

Her SECRET FIRE



I
thirst.

Next to the crucifix in every one of the Missionaries of Charity chapels around the world are the words “I thirst.” Taken from Jesus’ words on the cross, they symbolize Mother Teresa’s conviction that Jesus thirsts for, longs for, the redemption and salvation of every person. She explained that God speaks to every dark and lonely heart, whispering of his love, and asking for our love in return. She wrote that Jesus says to each of us: “I thirst for you. Yes, that is the only way to even begin to describe my love for you. I thirst for

you. I thirst to love you and to be loved by you — that is how precious you are to me. I thirst for you. Come to me, and I will fill your heart and heal your wounds.”

Her LOVE

Beloved by believers and nonbelievers around the world, Mother Teresa has been named as one of “the most admired women of the world.” While her appeal is broad-based, the reasons that she is so loved all stem from her own radical, unwavering love and commitment to Jesus and the Gospel. We can learn from her great example of love:

- Her love was inclusive. Although she was completely orthodox in her faith, she served the poor of all religions, equally and without distinction.
Am I willing to treat all people with dignity and respect, even those who do not share my beliefs?
- She was willing to become personally involved with those in need.
Am I willing to “get my hands dirty” by working at a mission, soup kitchen, or pro-life center?
- She was an instrument of peace, and she radiated God’s joy in all she said and did.
How can I find more joy in my life, and how can I share that with others?
- She was a messenger of hope and mercy for the entire world.
In what ways do I extend mercy to my family, friends, co-workers, and even strangers?

Her STRUGGLE

On the outside, Mother Teresa makes faith seem easy, but after her death, it was revealed that she suffered very real doubts and darkness for nearly 50 years. Of that time, she wrote: “Where is my faith? Even deep down ... there is nothing, but emptiness and darkness. ... If there be God — please forgive me. ... When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven — there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul” (*Come Be My Light*, 188-189).

While she worried that revealing her struggle would make people think “less of Jesus,” the opposite is true. The discovery that even a great saint like Mother Teresa could and did experience difficulties, but prevailed in the faith anyway, is a great encouragement for all Christians who experience the “dark night of the soul.”

Her LEGACY

While Mother Teresa has entered into history as a great humanitarian, her strength and resolve did not stem from her own convictions. It came entirely from, as her friend Pope St. John Paul II said, “prayer and in the silent contemplation of Jesus Christ, his Holy Face, his Sacred Heart” (Address for the Beatification of Mother Teresa, October 20, 2003).

For Mother Teresa, Jesus and his sacrifice were the very heart of her life and mission. Because of that, she had the courage to show the world “the real face of Jesus,” not the holy card image but rather the Jesus who walked among the lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and outcasts. The Jesus who healed the sick and gave the disheartened hope. The Jesus who stood up to injustice and hatred and who countered hate with love at every turn. Her legacy, as recognized in her canonization, is having made Jesus real to everyone who met her.

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Additional RESOURCES

“I Thirst: A Guided Meditation with Mother Teresa” (pamphlet), (Our Sunday Visitor, 2009).

Listening to God with Mother Teresa compiled by Woodeene Koenig-Bricker (Our Sunday Visitor, 2010).

Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady, Fr. Joseph Langford (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007, 2016).

Mother Teresa’s Secret Fire, Fr. Joseph Langford (Our Sunday Visitor, 2008, 2016).

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Saint Teresa OF CALCUTTA



“Do not think that love in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”

~ Mother Teresa

Her CALL

On September 10, 1946, on a train to Darjeeling, India, for her annual retreat, Mother Teresa experienced an epiphany of God's grace and great yearning — his "thirst" — for his children. This "Inspiration Day," as she later called it, was to be the beginning of many more revelations from God that would radically alter the course of her life.

After a year and a half of these revelations, in 1947 she experienced a vision in three parts. First, she was shown the plight of the poor — she saw a crowd of poor people calling out to her to save them. Next she saw Our Lady kneeling among the poor saying, "Take care of them, they are mine ... bring them to Jesus." Finally, she was shown the same crowd but this time the Crucified Christ was in their midst. Jesus asked her, "Will you refuse to do this for me ... to take care of them, to bring them to me?" Mother Teresa explained that she knew with sudden and inescapable clarity that "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" (*Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady*, 19-20).



Her LIFE

Mother Teresa was born Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910, in what is now Macedonia. When she was 18 she moved to Ireland and joined the Sisters of Loreto with the hope of becoming a missionary. That desire was fulfilled when she was sent to India, where she lived the rest of her life. For many years she taught school to girls in Calcutta, but after her life-changing train journey, she felt "the call within the call." She knew then she was to leave teaching and the convent to devote herself to serving the poor.

She began wearing a simple white and blue sari, adopted Indian citizenship, completed basic medical training, and ventured into the slums to serve the "poorest of the poor." Eventually she was joined by others and founded a new religious community — the Missionaries of Charity.

Internationally recognized for her work, including being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, she never lost zeal to give "wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor." She died of heart failure on September 5, 1997, at age 87. She was beatified as "Teresa of Calcutta" in 2003 and canonized in 2016.



Her Favorite PRAYER

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. Amen.

— CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN



Her WORK

While she was still teaching, Mother Teresa began her work with the poor. After she left the convent, she continued her work by trying to teach basic literacy and hygiene to the children of the slums of Calcutta. The needs of the poor exceeded her solitary efforts and soon she was joined by other young women, and was given donations of food, clothing, medical supplies, and even buildings. Her days were filled with taking care of the destitute and dying, distributing food, visiting the sick, and, in her later years, more international travel than she liked.

Her religious congregation, the Missionaries of Charity, has spread throughout the world. Today her sisters run hospices, homes for AIDS victims, leper centers, mobile clinics, orphanages, and schools in countries around the world. Mother Teresa always stressed that the sisters are not social workers, but rather they are "carriers of God's love."

Her faith was the core of all she did. She wrote about her life and that of her sister as being centered on the Eucharist and prayer. She explained:

"To make that love more living, more sure, more tender, Jesus gives us the Eucharist. This is why it is necessary for every Missionary of Charity to feed upon the Eucharist in order to be a true carrier of God's love. She must live on the Eucharist and have her heart and life woven with the Eucharist. No Missionary of Charity can give Jesus if she does not have Jesus in her heart" (*No Greater Love*, 114-115).

In addition to attending Mass, she spent at least an hour every evening in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. She also spent time in meditation and reading.

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