

Love is repaid by love  
alone mother teresa

People



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Mother Teresa first read these words when she was eighteen years old while on her way to Ireland to become a nun. Sixty-nine years later before her death she must have realized that she was one of the most loved women in the world. If the Saint Teresa's phrase has any literal meaning, there is possibly no one in our age who has deserved so much love in return as Mother Teresa. Anyone who has heard her story can attest to her greatness.

This was a woman who felt being a devout nun, just wasn't enough. She gave up her Sisters of Loreto robe for the blue and white sari of the poor, to aid and live among the destitute of Calcutta. Upon taking a vow of poverty, purity and obedience to start her new order, she told herself, " I'll teach myself to beg no matter how much abuse and humiliation I have to endure" in order to help others. Her unwavering devotion to this cause came from her belief that her work was nothing less than a direct order from God.

### Her Childhood

Mother Teresa's story begins in the small town of Skopje in Albania, Eastern Europe. She was born in Skopje on 27th August 1910 to a shopkeeper, Nikolle Bojaxhiu and his wife Drana. She was given the names Agnes Gonxha. The family always called her Gonxha, which means flower bud, because she was always plump and pink and cheerful. She was the youngest of three children, with a brother Lazar and sister Aga. They lived in a large house with a big garden.

The Bojaxhiu family had a long tradition of success in crafts, fabric-dyeing and trade. Gonxhe was baptized in the Heart of Jesus Catholic Church and successfully completed elementary and high school years in church schools,

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where she was an active member of the drama section, the literary section, and the church chorus. Her parents were very caring and never turned away anyone who needed help. When Mother Teresa recalled her childhood she said 'We were a united and very happy family.' Her greatest joy as a child came during church masses where she could sing, read and pray. Agnes attended mass every day, prayed and said the rosary every night.

When Agnes was eight years old her father died. Her mother worked very hard to make sure the children were happy and Mother Teresa remembered her childhood as being 'exceptionally happy.' Agnes' mother continued to help others in need, seemingly unaware of her own condition. She would take care of alcoholic women in their neighborhood and helped another widow with six children raise her family. When that widow died, those six children became a part of the Bojaxhiu family.

By looking back on Mother Teresa's childhood now we cannot help but understand the effects of her mother's values, charity and devotion. She grew up surrounded by faith and compassion and at age twelve received her first "calling from God" to help the poor. Upon hearing of this experience, her mother gave Agnes this advice, "Put your hands in His hands and walk all the way with Him." So at 12, she joined an Abbey, and at 18 she became a member of the Loreto Order of nuns. She trained in Dublin, where the motherhouse of the Loreto Sisters was. She chose the name of Sister Teresa, in memory of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

In December 1928 she began her journey to India and continued to Darjeeling, at the base of the Himalayan Mountains, where she would

continue her training towards her religious vows. Soon after, on January 6, 1929 she arrived in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal, India to teach at a school for girls. In Calcutta, she worked as a school aid, teacher and principal for a middle-class high school for Bengali girls. During these years she could not help but be touched by the poverty and misery in the streets and slums around her. She started actively going to hospitals and slums where she became more and more dissatisfied with the state of the people around her and the efforts to help them.

On September 10, 1946, on the long train ride to Darjeeling where she was to go on a retreat and to recover from suspected tuberculosis, something happened. She had a life-changing encounter with the Living Presence of the Will of God. Mother Teresa recalls:

" I realized that I had the call to take care of the sick and the dying, the hungry, the naked, the homeless - to be God's Love in action to the poorest of the poor. That was the beginning of the Missionaries of Charity."

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She didn't hesitate, she didn't question. She asked permission to leave the Loreto congregation and to establish a new order of sisters. While the church recommended she join the Daughters of Saint Anna, who worked with the poor, Sister Teresa felt this was not nearly adequate to the calling she had received. She didn't want to help the poor and retreat to a convent at night, but instead become one of the poor herself. She received that permission from Pope Pius XII.

In 1948, at the age of 38, she exchanged her sister's robe for the uniform of Calcutta's poor and adopted a diet of rice and salt. The impoverished people of Calcutta were stunned by her presence among them. They could not understand why this European woman who spoke their language fluently would wash their babies, clean their wounds and educate their young. It was here in the streets of Calcutta where she was approached by one of her former students who made the remarkable request to join her.

Mother Teresa was hesitant to invite someone else to take part in her calling because she wanted to make sure they understood the poverty that they would have to live in. Several weeks after Mother Teresa asked her former student to take time to think about it, the girl returned without any personal belongings or jewelry, wearing a sari, the uniform of the poor. She took Mother Teresa's childhood name, Agnes as her own and became the first sister to join Mother Teresa's calling.

More sisters would join every month and by 1950, Sister Teresa had received approval from the Vatican to create another vow beyond her sister's vows of poverty, purity and obedience.

The fourth addition was, " To devote oneself out of abnegation to the care of the poor and needy who, crushed by want and destitution, live in conditions unworthy of human dignity." With this vow, the Missionaries of Charity were born and its members were commanded to seek out the poor, abandoned, sick, infirm and dying and Sister Teresa became Mother Teresa. She wrote in her diary at this time that, " If the rich people can have the full service and devotion of so many nuns and priests, surely the poorest of the poor and the

lowest of the low can have the love and devotion of a few–The Slum Sister they call me, and I am glad to be just that for His love and glory."

In 1952 Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity began the work for which they have been noted ever since. Her order received permission from Calcutta officials to use a portion of the abandoned temple to Kali, the Hindu goddess of transition and destroyer of demons. Mother Teresa founded here the Kalighat Home for the Dying, which she named " Nirmal Hriday" (meaning " Pure Heart"). She and her fellow nuns gathered dying Indians off the streets of Calcutta and brought them to this home to care for them during the days before they died.

Mother Teresa's first orphanage was started in 1953, while in 1957 she and her Missionaries of Charity began working with lepers. In the years following, her homes (she called them " tabernacles") have been established in hundreds of locations in the world.

The world came to know Mother Teresa after a 1969 BBC documentary on her work, which included footage of a potential miracle. Images of an area in the hospice too dark to show up on film appeared in a soft light after development. This public exposure led to growth of her order throughout India and later in the world. Soon after Cardinal Spellman from the United States visited her at the Motherhouse.

Mother Teresa recalled, " He asked me where we lived. I told him, ' Here in this room, your Eminence. This is our refectory. We move the tables and benches to the side.' He wanted to know where the rest of our convent was, where we could study. ' We study here, too, your Eminence,' I said. Then I  
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added, ' And this is also our dormitory.' When the Cardinal asked if we had a chapel, I brought him to the end of this room. ' It is also our chapel, your Eminence' I told him... I don't know what he was thinking, but he began to smile."

Mother Teresa made no exceptions to her dedication. When asked what she expected of a sister she said, " Let God radiate and live his life in her and through her in the slums. Let the sick and suffering find in her a real angel of comfort and consolation. Let her be a friend of the little children in the street. I would much rather they make mistakes in kindness than work miracles in unkindness."

#### Mother Teresa's Wisdom

Analyzing her deed and achievements, John Paul II asked: " Where did Mother Teresa find the strength to place herself completely at the service of others? She found it in prayer and in the silent contemplation of Jesus Christ, his Holy Face, his Sacred Heart."

" I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper's wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord Himself. Is it not a beautiful experience?"

" The poor give us much more than we give them. They're such strong people, living day to day with no food. And they never curse, never complain. We don't have to give them pity or sympathy. We have so much to learn from them.

" There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience that in our lives - the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognize it. The poor you

may have right in your own family. Find them. Love them. Put your love for them in living action. For in loving them, you are loving God Himself."

" It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving."

" To God there is nothing small. The moment we have given it to God, it becomes infinite."

" You have to be holy in your position as you are, and I have to be holy in the position that God has put me. So it is nothing extraordinary to be holy. Holiness is not the luxury of the few. Holiness is a simple duty for you and for me. We have been created for that."

### Her Achievements

In 1965, by granting a Decree of Praise, Pope Paul VI granted Mother Teresa's request to expand her order to other countries. Teresa's order started to rapidly grow, with new homes opening all over the globe.

The order'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. In addition, the first Missionaries of Charity home in the United States was established in the South Bronx, New York. By 1996, she was operating 517 missions in more than 100 countries. Today over one million workers worldwide volunteer for the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa traveled to help the hungry in Ethiopia, radiation victims at Chernobyl, and earthquake victims in Armenia.



By the early 1970s, Mother Teresa had become known internationally. Her fame can be in large part attributed to the 1969 documentary *Something Beautiful for God* by Malcolm Muggeridge .

In 1971 Paul VI awarded her the first Pope John XXIII Peace Prize. Other awards bestowed upon her included a Kennedy Prize (1971), the Balzan prize (1978) for humanity, peace and brotherhood among peoples, the Albert Schweitzer International Prize (1975), the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom (1985) and the Congressional Gold Medal (1994), honorary citizenship of the United States (November 16, 1996), and honorary degrees from a number of universities. In 1972 Mother Teresa was awarded the Nehru Prize for her promotion of international peace and understanding.

In 1979, Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, " for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress, which also constitute a threat to peace." She refused the conventional ceremonial banquet given to laureates, and asked that the \$6, 000 funds be diverted to the poor in Calcutta, claiming themoneywould permit her to feed hundreds of needy for a year. In the same year, she was also awarded the Balzan Prize for promoting peace and brotherhood among the nations.

At the time of her death, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity had over 4, 000 sisters, an associated brotherhood of 300 members, and over 100, 000 lay volunteers, operating 610 missions in 123 countries. These included hospices and homes for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis, soup kitchens, children's and family counseling programs, orphanages, and schools.

Mother Teresa was granted a full state funeral by the Indian Government, an honor normally given to presidents and prime ministers, in gratitude for her services to the poor of all religions in India. Her death was widely considered a great tragedy within both secular and religious communities. The former U. N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, for example, said: " She is the United Nations. She is peace in the world." When she was asked " What can we do to promote world peace?" Her answer was simple: " Go home and love your family."

That was Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, Mother Teresa-our mother Teresa.