

**HOMILY - MASS OF THANKSGIVING FOR
CANONIZATION OF MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA
ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL, NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 10, 2016**

Today we give thanks to God for the life and service of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, canonized last Sunday by Pope Francis. I express my gratitude to all of you, especially to the Missionaries of Charity, to the volunteers, staff, and benefactors of this magnificent cathedral, to Cardinal Dolan and Archbishop Auza. I am happy to celebrate this occasion with you during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, in which Pope Francis encourages us "to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy." (*MISERICORDIAE VULTUS*, 15)

The canonization of Mother Teresa provides the occasion not simply to reflect on mercy but also to show forth the Mercy of God -to listen to the Lord's words and to act on them (cf. Luke 6:46-47). In his recent Message on the Occasion of the Celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in the Americas, the Holy Father described mercy: "Far from being an idea, a desire, a theory -much less an ideology- mercy is a concrete way of 'touching' weakness, of bonding with others, of drawing closer to others. It is a concrete way of meeting people where they are at. It is a way of acting that makes us give the best of ourselves so that others can feel 'treated' in such a way that they feel that the last word has not yet been spoken."

Isn't this precisely what Mother Teresa did- touch the weakness of the Poorest of the Poor, especially the forgotten and abandoned? She is a prophetic "sign of the times", awakening the consciences of the men and women of our day. Mother Teresa, was, in the words of Pope John Paul II, an "icon of the Good Samaritan" - of God's love, tirelessly carrying out works of mercy for the Poorest of the Poor.

It was 70 years ago today, a day called Inspiration Day, that she heard the voice of Jesus on journey to Darjeeling. Four years earlier she had promised Jesus that she would refuse Him nothing. On this day, she heard His word and acted upon it, beginning the Missionaries of Charity – so that poverty, sin and death would not be the last words heard by those living and dying in the slums of Calcutta. Jesus demanded something more of her, and she responded generously, founding her Order.

In our Second Reading (1Jn 4:7-16), we heard that *If we love one another, God will live in us*. This is precisely what Mother tried to do – to love each person- no matter how great or small- so that God might live in them. She spoke- by word and deed- as a Missionary of Charity- of God's love. According to the Constitutions of her order, "A Missionary of Charity is a carrier of God's love, especially to the poorest of the poor, setting all on fire with love for Him and for one another; a healing touch of God that cures all diseases; a soothing smile of God that warms all hearts; God's own language of love that all hearts understand."

The Constitutions continue: "The characteristic of this quality of love, which is not just human love, is selflessness: it shares in the selfless giving of God's love." This is what she modeled to the whole world – the selfless giving of God's love. Each person must ask: "*Am I really a missionary of God's love?*"

What is remarkable about Mother's witness is not merely that she made herself least through her radical poverty, but that she made herself the *Servant of the Least* - of the Poorest of the Poor. Acts of love done to the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and prisoners were acts of love directed to the poor Christ, whose presence -with a pure heart- she detected in the broken bodies of the poor, dwelling in the "dark holes" of the world, suffering from the terrible poverty of being rejected and forgotten.

Who are these Poorest of the Poor? Isaiah (Is 58:7) challenged us to *share your bread with the hungry*. Who are the hungry? They are not only those who are physically hungry, but those

who long to be fed with the Word of God. The thirsty are those who long, not only for water, but for knowledge, peace, truth, justice and love. Who is the *poor wanderer* whom we are *to provide with shelter?* (Is 58:7) The wanderer is not only a person in need of a shelter made of bricks, but could be the person who longs to find refuge in a heart that understands, covers, that loves. The poor are often those in our families- in our very midst – who suffer from terrible loneliness- a poverty of love. These are the poorest- the least! Again, each person must honestly face the question, “*What have I done for the least of my brothers and sisters? Or Who have I made the least or belittled through my lack of love?*”

It was at the “peripheries” -not in places of comfort- that with joy Mother satiated the thirst of the abandoned, Crucified One. We honor her by acting on the Lord’s words at the conclusion of the parable of the Good Samaritan: “*You go and do likewise.*” (Lk 10:37) Her witness invites us to be dedicated to “Wholehearted and free service to the Poorest of the Poor”.

It is not just her witness, but *your* witness that is necessary in this culture! Pope Francis described this culture: “We are part of a fragmented culture, a throwaway culture. A culture tainted by the exclusion of everything that might threaten the interests of a few. A culture that is leaving by the roadside the faces of the elderly, children, ethnic minorities seen as a threat. A culture that little by little promotes the comfort of a few and increases the suffering of many others. A culture that is incapable of accompanying the young in their dreams but sedates them with promises of ethereal happiness and hides the living memory of their elders.” (VIDEO MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY IN THE AMERICAS, 27-30 AUGUST, 2016)

While it is not easy today to imitate her radical witness, it is not impossible. Mother teaches us that no person -no matter how poor or how far from God they might be- is to be thrown away. *Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.* (Mt 25:40) On this vigil of the terrible attacks fifteen years ago on the World Trade Center in this very city, in which so many lives were senselessly lost, we cannot be indifferent to the assaults against life. We are a people of life, called to build a Culture of Life – one person at a time! Our efforts may seem small. Once Mother was told, “All this effort, all this work, only to help people die... What you are doing is useless! The sea is so great!” Mother simply responded: “It is a drop of water in the sea! But after this drop of water, the sea will not be the same!”

We cannot be resigned to indifference in the face of poverty- whether material or spiritual! In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis challenges us, just as 70 years ago Jesus demanded something more from Mother: “During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism! ... We cannot escape the Lord’s words to us, and they will serve as the criteria upon which we will be judged: whether we have fed the hungry and given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and clothed the naked, or spent time with the sick and those in prison (cf. Mt 25:31-45). ... Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: ‘as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love’.” (*MISERICORDIAE VULTUS*, 15).

St. Teresa of Calcutta loved much. May we follow her example, of hearing God’s words and acting upon them, in humble service of the Poorest of the Poor. *Saint Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us.*