

# 'Therese' well-meaning, but flawed

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — "Therese" (Luke Films) is an earnest but mawkish dramatization of the life of St. Therese of Lisieux, known affectionately as the "Little Flower."

As directed by Leonardo DeFilippis, the film is not so much a textured spiritual portrait of the young French nun, but a dry series of hagiographic tableaux which, though edifying to devotees, may limit the movie's mainstream appeal.

Set in Normandy of the late 19th century, the film opens on St. Therese, then Marie-Francoise Therese Martin (Melissa Sumpter), the youngest of five daughters and a precocious toddler, who even at a young age exhibited an acute spiritual intuitiveness.

A brief prelude establishes the bourgeois Martins as a pious Catholic family headed by the deeply devout Louis (Defilippis), who had contemplated being a monk but instead became a watchmaker. Soon thereafter, Therese's mother dies; it is a loss which would have a traumatizing effect on the future saint.

The movie fast-forwards, catching up with Therese (who has matured into Lindsay Younce) as a melan-

## Movie Review

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choly 14-year-old. Still haunted by her mother's passing and afflicted by an overly scrupulous conscience, she plunges toward a breakdown.

The mental collapse is hastened by the abandonment by her older sister and surrogate mother, Pauline (Linda Hayden), who leaves home to join the Carmelite order. Pauline's exit is followed by the subsequent departures of her next two older sisters, who also enter religious life.

But a Christmas time conversion experience stirs Therese out of her malaise. She becomes consumed with an overwhelming zeal to dedicate her life to helping others. She implores her father to let her follow her sisters into the convent at Lisieux, but is told that she is too young. Unable to be dissuaded, her persistence wins out and she is allowed to enter the novitiate at age 15.

Challenged by the rigors of cloistered life and inspired by Christ's counsel to be "like a child," Therese develops insights into a path of spirituality which she calls "the Little Way," a method of living which emphasizes great love over great deeds. Therese saw that God was everywhere, even in the quotidian details of life, and that joy can be found by undertaking each task — however menial — with charity and no expectation of reward.

The film gains some emotional traction in the final half-hour when Therese's failing health takes a turn for the worse and she is diagnosed with late-stage tuberculosis. The disease would ultimately lead to her untimely death at age 24.

It is during this dark night of the soul that the film offers a more visceral glimpse of a flesh-and-blood Therese, with whom viewers of all faiths — or none — can identify.

Financed totally by individual donations, the well-intentioned production has serious artistic flaws. Nevertheless, the beauty and power of Therese's inspirational life and words still shine through the film's shortcomings.

Due to thematic elements involving parental death and a criminal ex-



Luke Films/CNS

Lindsay Younce stars as Therese Martin — St. Therese of Lisieux — in the yet-to-be released film "Therese."

ecution, the USCCB Office for Film & Broadcasting classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

DiCerto is on the staff of the Office for Film & Broadcasting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.



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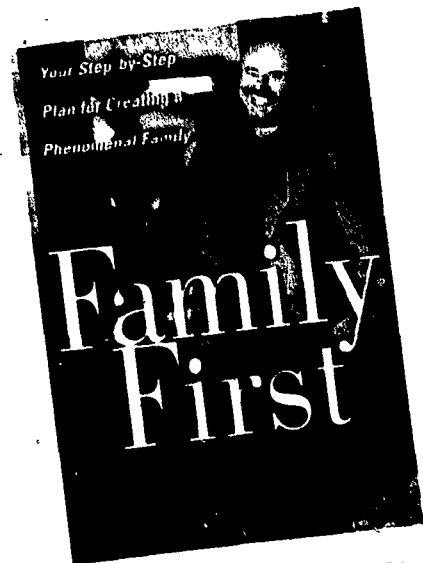


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