

**Mass of Thanksgiving for the Canonization of St. Teresa of Calcutta
St. Mary's Church
Plainfield, New Jersey
September 5, 2016**

On the Feast of St. Teresa of Calcutta, we offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice to thank Almighty God for the canonization of a woman known and loved by the world! We are all here because Mother Teresa, I am sure, has touched our lives in a beautiful and significant way. I am confident that each of you has a story about the little woman who was canonized yesterday by Pope Francis.

As Father chanted the Gospel of the Last Judgment so movingly, I could not help but think of Jesus saying these words to Mother Teresa as she entered Heaven and at the same time, challenging us to do the works that she has done so marvelously:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

We are celebrating this Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Mary's Church in Plainfield, NJ because Mother Teresa has touched this parish in a beautiful and significant way. As most of you know, the parish convent is the USA novitiate of the contemplative branch of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity. Let me tell you

how the Sisters came to be here. In 1946 Fr. Harold Colgan, Pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Plainfield, founded the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima (the World Apostolate of Fatima). The purpose of the spiritual movement was to spread the message the Blessed Mother gave the world at Fatima, Portugal in 1917. In 1946 Fr. Colgan only envisioned a Marian prayer group for his parish. For various reasons, this movement spread beyond St. Mary's Parish to other parishes and far beyond the Archdiocese of Newark. In a very short time, the Blue Army went viral, with a National center and shrine in Washington, NJ and an international center in Fatima, Portugal.

In 1987, Bishop Edward Hughes, then Bishop of the Diocese of Metuchen asked Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, then Archbishop of Newark, to release me from my parish duties to serve as National Director of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima and Rector of the Shrine of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Washington, NJ. Around the same time, Mother Teresa invited me to come to Calcutta to preach two retreats to the Indian superiors of the Missionaries of Charity on St. Louis de Montfort's Total Consecration to Our Lady. The coincidence of invitations offered me an opportunity to *negotiate* with Mother. I told her that I would happily come to Calcutta if she would visit the Blue Army Shrine during her next trip to the States. She graciously accepted the invitation.

June 13, 1988 was the day of Mother's visit to the shrine. One report claimed that 25,000 people came that day. I don't think there were that many people, but it was a huge crowd. After the Mass, Archbishop McCarrick publicly invited Mother to establish a community of sisters at St. Mary's Convent in Plainfield. On the spot, Mother accepted the invitation. The convent would be the novitiate of the contemplative branch of the Missionaries of Charity. The Sisters have been here ever since praying in a special way for the priests and people of St. Mary's Parish

and serving the poor. The presence of Mother Teresa's daughters at St. Mary's parish explains why this Mass of Thanksgiving is being celebrated in this Church visited several times by the new Saint.

As I prepared this homily a remarkable promise that Jesus made the night before he died kept coming to my mind. I think you will agree that this promise was wonderfully fulfilled in the life of St. Teresa of Calcutta: *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.* Jesus is telling his disciples that because of the presence of His Spirit in them, they will do his works and will do even greater works than he did.

Through the Spirit of Jesus living in her, Mother Teresa did the works of Christ that we call the *Corporal Works of Mercy*: She fed the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty. She not only visited the sick but took them into her home. She went to prisoners to comfort them. The homeless, orphans, the handicapped in body and mind, lepers, AIDS victims found a loving shelter in her homes. She tended the dying with great love in the famous Home for the Dying in Calcutta – named the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She gave everything that was given to her to the poor. Encouraging everyone to trust in the providence of the Heavenly Father, Mother Teresa inspired so many people to give alms – *until it hurts* – to the needy.

Mother also performed the *Spiritual Works of Mercy*. She was passionately concerned that all people have the opportunity to know Christ Jesus. Consequently, she insisted that the Missionaries of Charity have a thorough knowledge of Catholic doctrine as well as the skill of handing on that faith, especially to children. In this context, I cannot fail to mention Sister Frederick, a native of Malta, now 100 years old, who lived in the South Bronx for many years as regional superior for the U.S.A. After she returned to Calcutta, she established

the *Gift of Faith* at Mother's request and with the help of Fr. John Hardon, S.J. This site became a kind of M.C. *College* for future formators and catechists. Mother was convinced that authentic charity is only sustained by a solid life of faith!

Filled with the prophetic Spirit, Mother begged bishops and priests to be faithful to the teachings of Christ and the Church and to hand on that doctrine through the ministry of the Word. She was deeply pained by the secularization and liberalization of some of the clergy and religious men and women, realizing that these trends would silence the authentic proclamation of the Gospel in society and decelerate the Church's works of charity.

Mother did not hesitate to highlight chastity as an essential component of every Christian's life. She urged young people to preserve their virginity until marriage. She pleaded with married people to be faithful to each other until death and receive children joyfully from God. To support marital chastity, many of the Missionaries of Charity have been trained to teach *Natural Family Planning* to the poor throughout the world. Mother was deeply grieved by the so-called *sexual revolution*. She knew that the sins of fornication and adultery would lead many to the sin of abortion. In 1982, she addressed the graduates of Harvard University. Listen to her words:

It is very beautiful that a young man loves a young woman and a young woman loves a young man. How beautiful it is! But, love each other with a pure heart. Have something beautiful to give each other. Make this resolution, that on your wedding day you can give each other something beautiful. The most beautiful thing is to give a virgin heart, a virgin body, a virgin soul. That's the greatest gift that the young man can give the young woman, and that the young woman can give the man.

This is something we must all pray for our young people: that the joy of loving gives them joy in the sacrifice. It is a sacrifice that they must learn to share

together. And, if a mistake has been made, have the courage to accept that child and not to destroy it. Because that's sin: it's a murder. That sin is a greater sin: to destroy the image of God, to destroy the most beautiful creation of God that is life. And so, today when we are together, let us pray. Let us pray for each other that we may love God as He loves us.

Perhaps Mother's greatest concern was the protection of the unborn whom she considered the most vulnerable members of our society, truly the *poorest of the poor*. On February 5, 1994 at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC, in the presence of the then President Bill Clinton and the first lady, Hillary Clinton, Mother made this impassioned plea:

I will tell you something beautiful. We are fighting abortion by adoption - by care of the mother and adoption for her baby. We have saved thousands of lives. We have sent word to the clinics, to the hospitals and police stations: "Please don't destroy the child; we will take the child." So we always have someone tell the mothers in trouble: "Come, we will take care of you, we will get a home for your child." And we have a tremendous demand from couples who cannot have a child - but I never give a child to a couple who have done something not to have a child. Jesus said. "Anyone who receives a child in my name, receives me." By adopting a child, these couples receive Jesus but, by aborting a child, a couple refuses to receive Jesus.

Please don't kill the child. I want the child. Please give me the child. I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child.

Mother Teresa understood that every human person is poor. With a spiritual magnetic force, she was drawn to those who did not have the ordinary necessities of life, but her heart also ached for the lonely, and perhaps affluent, aged person, the lonely young person who tries to fill up his or her loneliness with promiscuous sex. She suffered for the priest or religious who lived in the darkness of tepidity and worldliness. Her heart broke for all the women who live with the sadness of having had an abortion. Her heart bled for the child who was unloved.

The Holy Spirit living in her heart taught Mother Teresa that there is no man, woman, or child who does not yearn to be loved by the Lord and to love Him in return. I believe we all love Mother because we know that she understands our personal poverty and loves us in our poverty, whatever form that poverty takes in our lives.

Some say, recklessly I believe, that Mother Teresa experienced the *dark night of the soul* for decades. According to my understanding, the *dark night*, as explained by St. John of the Cross, is a painful period of purification from sin and selfishness. The Holy Spirit purges the Christian in the *dark night* to make him or her share in the selfless *agape-love* of Jesus for the Father and for all others.

Yes, Mother was in darkness and desolation for years but her suffering, I believe, was very much like the suffering of St. Therese of Lisieux. Both Saints had been profoundly purified in the love of God very early in their lives. Both loved Jesus so much that He gave them a great gift – the gift of sharing in his desire – his passion -for the love of every human person.

At the heart of the spiritual life of each of these Saints was Jesus' cry from the cross: ***I THIRST***. Both understood that Jesus was thirsting for the love of every person for whom he was dying. Both accepted the darkness and offered their pain in communion with Jesus to draw those farthest from him to his heart. St. Therese of Lisieux suffered especially for priests who had lost their faith; St. Teresa of Calcutta suffered for the victims of poverty in all its forms. So many people love Mother Teresa because they instinctively sense that her love, like the love of the Little Flower, is the fiery love of the Holy Spirit, the merciful love of the crucified Christ, the tender love of the Heavenly Father for his wounded children.

Mother Teresa's way to holiness is truly a *little way*, a simple way. Perhaps we can form three simple resolutions today to honor Mother on her first feast day as a Saint:

- Mother beckons us to find and love Jesus in everyone we meet, especially when he comes into our lives in *the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor*.
- She urges us to have boundless confidence in our Blessed Mother's loving care for us. I asked Mother once to tell me how she founded the Missionaries of Charity. She said very simple: *Mary pleaded for the poor and Jesus gave me the grace to serve them*. Mother often said, *nothing is impossible for the person who has Mary as his or her Mother*. Important to note: Mother Teresa loved St. Louis de Montfort's classic, *True Devotion to Mary* and encouraged everyone to make his *Act of Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary*.
- Mother spent hours each day in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. She encouraged everyone to find the power to love as Jesus loves in the Eucharist. She knew that Jesus in the Eucharist will teach us, as he had taught her, how to *do something beautiful for God*.

The prayer that Mother said so often draws together the three foundation stones of her holiness: finding Jesus in everyone we meet, having boundless confidence in the Mother of God, and drawing our power to love from the Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist:

Mary, Mother of Jesus, give me your Heart: so beautiful, so pure, so immaculate; your Heart so full of love and humility that I may be able to receive Jesus in the Bread of Life and love Him as you love Him and serve Him in the distressing guise of the poor. Amen.

Reverend Frederick L. Miller