



September 24  
Ephesus



October 1 - The "Old Town" of Rhodes

WISH YOU  
WERE HERE



**Rhodes:**

**On Paul's Third Missionary Journey (52-57 AD), disciples in Rhodes warned Paul not to go back to Jerusalem (fearful that he would be killed).**

“The final goal at which this instruction aims is love, issuing from pure heart, a clear conscience and a sincere faith.

Some people have missed the way to these things and turned to empty speculation, trying to be teachers of the Law; but they understand neither the words they use nor the matters about which they make such strong assertions.

We are well aware that the Law is good, but only provided it is used legitimately, on the understanding that laws are not framed for people who are upright. Rather, they are for criminals and insubordinate, for the irreligious and the wicked, for the sacrilegious and the godless.”

(1 Timothy 1:5-9a)

My dear Little Flower - co-pilgrims on the journey,

As we mark the Feast Day of Saint Therese, we embark on a continued journey of pilgrimage. Today, we celebrate her feast day!

Who is this revered figure known as Saint Therese of Lisieux?

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, also known as "The Little Flower," was a French Carmelite nun who lived from 1873 to 1897. She is known for her "Little Way" of spirituality, which emphasizes doing small, everyday actions with great love for God. Thérèse believed that it was not necessary to do great deeds to achieve holiness, but rather to approach life with simplicity, humility, and trust in God's love. Her autobiography, "The Story of a Soul", details her spiritual insights and journey, and it has inspired countless people worldwide.

Pilgrims who visit Lisieux often seek spiritual inspiration from Thérèse's life and teachings. Many feel a deep connection to her "Little Way". Some pilgrims visit to ask for her intercession in personal matters, healing, or guidance, believing in her powerful advocacy from heaven. They may also visit her relics and her incorrupt body (though not fully incorrupt, her remains are venerated at the Lisieux basilica) as a tangible link to her holiness and her presence in their faith journey.

Saint Thérèse is indeed a very popular saint, not only in France but worldwide. As modern-day pilgrims, we seek her companionship on our spiritual journeys. In moments of adversity, we implore her to bestow upon us the promised "shower of roses," a symbolic manifestation of answered prayers, as she pledged before her mortal departure.

St. Therese, the Little Flower,  
*pray for us.*

We arrive in Rhodes - a prominent island in the Aegean Sea. Rhodes played a notable role during St. Paul's missionary journeys, particularly as a strategic stopover. Although the Book of Acts does not detail extensive activities by Paul on the island of Rhodes, the island's geographical and cultural significance cannot be overlooked.

*"After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara.*

*We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail".*

*(Acts 21:1-12)*

During the 1st century, when St Paul visited Rhodes, the island was a significant cultural and commercial center in the Mediterranean. Its historical and cultural context played a crucial role in shaping the environment in which Paul ventured to evangelize.



Rhodes was strategically located at the crossroads of major maritime routes, making it a vital port for trade and travel. This position allowed for the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures, facilitating interactions between various peoples, including Greeks, Romans, and Jews. The island's political stability under Roman rule, at that time, contributed to its prosperity and made it an attractive stop for travelers like Paul. On the island, a legacy of rich cultural heritage dating back to ancient Greek religion flourished. Among the impressive architectural accomplishments of this heritage was the Colossus of Rhodes. This majestic statue of the sun god Helios stood in the ancient Greek city of Rhodes and was revered as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This cultural backdrop provided a vibrant setting for Paul's missionary activities, as he encountered a populace steeped in Hellenistic traditions and philosophies. The blending of cultures on Rhodes created an environment ripe for dialogue and exchange of ideas.



Rhodes was home to a variety of religious practices, including traditional Greek polytheism and various mystery religions. This religious pluralism meant that Paul had the opportunity to engage with a wide range of beliefs. His ability to articulate the Christian message in a way that resonated with both Jews and Gentiles was essential for his mission. The presence of Jewish communities on the island also provided a platform for Paul to preach in synagogues, as he often did in other cities like Philippi and Corinth.

The economy of Rhodes was robust, driven by trade, agriculture, and craftsmanship. The island was known for its production of high-quality goods, including textiles and pottery. This economic vitality attracted a diverse population, including merchants and travelers, which would have provided Paul with numerous opportunities to share his message with a broad audience.

The 1st century was a time of significant philosophical thought, with schools of philosophy such as Stoicism and Epicureanism influencing the intellectual climate. Paul's interactions with the educated elite on Rhodes would have been shaped by these prevailing ideas, allowing him to frame his teachings in ways that were relevant to his audience. His ability to engage with philosophical concepts would have enhanced his effectiveness as a missionary.

Sometimes, we pass through places or experiences that seem insignificant and unrelated to our own spiritual journey in life. But after prayer and reflection, we are gifted with the Holy Spirit; we discover that every step in our pilgrimage has a significant value. Like Paul, we should remain faithful and focused on our spiritual mission (remember our spiritual goals) even in the seemingly small, mundane or temporary phases of life.

Life's transitions - whether moving, changing jobs, or experiencing challenges - can all contribute to our own spiritual growth. Though nothing extraordinary is recorded about Paul's time in Rhodes, it serves as a reminder that not every moment in life needs to be dramatic for God to be at work. Often, spiritual growth happens in the mundane and everyday experience - often, unnoticed and in the quiet places of the heart. Our pilgrimage is not only about mountaintop experiences, but also about finding meaning in the daily, routine parts of life.



Paul's "*Little Ways*" back to Jerusalem was part of a larger mission. Rhodes was one stop along his journey, but his destination was clear to him, and he trusted God through every phase of it. Similarly, we must trust the path that God lays before us, even if each step isn't fully understood: "Your words are lamp upon my feet..." - *It is enough for the Lord to show us each step - sometimes, we do not have to see the big picture yet, in order to move forward in faith...* "For we walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Trust that every stop - whether full of clarity or depleted with certainty - is part of God's greater plan for your life. Like Paul, we are on a journey of faith, where each step invites us to serve our purpose - each step is intentional.

Like our stop at Veria, the one at Rhodes celebrates the briefest moments of connections with others. Even the briefest moments of connection with others can have a lasting impact. Our faith journey is not just about where we are going, but how we impact others along the way.

As we continue our journey and pilgrimage, we can see how even the minor details of our journey - those that seem less dramatic or impactful - are all part of God's divine plan. Our pilgrimage, like St. Paul's, is shaped by both the quiet moments of travel and the great significant and memorable moments.

Your parish priest,  
Fr JC Merino



## *Reading*

**“We are God’s co-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But each one must be careful how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:9-11).**

## *Reflecting on St. Paul with Pope Benedict XVI*

**“The Apostle helps us to understand ever more deeply the mystery of the Church in her different dimensions as an assembly of God in the world. This is the greatness of the Church and the greatness of our call; we are a temple of God in the world, a place in which God truly dwells, and at the same time we are a community, a family of God who is love. As a family and home of God, we must practice God’s love in the world and thus, with the power that comes from faith, be a place and a sign of his presence” (General Audience, Oct. 15, 2008).**

## *Prayer*

**Dear St. Paul, help us to grow in our love for and devotion to the Church, each doing our part to give Christ glory and help it grow. And hear all the desires of my heart. Amen.**

*Our Father ...*

*Hail Mary ...*

*Glory Be ...*

*St. Paul the Apostle, pray for us!*