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Mother Teresa of Calcutta, tireless worker of mercy

Mother Teresa of Calcutta is now a saint for the entire Catholic Church. Applause followed the phrase “Beatam Teresiam de Calcutta Sanctam esse decernimus et definimus ac Sanctorum Catalogo adscribimus...”, by which the Holy Father proclaimed her a saint this morning, before more than 120,000 people in St. Peter’s Square during the Holy Mass celebrated with seventy cardinals, 400 bishops, and more than 1,700 priests. Many of the faithful present were from Albania, reflecting the new saint’s ethnic origin, and from India, where she spent most of her life and was buried. It was also attended by many volunteers and workers of mercy, participating in their Jubilee.

“On many occasions the prophets proclaimed what was pleasing to God”, said the Pope in his homily. “Their message found a wonderful synthesis in the words ‘I want mercy, not sacrifice’. God is pleased by every act of mercy, because in the brother or sister that we assist, we recognise the face of God which no one can see. Each time we bend down to the needs of our brothers and sisters, we give Jesus something to eat and drink; we clothe, we help, and we visit the Son of God. In a word, we touch the flesh of Christ”.

“We are thus called to translate into concrete acts that which we invoke in prayer and profess in faith. There is no alternative to charity: those who put themselves at the service of others, even when they don’t know it, are those who love God. The Christian life, however, is not merely extending a hand in times of need. If it is just this, it can be, certainly, a lovely expression of human solidarity which offers immediate benefits, but it is sterile because it lacks roots. The task which the Lord gives us, on the contrary, is the vocation to charity in which each of Christ’s disciples puts his or her entire life at His service, so to grow each day in love”.

“We heard in the Gospel, ‘Large crowds were travelling with Jesus’”, he continued. “Today, this ‘large crowd’ is seen in the great number of volunteers who have come together for the Jubilee of Mercy. You are that crowd who follows the Master and who makes visible His concrete love for each person. I repeat to you the words of the Apostle Paul: ‘I have indeed received much joy and comfort from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you’. How many hearts have been comforted by volunteers! How many hands they have held; how many tears they have wiped away; how much love has been poured out in hidden, humble and selfless service! This praiseworthy service gives voice to the faith – it gives voice to the faith! – and expresses the mercy of the Father, who draws near to those in need”.

“Following Jesus is a serious task, and, at the same time, one filled with joy; it takes a certain daring and courage to recognize the divine Master in the poorest of the poor and those who are cast aside, and to give oneself in their service. In order to do so, volunteers, who out of love of Jesus serve the poor and the needy, do not expect any thanks or recompense; rather they renounce all this because they have discovered true love. And each one of us can say: ‘Just as the Lord has come to meet me and has stooped down to my level in my hour of need, so too do I go to meet Him, bending low before those who have lost faith or who live as though God did not exist, before young people without values or ideals, before families in crisis, before the ill and the imprisoned, before refugees and immigrants, before the weak and defenceless in body and spirit, before abandoned children, before the elderly who are on their own. Wherever someone is reaching out, asking for a helping hand in order to get up, this is where our presence – and the presence of the Church which sustains and offers hope – must be’. And I do this, keeping alive the memory of those times when the Lord’s hand reached out to me when I was in need”.

He went on to refer directly to Mother Teresa herself, who “in all aspects of her life was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defence of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded. She was committed to defending life, ceaselessly proclaiming that ‘the unborn are the weakest, the smallest, the most vulnerable’. She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity; she made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognise their guilt for the crime – the crimes! – of poverty they created. For Mother Teresa, mercy was the ‘salt’ which gave flavour to her work, it was the ‘light’ which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering”.

“Her mission to the urban and existential peripheries remains for us today an eloquent witness to God’s closeness to the poorest of the poor. Today, I pass on this emblematic figure of womanhood and of consecrated life to the whole world of volunteers: may she be your model of holiness! I think, perhaps, we may have some difficulty in calling her ‘Saint Teresa’: her holiness is so near to us, so tender and so fruitful that we continue to spontaneously call her ‘Mother Teresa’”.

“May this tireless worker of mercy help us increasingly to understand that our only criterion for action is gratuitous love, free from every ideology and all obligations, offered freely to everyone without distinction of language, culture, race or religion”, Pope Francis concluded. “Mother Teresa loved to say, ‘Perhaps I don’t speak their language, but I can smile’. Let us carry her smile in our hearts and give it to those whom we meet along our journey, especially those who suffer. In this way, we will open up opportunities of joy and hope for our many brothers and sisters who are discouraged and who stand in need of understanding and tenderness”.
