

## 10. Mother Teresa

The former secretary general of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, once called Mother Teresa "the most powerful woman in the world." Hyperbole notwithstanding - it can be said of the peasant "saint of the gutters," the saint of God's thirst to love and be loved by humanity, that she is history's best known nun. Appreciated primarily for her service to the "poorest of the poor" - and honored for it through a Nobel Prize - Mother Teresa's extraordinary holiness and mystical depths came to light only a few years ago because of the publication of her private correspondence.

**I. Jesus' Death as Birthing New Life:** If I ever become a saint - I will surely be one of darkness. I will continually be absent from heaven - to light the light of those in darkness on earth. Mother Teresa, Come Be My Light, 1.

A brief biography of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: Lived 1910-1997. Born of Albanian parents in Macedonia. Once called "the most powerful woman in the world." History's best known nun. Called the peasant "saint of the gutters," the saint of God's thirst to love and be loved by humanity. She possessed both an intense love of the "Sacred Heart of Jesus" and "the love of souls" from the time of her First Communion.

She knew from the age of twelve that she was destined to serve the poor in a foreign land. Entering the sisters of Loreto in Dublin in September 1928, she took the name "Teresa" out of devotion to Therese of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries, and was sent to Calcutta to teach at St. Mary's medium school for girls. During this time, Mother Teresa took an exceptional private vow to consider even the smallest voluntary refusal to submit to God's will to be a "mortal sin." This private vow was the motivation behind all that she did and one of "her greatest secrets."

During a train journey to Darjeeling on September 10, 1946 (which she called her "initiation day") Mother Teresa received the "call within a call" to quench the thirst of the crucified Jesus to love and to be loved by serving him in the poorest of the poor. This invitation also initiated a series of further interior words and locutions, in which Christ addressed her as "my own spouse." She realized that she must then "live like an Indian with the Indians."

**II. Mother Teresa's Mysticism:** Her so-called "business card" summary: "The fruit of silence is prayer. The fruit of prayer is faith. The fruit of faith is love. The fruit of love is service. The fruit of service is peace." Mother Teresa in Soundings

in the Christian Mystical Tradition, 369. Three visions deepened Mother Teresa's mysticism of enculturation. Although she experienced no further visions, she had not the slightest doubt about the genuineness of these three visions - nor did she have any interest in them.

Her 1946-47 honeymoon period of her mystical life, during which she experienced so much "union – love – faith – trust – prayer - sacrifice." "The sweetness and consolation and union of those six months passed by too soon." There were also "oasis moments" of "joy untold" that punctuated her long bouts of darkness, loneliness, and pain of loss. Mother Teresa, Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition, 370. The 13th-century Franciscan ecstatic mystic, Giles of Assisi. Bonaventure wrote of "ecstatic anointings" and "mystical death." Catherine of Siena also experienced a "mystical death."

**III. "Dark Raptures" and Suffering Servant Mysticism:** Description and examples of the experience of dark raptures: Marie of the Incarnation and her vision of a building fashioned of crucified bodies. Gemma Galgani, during a vision of Christ crucified. Therese of Lisieux wrote of her mysticism of the Little Way as one of the victim-face of Isaiah's suffering servant. Elizabeth of the Trinity, Victim-Soul mysticism. Faustina Kowalska agrees to be a sacrificial host for the forgiveness of sins.

Mother Teresa's dark raptures and Suffering Servant Mysticism are in line with what we have just heard. Mother Teresa's account of her severe trials surpasses even the prolonged years of suffering of Paul of the Cross. A counter-balance to the popular view of mysticism as consisting of ecstatic experiences and states of rapture.

Another anomaly in her writings: an almost complete absence of references to sin and disorder. Her unshakable resolve to live "for God alone, God everywhere, God in everybody and in everything, God always." "Her greatest secret": the excruciating mystical dark night allowed her to identify more closely with the poor. Suffering-Servant mysticism (atoning for and "repairing" the sins of others) and her prophecy that she would be a saint of darkness giving light to others. Her lived commentary on 2 Cor 5:21, Galatians 2:20. Heart of her mysticism: mad, passionate, total love of Jesus Christ. She wrote of herself as leading a Eucharistic, Calvary life. Almost her last words: "Jesus, I have never refused you anything."

### **Review Questions**

1. How is Mother Teresa's mystical darkness connected to her service of the

poorest of the poor.

2. The idea of dark raptures and suffering servant mysticism show that the life of a mystic is not always glorious. Is this something to which we are all called or is this a special calling?