

Words of Wisdom from Mother Teresa of Calcutta

By Jim Seghers

The first of the year is customarily a time when many people reevaluate their lives and make resolutions. With this in mind I will delay my reflections on the Book of Revelation one month to share with you some thought provoking quotations from Mother Teresa of Calcutta. They are drawn from the book, *Mother Teresa of Calcutta* by Msgr. Leo Maasburg.

When she left the Loretto Sisters on August 16, 1948, to begin her work of serving the poorest of the poor, Mother Teresa carried a suitcase and a handbag. She had almost no money. She placed herself and her work entirely in God's Providence. When she died on September 5, 1997, she left a religious family of five congregations in 592 houses scattered throughout the world. Today that number has grown to 750 houses. The Missionaries of Charity own no property and have no endowments. They live like the poorest of the poor. They still rely totally on God's Providence.

"By birth I am Albanian. I am an Indian citizen. I am a Catholic nun. In what I do, I belong to the whole world, but my heart belongs entirely to Jesus."

"I am only a little pencil in the hand of God, a God who is about to write a love letter to the world."

She was once challenged, "Mother your theology is two hundred years behind the times." She replied simply, "No, two thousand years."

To her Sisters she said: "You and I, we are nothing, and in this we see the terrible humility of God. He is so great, so wonderful, that He uses nothingness to show His greatness. And that is why He uses us. Like tubes, we must simply allow God's grace to come through."

When addressing the "Peace Committee" made up of KGB agents and Communist party members, she said: "God loves you! He has written you in the palm of His hand. You are His! He created you to love and to be loved."

Before opening a house in the "Workers Paradise" of the Soviet Union, Mother Teresa was challenged, "What would the Sisters do here? The state provides people with everything that the need." Mother Teresa replied, "They will bestow love and care on those who have no one in their lives. The state cannot do that." By the time of her death there were 15 houses established in the former Soviet Union.

"We came to proclaim Christ in the poorest of the poor by giving humble love and service and do that with a smile."

To her Sisters she said, "God loves the world through you."

"You don't need to come to Calcutta at all to discover Jesus in the poorest of the poor. The poor are right there where you are, very often in your own families. Look for them, find them, and put your love for Jesus into a living action for them."

"Doesn't matter race, doesn't matter religion, Christian or Communist doesn't matter—we are all children of God, created to love and be loved."

To the author: "Father, our witness for Christ must always be of such a kind that people cannot decide against Him by mistake."

"Our works of charity show the poor and the suffering the love that God has for them."

"I will take all the children who are 'incapable of life'."

When receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979: "I feel the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a direct war, a direct killing, direct murder by the mother herself. ... Many people are very, very concerned with the children of India, with the children of Africa where quite a number die, maybe of malnutrition, of hunger and so on, but millions are dying deliberately by the will of the mother. And this is what is the greatest destroyer of peace today. Because if a mother can kill her own child, what is left [but] for me to kill you and you to kill me. There is nothing [in] between."

On February 3, 1994, in Washington, D.D., at the National Prayer Breakfast hosted by the Congress of the United States: "Our Sisters serve the poor people in 105 countries throughout the world. Jesus insisted that we love one another as he loves each one of us. Jesus gave His life to love us. ... Jesus says very clearly: 'Love as I have loved you.' Maybe in our own family we have some body who is feeling lonely, who is feeling sick, who is feeling worried. Are we there? Are we there to be with them, or do we merely put them in the care of others? Are we willing to give until it hurts in order to be with our families, or do we put our own interests first?"

I was surprised in the West to see so many young boys and girls giving to drugs. And I tried to find out why. Why is it like that, when those in the West have so many more things than those in the East? And the answer was: 'Because there is no one in the family to receive them.' ... So their children go to the streets and get involved in drugs or other things. We are talking of love of the child, which is where love and peace must begin. There are the things that break the peace... .

I am willing to accept any child who would be aborted and to give that child to a married couple who will love the child and be loved by the child. From our children's home in Calcutta alone, we have saved over 3,000 children from abortion. These children have

brought such love and joy to their adopting parents and have grown up so full of love and joy.”

“Abortion, which often follows from contraception, brings a people to be spiritually poor, and that is the worst poverty and the most difficult to overcome.”

“I am a specialist in that, probably the world’s best specialist in cleaning toilets.” When she was in China she was asked, “What is a Communist to you?” She answered, “A child of God, a brother, my sister.”

“Holiness is not a luxury of the few. It’s a simple duty for each one of us. For holiness brings love, and love brings peace, and peace brings us together.”

“How do you learn humility? Only through humiliations!”

“God didn’t call me to be successful. God called me to be faithful.”

When the author touted the efficiency of mobile telephones and suggested that each of the Sister’s houses be equipped with one, Mother Teresa replied, “Father, we have a vow of poverty, not a vow of economy.”

“Father, the miracle is not the work that we do. The miracle is that we are happy to be able to do it.”

When asked what is wrong with the Church today, she replied: “You and me!”

“Yes, it is true. What we do is only a drop in the ocean. But without our work the ocean would be poorer by that drop.”

To her Sisters she said, “If you meet someone who has no smile on his lips, give him one of your smiles.”

“I once dreamed that I had already arrived at the gate of heaven, but Saint Peter told me: Go back to earth; we have no slums up here.”

Epilogue

The miracle approved for Mother Teresa’s beatification was not performed for a Catholic. The Indian woman was an animist (a person who believes that spirits inhabit non-human entities). After several unsuccessful courses of treatment, she was in the final stages of cancer and came to the Sisters’ house to die. The Sisters prayed with her and asked Mother Teresa to intercede. The woman fell asleep. When she woke up the next morning she was—as the doctors confirmed—completely cured.