

**HOMILY - MASS OF THANKSGIVING FOR
CANONIZATION OF MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA
NATIONAL SHRINE OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II, SEPTEMBER 1, 2016**

Today we gather to give thanks to God for the life and service of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, who will be canonized in the coming days by Pope Francis. I express my gratitude to all of you, especially to the Missionaries of Charity, as well as the volunteers, staff, and benefactors of this National Shrine of Saint John Paul II, including the Knights of Columbus. In a special way, I want to welcome and thank the Babailovs. In the introduction to the book *Greatest Portrait Moments*, featuring the work of Mr. Babailov, Michael Novak wrote: "Mr. Babailov has an uncanny ability to get inside the souls of the subjects of his paintings, at the same time as he somehow finds a way to capture some characteristic feature of their eyes or smile... He somehow captures the soul of the person over time, so that the portrait is never exactly a photograph of a moment in time but a glimpse of character and suffering over time."

Later, we will have the unveiling of *Credo*; however, the life of Mother Teresa of Calcutta itself reveals her character in the face of suffering. In his homily of beatification St. John Paul II expressed his own gratitude for her: "*I am personally grateful to this courageous woman whom I have always felt beside me. Mother Teresa, an icon of the Good Samaritan, went everywhere to serve Christ in the poorest of the poor.*"

Mother Teresa is an "icon" of God's love. She is a prophetic "sign of the times", awakening the consciences of the men and women of our day. In this chapel we see the stark contrast between sin and redemption. We see the suffering and confusion brought about through rejection of God and God's perfect plan for Redemption. Suffering has not left this world after the arrival of the Redeemer, but Mother Teresa teaches how to respond to evil— with love – one person at a time.

When accepting the Nobel Peace Prize she said, "If you hear of some woman who does not want to keep her child ... try to persuade her to bring him to me. I will love that child, seeing in him the sign of God's love."

Do we see each person as an icon or sign of God's love? Pope Francis laments the dominant throwaway culture- even of persons! Mother Teresa provides a prophetic reminder that even those at the peripheries are lovable and are signs of God's love to us. She founded the Missionaries of Charity. In doing so, she gave witness that the evangelizing mission of the Church passes through charity. According to the Constitutions of her order, "A Missionary of Charity is a carrier of God's love, especially to the poorest of the poor, setting all on fire with love for Him and for one another; a healing touch of God that cures all diseases; a soothing smile of God that warms all hearts; God's own language of love that all hearts understand."

Does that sound like you or me? In prayer and action, we encounter the God who is love (1 Jn 4:8). Charity is divine love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5). The Constitutions continue: "The characteristic of this quality of love, which is not just human love, is selflessness: it shares in the selfless giving of God's love."

The evangelizing mission of the Church passes through charity, *nourished by prayer and listening to God's words*. Again at her Mass of Beatification, Saint John Paul II said: "*Contemplation and action, evangelization and human promotion: Mother Teresa proclaimed the Gospel living her life as a total gift to the poor but, at the same time, steeped in prayer.*"

Today, our mission is brought into focus by hearing God's words from the Gospel of Matthew. It summarizes the life and mission, not only of Mother Teresa, but of each person here. *Whatever you did for the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.* (Mt 25:40) During this Year of Mercy, we hear a Gospel of Judgment. We will be judged on the basis of our love for the least of His brothers and sisters.

The Pope is called the Servant of the Servants of God. What is remarkable about Mother's witness is not merely that she made herself least through a life of radical poverty, but that she made herself the *Servant of the Least* - of the Poorest of the Poor. Acts of love done to the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and prisoners were acts of love directed to the poor Christ, whose presence she detected in the broken bodies of the poor, dwelling in the "dark holes" of the world, suffering from the terrible poverty of being rejected and forgotten. It was at the "peripheries" that with joy she satiated the thirst of the abandoned, Crucified One, following the example of the Mother of God who refused to abandon her Son.

Mother Teresa's witness calls us from our comfort to a deeper, radical love for Christ Himself. As a consecrated woman her witness is still more powerful, particularly in the midst of an ideology and culture that confuses the distinction between man and woman. Her *spousal love* for Christ, her self-giving, was shown forth in her love for him in the Poorest of the Poor. St. John Paul II said, "*Recognizing him, she ministered to him with wholehearted devotion, expressing the delicacy of her spousal love. Thus, in total gift of herself to God and neighbor, Mother Teresa found her greatest fulfillment and lived the noblest qualities of her femininity. She wanted to be a sign of God's love, God's presence, and God's compassion.*"

Her witness is an invitation to dedicate ourselves to "Wholehearted and free service to the Poorest of the Poor." She said, "Faith in action is love. Love in action is service." It is not easy in this culture to imitate her radical witness, but it is not impossible either. Our efforts may seem small. Once Mother was told, "All this effort, all this work, only to help people die... What you are doing is useless! The sea is so great!" Mother simply responded: "It is a drop of water in the sea! But after this drop of water, the sea will not be the same!"

Saint John Paul II and soon-to-be Saint Teresa of Calcutta were never content to let the sea- to let our world - be the same - not for you, me, or the Poorest of the Poor! Where Mother Teresa is there are no more slums- only love. We give thanks to God for her and ask her for help, so that where ever we are we may be true missionaries of charity- of God's love.