

One of the beautiful things about family is the sheer number of experiences shared together – weekly meals, birthday celebrations, vacations, holidays, etc. It is a gift to be able to the joys, challenges, and sufferings that life brings as a family. What’s so beautiful about our gospel is seeing Jesus enter into a family – the home of Martha and Mary, two sisters. From John 11, we know that they also had a brother named Lazarus who died and was raised by Jesus from the dead.

And in this family, like all families, there were different temperaments and personalities. Martha was energetic, a little more anxious, and built for service, while Mary seemed to be more quiet and reserved. Different temperaments and personalities in a family, of course, can be really challenging, but also a means for self-sacrifice.

This is a special weekend for our parish in that we will be blessing our two new statues – Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, a husband and wife with very different temperaments. Louis was a guy’s guy. He was a little more reserved and a penchant for solitude. His favorite pastime was fishing and taking pilgrimages. Zélie, on the other hand, was spontaneous, active, expressive, and not afraid to give her advice on things. It is said that Louis had to accept this part of her personality.

On our statue of Louis, you will notice a couple of things. First, he has a watch in the upper left pocket on his coat. Louis ran his own little shop where he fixed watches for 21 years. He was known for never doing business on Sunday to respect the Sabbath.

Additionally, you will notice that he has a regal appearance. It's said that Louis had quite the presence. He was a true gentleman. His daughters absolutely adored him. They called him their king. St. Thérèse said of her father, "If papa were the king of France, everybody would be happy. But then he wouldn't just be our king."

Additionally, you will notice that in Louis holds a white lily in his right hand. The lily, of course, symbolizes his daughter St. Thérèse, who is known as the Little Flower. Even more, it symbolizes the moment when St. Thérèse asked her father for permission to enter the convent as a religious sister. She recounts the significant moment in *Story of a Soul*.

It was Pentecost Sunday in 1887. Thérèse was fourteen and a half. Sitting in the backyard with her father, he could tell that she was troubled. Her eyes were filled with tears. Placing her head next to his heart, Louis asked, "What's the matter my little Queen? Tell me." Thérèse expressed her desire to enter into Carmel and become a religious sister. Louis was concerned because she was quite young. However, after a little conversation, he knew this was truly something she wanted.

According to Thérèse, Louis walked over to some little white flowers, like lilies in miniature, and plucking one of them, he gave it to her. With roots still attached, Thérèse understood that God was plucking her up from "the sweet valley of family life and inviting her to climb Mount Carmel." She kept the flower for many years. Our statue of Louis captures this moment of him plucking the flower for his daughter.

For Louis, this was a moment of bitter sweetness – bitter in having to let go and offer his daughter to God. And yet, while difficult, it was also a moment of grace – to do God’s will. Of course, parents today also have many moments where they must let go. You quickly realize that while you are responsible and do the best you can to instill good values in your children, they have their own will.

And while you are always supportive, there are moments when you really have to let go – when they go away to college, move out of the house, find a job, get married, and raise their own families. Saints Louis and Zélie, for their part, shared difficult moments of having to let go.

And then we have our beloved Zélie. She was extremely expressive. She loved to write letters to her family members, especially her brother, sister, and sister-in-law. One of my favorite books is a compilation of all her letters entitled *Called to Deeper Love*. Reading her letters, you get a sense of her sense of humor, predisposition to anxiety, and deep joy in serving her family. If Louis was like Mary in our Gospel today, Zélie certainly was like Martha.

On Zélie’s statue, you will notice that she has lace on her collar and sleeves. Zélie was very gifted at making fine lace. She began her own business and was extremely successful. In fact, she was so successful that Louis decided to sell his watchmaking business and help his wife with the orders and purchasing materials.

From her letters, we learn that Zélie oftentimes struggled to keep up with the high demand of orders while simultaneously caring for her children. There were times she was extremely worried how she could keep up. Like many mothers today, she had to juggle a busy schedule of work, care for her children and aging parents. This is not to mention that both she and Louis lost four children under the age of five. The two knew suffering well, and relied upon God's strength through it all.

In Zélie's hands, you will notice that she holds a rosary. Zélie had a deep devotion to our Blessed Mother and praying the rosary. She often prayed for one of her daughters, Léonie, who was often sick and difficult. Later, it was revealed that the family maid had been abusing Léonie. Once removed from the family, Léonie's behavior and affection for her mother improved dramatically. Like many parents today, Zélie often needed to be patient with her children and pray for them. She supported them as best she could, and trusted that God would always provide.

Finally, we had the rosary added because in her early forties, Zélie became terribly sick with breast cancer. She and her three oldest daughters traveled to Lourdes to ask for the Blessed Mother's intercession for healing. Unfortunately, on the way, Zélie lost her sister's rosary, which was her most prized possession. Sadly, Zélie did not receive the healing she had hoped for and passed away just a couple of months later. She was just 45 years old. Now that she is heaven with Louis, we trust that she has received her rosary back. 😊

Louis and Zélie remind us that while family life is a great blessing, it is not easy. There is much suffering. Family members stretch you. There are moments of great joy, but also moments of disappointment, and pain. And yet, while we may not always see how, God is always there – working, support you, guiding you, stretching you to be more than you could ever be on your own. Louis and Zélie know your joys and struggles well, and as a couple in heaven, they will always be praying for our parish and your families, helping us and protecting us.

Be sure to stop often and ask for their intercession for your families and whatever you are doing through. Be assured that this saintly couple – great models of faith, hope, and love – will gladly pray for you and your families. May they be an inspiration and joy for you and for all who come to St. Thérèse! ~Saints Louis and Zélie Martin, pray for us!