

The world revolves; the Cross stands still

By Heather King, Keynote Speaker at the USA National Gathering

“Women helping women” is the slogan of Theresians International.

At their annual gathering, held this year in New Orleans, I saw that ethos embodied and lived out.

Months before the event, co-organizer Robin Hebert invited me to be the keynote speaker. As the author of *Shirt of Flame: A Year with St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, I found this a great honor. Plus I'd been to NO once before and had yet to scarf down a po'boy. This, I felt, was a major blot on the account I will be called to give one day when the sheep are separated from the goats. So I said yes forthwith.

I was to give four talks. If you've never been on the planning end of such an event, let me say that before all else, it involves exchanging approximately 800 emails: the fee, the contract, the discussion topics, the flight, the head shot and bio, the promotional material for flyers, the particulars of the book-selling.

From bitter experience, I emphasized up front: “I *must* have some dear woman who will sit with me at the book table and help sell books.” I'll show her how to use the Square app on my phone, super easy. But it's impossible to schmooze, inscribe, sign, and look into people's eyes with the genuine understanding, curiosity and gratitude I inevitably feel while also taking people's cash, checks and/or credit cards.

I have patiently given this little spiel a hundred times. Once I was assigned a gal in her 90s who was let's say technologically innocent and who, when I tried to hand her my cell phone, jumped back as if I'd lobbed her a live grenade. I've had tweens who spent the whole time texting. Mostly, my concerns go in one ear and out the other. *C'mon*, I can hear my hosts thinking. *How hard can it be to sit around and sell a few books?*

Enter Sheryl Lyons, Esq. Sheryl stepped up to the plate mid-afternoon on Friday. First thing she did was to fashion a sign listing the prices, a little detail I myself had overlooked.

My first talk was to be at 7:30 that night. The two of us ended up sitting there gabbing, selling, swapping stories, and chatting up the women who were buying till almost 7.

Then she sat with me again after the talk, stowed several boxes of books for the night, and before I retired to my room, presented me with a stack of bills, neatly sorted and wrapped with a rubber band.

She was there the next morning, solid, cheerful, steady, at 8 a.m. By that time I had realized an interesting fact about Sheryl: she knows basically everybody in New Orleans,

Lafayette, and all points in between. Every woman who stepped up turned out to have taught Sheryl, or to have had a son who'd been in school with one of Sheryl's sons, or to have been a spouse, cousin third-removed, or nephew of someone who was also a Louisiana lawyer. I learned that Sheryl had flooded not only during Katrina, but a second time, after she'd moved to Lafayette. I learned the names of her kids. I learned the meaning of debris as a Cajun foodstuff. I learned of a prayer called the Litany of Trust.

I had two talks that day. Sheryl and I sold books before and after. We sat together at the Vigil Mass at Immaculate Conception. She walked me to a convenience store so I could buy some aspirin.

She did a hundred other little things to make my stay go smoother, that allowed me to shine, that freed up my attention so I could talk and share with the legions of splendid, warm women who stopped by the table. She was my companion, and I don't know what I would have done without her.

She didn't have to do it. No-one was paying her to do it. She just quietly, steadfastly, more or less sacrificed her weekend.

There's a certain current in contemporary "feminism" that shuns such service, based on the fatally mistaken notion that we're thereby allowing men to do all the "important" work and make money. I couldn't disagree more. Such service *is* the most important work. It holds the world together for all women, all men, all children.

Sheryl was just one of the women who gave hours of their time, their talents, and their hearts to make the weekend possible. Christ and Thérèse were very much in our midst. Back out we have now gone, each on our "little Way."

Women helping women—and thus helping the world.

Stat crux dum volvitur orbis. The world revolves; the Cross stands still.