

THE VISIT OF THE RELICS OF ST. THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS TO RUSSIA

February 27 – June 30, 1999

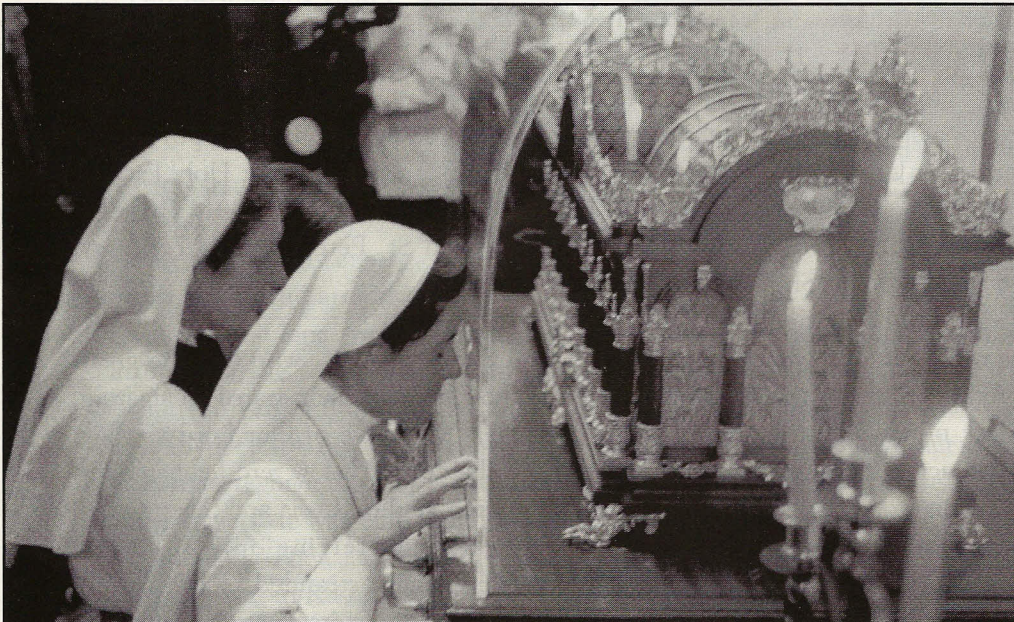
In 1929, Pope Pius XI declared St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus “Patron of the Russicum”, a seminary founded in Rome for the evangelization of Russia, and again in 1932 as a statement of his further commitment, His Holiness named her Protectress of Russia. He understood the terrifying climate in the Soviet Union and the malignant grip of Communism. The free world had been in the dark for the last three quarters of the twentieth century about the effects of this atheistic ideology on the Church and its people.

Only looking back, can we see “God’s” hand at work. It all began in 1988, when Sister Tamara, a member of the French international Community of Beatitudes was sent as a journalist to the former Soviet Union, to document and report the historic events surrounding the fall of the former Soviet Union. It was during her travels

through the Soviet Union that Sister Tamara got her first glimpse of the devastation this vast empire was experiencing. However, it was also during this time that the nuclear power plant explosion occurred in Chernobyl and Sister Tamara joined in the humanitarian efforts to give aid and support to the 4.9 million residents of this area suffering from illness due to the high dose of radiation emission and the devastating effects of millions of people left homeless.

In 1988 Sister Tamara was also privileged to witness and be part of the great event called “The Baptism of the Russ” – one thousand years of the birth of Christianity in Russia and the Ukraine. Sister established many relationships and friends, and in 1995 returned to France from Russia.

Returning from one of her visits in Russia, Sister met with Father Raymond Zambelli, the Rector of the Basilica of St. Thérèse in Lisieux and shared her experiences and desire to go further and deepen their commitment to the people of Russia. She requested that the relics of St. Thérèse be brought to Russia. After a long pause, she said, “He didn’t say yes, but he didn’t say no.” His only response was, “I will look into it.” In seconds, he realized the call of Jesus to begin the enormous task of evangelization through St. Thérèse, Patroness of the Missions and Protectress of Russia and its people. However,



Sister Tamara and Sister Cristelle venerating Relics of St. Thérèse

what also flashed through his mind was the extraordinary difficulties that would be encountered in a country that had been atheistic for over three quarters of the 20th Century, leaving its people with no knowledge of God, their former churches either destroyed or turned into libraries, offices or museums, and the brutal winter climate which would pose severe difficulties in the transportation of the relics. Father Zambelli was struck by the

enormity of "the call," and the difficult tasks ahead, and immediately asked that this divine inspiration be committed to prayer. However, Father Zambelli began to make contacts with the Catholic Church in the former Soviet Union. After much prayer and diplomatic engineering, Father Zambelli informed Sister Tamara and her community that she could begin preparations for the relics to travel throughout the former Soviet Union.

Sister Tamara had the name and address of one priest Father Alexandre Men, who had a prayer group. She stayed in contact with him for 4 1/2 years, as they joined in prayer and effort to bring Thérèse to Russia. Through his guidance and instruction, he informed Sister of the depth of devastation, poverty and lack of any spiritual awareness, and it was through her contact with Father Men, that she realized what her mission would be to prepare the people for the visit of Thérèse. Sister began to have the autobiography of St. Thérèse, *Story of a Soul* and Bishop Guy Gaucher's biography of St. Thérèse entitled *Story of a Life* translated into Russian. She had pictures of St. Thérèse printed, and hymns and music

translated into Russian. All was sent to the former Soviet Union to awaken these people to their sister Thérèse, who had never left them during their



Veneration of the Relics of St. Thérèse

unimaginable century of horror. It was during this final preparation that her only contact, Father Men was murdered by the K.G.B. because they were threatened by his religious convictions, leaving Sister Tamara with no contact in Russia.

However, with a lot of prayer and support, and the blessings and full permission of Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, Sister Tamara, and Sister Cristelle left Paris and arrived in St. Petersburg on February 27, 1999.

Sister Tamara and Sister Cristelle, who like the great saintly women of the Church, demonstrated an amazing courage, commitment and love of Our Lord as they persevered through the 20-30° below zero temperatures through the dark, frozen land of Russia and Siberia with no heat, no food, at times relying only on God's providence and many times, stranded in the frozen tundra as their van carrying Thérèse would stall from the cold.

At every city and village where Thérèse visited, both Sister Tamara and Sister Cristelle taught the people about Thérèse's Jesus, the merciful and loving God. They taught the hymns which the children loved, and Sister Cristelle, who is fluent in Russian, gave talks, answered questions, and repeated the love that God has for them. At each stop, people wanted more information about God and were left with a great deal of hope – the great gift of Thérèse.

What follows is an excerpt written by Father Pierre Dumoulan, Vice-Rector of the Catholic Seminary of Russia and translated by Father Donald Kinney, O.C.D. published in the magazine *Thérèse de Lisieux* (No. 790- June 1999 and No. 791-August, 1999) as well as two articles by Sister Tamara and an interview with Sister Tamara in France:

The pilgrimage of the relics of Thérèse across Russia was a shower of graces. It was the arrival of a friend, the long-awaited return of a sister. Thérèse, Patroness of the Missions and Protectress of Catholic Missions in Russia finally arrived. This pilgrimage had been in preparation for a long time. During the totalitarian regime, *Story of a Soul* circulated in Russia "under cover." It was edited and re-edited during the last ten years. Then last year the original manuscripts were published in Russian. And now hundreds of copies of Bishop Guy Gaucher's *Story of a Life* are being distributed. To prepare for the visit of the relics, days of

recollection were organized just about everywhere last year and holy cards were distributed. Finally here "she" is! For the faithful don't speak any more of "relics": it is Thérèse herself who is coming to visit her Church in distress. "She" is going to that parish, she will leave for that city, she will pass through my village!"



Relics of St. Thérèse enter Our Lady of Lourdes in St. Petersburg

Thérèse began her visit at the Catholic Seminary of Russia in St. Petersburg. (From there she set out on a pilgrimage of four months across European Russia, Katakstan, and Siberia.) This is the only Catholic seminary for the Russian language. For Thérèse, who entered Carmel to pray for priests this must have been quite something! She certainly was not disappointed by the welcome given her. When she arrived, the cathedral church was full. Fifty Seminarians in albs formed an honor guard and escorted her right up to the main altar where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed all afternoon. A reposoir was set up with..oh! what a wonder for this poor country freezing in the snow...bouquets of roses! Solemn Vespers and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed. Everyone was very moved: "She is here!" We felt it....Many people cried....Late into the night, there were still people praying before the reliquary. The next day, the church was full until the all-night vigil began, organized by the Seminarians. Everybody did their best: the seminarians had learned songs about Thérèse in Russian and accompanied them with their own instruments. Viktor played the violin,

Mirolave accompanied him on the guitar, Sergei played the organ, Sylvie Buisset from Lisieux sang in French, and Helena, a parishioner, sang solos. For three hours, the church was packed, and time seemed to stand still. The veneration of the relics was the most moving moment. The procession seemed as if it would never end. There were more than five hundred people this second evening!

A few days later, the relics arrived at Sacred Heart Church, a neo-gothic building which had been divided into four floors of offices, of which only one part on the ground floor and on the fourth floor have been returned to the Church. The ceremony was supposed to take place in the "Lenin Room," but it was impossible to get the reliquary through the doors. Thérèse refused to go into Lenin's Room! So for several hours hundreds of people filed by the reliquary out in the hallway. Some brought sick people: a young mother who has tuberculosis of the bone and who has difficulty getting out absolutely had to come with her husband, who himself has cancer. The deaf and the blind also came. There was much misery there, just as in Jesus' time "when he went about doing good and healing the sick" (Acts 10:38).

But this was only the beginning: the reliquary went to the Catholic parishes of St. Petersburg for a week, before going down toward Moscow, then they reached the shores of the Volga and the Black Sea, Siberia and even Vladivostock in the Far East, then on to Kazakhstan and the steppes of Central Asia. Thérèse wanted to be a missionary, and for the love of God she

shut herself up in a Carmel! She was certainly leaving it now! News of the relics was "flying like snow balls," crowds kept getting bigger, and each parish was preparing as best as it could.



St. Thérèse visited the Church of St. Vladimir

In order for you to understand what a "storm" of graces the presence of the relics brought about, I would like to tell you a few "fioretti" which I experienced personally.

The confessions were especially overwhelming. Many people went to confession for the first time or came back to the sacraments after many years. One night a man, after his confession, told me the drama of his life: his eldest daughter, who is 30, was raised under the atheistic regime. The parents did not dare send her to catechism. She was baptized, but said she did not believe. The same night, a woman spoke to me of an identical problem, and I guessed it was the wife of the first man. I just said to both: "Pray to Thérèse and tell your daughter, 'A priest is expecting you tomorrow, at the end of the vigil.' Don't say anything else. Don't force her. Offer, but don't insist." The next day, after the vigil, I heard confessions until midnight. Some people left the confessional in tears: I had never seen that. The last penitent was a young woman who entered sobbing and said, "Yesterday you said to my parents that you would be expecting me. I hesitated, but here I am." **Thérèse wanted to be a "fisher of souls."** The rest of what this young woman said is under the seal of confession, but when she left, she prayed for a long time at the reliquary, then she turned toward her parents and the three embraced emotionally.

Another little story: one night, the Missionaries of Charity brought a group of homeless people whom they care for and who are not religious, to visit Thérèse. At the end of the evening, following three hours of prayer, one of them was still there, his head in his hands. Was he sleeping? Was he drunk? A sister came up to him and shook him. "Let's go, Igor, we have to leave! Get up!" The man raised his face, and it was radiant. He pleaded, "Sister can't we stay. I haven't talked to God in so many years."

Two weeks after the visit of the relics, we are seeing

visible and lasting effects. Many non-believers are asking for books and photos of Thérèse, and they want to know more about God. In Sacred Heart Parish, two people came to ask to be baptized, "because of Thérèse" and a young woman felt the call to religious life while praying before the reliquary.

But especially Magghy, the young woman with tuberculosis of the bone, has found hope again after weeks of resignation and despair. She got up, is walking, smiles, and has faith: God loves her! Her doctors are astonished. They have been able to make an exact diagnosis, have found a treatment, and have decided spinal surgery would help her. Her husband is happy, and they have decided to get married in the Church. He told me, "How can it be that we have lived in the shadows for ten years?"

ST. PETERSBURG by: Sister Tamara

During little Thérèse's stay in St. Petersburg, a great many Catholics and even Orthodox came to pay

homage to her. We also went to visit the street people cared for by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. At St. Stanislaus Church, which was just given back to the Church three years ago, the poor parishioners couldn't believe their eyes. Thérèse was really there in their

midst, giving them the inner feeling of a grace, and an event which only comes once in a lifetime. Then she went to visit the sick in a hospital, specifically to the ward for the terminally ill, where Fr. George has a very beautiful ministry to the dying. We should also mention the welcome at Sacred Heart Church and

at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, which is the largest parish in European Russia. This parish, along with St. Louis's Church in Moscow, was the only one to stay open during the long years of religious persecution under Soviet regime. It was restored on the final visit of General Charles DeGaulle's visit to Russia.

On Sunday, March 7, we left St. Petersburg for Novgorod. We were welcomed with a very fervent celebration at the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. It was still snowing when we arrived at the poor and simple little parish church of St. Nicholas in Luga. It was cold, very cold, and the vehicle carrying the reliquary would not start. We had to call the local police, who came to help us in their uniforms. Then we continued on to Pskoff. There we prayed before the icon of Thérèse which had been painted especially for this occasion by the famous iconographer Fr. Zenon. Everyone wants to know where this icon will be after the pilgrimage of the relics. An idea arose very quickly. Why not build a little shrine to Thérèse in the heart of Russia at Pskoff? Wouldn't the icon be right at home here? We entrust all that to Divine Providence.



Van carrying the relics of St. Thérèse

MOSCOW

by: Sister Tamara

On Friday, March 12, we traveled 350 kms which separated us from Moscow, where we were expected at St. Louis's Church on Saturday, March 13 at 5:30 PM. Thérèse's first stop in Moscow was in Red Square, in front of the headquarters of the former K.G.B. The militia carried Thérèse on their shoulders, it was their first experience with someone "holy". They didn't know what to do. One took off his hat, than another. The next day they brought their wives and children. We thought we were dreaming. Everything was very well organized. A great banner adorned the front of the church. "Welcome Saint Thérèse." The Mass began to the sound of trumpets and fanfare. The church was packed. There were very many children present, and after the Mass they brought up bouquets of flowers to the reliquary. The next day, Laetare Sunday in the liturgy of Lent, there was a "High Mass" with many government officials and numerous delegations from different embassies. Father Le Leannec, the pastor of the parish, had invited Channel 2 and the press from France-Presse. The church was bursting with fervent people. The church was full all day long. Then, that night, as the snow fell there was a Rosary procession to the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul. Father Michael, an American priest who has ministered in Russia for several years, said to me on the way: "This is magnificent. There are no words to express what I feel." We returned to Moscow on Sunday, March 21, and the Apostolic Administrator Kondruciewicz celebrated a solemn Mass in the presence of the relics. The church was full for two days. Then we left for the Volga and Siberia. The reliquary was covered with flowers, and there were even orchids!



The poor of Siberia greet St. Thérèse with a reverent procession

SIBERIA:

An interview with Sister Tamara

The pilgrimage through Siberia was quite different and extremely difficult. It was a great adventure with many signs of God's blessings, and as difficult as it was, Sister Tamara said they never experienced one negative reaction, despite the local police and governmental bureaucracies.

The vastness of Siberia, the largest diocese in the world, encompasses 5 million square miles in Oriental Siberia alone, with only 24 priests and 13 religious. This area has no infrastructure, no means of communication, so letting people know of the arrival of Thérèse was by word of mouth. Sister Tamara said "We felt like the first apostles, like St. John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Our Lord...Thérèse would bring the loving Jesus to people that had felt forgotten for 80 years. We felt like the Israelites putting ourselves in the hands of God as they crossed the desert. but God gave us tremendous

strengths, support and perseverance. What we saw was total devastation, poverty beyond anyone's imagination in sub-zero temperatures, starving children begging for food and no food to give them, but at the same time Sister Tamara said Thérèse was showing us an immense field to harvest, yet the few priests and religious are exhausted, feel helpless and hopeless, and at times struggle and question their faith." One priest said, "Thérèse passes through Russia like one of those who sprinkles the earth with the blood of martyrs...I guess she's fertilizing us and bringing us back to life, showing us that Jesus truly loves us...He will never leave us."

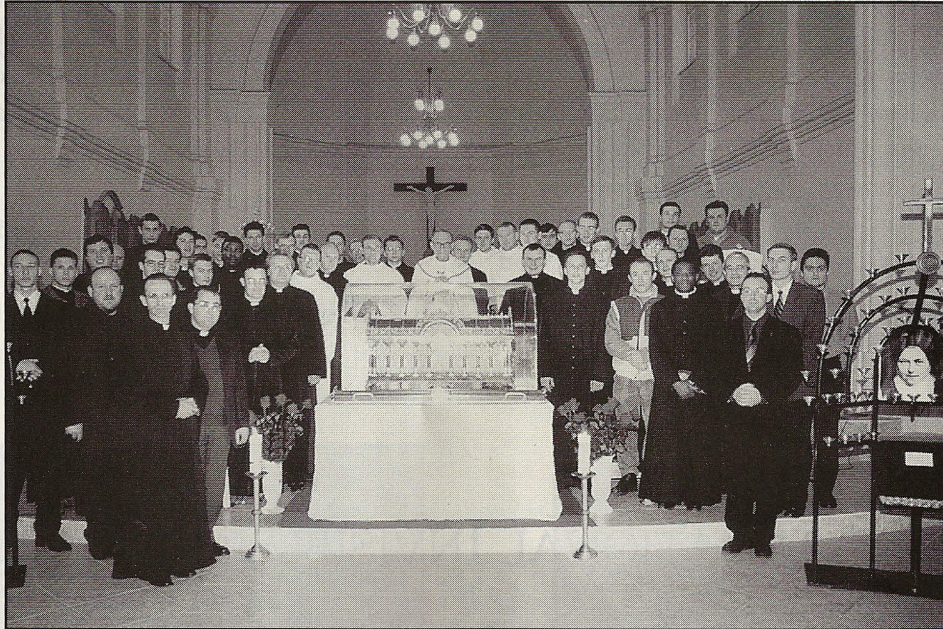
In Kazakhstan, a territory five times bigger than France, they estimate there are about 2 million Catholics and 40 priests. Most of the priests are in the north with not even the basics for existence. One priest said, "To live here,

you either have to be a saint, or question your sanity." The 80 years of Communism haven't demolished the structures of the Church, because it was never built, and most remnants of civilized society have been destroyed. Sister Tamara said, "Everything is still to be done—teaching and giving witness to the Gospels, taking care of people, evangelization, building churches, schools." She stated emphatically, "In passing, we were taken by the climate of dying, paralyses and desperation... priests live in this day after day... year after year, in just a short time we felt brought down by it... there's no hope, no money, no programs, no development... it's too big to build anything... the religious feel helpless. There is a lot of misery, poverty, suffering and violence. People are deported, killed in wars, families homeless, illness is rampant and untreated. These people are in need of our saving efforts and prayers. They need to come out of being forgotten".

At one point Sister said, "We were amazed how the young people came and gathered around Thérèse. There are no schools, no work, they grow up in nothingness, but Thérèse brought them HOPE – they came to wherever Thérèse came to visit with her, there they encountered God – Thérèse's God of love and mercy.

People walked for days and days in below zero temperatures in snow drifts of 10-15 feet high to wait in line for hours to see Thérèse, "our sister and our friend...we know she never forgot us." There were very

few churches, consequently, the relics were venerated in homes with no heat, no electricity, sitting in candle light on the floor, praying, crying, pleading for hours. At times, the snow drifts blocked the front door of the home where the relics were to be venerated. So, they resorted to lifting this 300 pound reliquary through a second floor window.



The entire seminarian class of the future priests of the Russian Catholic Church.

Thérèse that the old religious people could give to the young people. "The elderly folk just let their hearts speak" commented Sister Tamara. Most people didn't know what to do in a church and had no concept of prayer, but they came with flowers and kissed the relics of their special friend Thérèse, who came to see them in their poverty and misery. They greeted her like a long, lost family member, and left crying that their dear friend was leaving. Small children sat for hours and wanted to know more about her. They called her "little czarina" – "little queen" and wanted the picture of Thérèse at 8 years old to stay with them. **They repeatedly asked... "tell us about Thérèse's God."**

The people had never seen a nun, or a religious habit being worn. However, Thérèse looked like Sister Tamara and Sister Cristelle, and one little girl said, "Sister, I want to be like you when I grow up." Sister

During the Stalin era, 178,000 priests were arrested, and records show 109,000 priests died. However, despite this staggering devastation, there was an underground church. The old people knew Thérèse very well. It was through

Tamara said, "In being with these young people, I experienced a nursery of vocations – a hope for the Church".

For most people, Thérèse's coming to see them resulted in a profoundly deep conversion. And though the land mass of Siberia is enormous, and traveling was extremely arduous, Sister Tamara said, "The church of bits and pieces was unified through Thérèse."

As the relics of Thérèse travel from country to country, each collects different graces and fruits from her visit. Let us pray that we here in the United States may be filled with many graces, as has been the overwhelming experience world-wide, and may the people of God begin to know the merciful loving Jesus of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, our new Doctor of the Church.

Sister Tamara and Sister Cristelle returned to France deeply moved by their experience and the work of evangelization that was begun by Thérèse. Sister Tamara felt called to initiate the "Invisible Monastery" – a worldwide commitment from all priests, religious, and lay people to pray daily for the vocation of priests and their ministries and in particular, for the priests and their ministry in Russia, and like St. Thérèse, who never left her Carmel and became "Patroness of the Missions", Sister calls us to also become a patron of the missions by offering our prayers and daily acts of love to God for this intention.

by Dr. Fran Renda

THE INTERNATIONAL INVISIBLE MONASTERY

We encourage you to fill in the form below, so your name can be added to those already listed in the "International Invisible Monastery"

Dear Sister Tamara,

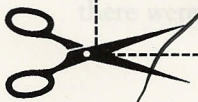
Yes, I feel privileged to be asked to offer my prayers with countless other people world-wide in the International Invisible Monastery. I will offer my prayers and daily acts of love to Our Lord, for all priests, and especially the priests and their ministry in Russia.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please return this form to the box located at the St. Thérèse Desk near the Fifth Avenue entrance of the Cathedral or mail to:

Invisible Monastery
 c/o Dr. Fran Renda
 St. Patrick's Cathedral
 14 East 51 Street
 New York, NY 10022



The official welcome of St. Thérèse to Moscow



In front of the offices of the K.G.B., Thérèse is carried by the Kremlin Guard.

A PICTORIAL ESSAY OF THE JOURNEY WITH SISTER TAMARA AND SISTER CRISTELLE AS THEY BRING ST. THÉRÈSE TO THE PEOPLE OF RUSSIA

This pictorial essay takes us through the four-month journey of the relics of St. Thérèse as she, Patroness of the Missions, brought back the merciful love of Jesus to the people of Russia.

The pictures that follow take us through Russia and Siberia, through brutal winter conditions – from cities to small peasant villages – from Red Square where the Kremlin guard stood at attention, to the small peasant homes where the faithful venerated through the night in candle light.

St. Thérèse's powerful impact – to bring the love of Christ to the "Five corners of the world" – is evident in this pictorial story.



The elderly, their faith still alive after so many years, say thank you Thérèse for not forgetting them.



Kremlin Guard stand at attention before the Blessed Sacrament with the relics of St. Thérèse.

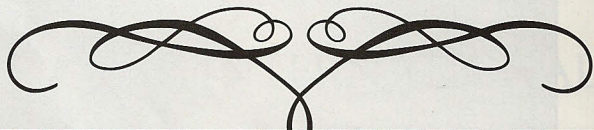
Photographs used with permission of
Father Raymond Zambelli, Rector, St. Thérèse Basilica, Lisieux, France.
The Community of Beatitudes, Dominique Lefèvre, Sister Tamara, Sister Cristelle



The sisters help to teach the faithful the Rosary as they went from home to home bringing Therese and her message of the love of Jesus to the people of Russia.



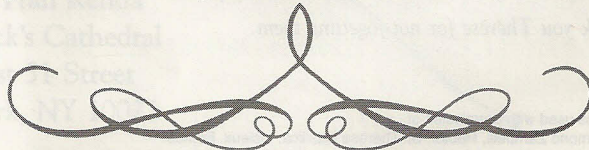
Sisters lead procession through the village of Marx directing the faithful in prayer.



People walking for miles in the snow to venerate the relics of Thérèse at the Church of St. Vladimir

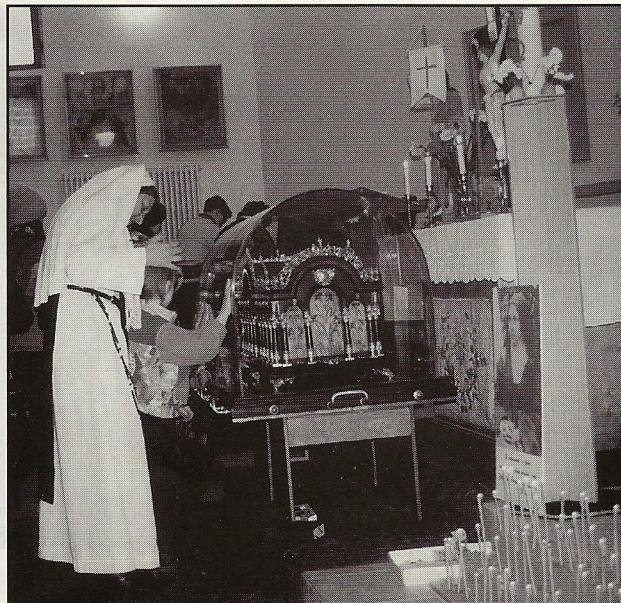


Snow drifts make it impossible for relics to enter ground floor. Town folk persevere in bringing relics to their home for veneration.





In Talmenka, a new religious community – Sisters of Mary – Co-Redemtrix, before the relics of St. Thérèse



In Tcheliabensk, children came to say hello to their “little czarina” St. Thérèse. One little girl asked, “Sister, can I be like you when I grow up?”



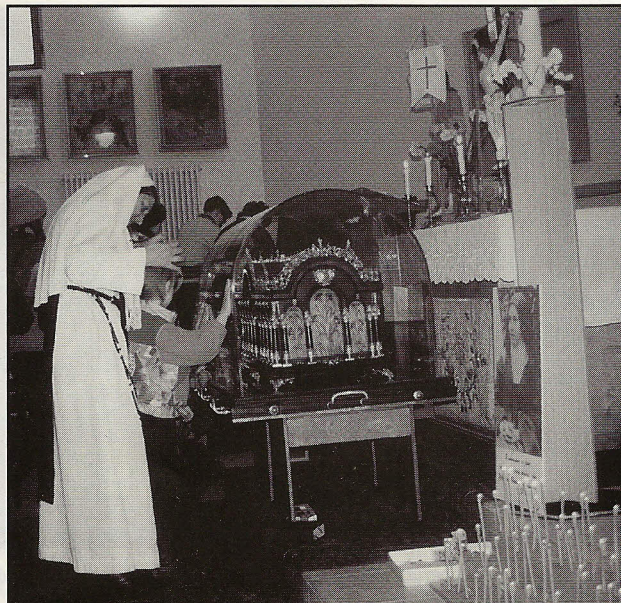
In Sousdal, snow drifts and sub-zero temperatures did not prevent people from coming to venerate the relics.



In Irkoutsk, Sister Tamara, standing, and Sister Cristelle, with two priests, before their talk on the life and spirituality of St. Thérèse



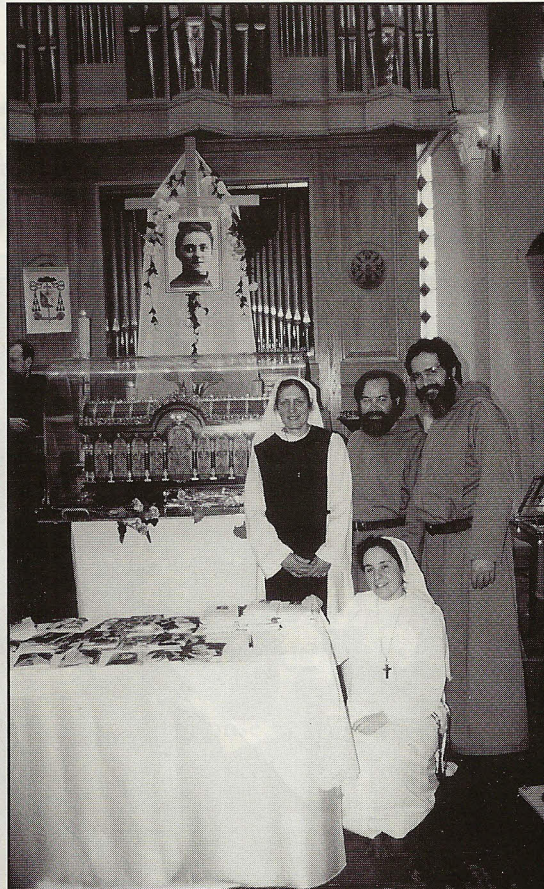
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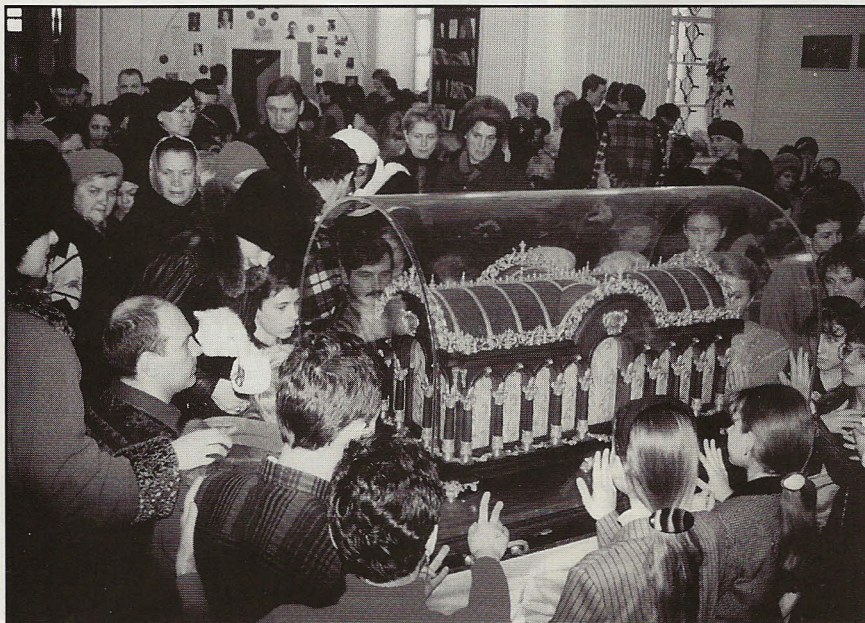
In Irkoutsk, Sister Tamara, standing, and Sister Cristelle, with two priests, before their talk on the life and spirituality of St. Thérèse



In Prokopiesk, Siberia, the elderly faithful came to thank St. Thérèse for her faithfulness.



The faithful in Siberia pray before the relics of St. Thérèse.



Children and the faithful venerate the relics – Sister Tamara said – “I felt this was a nursery of vocations. there is hope for the Church in Russia”