



Mother Teresa – Come Be My Light

The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”

Team Notes For:

- Preface and Introduction
- Chapter One

Reading For Oct. 11th:

- Chapter Two (11 pgs)
 - Chapter Three (15 pgs)
- NOTE!** Oct 25th's meeting will be postponed one week to Nov 1st.

***“Put your hand in His hand, and walk alone with Him.”
“She was very, very much in love with Almighty God.”***

- **Fitting prayers from Mass on the opening day of our Book Club:** Entrance Antiphon: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me and sent me to preach the good news to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted.* Responsorial Psalm: *Hope in God; I will praise him, my savior and my God.* Communion Antiphon: *Let them thank the Lord for his mercy, his wonders for the children of men, for he satisfies the thirsty soul, and the hungry he fills with good things.* (Breaking Bread p 874)
- **Allowing the will of God to lead**
- Despite the extraordinary attention that Mother Teresa garnered for her work over the course of her eighty-seven years, she steadfastly held the view that she was simply God’s instrument. She likened herself to “*a pencil in God’s hand.*” (Preface ix) “*Very often I feel like a little pencil in God’s Hands. He does the writing, He does the thinking, He does the movement, I have only to be the pencil.*” (Endnotes p 363) Mother Teresa embraced her nothingness as a means for God to shine through and allow his greatness to be seen. (Preface ix)
 - We discussed the value of being simple – Mother Teresa led a life uncomplicated by the world; her guide was God. Her mission was clear and focused; she and her order delivered profound and impactful aid to those greatly in need, the poorest of the poor, despite the many challenges they faced.
 - We noted that her work came to be known throughout the world; the whole world responded to the news of her death. Though she didn’t follow the world, the world followed her – “*People of all creeds and walks of life recognized her selfless love and compassion for the poor, they admired her simplicity and genuineness and were attracted by the joy and peace that radiated from her.*” (Preface ix)
 - Interestingly, while we, like many, saw the beauty of simplicity, we noted the difficulty in achieving it ourselves. The world around us is in a tumultuous state – yet time and time again, genuineness and simplicity are valued. We should strive to be that way and share our faith in God’s lead publicly – we can be that way and we have so many examples to point to, such as Mother Teresa.
 - Simplicity isn’t easy, it takes effort: “*...my love for Jesus – I would give everything, even life itself, for Him. It sounds nice but in reality it is not so easy...*” (p 25). Again, we have a saint whose mission is clear and straightforward but perseverance is still needed.
 - Though she had an interior calling at 5 ½ years old, she contemplated her vocation until she was 18. It took 6 of those years to decide on her vocation as a missionary nun. She shows us that contemplation is important, even when living a life of simplicity, that we must be still. Consider our Mother, Mary – she often ponders vs. reacts.
 - We noted many similarities between Mother Teresa and her chosen namesake, St. Thérèse of Lisieux: Faith in God, especially through trials, and the value of prayer. A strong, faithful family as support and guidance. Religion as a foundation for living life and notably, a very supportive parish: “*She had been raised in a family that fostered piety and devotion, and in a fervent parish community that also contributed to her religious upbringing.*” (p 14). Her mother provided excellent counsel – advice that we should all take, “*Put your hand in His [Jesus’] hand, and walk alone with him. Walk ahead, because if you look back, you will go back.*” (p 13)
 - Mother Teresa’s commitment and devotion to doing God’s work, bringing all glory to him, was so strong that she sincerely did not want her private writings to be made public; even more so, she wanted them to be destroyed, lest they bring attention and accolades to her and her Sisters, rather than God. (Preface ix, p 4-7)
 - Given this, we found it interesting that while she learned so much from St. Thérèse and her writings and others before her, she didn’t want to share her interior externally. It was her humility and deep, delicate love for God (Preface x) that compelled her to keep all focus on Him. There must be something deeply personal and devoted within these saints that they don’t fully recognize their impact on the world. “*It is traditional teaching that the mystical charism of God’s close friends is meant not primarily for themselves but for the good of the whole church.*” (p 10). In the end, it is obedience to God that causes her to reveal her spiritual darkness: “*She revealed her interior state only because she felt God urging her to do so...*” (p 8-9)

- **A sensitivity to ‘darkness’ early in life; Determination & trust through her own darkness** (bold added)
- “From the age of 5 ½ years, – when first I received Him [Jesus] – the love for souls has been within. – It grew with the years – until I came to India – with the hope of saving many souls.” (p 3). And from her letter while traveling to India: “Pray for your missionary, that Jesus may help her to save as many immortal souls as possible from the **darkness** of unbelief.” (p 15). “Her mission was to bring the light of faith to those living in **darkness**.” (p 3)
 - Throughout her life, Mother Teresa strove to follow the guidance she received from Jesus to “Come be my light” – “to be that light of God’s love in the lives of those who were experiencing darkness.” (p 1, 3)
 - God works in mysterious ways. Though she aimed to bring light, she herself would be immersed in darkness for close to half her life: “...this loneliness – this continual longing for God – which gives me that pain deep down in my heart. – **Darkness** is such that I really do not see – neither with my mind nor with my reason. –The place of God in my soul is blank...” (p 1-2 – please read her full letter). Darkness in her life: “...the new call inviting her to embrace the spiritual reality of those she served.” (p 2) Mother Teresa came “to grasp that her painful inner experience was an essential part of living out her mission. It was a sharing in the Passion of Christ on the Cross... Eventually, she recognized her mysterious suffering as an imprint of Christ’s Passion on her soul.” (p 3-4) We found that God gave her darkness as a gift which she drew from to serve others.
 - “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.” (p 1)
 - Trust is forefront in Mother Teresa’s approach to serving, living and persevering through darkness: “Now I really rejoice when something does not go as I wish – because I see that He wants our trust...” (p 24). Trust is faith. Faith is trust. This trust was crucial to see her through: “Since she had experienced a high degree of union with God, the change was not only surprising but also agonizing; unable to feel His presence as she had earlier, she was bewildered and afraid.” (p 3) “She was truly a witness to hope, an apostle of love and joy, because **she had built the edifice of her life on pure faith.**” (p 4)
 - In her early experience with ‘darkness’ she was concerned that she might be going the ‘wrong way’, that it might be some form of purification for her sinfulness and weakness... “...with the help of her spiritual directors, she progressively came to grasp that her painful inner experience was an essential part of living out her mission.” (p 3)
 - Her interior disposition provided a framework and foundation to accept her suffering and serve others: a complete trust in God even though, for years, she received no consolation (no comfort) from God. In her pain and loneliness, she persevered in trust: “I have more often as my companion “darkness”. And when the night becomes very thick – and it seems to me as if I will end up in hell– then I simply offer myself to Jesus. If He wants me to go there – I am ready– but only under the condition that it really makes Him happy. I need much grace, much of Christ’s strength to **persevere in trust**, in that blind love which leads only to Jesus Crucified...” (p 20)
 - Page 22 provides an overview of St. John of the Cross’s view of ‘darkness’ as he termed, “dark night of the senses” and “dark night of the soul”. Please see the next page of this document for more information on this. We discussed that when God grants these ‘dark nights of the senses’ and ‘dark nights of the spirit’, it is for the good of our soul. We must be patient, humble, trusting. We cannot let times of darkness bring us to discouragement but, rather, to have faith this is not a form of torture but a means to bring us to another level, another depth, of love for God.
- **An understanding of sacrifice** (an offering of something precious) **aka suffering**
- Her suffering is one of darkness – God hidden from her and the trials of her daily work: “It does not go so easily when a person has to be on one’s feet from morning till evening. But still, everything is for Jesus...” (p 25) We observed that being on their feet all day must not have been easy – likely with poor shoes, often leaning over to care for others, lifting people to help them, “the heat of India is simply burning... it seems to me that fire is under my feet from which even my whole body is burning. When it is hardest, I console myself with the thought that souls are saved in this way and that dear Jesus has suffered much more for them...” (p 18-19)... ‘all day on their feet’ was/is significantly different than all day on ours.
 - From her poem, “In her hand a cross of iron – On which the Savior hangs, – While her eager soul offers there – Its painful sacrifice. – Oh God, accept this sacrifice – As a sign of my love, – Help, please, Thy creature – To glorify Thy name!” (p 16)
 - “I used to get goose bumps at the thought of suffering – but now I embrace suffering even before it actually comes, and like this Jesus and I live in love.” (p 20)

- “...because I am enjoying my complete happiness, even when I suffer something for my beloved Spouse.” (p 18)
- She observes and learns from others: “Sister Gabriela... the most important is that she knows how to suffer and at the same time how to laugh. That is the most important – to suffer and to laugh”. “Sister Bernard... And she is a real hero, bearing up everything courageously with a smile...” (p 24). We thought these were beautiful and helpful. It is OK, and helpful, to laugh and be joyful even in times of struggle and strife; we should introduce joy to our struggles. “But do not think that I am only suffering. Ah no – I am laughing more than I am suffering – so that some have concluded that I am Jesus’ spoiled bride, who lives with Jesus in Nazareth – far away from Calvary.” (p 20)

➤ The power of a smile, your presence, of offering joy to those who struggle

- “Every Sunday I visit the poor in Calcutta’s slums. I cannot help them, because I do not have anything, but I go to give them joy... [description of the deplorable conditions] It was very painful for me, but at the same time I was very happy when I saw that they are happy because I visit them. Finally, the mother said to me: “Oh, Ma, come again! Your smile brought sun into this house!” (p 27)

➤ The value of prayer

- Mother Teresa continually prays and asks for prayer. She understands its power. She trusts, has faith, that God will answer in his own way – according to his will. “Pray for your missionary, that Jesus may help her to save as many immortal souls as possible from the darkness of unbelief.” (p 15) “Pray for us that we may be good and courageous missionaries.” (p 17) “Pray, pray much for me – I really need His love.” (p 20) “But one thing I beg of you: pray always for me” (p 21) “One thing, pray much for me...” (p 25)
- We discussed that seeking prayer for oneself isn’t selfish. Seeking help to draw closer to God and accept his grace and guidance is wonderful.
- We also noted that the Rosary is a valuable prayer tool; a way to share our prayer intentions with Mary as an intercessor with Jesus.

➤ St John of the Cross and “The Dark Night”

- “The spiritual master aptly employed this term to designate the painful purifications one undergoes before reaching union with God. They are accomplished in two phases.” “In the first night one is freed from attachment to sensory satisfactions and drawn into the prayer of contemplation...” In the second night “to be purged from the deepest roots of one’s imperfections. A state of extreme aridity accompanies this purification, and one feels rejected and abandoned by God... and is excruciating because one wants only God...” (please read p 22 - 23)
- **Catholic.com: The Dark Night – there are four parts to the night:**

Those who have developed a certain faithfulness to prayer (e.g. meditation and devotions) and who strive to mortify their passions, reign in their desires and change bad behaviors may experience the ‘dark night of the senses’:

1. **Dark night of senses (active)** – our exterior senses are being purified ... seeing, hearing, tasting, etc.

As our way of prayer is changed by God away from meditation to simplified recollection and infused contemplation, we may experience a passive dark night of the senses:

2. **Dark night of the senses (passive)** – our interior-sense faculties of imagination, fantasy, etc. are the object of purification.

We respond to God’s initiative through ever deeper mortifications – no longer of sense but now of spirit:

3. **Dark night of spirit (active)** – In an effort to be faithful to the strong desire for recollection and contemplation that God has infused into us, we strive to conform our intellect, will and memory to the work He is doing. It is a time of deep interior joy and profound spiritual insight. To a large degree this involves keeping check on the wanderings of mind and heart. In short, reigning in our thoughts and feelings so as to remain more habitually recollected and united to God in prayer that is now becoming continuous.

The passive night of spirit may follow:

4. **Dark night of spirit (passive)** – Our contemplation no longer consoles but assails us. It can be a time of utter desolation as we are stripped completely bare before our Lord. We are blinded in His dazzling light as our remaining imperfections are pulled up by their very roots. In short, we are being made “perfect” ... at least to the degree possible in this earthly life.