Paul II will declare her a Doctor of the Church — possibly this August when he visits Paris and Lisieux.

Retired Auxiliary Bishop Patrick Ahern of New York, for one, is excited about the possible declaration.

"It will be just a great thing, because she is the saint for the next millennium," declared Bishop Ahern, whose proposal that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops support her being declared a doctor was approved in 1993.

"I have long thought she should be a Doctor of the Church because I believe her mysticism, her spirituality ... is as prophetic as any doctrine that has ever been taught by any doctor," Bishop Ahern declared.

A "doctor," he explained, is a teacher of the faith. But teachers must attract students in order for their doctrines to spread. St. Thérèse, he said, has been far more effective in attracting followers than two current Doctors of the Church who also happen to be Carmelites — St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila.

"Tens of thousands read John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila," Bishop Ahern said. "Millions in 50, it may even be 60 now, languages have read the autobiography (of St. Thérèse). She is the ordinary per-

Continued on page 12



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