



## Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time September 4, 2016 C

### Mother Teresa becomes St. Mother Teresa this weekend

This weekend, our Church—and many outside our Church—rejoice as one of the best known nuns in the past 50 years is canonized a saint.

Mother Teresa was born on August 26, 1910 in Albania as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu.

At the age of 18 (1928), Agnes left home to join the Irish Sisters of Loreto in Dublin, where she also learned to speak English. A year later she was sent to India. She took the name Teresa as her religious name after St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Little Flower, because she like her “Little Way” of spirituality. From 1929 until 1948, the young Sr. Teresa was a teacher in India, coming to Calcutta in 1931.

Although her Loreto House School was in the heart of the poor area of Calcutta, Sister was not permitted to leave her convent to serve the poor. During those years, Mother Teresa became more and more aware of the plight of the poor in Calcutta.

#### “A call within a call”

In 1946, during a train journey, Mother Teresa received what she called “a call within a call”—her second call. She felt Jesus was calling her to leave the Sisters of Loreto and to found a new religious order to serve the “poorest of the poor” in the slums of Calcutta. It took about a year to receive permission to leave the Sisters of Loreto and still remain a religious sister, and to get permission from the local Archbishop to found a new religious order.

Having received both permissions, she left the convent walls and started to minister to what she called “the unwanted, the unloved and the uncared for” — children and adults alike.

**In 1949**, some of her former students joined her in her work and became her first sisters. Mother named her new Order *Missionaries of Charity*—sisters dedicated to bringing love of Jesus to the poor.

**By 1960**, Mother Teresa was allowed to establish Missionaries of Charity Houses outside Calcutta.

Before long, she had more than 20 new mission centers in India.

**In 1965**, Mother’s work started to spread all over the world. In the early 1970’s, Mother Teresa had 80 houses in various locations all over the world. By 1979, she had over 200 operations in over 25 countries. By this time, Mother’s work was known all over the world. In 1979, she was awarded the Nobel Prize for her work “in bringing help to suffering humanity.”

At the time of her death, Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity had over 4,000 sisters and an associated brotherhood of 300 members, operating 610 missions in 123 countries.

**Interior darkness.** After her death, it was revealed by the publication of a series of letters to her spiritual director that she suffered intense spiritual darkness for about 40 years. During those painful years, Mother Teresa felt separated from God, even rejected by him, along with an ever-increasing longing for his love. On the outside she was becoming a global superstar, but inside she experienced great spiritual desolation.

#### Interview of priest who promoted Mother Teresa’s case for canonization

The following article appeared in the New York Times two weeks ago.

#### *How did you meet Mother Teresa?*

*My sister—we’re only two of us—joined the Missionaries of Charity Sisters in 1976, and a year later my parents and I came from Winnipeg to see her in Rome. During a Mass with the first group of contemplative brothers, Mother Teresa pinned a cross on a priest and six laymen. The male branches of the M.C.’s wear a cross over the heart, and the sisters wear a cross on the shoulder, which serves the purpose of holding the sari together. After the Mass, as we were saying goodbye, Mother Teresa said to me, “Oh, I would like to pin a cross on you, too.” I was only 21, and this was Mother Teresa talking, and I was just so shocked, I didn’t say anything. The next morning after Mass, in the convent of San Gregorio, I was brave enough to go up to Mother and ask her what*

she meant. She invited me to join the brothers. So I did.

**There are usually two miracles required to establish sainthood—one for beatification and another for canonization. How do you go about finding the two miracles?**

It's more like waiting and hoping for people to report something. The first one, the miracle for the beatification, was Monica Besra in Bengal, in India. Monica had a tumefaction, like a tumor, in her abdomen, and it was 16 or 17 centimeters—roughly the size of a woman six months pregnant. Her family had tried different things, and nothing was working. They took her to the sisters, who took her to the doctor, who sent her home on the 31st of August of 1998. Pretty much, she was dying. On Sept. 5, the first anniversary of Mother Teresa's death, the sister superior took a medal of Mary that had been touched directly to the body of Mother Teresa at the time of the funeral, placed it on Monica's stomach and made a very simple prayer: "Mother, today's your day. You love the poor. Do something for Monica." That was about 5 p.m. on Saturday. At 1 a.m. when Monica got up in the middle of the night to go to the washroom, she discovered that her stomach was flat. Sunday morning, the sisters saw her up and sweeping with a broom, and they said, whoa, what is up with Monica?

**But what proof is there that this was really a miracle, and that there was no medical or scientific explanation?**

They're quite strict on these things. In Brazil, a postulator I knew on another sainthood cause received the news that the miracle case he had put forth was rejected, so it's not automatic. In the India case for Mother Teresa, there were 11 doctors consulted, and only one was Catholic. The rest were Hindu. You don't ask the doctors whether they think it's a miracle. You only ask them, "Can you explain this medically?"

**Why were there 10 years between the first miracle and the second miracle?**

There were other cases, but when we had the documentation, I would ask the doctors I knew at Scripps [Scripps Clinic Torrey Pines in La Jolla, Calif.] or in Tijuana, and usually the doctor would say, "It could happen naturally." I had another case, everything looked like it was checking out fine, except the mother-in-law wrote me a letter and said the whole year she was praying to Padre Pio. And that was the end of that. Whose miracle was that, Mother Teresa or Padre Pio?

The second miracle finally happened in Brazil, and this time it was a man, Marcilio. He had a bacterial

infection in the brain which had caused multiple abscesses... and he developed hydrocephaly. His wife started praying a novena, nine days of prayer, to Mother Teresa, and she asked her family members to do the same. On Dec. 9, at 2 in the morning, Marcilio had excruciating pain in the head, and went into a coma. He was just near death. The doctor finally gets him in the operating room, hoping to drain the water, but couldn't do it the way he had planned, so he left the operating room at about 6:10 p.m. to find a doctor who could do it another way. When he returned to the operating room—unsuccessful in his attempt—he discovers that Marcilio is awake, in no pain, and he says, "What am I doing here?" Two brain scans were taken, one on Dec. 9 and one on Dec. 13, and all the different surgeons look at the two scans, and they say you can't go from here to there. The doctor even told Marcilio's brother that he had 30 patients with hydrocephaly like this and 29 died. Only Marcilio survived.

**Mother Teresa has her critics. They have accused her of running facilities that offered substandard care, and of cozying up to dictators like Enver Hoxha in Albania and Jean-Claude Duvalier of Haiti. Did the sainthood process examine these allegations?**

Oh, yes. In fact, Christopher Hitchens was called as a witness in Washington. When we were preparing the actual case, myself and the people helping watched his movie "Hell's Angel" and read his book "Missionary Position." We have to take them seriously. But some of it is just mistaken information. Mother never took any money from Duvalier. And in the movie, Hitchens presented Mother going to the tomb of Enver Hoxha, the dictator. What was she doing there? The facts are that she had asked to see the tomb of her mother and sister, and government escorts took her without telling her to Hoxha's tomb. Then she says, now can I go to the tomb of my mother and sister? The Albanian translator, who also gave her testimony, said, "We in Albania know that any foreign visitor was taken to the tomb of Enver Hoxha." That was part of the protocol.

**Mother Teresa's private letters and writings, which were published in a book that you edited in 2007 on the 10th anniversary of her death, revealed that she suffered for decades from an excruciating anxiety that God had abandoned her. Is that kind of spiritual suffering a prerequisite for sainthood, or an obstacle?**

In the *Positio*—that's the Latin for the written case examining how Mother Teresa lived her Christian life—we had a special chapter on the darkness

*because it was a very distinctive feature. We had to examine it in light of the mystical tradition. It wasn't surprising that she had it because other saints have had it. What was really more surprising is that it was so long, almost 50 years. To live like that is heroic. An immature person would have been crushed by such an experience. She was suffering that loneliness, that sense of being unloved, unwanted in her relationship with Jesus, but in solidarity with and identified with others who were in some way living that sense of loneliness and being unloved.*

In his book *Something Beautiful for God*, British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge writes:

*"In a dark time she was a burning and shining light; in a cruel time, a living embodiment of Christ's gospel of love; in a godless time, the Word dwelling among us, full of grace and truth. For this, all must be eternally grateful."*

Mother Teresa writes:

*You and I have been created for greater things.  
We have not been created  
to just pass through this life without aim.  
And that greater aim is to love and be loved.  
Give yourself fully to God,  
who will use you to accomplish great things  
on the condition that you believe  
much more in his love than in your weakness.  
Never think that a small action  
done to your neighbor is not worth much.  
It is not how much we do that is pleasing to God,  
but how much love we put into the doing.*

About eight years ago, I had the good fortune to visit Calcutta and stay in the convent where Mother Teresa taught for about 10 years.

Have a blessed week,

*Le Saran*