

23rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”
September 3-4, 2016

Called to serve the poorest of the Poor.

Readings: Wisdom 9:13-18; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33

In his Canonization homily earlier today, the Holy Father wryly noted we have a little difficulty to call her Saint Teresa. Her sanctity is so close to us that we spontaneously continue to call her “Mother Teresa.” How true indeed. She was a spiritual mother to so many in her work amongst the poorest of the poor.

In watching a film showing her visiting the center for the lepers, it was difficult to see the images of the people, so consumed by their diseases. And yet there were the sisters, working alongside medical staff in bathing and dressing the wounds. Mother Teresa had said that through and only through the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, were the sisters able to conform themselves to Jesus, such that they could truly say that when they were dressing the wounds of the lepers, they were touching Jesus himself.

For the honor of the Blessed Trinity, the exaltation of the Catholic faith and the increase of the Christian life, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own, after due deliberation and frequent prayer for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother Bishops, we declare and define Bl. Teresa of Calcutta to be a saint and we enroll her among the saints, decreeing that she is to be venerated as such by the whole Church. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ Ad honorem Sanctæ et Individuæ Trinitatis, ad exaltationem fidei catholicæ et vitæ christianæ incrementum, auctoritate Domini nostri Iesu Christi, beatorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli ac Nostra, matura deliberatione præhabita et divina ope sæpius implorata, ac de plurimorum Fratrum Nostrorum consilio, Beatam Teresiam de Calcutta Sanctam esse decernimus et definimus, ac Sanctorum Catalogo adscribimus, statuentes eam in universa Ecclesia inter Sanctos pia devotione recoli debere. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.

Born on September 26, 1910 with the baptismal name of Agnes in Macedonia, still then part of the Ottoman Empire. She was baptized the following day, which she considered her “true birthday” and one reason why August 27 had sometimes been listed as her birthday.

Her family was of Kosovar Albanian origin and later moved to that neighboring country. She has said: "By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus." She joined the convent at age 18, journeying to Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto, where she learned English and prepared to be a missionary. She took the name Teresa, after Therese of Lisieux, but as one sister already had that name, she opted for the Spanish spelling of the name.

Sent to India as a teacher, she led a happy life, but became increasingly disturbed by the poverty surrounding her in Calcutta and later spoke of a call within a call, while on a train to the order's convent in Darjeeling for her annual retreat. She recounted: "I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order. To fail would have been to break the faith."

She exchanged her habit for a simple cotton Sari, decorated with a blue border recognizable to all. Receiving all the necessary approvals, she opened the first home for the dying in 1952. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, humbly declining a banquet in her honor, and using the award money to further her mission. We all recall her simple, yet direct defense of innocent life in the womb at the National Prayer Breakfast in the presence of the President of the United States in 1994, saying “Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion...”

Our first reading from the Book of Wisdom makes a sobering observation: “For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.” Indeed, we have many concerns, and I cannot imagine the many concerns that must have occupied St. Teresa’s mind and heart as she sought the world over to find and serve the poor. She suffered spiritual dryness and abandonment, and yet turned it all over to God. Living herself in such utter simplicity and poverty, she became one with those whom she served.

The Mass took place in the Piazza outside of St. Peter’s Basilica, and it was impossible to overlook the scaled back decorations. Minimal flowerpots dotted the area near the altar, as she would have wished. No one dared to decorate as typically happens for such occasions—how fitting it was indeed.

If our minds are weighed down with so many cares that they cannot function as they were intended, we must ask God for the grace to change course, to recalibrate our lives. Let us rest calm in the knowledge of God’s presence, knowing that He will assist us to carry on with our daily lives, even in the midst of all our cares. I close with a prayer attributed to Mother Teresa:

Dear Jesus, help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Thy spirit and love. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine. Shine through me and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus. Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others.