

## THE LEGACY OF MOTHER TERESA: RADICAL LOVE AND SERVICE

As you likely know, **St. Teresa of Calcutta** died twenty years ago this past Tuesday at the age of 87 and was **buried on September 13, 1997** at Netaji Stadium in Calcutta, India. It is amazing how time passes so quickly. For a few years, while serving as Chaplain at St. Thomas Academy, I shared the priest residence on campus with retired Archbishop John R. Roach before he moved to assisted living. One night at dinner, the topic of Mother Teresa came up; I recall it may have been on the first anniversary of her death. In any case, he shared with me that he had been part of the official U.S. Delegation, flown over in government aircraft, along with First Lady Hillary Clinton and several other clergy (including Rev. Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral) and Ken Hackett of Catholic Relief Services. He shared how it was an honor to represent the United States, as Mother Teresa was granted a state funeral. He also noted that as soon as the funeral ended, it was wheels up and back to Washington D.C., a real whirlwind experience.

Archbishop Roach recalled how small her open casket appeared, barely larger than one used for a child. He could see from his vantage point near the altar into the casket, later remarking: “It’s a remarkable example of the power of God,” he said, “that someone so tiny could accomplish so much.” He added that her work and her legacy were “so uncomplicated. (It’s) a mission of God’s love and...it’s going to last.” Like so many, I watched the funeral on television, recalling straining to listen as the sound quality was not what we might expect. It was an evening funeral in our time zone. Thousands lined the seven-mile funeral route; her casket was carried on the same carriage that had borne the remains of Mahatma Gandhi 49 years before. I could never fathom that she would have critics, but she did. Such is the price of being on a world stage, even if she eschewed the public spotlight. She did not see her mission as one of “challenging unjust structures” as her critics maintained she should, but rather of exercising **radical charity and service**. In 2015, the order counted 5,150 active and contemplative sisters serving in 758 houses in 139 countries. There are also over 400 brothers and 35 priests serving in the order.

Perhaps the most courageous speech she ever gave was delivered with tremendous love and compassion. It was at the **National Prayer Breakfast** in 1994 at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In the presence of President Clinton and the First Lady, Mother Teresa spoke about the dignity of human life (the speech in its entirety is posted online with this column). “Let us thank God for the opportunity He has given us today to have come here to pray together. We have come here especially to pray for peace, joy and love. We are reminded that Jesus came to bring the good news to the poor. He had told us what that good news is when He said: ‘My peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you.’ He came not to give the peace of the world which is only that we don’t bother each other. He came to give the peace of heart which comes from loving - from doing good to others.”

Then, after speaking about peace, family, and reaching out to those in poverty and paralyzed by drugs, she added: “I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? ...Any country that accepts abortion is **not teaching its people to love...**” She quickly added that she would take in any child threatened by abortion and find a home. You see, Mother Teresa was perhaps as apolitical as one could be. She simply responded to the tremendous needs in the world, marshalling her forces to bring the love of Jesus into the darkest corners of the world. The strength behind her ministry was simple— fervent prayer and the daily celebration of the Holy Mass.

Despite the many challenges in the Church today, the ministry offered by the Missionaries of Charity continues to this day, as young women hear the call to love in such utter simplicity amongst the poorest of the poor. Following the death of a founder, it is not uncommon for religious communities to struggle. However, the Missionaries of Charity remain vibrant, animated by the love of Jesus for the least among us. I have previously written that I “saw” Mother Teresa while in Montessori School, during one of her visits to the **Visitation Convent in Mendota Heights**. I can’t prove it, but I distinctly recall the nuns telling us that we had a very special sister visiting the convent. We all stood to greet her as she passed through our classrooms. She was not

“world famous” in 1970, but her truly exceptional ministry was recognized and it most importantly continues to this day. St. Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us.

- I witnessed something “new” at my nephew’s wedding last weekend. The tables all had a number– ours was Table 11. Each person was to write a note on a card that would only be opened on the couple’s anniversary corresponding to the table number. Quickly doing the math, I realized that I’ll be eligible for **full Social Security benefits** when they open that card in 2028. It remains to be seen whether by then there will be any Social Security funds will remain for me to collect.
- The government of Pakistan has passed a law requiring religious instruction in the Quran, even in educational institutions operated by the Catholic Church. Pakistan is officially an Islamic Republic. Article 31 (2) of the Constitution states that “the State shall endeavor to make the teachings of the Holy Quran and Islamiat compulsory.” Be grateful for religious freedom in this country!
- In a book-length interview, Pope Francis acknowledged that he occasionally gets nervous, not at General Audiences in front of thousands, but when **being interviewed by journalists** on the airplane following a papal visit! Can you blame him? Imagine if every word you spoke was instantly scrutinized for accuracy and broadcast the moment the plane touches down in Rome. He returns from his apostolic visit to Columbia tomorrow.
- Now that the **High Bridge** is out of commission for more than a year for a new deck, I pray that our parishioners and welcome guests from the West Side and suburbs will make the extra sacrifice it may take to access the Cathedral. I was in the college seminary when the old high bridge was detonated on February 24, 1985 and came down to watch the event early on a Sunday morning.
- Ouch! **St. John’s edged St. Scholastica** last Saturday in Collegeville, MN by the score of 98-0! The Johnnies scored 14 touchdowns and averaged 9.0 yards per play to the Saints’ 0.9 yards per play. I understand that all 180 Johnnies saw action in the game. Both schools are in the Benedictine family– Scholastica was Benedict’s sister. St. John’s plays St. Thomas on September 23– it should be very interesting!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,

Rector