

# REEL REVIEW

## ★★★★ *Therese Hippodrome*

Director Alain Cavalier's beautiful *Therese* is a film about pure, unconditional love: love of the world, love of life in a convent and, above all, love of God.

Gorgeously photographed by cinematographer Edward Rousset, it is a gentle meditation on the life of Therese, a Carmelite nun who spent her days in sweet devotion to Jesus.

As a young woman, Therese longed to join her two older sisters in the Carmelite convent — a very strict order. But the move was resisted by the local hierarchy which feared rumors that a man who sent three daughters into religious life was suspiciously zealous. It was a cruel irony for her father because he loved Therese best of all and her eventual departure would break his heart.

And Therese finally did get her wish — after pleading her case to everyone from the local monsignor to the pope himself. Once admitted to the convent, she blooms. The other nuns fondly nickname her "Little Sister Amen," because she is so thoughtful and kind.

When Therese becomes sick, one of the nuns chides her that "no one will pray for you" because they know she will just direct their prayers towards others. "So why waste them?" Therese finishes laughingly.

It is a quietly convincing scene, and a telling one because we never question the underlying message

of faith. For Therese, prayer is as common and necessary as eating and sleeping — in fact, even more necessary, for she frequently and happily deprives herself of both to prove her love for Jesus.

Some movies — especially American ones — flit by in an instant, a rush of energy and excitement.

But *Therese* is different. It creates a story so real and convincing that it becomes hard to remember anything else. We are so absorbed in Therese's world that our own fades into memory.

*Therese* is strikingly photographed and deeply moving. Each scene is a pristine tableau, using minimal settings and vivid images to create a powerful, almost surreal atmosphere. It's as if the film was staged only for our edification, a morality tale with only one message: in life, faith can be the question *and* the answer.

By Michael Giltz