

Twenty-Third Sunday of the Year
9/4/16
Cycle C
Canonization of Mother Teresa of Kolkata

Mother Teresa was already a religious woman working as a missionary in Kolkata when the Lord Jesus called her to live her religious vows in a more radical way. She left the sheltered routines of her life as a religious teacher in Kolkata to enter the chaotic misery on the streets of that city. There she would meet and serve her Lord, Jesus Christ.

I visited Kolkata in January 2015. On the first of January a group of brother priests from Sacramento and I were driven by van out to the motherhouse where Mother Teresa began her work and where her human remains were laid to rest. The restless, noisy, colorful, busy urban whirl of the Kolkata was all around us. Poor people living and dying on the streets were everywhere. After about 20 minutes of navigating through the shifting tides of cars, buses, truck, scooters, bicycles and pedestrians, the driver stopped, indicating that we have arrived. I searched through the kaleidoscope of colors and smells that churned around us. Finally, my eyes caught a simple sign that read, "Missionaries of Charity."

We got out of the van and were lead down an alley. Even in midmorning that did not seem like a good idea but along we all

went. A few yards through the narrow passage we found a young Missionary of Charity standing at the door with a frail homeless man sitting on the stoop, both of them welcoming us with a grin. We were escorted into the Motherhouse and taken to the room where the tomb of Mother Teresa was placed. The rumble and blare of the street filtered through the windows but the room was possessed by the tranquility of a sanctuary. We were able to linger with the Muslims, Hindi, and Christians affectionately gathered around the tomb. Later we offered Mass on one side of her tomb, visited with the sisters, toured the Motherhouse, saw Mother's room, and then left to continue our journey through India.

In today's gospel, Jesus said to his followers, "Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14.25-33) The tone of his words seemed to be more a warning than an invitation. He told them to consider carefully the cost. Like a builder who must calculate the cost of construction or a king weighing the cost of battle, a disciple should consider the weight of the cross to be carried. "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

St. Teresa of Kolkata entered into the mystery of this mission, the saving mission of Jesus. Pundits praise her

successes. Others question her achievements. Most weigh her legacy on worldly scales. They fail to see that her life was not a matter of success or accomplishments. Hers was a life of faithfulness. She embraced the cross upon which so many of the poor and discarded suffer. With St. Paul, she sought the inestimable treasure of Christ crucified and found him in the anguished faces, the crippled limbs, and famished features of her sisters and brothers forsaken on the streets of Kolkata as well as cities around the world.

“I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.” (Phil. 3.8-9) St. Teresa found Christ in those the world considers rubbish, those who have been pushed aside by a throw-away culture.

Pope Francis has criticized the domination of a throw-away culture. He has challenged us to create a new culture, a culture of encounter. In this jubilee year of mercy, the Holy Father wants us to encounter God’s mercy and to bring an encounter of mercy to others. For this reason, he has chosen to canonize Mother Teresa during this jubilee of mercy. She found the Lord’s mercy in the squalor of Kolkata. She became a vessel of that mercy for those she approached, for those whose fevered bodies she

bathed, for those whose trembling hands she touched, for those whose fears faded in the gentle light of her smile.

The heart of this mystical mission of mercy was St. Teresa's love for the Eucharist. There was a graceful fusion of charity and worship that weaved into one faithful fabric her contemplation of the Eucharist Lord with her gaze of the poor. Hers was a life of profound reverence for the Lord Jesus and the wounded humanity he saved by his sacrifice on the cross.

This reverential life lived in solidarity with Christ crucified is what made her life so attractive. People still look in wonder at her life. Even for those who question her legacy, it is the unfathomable mystery of God's mercy that provokes such pondering. She made the gospel both alluring and unsettling.

The life of St. Teresa of Kolkata should unsettle the soul. The first reading today asked us all to consider, "Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the LORD intends? For the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans." (Wis. 9.13-18)

Through St. Teresa of Kolkata the mercy of God looms over us. Her legacy shakes us from the dullness of indifference. How great is the cost of following Jesus but how unimaginable is the

joy of embracing the supreme good of knowing, face-to-face, the tender mercy of Christ Jesus, the Lord.