

Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Sacred Heart Church

5 September 2018

Dear Father Garry; consecrated men and women, especially dear Missionaries of Charity and cooperators here in the Archdiocese to whom we owe our gratitude for being witnesses to your Foundress's love of Jesus thirsting on the Cross and service of the poorest of the poor; and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

It is a joy for us to gather to celebrate the feast of Mother Teresa, and I thank Father Garry for inviting us to his church and the Sisters who want to share the happiness of this occasion with us.

Touching Jesus in the Eucharist and in the Poor

While the world rightly praises Mother Teresa for the corporal works of mercy she carried out so zealously, I think it is important for us to remember that everything she did began in prayer. Because she prayed, blessing Lord at all times despite long periods of interior darkness, she could embrace people in their suffering. With the eyes of faith she saw in the living presence of Jesus.

“We are not social workers,” Mother used to say, but “we are first and foremost contemplatives.” For her, the Christian life was not merely extending a hand in times of need. If it is just this and nothing more, it can certainly be an authentic expression of human solidarity but will lack depth without the roots of love. Mother recognized that “the task

which the Lord gives us, on the contrary, is the vocation to charity in which each of Christ's disciples puts his or her entire life at his service, so to grow each day in love."¹

The love of God, coming to experience "not that we have loved God," as St. John wrote, "but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10) begins in contemplation, in seeing into the depths of reality where God is. And, because the Lord became flesh and is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, we can really touch him in our brothers and sisters.

Mother Teresa saw an unbreakable link between these two forms of Jesus' presence in our world: in the Eucharist and in the "least of the little ones," the poorest of the poor. She often told her Sisters that the way in which the priest touches the Body of Christ at Mass is how they "should handle the same Body of Christ in the suffering bodies of men."²

¹ Francis, Homily, Mass of Canonization (4 September 2016).

² Both citations from the pamphlet by Paul Chetcuti, *Choosing to Serve the Destitute* (Dublin: Irish Messenger Publications, 1980), 11.

She continued to meet the Christ she worshipped and received in the Eucharist on the roads and streets of the city, in the poorest of the poor. “Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). This Gospel passage of today was crucial to Mother Teresa’s understanding of her vocation. “It was to Jesus himself, hidden under the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor, that her service was directed. Mother Teresa highlights the deepest meaning of service – an act of love done to the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, prisoners (cf. Mt 25: 34-36) is done to Jesus himself.”³ Mother recognized that such service was not easy; it was a grace that demanded the response faith to accept the sacrifice entailed. With feet-planted-on-the-ground realism, she once said: “One cannot love, unless it is at their own expense.”⁴

In the night of human sorrow – and a night she also knew in her own spiritual life – she made the light of divine Love shine out and helped so many hearts to rediscover that peace which God alone can give. To countless men and women in wretched situations of suffering, she brought consolation and the certainty that God never abandons

³ St. John Paul, Homily, Mass of Beatification (19 October 2003), 4.

⁴ Cited by Francis, Video Message to TED Conference in Vancouver (26 April 2017).

anyone, that each person is precious, a marvel in his eyes.⁵

Particularly significant today – when people flee from the suffering of life as it passes into eternity – is how Mother Teresa stooped down before those who were left to die at the side of the road, consoling them and reassuring them of God’s love for them.

⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address to Rome’s Neediest (26 December 2010).

Many told her – and they might tell us today as well: “Mother, this is a waste of time!” Yet she persisted in finding people dying on the street, and she took them home so they could die clean, calm, touched gently, naturally and in peace.⁶

Surely, if we are to honour her memory we are all called to do likewise: to accompany, to respect and console the suffering and dying among us.

Witness to Joy

A singular mark of Mother Teresa’s life was her joy, a radiance reflected on her wrinkled face. Even though she lived in touch daily with degradation and death, like a Gothic Madonna she gave everyone God’s smile. In one of her books, she wrote: “We wait impatiently for paradise, where God is, but it is in our power to be in paradise even here on earth and from this moment. Being happy with God means loving like him, helping like him, giving like him, serving like him.”⁷

Following Jesus is a serious task, and, at the same time, one filled with joy; it takes a certain daring and courage to recognize the divine Master in the poorest of the poor and those who are cast aside, and to give oneself in their service. In order to do so, those who out of love of

⁶ Francis, Homily, Mass of Canonization (4 September 2016).

⁷ Mother Teresa, *The Joy of Giving to Others* (1987), 143.

Jesus serve the poor and the needy, do not expect any thanks or recompense; rather they renounce all this because they have discovered true love.

That's why they can say, as Pope Francis recounts:

Just as the Lord has come to meet me and has stooped down to my level in my hour of need, so too do I go to meet him, bending low before those who have lost faith or who live as though God did not exist, before young people without values or ideals, before families in crisis, before the ill and the imprisoned, before refugees and immigrants, before the weak and defenceless in body and spirit, before abandoned children, before the elderly who are on their own. Wherever someone is reaching out, asking for a helping hand in order to get up, this is where our presence – and the presence of the Church which sustains and offers hope – must be.⁸

⁸ Francis, Homily, Mass of Canonization (4 September 2016).

True joy will, then, enter our hearts, as it did St. Teresa's, if we put ourselves at the service of the Gospel, a Gospel which gives pride of place to service of the lowly and poor. "God abides in those who love like this and their souls rejoice."⁹

Once again, I want to thank the Missionaries of Charity, their cooperators and friends, because your life bears witness to "where true joy is to be found: in sharing, in giving, in loving with the same gratuitousness as God, which breaks all the logic of human selfishness."¹⁰

Conclusion

St. Teresa of Calcutta is light to the world and to us gathered here. She is a gift of God to our world hungering for meaning and, ultimately to love and to be loved. Entirely consumed by a thirst for souls, like Jesus on the Cross, she gave herself to those abandoned by this world and radiated – for did truly shine – God's love for each person. Mother Teresa is a teacher of holiness for all of us, revealing through her wrinkled visage the face of Christ that shone in her.

The greatest gift of Mother Teresa to the Church will not be her memory, as beautiful and inspiring as it is, but that she has helped to

⁹ Benedict XVI, Angelus (16 December 2007).

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Reflection (26 December 2010).

give rise to other saints, that she has helped to awaken in us a desire to serve Jesus without reserve and in all things, especially among the poorest of the poor and the most marginalized.

St. Teresa of Calcutta remains a shining example and sign full of fascination for our time of how a life founded on the love of Jesus and radical service of others can be the source of profound joy.

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