

23rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”
September 3-4, 2022

Serving the “poorest of the poor”

Readings: Wisdom 9:13-18; Philemon 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33

In his homily for the canonization of Mother Teresa six years ago today, Pope Francis noted the difficulty in calling her St. Teresa because “her holiness is so near to us, so tender and so fruitful that we continually spontaneously call her ‘Mother Teresa’.” She was a spiritual mother to so many in her work amongst the poorest of the poor. She died 25 years ago (September 5, 1997), meaning there is an entire generation born since her death- we need to keep her legacy alive for a new generation.

In a 1986 documentary showing her visiting the center for the lepers, it was difficult to see the images of the people, who so consumed by their diseases. And yet there were the sisters, working alongside medical staff in bathing and dressing the people’s wounds. Mother Teresa noted that only through the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament were the sisters able to conform themselves to Jesus such that they could truly say that when they were dressing the wounds of the lepers, they were touching Jesus himself. The Knights of Columbus have just premiered a new film.

Born on August 26, 1910 with the baptismal name of Agnes in **Skopje** (SKOP-*yee*) Macedonia-part of the Ottoman Empire- Teresa was baptized the following day, which she considered her “true birthday,” one reason why August 27 has sometimes been listed as her birthday. Her family was of Kosovar Albanian origin and later moved there.

Mother Teresa said: “By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus.” She joined the convent at 18 and took her religious name after Therese of Lisieux. As one sister had already that name, she opted for the Spanish spelling. She journeyed to Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto, where she studied the English language and prepared to be a missionary.

Though content to be sent to India as a teacher, she became increasingly disturbed by the poverty in Calcutta. While on a train to Darjeeling for her annual retreat, she recounted the genesis of her “call within a call”: “I

was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order. To fail would have been to break the faith.” Her new habit was a simple cotton Sari, decorated with a blue border recognizable to all.

She opened the first home for the dying in 1952. She received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, humbly declining a banquet in her honor, using the award money to further her mission. Her simple, yet direct defense of innocent life in the womb at the 1994 National Prayer Breakfast in the presence of the President of the United States was powerful. She said “the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child...”

She concluded by saying: “Let us make that one point – that no child will be unwanted, unloved, uncared for, or killed and thrown away. And give until it hurts – with a smile. If we remember that God loves us, and that we can love others as He loves us, then America can become a sign of peace for the world.” What a beautiful challenge issued to our nation on this Labor Day weekend. May we indeed labor to provide for all those who are in need, without respect to age, sex, class, race or ethnicity.

Our reading from the Book of Wisdom makes a sobering observation: “For the corruptible body burdens the soul and the earthen shelter weighs down the mind that has many concerns.” I cannot fathom the many concerns that must have occupied St. Teresa’s mind and heart as she sought the world over to serve the poor. She suffered spiritual dryness and abandonment, and yet turned it all over to God.

Similarly, if our minds are weighed down with so many cares that they cannot function as they were intended, we must ask God for the grace to recalibrate our lives, resting in the knowledge of God’s presence.

I close with an excerpt from a prayer included in the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890). Mother Teresa adapted it slightly, praying it after Holy Communion with her Sisters of Charity. The final two words of this excerpt are also the episcopal motto of our Archbishop:

Shine through us, and be so in us,
that every person we should come in contact with
may feel your presence in our soul.
Let them look up and see no longer us, but only Jesus.