

MOTHER TERESA AND HER MISSIONARY WORK

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Introduction

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless"

- Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa, known in the Catholic Church as **Saint Teresa of Calcutta**. The original name of Mother Teresa was **Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu**. She was born in **Skopje**, the capital of **Macedonia**, on **26 August, 1910**. In **1919**, when she was eight years old, **Agnes** lost her father, a noted politician in **Albania**. At the age of twelve, she felt strongly the "call of God". After living in **Macedonia** for eighteen years she moved to **Ireland** and then to **India**, where she lived for most of her life. Her religious foundation developed further and in **1928**, she left **Skopje** to join the **Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Ireland**. The institution was popularly known as **Sisters of Loreto**. There, she received the name **Sister Mary Teresa**. After a training of around six months in **Dublin**, the capital of **Ireland**, **Teresa** was come to **India**. On **24 May, 1931** she took her initial vows as a nun. On **10 September 1946**, **Teresa** experienced what she later described as "the call within the call" when she travelled by train to the **Loreto convent in Darjeeling** from **Calcutta** for her annual retreat. "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." **Joseph Langford** later wrote, "Though no one knew it at the time, **Sister Teresa** had just become **Mother Teresa**". She was fluent in five languages - **Bengali, Albanian, Serbian, English and Hindi** - she made occasional trips outside **India** for humanitarian reasons.

As a Young Girl

In her younger age, had a dream to go to **India** to do mission work and to serve the poor, the abandoned and the sick. She also prepared herself to make her dream come true. She read the **Word of God**, meditated on it and understood its values. She also knew that the best way to practice those values is to enter into a religious life. Finally she joined the **Congregation of Loreto** and came to **India** as a missionary on **January 6, 1929**.

Service to the Poor

Mother Teresa made the **Sermon on the Mount** her own. **Heart of heart**, the poor always remained in her mind. To work for the poor, she herself became poor.

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She had great love for them and showed them mercy and kindness. She was convinced that whatever she did to the poor, she did them to Jesus himself. Therefore, she always served the poor, the destitute and the dying with kindness and affection.

Her Social Works

Mother Teresa worked as the Headmistress of St. Mary's High School in Kolkata for 17 years. When she was working in the school, she observed the poor people living in huts around the school campus. Fr. Julian Henry, the Parish Priest, was taking care of these people. He often used to share his experience with Sr. Teresa and thus she was motivated to serve the poor. On 10 September, 1946, while traveling to Darjeeling, North-Bengal, for the annual retreat Mother realized "the call within call". She felt as if the Jesus was asking her to come out of the walls and serve the down-trodden people. The feeling was so intense that on 17 August, 1947, Mother dressed in white, blue bordered sari left the Convent.

In December 1950, Mother for the first time visited the slums of Calcutta. Although she had no funds, she started an open-air school for slum children. Soon she was joined by many voluntary organizations, which provided Mother, a crucial financial support. She founded the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India in 1950. Although her mission started in India, she succeeded in bringing the people of all societies under one roof, i.e. humanity. By 1996, she was operating 517 missions in more than 100 countries. Over the years, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity grew from twelve to thousands serving the "poorest of the poor" in 450 centers around the world. Teresa's Missionaries of Charity continued to expand, and at the time of her death it was operating 610 missions in 123 countries, including hospices and homes for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis, soup kitchens, children's and family counseling programs, orphanages, and schools.

Missionaries of Charity

Mother Teresa was an Albanian-Indian Roman Catholic nun. The first home of the Missionaries of Charity in the United States was established in the South Bronx, New York. In the USA, the Missionaries of Charity are affiliated with the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, a body of female religious, representing 20% of American nuns. They are identified by the wearing of religious habits, and loyalty to church teaching. By 1996, the organisation was operating 517 missions in more than 100 countries.

In India she began missionary work with the poor in 1948, replacing her traditional Loreto habit with a simple, white cotton sari with a blue border. Teresa adopted Indian citizenship, spent several months in Patna to receive basic medical training at Holy Family Hospital and ventured into the slums. She founded a school in Motijhil, Kolkata, before she began tending to the poor and hungry. At the beginning of 1949 Teresa was joined in her effort by a group of young women, and she laid the foundation for a new religious community helping the "poorest among the poor". Her efforts quickly caught the attention of Indian officials, including the prime minister. Teresa wrote in her diary that her first year was fraught with difficulty. With no income, she begged for food and supplies and experienced doubt, loneliness and the temptation to return to the comfort of convent life during these early months.

Our Lord wants me to be a free nun covered with the poverty of the cross. Today, I learned a good lesson. The poverty of the poor must be so hard for them. While looking for a home I walked and walked till my arms and legs ached. I thought how much they must ache in body and soul, looking for a home, food and health. Then, the comfort of Loreto [her former congregation] came to tempt me. "You have only to say the word and all that will be yours again", the Tempter kept on saying ... Of free choice, my God, and out of love for you, I desire to remain and do whatever be your Holy will in my regard. I did not let a single tear come.

On 7 October 1950, Teresa received Vatican permission for the diocesan congregation which would become the Missionaries of Charity. In her words, it would care for "the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, and all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone". In 1952, Teresa opened her first hospice with help from Calcutta officials. She converted an abandoned Hindu temple into the Kalighat Home for the Dying, free for the poor, and renamed it Kalighat, the Home of the Pure Heart. Those brought to the home received medical attention and the opportunity to die with dignity in accordance with their faith, Muslims were read the Quran, Hindus received water from the Ganges, and Catholics received extreme unction. "A beautiful death", Teresa said, "it is for people who lived like animals to die like angels – loved and wanted."

She opened a hospice for those with leprosy, calling it Shanti Nagar (City of Peace). The Missionaries of Charity established leprosy-outreach clinics throughout Calcutta, providing medication, dressings and food. The Missionaries of Charity took in an increasing number of homeless children. In 1955, Teresa opened Nirmala Shishu Bhavan, the Children's Home of the Immaculate Heart, as a haven for orphans and homeless youth.

Thirteen members of Calcutta congregation had grown to more than 4,000 sisters in 1997, who managed orphanages, AIDS hospices and charity centres worldwide, caring for refugees, the blind, disabled, aged, alcoholics, the poor and homeless and victims of floods, epidemics and famine. The congregation began to attract recruits and donations, and by the 1960s it had opened hospices, orphanages and leper houses throughout India. Teresa then expanded the congregation abroad, opening a house in Venezuela in 1965 with five sisters. Houses followed in Italy (Rome), Tanzania and Austria in 1968, and during the 1970s the congregation opened houses and foundations in the United States and dozens of countries in Asia, Africa and Europe.

The Missionaries of Charity Brothers

The Missionaries of Charity Brothers was founded in 1963. Brother Andrew founded the Missionary Brothers of Charity in Australia along with Mother Teresa. In 1965, by granting a Decree of Praise, Pope Paul VI granted Mother Teresa's request to expand her congregation to other countries. The Congregation started to grow rapidly, with new homes opening all over the globe. The congregation's first house outside India was in Venezuela, and others followed in Rome and Tanzania, and eventually in many countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe, including Albania. Lay Catholics and non-Catholics were enrolled in the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, the Sick and Suffering Co-Workers, and the Lay Missionaries of Charity. Responding to requests by many priests, in 1981 Mother Teresa founded the Corpus Christi Movement for Priests and the Missionaries of Charity Fathers in 1984 to combine the vocational aims of the Missionaries of Charity with the resources of the priesthood.

In 1982, at the height of the Siege of Beirut, Teresa rescued 37 children trapped in a front-line hospital by brokering a temporary cease-fire between the Israeli army and Palestinian guerrillas. Accompanied by Red Cross workers, she travelled through the war zone to the hospital to evacuate the young patients. When Eastern Europe experienced increased openness in the late 1980s, Teresa expanded her efforts to Communist countries which had rejected the Missionaries of Charity. She began dozens of projects, undeterred by criticism of her stands against abortion and divorce: "No matter who says what, you should accept it with a smile and do your own work." She visited Armenia after the 1988 earthquake and met with Nikolai Ryzhkov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Teresa travelled to assist the hungry in Ethiopia, radiation victims at Chernobyl and earthquake victims in Armenia. In 1991 she returned to Albania for the first time, opening a Missionaries of Charity Brothers home in Tirana.

In 1996, Teresa operated 517 missions in over 100 countries. Her Missionaries of Charity grew from twelve to thousands, serving the "poorest of the poor" in 450 centres worldwide. By 2007 the Missionaries of Charity numbered about 450 brothers and 5,000 sisters' worldwide, operating 600 missions, schools and shelters in 120 countries.

The Missionaries of Charity Fathers

In 1984 a priest branch, the Missionaries of Charity Fathers, was founded by Mother Teresa with Fr. Joseph Langford, combining the vocation of the Missionaries of Charity with the Ministerial Priesthood. As with the Sisters, the Fathers live a very simple lifestyle without television, radios or items of convenience. They neither smoke nor drink alcohol and beg for their food. They make a visit to their families every five years but do not take annual holidays. Lay Catholics and non-Catholics constitute the Co-Workers of Mother Teresa, the Sick and Suffering Co-Workers, and the Lay Missionaries of Charity.

The world Acclaims

Mother Teresa became famous for her service to the poor around the world. Many titles and awards were given to her:

- ◆ In 1962, the Indian government conferred the title, **Padma Sree** on Republic Day.
- ◆ In 1969, the **Jawaharlal Nehru Award** was given to her for **social works**.
- ◆ In 1971, **Papal Peace Prize** was given to her
- ◆ In 1972, **Nehru Memorial Prize** was given to her
- ◆ In 1979, **Nobel Peace Prize** was given to her
- ◆ In 1980, she was given, **Bharat Ratna** – The Highest civilian award in India for her humanitarian work.
- ◆ In 1980, the Indian Postal Department issued stamp with her picture.
- ◆ In 2010 on the 100th anniversary of her birth, she was honoured around the world, and her work praised by Indian President Pratibha Patil.

Though she had received many titles and awards, the greatest title that she received was the title of the "**Living Saint**".

After 1980, Mother suffered some serious health problems including two cardiac arrests. Despite the problems, Mother herself governed the Missionaries of Charity and its branches, as efficiently as earlier. In April 1996, Mother Teresa fell and broke her collar bone. Since then, Mother's health started declining. On September 5, 1997, Mother Teresa passed away.

Conclusion

Mother Teresa began as a small community with 12 members in Calcutta (now Kolkata), and today it has over 4,500 Sisters running orphanages, home for those dying of AIDS, charity centre's worldwide, and caring for refugees, the blind, disabled, aged, alcoholics, the poor and homeless and victims of floods, epidemics and famine in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, Europe and Australia. They have 19 homes in Kolkata Calcutta. On 13 March 1997 Teresa resigned as head of the Missionaries of Charity. Teresa 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."

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