

## BEATIFICATION OF MOTHER THERESA OF CALCUTTA

### **HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

*World Mission Sunday  
Sunday, 19 October 2003*

1. "*Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all*" (Mk10: 44). Jesus' words to his disciples that have just rung out in this Square show us the way to evangelical "greatness". It is the way walked by Christ himself that took him to the Cross: a journey of love and service that overturns all human logic. *To be the servant of all!*

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Foundress of the Missionaries of Charity whom today I have the joy of adding to the Roll of the Blesseds, allowed this logic to guide her. I am personally grateful to this courageous woman whom I have always felt beside me. Mother Teresa, *an icon of the Good Samaritan*, went everywhere to serve Christ in the poorest of the poor. Not even conflict and war could stand in her way.

Every now and then she would come and tell me about her experiences in her service to the Gospel values. I remember, for example, her pro-life and anti-abortion interventions, even when she was awarded the Nobel Prize for peace (Oslo, 10 December 1979). She often used to say: "If you hear of some woman who does not want to keep her child and wants to have an abortion, try to persuade her to bring him to me. I will love that child, seeing in him the sign of God's love".

2. Is it not significant that her beatification is taking place on the very day on which the Church celebrates World Mission Sunday? With the witness of her life, Mother Teresa reminds everyone that *the evangelizing mission of the Church passes through charity*, nourished by prayer and listening to God's word. Emblematic of this missionary style is the image that shows the new Blessed clasping a child's hand in one hand while moving her Rosary beads with the other.

Contemplation and action, evangelization and human promotion: Mother Teresa proclaimed the Gospel living her life *as a total gift to the poor* but, at the same time, *steeped in prayer*.

3. *Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant*" (Mk 10: 43). With particular emotion we remember today Mother Teresa, a great servant of the poor, of the Church and of the whole world. Her life is a testimony to the dignity and the privilege of humble service. She had chosen to be not just *the least* but to be *the servant of the least*. As a real mother to the poor, she bent down to those suffering various forms of poverty. Her greatness lies in her ability to give without counting the cost, to give "until it hurts". Her life was a radical living and a bold proclamation of the Gospel.

The cry of Jesus on the Cross, "*I thirst*" (Jn 19: 28), expressing the depth of God's longing for man, penetrated Mother Teresa's soul and found fertile soil in her heart. *Satiating Jesus' thirst for love and for souls* in union with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, had become the sole aim of Mother Teresa's existence and the inner force that drew her out of herself and made her "run in haste" across the globe to labour for the salvation and the sanctification of the poorest of the poor.

4. "*As you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*" (Mt 25: 40). This Gospel passage, so crucial in understanding Mother Teresa's service to the poor, was the basis of her faith-filled conviction that *in touching the broken bodies of the poor she was touching the body of Christ*. 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.

Recognizing him, she ministered to him with wholehearted devotion, expressing the delicacy of her spousal love. Thus, in total gift of herself to God and neighbour, Mother Teresa found her greatest fulfilment and *lived the noblest qualities of her femininity*. She wanted to be a sign of "God's love, God's presence and God's compassion", and so remind all of the value and dignity of each of God's children, "created to love and be loved". Thus was Mother Teresa "bringing souls to God and God to souls" and satiating Christ's thirst, especially for those most in need, those whose vision of God had been dimmed by suffering and pain.

5. "*The Son of man also came... to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mk 10: 45). Mother Teresa shared in the Passion of the crucified Christ in a special way during long years of "inner darkness". For her that was a test, at times an agonizing one, which she accepted as a rare "gift and privilege".

In the darkest hours she clung even more tenaciously to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. This harsh spiritual trial led her to *identify herself more and more closely with those whom she served each day*, feeling their pain and, at times, even their rejection. She was fond of repeating that *the greatest poverty is to be unwanted*, to have no one to take care of you.

6. "*Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you*". How often, like the Psalmist, did Mother Teresa call on her Lord in times of inner desolation: "In you, in you I hope, my God!".

Let us praise the Lord for this *diminutive woman in love with God*, a humble Gospel messenger and a tireless benefactor of humanity. In her we honour one of the most important figures of our time. Let us welcome her message and follow her example.

Virgin Mary, Queen of all the Saints, help us to be gentle and humble of heart like this fearless messenger of Love. Help us to serve every person we meet with joy and a smile. Help us to be missionaries of Christ, our peace and our hope. Amen!