

*"God gave me a father and mother more worthy  
of heaven than of earth." St. Therese of Lisieux*



This charming drawing of the Martin family depicts a typical evening spent in the family home. St. Therese wrote that her father told stories and sang songs in a rich baritone voice. The young mother would soon die, leaving M. Martin with five young daughters to care for.

Our Lady's statue became the spiritual meeting place and the sign of their living unity. There every morning Therese knelt to say her childish prayers. Marie, thinking that the statue was too large for the small chamber would have liked to replace it by a smaller one, but her mother protested. *"When I am no longer here, my dear, you will do what you like, but so long as I live this statue of our Blessed Mother does not leave this room."*

After her mother's death, it was this statue that *smiled on* the seriously ill young Therese and cured her of an mysterious malady that threatened her life.

Zelie was a prolific letter writer. She left tender testimony of her enduring love for Louis in her correspondence:

*"I am with you in spirit all day, telling myself: 'now you are doing such-and-such a thing.' I long so much to be with you; I love you with all my heart...It seems impossible for me to live without you."* To a friend she once wrote: *"My husband is indeed a holy man; I wish every woman could have a husband like him."*

The mutual love of Zelie and Louis created an atmosphere which encouraged the spiritual and human blossoming of their children. They often spoke of God, yet they lived their lives on a very practical level. Surrounding their daughters with love, tenderness, a healthy dose of humor and good times, the parents formed each carefully in the spiritual life. Louis and Zelie Martine are timely role models for all families struggling to live a Christian life in the midst of a very secular society. They handed on the treasure of the Faith to their children by word and example. Daily Mass, frequent Communion and family prayers held a privileged place, yet there was nothing stiff or bigoted about them. They both taught their children to love and respect the poor.

## Prayer

God of eternal love, You give us Saints Louis and Zelie Martin, the parents of St. Therese, as an example of holiness in marriage. They remained faithful to You in all the duties and trials of life. They desired to raise their children to become saints. May their prayers and example help Christian family life to blossom in our world today. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Zelie and Louis were married on July 13, 1858, just three days before Our Lady of Lourdes final appearance to Bernadette on July 16. They were beatified together on October 19, 2008 in the 150 Anniversary Year of Our Lady's apparitions and 150 anniversary year of their marriage. They were canonized by Pope Francis on October 19, 2015 in St. Peter's Square in Rome. They are the first-ever married couple with children to be canonized in the same ceremony.

Louis and Z lie did not do anything extraordinary during their lifetimes, but rather lived their faith in a very simple, humble way, teaching by example, knowing what it was like to mourn the loss of loved ones, nurturing the vocation of their children, and putting their faith into action by reaching out to others in need. Louis and Z lie are excellent models for all Christian spouses.

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*Sts. Louis and  
Zelie Martin*



*St. Zelie Guerin Martin  
1831 - 1877*

*St. Louis Martin  
1823 - 1894*

The parents of St. Therese of Lisieux



# Zelie Martin



Zelie Guerin was born in December 1831. As a young woman she wanted to become a Sister of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul but her health was not strong enough. Zelie never lost her longing for the cloister yet she loved her husband and children, and totally

fulfilled her role as both wife and mother. She had a tremendous enthusiasm for life and was a highly skilled lace maker (at twenty she went to school and started her own business, employing about 60 lace makers); yet her sights were firmly set on Heaven. She was a great letter writer and she comes across as a vivacious and witty woman who is not only deeply perceptive, but also critical of the society in which she lived and, by her own admission, impatient.

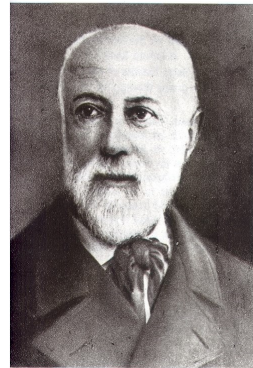
She was nearly 27 when an interior voice told her she was to marry Louis Martin. Her first child was born two years later. After the birth of her fourth child she became aware of a glandular swelling in the breast, which had become painful. She did not trust the surgeons of her day and this tumor was ignored for the next eleven years. Her character was largely formed by suffering but in her life she also knew much love. The death of her father-in-law was a great sorrow. She wrote, "He had a very holy death and died as he had lived. I should never have believed it could have affected me so much. I am overwhelmed."

Little did she know that she would lose five more loved ones in as many years. She nursed

her own father, who lived with them for a year before he died. Her second son, only eight months old, had just died two weeks earlier.

Zelie gave birth to her last child, Therese in 1873, who was destined to become a saint and the co-patron of the Missions. Zelie died four years later after a very painful struggle with cancer. After her pilgrimage to Lourdes to seek a cure, she wrote her last letter to her brother: "*If the Blessed Virgin does not cure me, it is that my time has come and that God wishes me to find my rest elsewhere than on earth.*"

# Louis Martin



Louis Martin was born in August, 1823 in Bordeaux, in southern France. His father was an army captain. At the age of nineteen Louis was apprenticed to a watchmaker.

After two years he sought entrance into the Augustinian Monastery of St. Bernard in the Swiss Alps. He was refused entrance because he did not know Latin so he returned home to study. When illness forced him to give it up he never returned to it. Eventually he became a master watchmaker and established a thriving business, bought a house for his parents, and a Pavillion, small property on the outskirts of the town and added a jewelers shop to his business. His great loves were his faith, his work and the countryside.

Louis had no desire to marry until he met Zelie Guerin when he was thirty five. They chose to continue their dedication to God through chastity after their marriage. After ten months a confessor suggested that they should consider the vocation of parenthood. They had nine children, one of them described as the greatest saint in the modern Church, St. Therese.

Louis sold his business in order to assist Zelie with her lacemaking business. He did the book-keeping, marketing, traveled to Paris to secure the best prices, supervised the deliveries of particularly valuable pieces of work and even chose patterns and drew out designs himself.

He loved to spend time with his five daughters and he delighted them with the toys he made. He told stories, did imitations and sang to them. He was firm with them too, expecting obedience and they obeyed him out of love. At the end of 1876 when he realized that his wife was fatally ill he became inconsolable. On the first Friday of August he went to Mass with Zelie for the last time. After that he hardly ever left her side until the 26<sup>th</sup> when he went to fetch the priest for the Last Rites.

Left as he was with five daughters ranging in age from 4 to 17, he fulfilled his wife's wishes by selling the lacemaking business and moving to Lisieux to be near her brother and his wife. He took a daily walk to visit the Blessed Sacrament and spent time in prayer and reading. The family evenings always ended with prayers. St. Therese said that she only had to watch her father to know how the saints pray. He assisted at early Mass daily. He helped establish the Nocturnal Adoration Society and he was active in the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

One by one he gave permission to four of his daughters to become religious. Each parting was a great sorrow. He said to Marie, the second daughter to request permission to Carmel, with tears in his eyes: "*God could not have*

*asked a greater sacrifice from me. I thought you would never leave me!*"

Just before his youngest daughter, Therese, entered Carmel his health began to deteriorate after his first stroke which affected his left side. Before long he began to lose his memory, become disoriented and several times disappeared for days at a time. He had to be hospitalized. He told a doctor, "*I was always accustomed to command, and here I must obey. It is hard! But I know why God has sent me this trial. I never had any humiliation in my life; I needed one.*"

When asked if his daughters should make a novena to St. Joseph for his cure, he said, "*No, you must not ask for this, but only for God's Will.*"

He eventually returned home to be cared for by his daughter Celine, and a married couple was employed to help. By this time he was unable to walk and did not speak very much, although he understood everything. He suffered more strokes and several heart attacks. He died very peacefully on Sunday, July 29, 1894. Celine wrote to her sisters in the Carmel of Lisieux: "*Papa is in Heaven.*"

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