

# The Beatification of a Missionary of Love

On World Mission Sunday, October 19, 2003, Pope John Paul II solemnly declared Mother Teresa of Calcutta Blessed. Once again, the call which Jesus addressed to Mother Teresa in 1946, “Come be My light”, rang out through St. Peter’s Square as a call to all Christians to shed the light of Christ upon the darkness of our culture of death.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, one of the most extraordinary figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, died at 9:30 p.m. on September 5, 1997. She was a great saint of our times, the most celebrated and admired woman of the modern world. On December 25, 1948, at the age of 38, prompted by Jesus’ call, she left the Sisters of Loreto to embark on her new mission of serving the poorest of the poor. She founded the congregation of the Missionaries of Charity, which, by the year of her death, numbered nearly 4000 members working in 610 houses in 123 countries of the world. She held many of the world’s highest awards: India’s “Padmashri” and “Pandit Nehru”, the Philippines’ “Magsaysay” (1962), the John XXIII Peace Prize (1971), the Templeton and Albert Schweitzer Prizes (1973), the Nobel Peace Prize and the Balzan Foundation Prize (1979). In addition, she held dozens of honorary doctorates from the most prestigious universities around the world.

Even during Mother Teresa’s lifetime, many of the world’s most outstanding intellectuals, artists, statesmen, and adherents of various religions and



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ideologies considered her a saint. Her personality radiated Christ’s power of unconditional love, especially for the world’s poorest, those most scorned and rejected by modern society. *Before her we*

*all feel small and ashamed*—stated India’s Prime Minister Indhira Gandhi. Two days after Mother Teresa’s death, the Holy Father observed: *Her mission began every day at dawn in front of the Eucharist.*

*In the silence of contemplation Mother Teresa of Calcutta heard Jesus' cry from the cross: "I thirst!" Piercing her to the depths of her heart, this cry bade her go out into the streets of Calcutta and the outskirts of the world, to seek out Jesus in the poor, the abandoned, and the dying (Castel Gandolfo, 7 September 1997).*

Mother Teresa often said that she was nothing but "an ordinary instrument in the hands of God". *If I have done something good, it is not to my credit. I have simply done as well as I could what Jesus asked me to do. That is why you should not speak of me, but of the task Our Lord called me to perform.* In an interview once, she observed: *I am one among many ordinary nuns. Our Lord entrusted me with a certain mission. I try to carry it out as well as I can. But it is He who does it all. Jesus loves the poor. They are his beloved children. He himself, when He came into the world, was born into a poor family, and some of the most beautiful words of the Gospel are aimed at the poor. We ought to talk about them, not me. I count for nothing.*

According to Church regulations, the process of beatification could not begin until five years after a candidate's death. However, because of the enormous number of requests coming to the Vatican from all parts of the world, the Congregation of Canonization Affairs granted a special dispensation. Materials attesting to Mother Teresa's "heroic virtues" began being gathered as early as a year and a half after her death. On December 12, 1998, the Holy Father formally inaugurated the process. On August 15, 2001, 76 volumes of documentation (35,000 pages) were delivered to the Congregation of Canonization Affairs. After studying these materials, a special Vatican commission made up of nine theologians acknowledged the heroic character of Mother Teresa's virtues. All that was now needed was a miracle attributed to her intercession. The Congregation of Canonization Affairs announced such a miracle on October 2, 2002. It took place in Calcutta on 5 September 1998, the first anniversary of Mother Teresa's death. Thirty-year-old Monica Besra, a mother of three, had been suffering from TB and cancer of the stomach. The tumor in the stomach was so large that she looked six months pregnant. After praying ardently for Mother Teresa's intercession, sisters of the congregation of



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Missionaries of Charity placed a medal upon the sick woman. That night an instantaneous and complete healing took place. A commission consisting of five doctors concluded that the woman's total cure admitted of no natural explanation. On 19 December 2002, the miracle was ratified by the theological commission of the Congregation of Canonization Affairs. The Holy Father signed two decrees, one declaring the heroic nature of Mother Teresa's virtues, the other attributing Monica Besra's miraculous cure to Mother Teresa's intercession. Mother Teresa was declared a Servant of God, and the date of beatification was fixed for October 19, 2003.

Holiness – stated Mother Teresa – is not a privilege of the elect, but the duty of every Christian, mine as well as yours. Everyday holiness consists in living in love and peace with God and our neighbor, in helping all those who stand in need of our hands, our words, our smiles, and our heart. Readiness to sacrifice ourselves for others, serving others, loving our neighbor – this is holiness at its simplest; and yet it is deep and true. Only holiness can make us capable of total self-sacrifice and complete self-giving. ●

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