



St. Teresa Was a 'Pencil in God's Hand' - But How Much He Was Able to Write With This 'Little Pencil'

(ZENIT, Vatican City, September 5, 2016). On this first feast day of St. Teresa of Calcutta, the Pope's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Square this morning to give thanks for her canonization on Sunday. The canonization was celebrated by Pope Francis and was attended by thousands of pilgrims from all over the world including many men and women religious of the order she founded, the Missionaries of Charity.

"Mother Teresa liked to define herself as 'a pencil in the hand of the Lord'. But how many poems of charity, compassion, comfort and joy this little pencil was able to write! Poems of love and tenderness for the poorest of the poor, to whom she consecrated her existence", said the Cardinal in his homily.

The recently proclaimed saint "opened eyes to suffering, and embraced it with a gaze of compassion. All her being was challenged and moved by this encounter, which in a certain sense pierced her heart, following Jesus' example, which was moved by the suffering of the human creature, incapable of getting up again alone". The saint of the slums of Calcutta discovered in the face of Christ Who made Himself poor for us, to enrich us with His poverty, and responded to His boundless love with an immense love for the poor.

But Mother Teresa also knew that one of the most terrible forms of poverty consists in the awareness of being unloved, unwanted and despised. "A form of poverty present even in those countries and families that are less poor, even in people belonging to categories that have access to means and opportunities, but which experience the interior emptiness of having lost meaning and direction in life, or who are violently struck by the desolation of broken bonds, of the harshness of loneliness, of the feeling of being forgotten by all or of not being of use to anyone".

This led her to identify unborn children whose very existence is threatened as "the

poorest of the poor". "Indeed", continued Cardinal Parolin, "each one of them depends, more than any other human being, on the love and care of the mother and the protection of society. The unborn child has nothing of his own: all his hopes and needs are in the hands of others. She therefore bravely defended the life of the unborn, with the frankness of word and linearity of action that are the luminous sign of the presence of the Prophets and the Saints, who kneel before none other than the Almighty, who have inner freedom as they have inner strength, and do not bow before the fashions or idols of the moment, but are reflected in consciousness enlightened by the sun of the Gospel".

"In her, we discover that happy and inseparable combination of the heroic exercise of charity and clarity in the proclamation of truth; we see constant industriousness, nurtured by the profundity of contemplation, the mystery of good performed in humility and tirelessly, the fruit of a love that 'hurts'".

"In this respect", the Secretary of State remarked, "she affirmed in her famous address upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Oslo on 11 December 1979, that 'it is very important for us to realise that love, to be true, has to hurt. It hurt Jesus to love us, it hurt him'. And, giving thanks to present and future benefactors, she said, 'I don't want you to give to me from your abundance, I want that you give to me until it hurts'".

"I believe that these words are like a threshold and, once we cross it, we enter into the abyss that surrounds the life of the Saint, in those heights and those depths that are difficult to explore as they closely follow the sufferings of Christ, His unconditional gift of love and the deep wounds that He had to endure", observed Cardinal Parolin.

"Another of the seven words pronounced by Jesus during His agony on the cross, she wanted to be written in English in every house of her Congregation, beside the Crucifix: 'I thirst'. Thirst for fresh, clean water; thirst of souls to console and redeem from their ugliness, to become beautiful and pleasing to the eyes of God; thirst for God, for His living and luminous presence. 'I thirst': this is the thirst that burned in Mother Teresa, her cross and her exaltation, her torment and her glory".

"When Mother Teresa left this earth for Heaven, on 5 September 1997, for several long minutes Calcutta was without light", he said. "On this earth, she was a transparent sign that pointed to Heaven. On the day of her death Heaven wished to offer a seal to her life and to communicate to us that a new light had been lit above us. Now, following the 'official' recognition of her sainthood, it shines even more brightly. May this light, that is the everlasting light of the Gospel, continue to illuminate our earthly pilgrimage and the paths of this difficult world".

Pope Francis' Homily at Canonization of Blessed Teresa

"Who can learn the counsel of God?" (*Wis* 9:13). This question from the Book of Wisdom that we have just heard in the first reading suggests that our life is a mystery and that we do not possess the key to understanding it. There are always two protagonists in history: God and man. Our task is to perceive the call of God and then to do his will. But in order to do his will, we must ask ourselves, "What is God's will in my life?"

We find the answer in the same passage of the Book of Wisdom: "People were taught what pleases you" (*Wis* 9:18). In order to ascertain the call of God, we must ask ourselves and understand what pleases God. On many occasions the prophets proclaimed what was pleasing to God. Their message found a wonderful synthesis in the words "I want mercy, not sacrifice" (*Hos* 6:6; *Mt* 9:13). God is pleased by every act of mercy, because in the brother or sister that we assist, we recognize the face of God which no one can see (cf. *Jn* 1:18). 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 (cf. *Mt* 25:40). 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 (cf. *1 Jn* 3:16-18; *Jas* 2:14-18). 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" (*Lk* 14:25). 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" (*Philem* 1:7). 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.

Mother Teresa, 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 recognize 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 continually 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. 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.