



Mother Teresa – Come Be My Light

The Private Writings of the “Saint of Calcutta”

Team Notes For:

- Chapter Six
- Chapter Seven

Reading For Nov. 22nd:

- Chapter Eight (29 pgs)
- Chapter Nine (30 pgs)

Special session: Friday, November 15th we will watch a movie on Mother Teresa, “The Letters”.
9:30 – 11:00 am – Meet in the Gathering Room.

“Seeing her poorly dressed in a simple, humble sari, with a Rosary in her hand, was like seeing the Gospel come alive, making Jesus present among the poorest. One could say a Light has dawned in the darkest of the slums.”

The Power of Prayer, The Impact of Works

The most prevalent topics present in these chapters were the overwhelming reality of the power of prayer and the impact of works. See ‘I’ and ‘II’ below for two impactful observations that came forth:

- I. **Do we really mean it when we ask for prayers on behalf of someone/something or respond that we’ll say prayers for that person/situation? Or has it become a ‘throw-away’ thing to say? We decided we needed to take prayer more seriously. We need more quiet time in conversation, listening and talking to God.**

Throughout Mother Teresa’s journey, she always asked for prayer. The consistency and urgency of her prayer and prayer requests reveal that she really, truly understood the role of prayer in pursuing and having the courage to follow-through, on God’s will – despite delays, obstacles and other challenges. She had faith (trust) that God’s would be successful if she did her role properly. She also grasped the need for the support of others – she could not complete God’s mission on her own. As such, she knew that God’s hand needed to be involved in all aspects of her work. Thus, the continual need for prayer – conversation with God and Jesus, together with the intercessory help of Mary. These prayers sought to bring God’s light and wisdom into the hearts and minds of everyone who would help bring the mission to life.

Prayer & faith – and their impact:

- The previous, seemingly reluctant Archbishop’s support changed and soon brought much needed validation to her mission: *“Archbishop P erier became her earnest advocate and principal guide.”* (p 107)
- Regarding success or failure, we were captivated by her recognition that her role had to be aligned with God’s, otherwise, failure might ensue. She refused to attach failure to God. Underline added: *“[I]f the inspiration comes from God, and I am convinced it does, there could be no question of failure.”* (p 108) *“Success or failure whatever be His plan– the first is His– the second be mine.”* (p 130)
- Despite constant obstacles, she persevered: *“...Mother M. Teresa has not always been understood well and that in the opinion of a few she is not considered very highly, perhaps even not favourably...”* (p 109) She prayed much, especially valuing her time in adoration from which she drew strength to deal with these challenges, not becoming defeated.
- Her very self was formed around God; she constantly sought to put herself, her comfort, her needs aside so that she could respond to Jesus’ call: *“she has a very high ideal in her religious life, is intimately united with Our Lord, humble and submissive, obedient and extremely zealous, entirely oblivious of self.”* (p 109)
- In addition to prayer, Mother Teresa sought to have Jesus with her at all times: *“How many must we be to have the Blessed Sacrament in our midst? – The work that we will have to do, will be impossible without His continual grace from the tabernacle. – He will have to do everything. – We have just to follow.”* (p 111) We often forget that we can have Jesus with us by praying before Jesus present in on our own at church or in adoration and at Mass, and by receiving him at Communion.
- The recognition the new order was made more joyous for Mother Teresa: *“the long desired permission to have the Blessed Sacrament present in the convent chapel... ‘Soon our Lord will be with us.—Everything will be easy then—He will be there personally.”* (p 139)
- To her spiritual director, she asked for prayer to strive only to do God’s work and not her own: *“You must pray for me – to learn how to get rid of self in myself and live intimately with Him... Pray for light that I may see and [for] courage to do away with anything of self in the work.”* (p 113). Her letters continually reflect her request for prayerful support: *“Please pray for me that I may have the courage to complete my sacrifice as He has given me the inspiration and grace to begin...”* (p 121)
- Her faith was firm to pursue a mission that she knew she didn’t have the skills to do alone, but she trusted completely in God. She wrote to the Pope: *“...I admit that I possess no virtue and have not merit; it is a mystery to me how the Good God wants this from poor me.”* (p 116)

- Mother Teresa’s fellow religious prayed fervently for her: “...know that you can always rely on us to help you with our prayers.” (p 124). So much so that one commented – which we found beautiful and full of wisdom from one who had a profound and deep belief in prayer: “I wonder if St. Peter looking at us both at the Eternal Gates will say which is which? Because I shall have helped you with my prayers all along the way.– Please remember me too– I need prayers” (p 125). This caused us to revisit St. Thérèse and her dedication to prayer, despite her severe illness. Her approach to prayer and small acts of kindness had a huge impact on her community and to millions after her death and were inspiration for Mother Teresa, who took her name after St. Thérèse. Should we not also take prayer to seriously, as Jesus taught us to? How wonderful it would be to be greeted by St. Peter with joy because of the prayers we offered in the silence of our hearts and together with others in Mass and group devotional prayer. We decided that we are not praying enough – as individuals, as a community, as a world.
- Mother Teresa had great devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. “Immaculate Heart of my Mother, have pity on thy poor child.” (p 134) Prayer to Our Lady was central to her prayer life, the work of the Missionaries of Charity, and the governance of her order. She relied on Our Lady and appealed to her through prayer and especially the Rosary: “I want to become a real slave of Our Lady– to drink only from His chalice of pain and to give Mother Church real saints.” (p 141) “Our Lady was her indispensable companion and the rosary the simple but powerful means to remain united to her: ‘We are taught to love and say the Rosary with great devotion... for it will bring us closer to our Heavenly Mother. Our rule asks of us never to go to the slums without first having recited the Mother’s praises; that is why we have to say the Rosary in the streets & dark holes of the slums. Cling to the Rosary as the creeper clings to the tree – for without Our Lady we cannot stand.’” (p 141) We were happy to also note that participation in group Rosary at St. John Neumann has been on the rise these past months!
- The Missionaries of Charity, was established “on October 7, 1950, the feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary”. (p 138) “The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Charity’s Holy Patron: The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It’s purpose: To quench the thirst of Our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls... to the care of the poor and needy who, crushed by want and destitution, live in conditions unworthy of the human dignity.” (p 138-9)
- Mother Teresa was inspired to harness the power of prayer; she was innovative in doing so. An opportunity presented itself and instead of tending to just the one person, it illuminated a whole new plan of support for her mission. “...since Jacqueline could not work with the poor in Calcutta [due to poor health], she would share in the apostolate by becoming Mother Teresa’s ‘second self’– a spiritual twin who would offer to God her prayers and suffering for Mother Teresa and the fruitfulness of her work.” These prayer companions would later be called “the sick and suffering co-workers” (p 146) “Mother Teresa believed that finding a purpose in their sufferings would give them a new incentive to carry on: ‘Love demands sacrifice. But if we love until it hurts, God will give us His peace and joy... Suffering in itself is nothing; but suffering shared with Christ’s Passion is a wonderful gift.’” (p 146) We reflected on the peace and strength this new group of fellow missionaries brought Mother Teresa and were reminded just how important prayer can be, especially as we marveled on the remarkable rapid growth of her order and how widespread her mission has become. Just one person, with God on one hand and Our Lady and prayer on the other accomplished, and continue to accomplish, great works of love: “Personally I feel very happy & a new strength has come in my soul at the thought of you & others joining the Society spiritually. Now with you & others doing the works with us, what would we not do, what can’t we not do for Him?” (p 148).
- “After storming heaven with prayer, she found a house on Lower Circular Road that is still today the motherhouse of the Missionaries of Charity.” (p 148) We were left remarking – how could prayer not have been a weapon in her work?
- Revisiting her plan (p 73 -78), we noted her focus on prayer and the Blessed Sacrament as key to achieving God’s will.
- On the last page of these notes, please find a prayer from Mother Teresa. We opened our Book Club session with it.

II. Prayer and works: it’s not a competition between the two. They are equal in importance and mutually necessary. Some are called to more of a prayer life, others to more of a works life, some have both. But as the body of Christ, it all comes together. We need prayer – we need quiet time with God to help us on the journey to serve him, to really do good works. Bottom line, we agreed with the Church’s teaching of ‘faith and works’ – ‘works and faith’.

The striking and unbelievable accomplishments that Mother Teresa achieved in a relatively short time and also over time showed the incredible impact just one person can have on their neighbors and thereby the world. Her focus and dedication to the mission God put before her, step by step, yielded a huge impact: the true recognition of human dignity, no matter how young or old, how destitute, how ill... or even if near death. She saw the face of Christ in *everyone*. She witnessed human beings treated as dogs or, in reality, worse than dogs and sought to change that. No matter what,

Mother Teresa put a spotlight back on the undeniable value of each human being and that love and respect are due to all – regardless of their circumstance; again, please see her prayer on the last page of these notes. One person pondered – was Mother Teresa also sent to penetrate their caste system to help the country recognize the equal human dignity of all?

Her dedication to the mission given her was absolute:

- Though Mother Teresa had wanted to stay a religious but she was willing to become secular in order to fulfill Jesus’ mission – she was willing to annul her vows (to the Loreto order) in order to proceed with her mission. *“she disclosed her intention to ask for annulment of her vows (secularization)... she was determined to remain consecrated to Jesus as a religious...”* (p 107). She was willing to take the risk that her new order might not be formed. While one step removed from her order, she came to learn the undeniable importance of religious persons – the special grace that they have: *“She realized remaining a religious, we she had initially considered unnecessary, was providential; being a nun inspired confidence in the people and in the young girls who thought of joining her.”* (p 133)
- She sought to truly understand those that she wanted to serve, thereby seeking poverty for herself: *“By absolute poverty I mean real and complete poverty – not starving – but wanting – just only what the real poor have – to be really dead to all that the world claims for its own.”* (p 111) We felt this told her story in a nutshell: *“...clad in a white sari with a blue border,... set out to begin life as a Missionary of Charity. Her lifestyle would be as innovative as the dress she wore... she chose to leave with just five rupees... this ‘lone woman wearing only a sari’... Yet her wealth lay in her heart: unshakable faith in God and absolute confidence in the promise He had made to her two years earlier: ‘Do not fear – I shall be with you always. . . Trust me lovingly – trust me blindly.’”* (p 121-2)
- Mother Teresa was able to accept the hardships she faced in her work, recalling that many before her faced hardships too, as shared through Scripture: having difficulty finding housing in India, she reflected, *“When the King of Kings and His Blessed Mother sought for a dwelling place ‘There was no room in the inn.’ Why should there be a place for us?”* (p 130) *“I keep on telling her [the Virgin Mary] ‘I have no children’– just as many years ago she told Jesus ‘They have no wine’– I put all my trust in her Heart. She is sure to give me in her own way.”* (p 135)
- Her experiences in the slums begin to be shared in Chapter 7 – her first day is recalled on p 132.
- *“It was unusual for Mother Teresa, normally self-possessed, to let others see her suffering.”* (p 135). We knew the journey Mother Teresa was on must have been difficult for her, but its challenges and loneliness were revealed when Mother Teresa shared, in utterly human terms, just how difficult this journey had been for her: *“Today –my God– what tortures of loneliness. –I wonder how long will my heart suffer this.... Tears rolled and rolled. –Everyone sees my weakness. My God, give me courage now to fight self & the tempter. Let me not draw back from the sacrifice I have made of my free choice and conviction.”* (p 134)
- The success of Mother Teresa’s work was evident but as we read about the results, we were amazed at the astonishing growth of her mission (p 135-7) in just 1 ½ years from just one to twelve missionaries, though largely unknown. In just four years, the order grew to 26 members. In its first year, their new school grew from 26 children to 350! Both are a testament to the genuine need for and value of their work. And what can be accomplished with God’s help.
- Her success also drew criticism of others since young women sought to join Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity’s order rather than the Loreto order she came from and as a result: *“Mother General... has forbidden everyone to have anything to do with me.”* (p 137). We discussed being human –whether lay or religious, we all have our own humanness to deal with and try to shed. Mother Teresa’s work was so wonderful yet she was being accused of stealing young women to join her order versus Loreto’s, *“These misunderstandings, occasioned by this alleged pilfering of vocations, added to the heaviness of her sacrifice, yet she remained upright and charitable toward the Loreto nuns.”* (p 137)
- We discussed the importance of one’s perspective (underline added): *“The aim of the new institute was being realized not in spite of the difficulties and sufferings but precisely through them. Mother Teresa did not want to avoid sacrifice or eliminate it from her life or the lives of her followers. ‘Grab the chance to offer something to Jesus’ she would insistently counsel her sisters.”* (p 140). We spent much time how saints have remarked, when looking back on their lives, that they had wasted much suffering by not offering it as a sacrifice to Jesus in reparation for the sins of ourselves and others (living and in purgatory, ‘the Church Suffering’). We noted that Our Lady of Fatima asked us to make sacrifices in reparation for sins committed. One person noted that she shared with someone who has been suffering recently the purpose and value offering our sufferings to help with reparation for sins. What happened? That person’s outlook was lifted by the opportunity to be able to do important good works through her suffering! So much good came of that simple conversation. We were reminded that we must not waste life’s hardships in anger or disappointment but should direct them as sacrifices to help those in need. We need to redouble our efforts to make reparation for sins.

- “Challenges did not dishearten Mother Teresa. On the contrary, she impressed those around her by her cheerful disposition. It was a conscious choice; she wanted ‘to keep on smiling in spite of everything’” (p 141) We reflected that consolations from God and Jesus should be stored up and recollected when we need to get through times of desolation. We were reminded of ‘recollection’ as an important element in the stages of the Dark Night of the Soul that we leaned about in reading of St. Thérèse.
- Sadly, Mother Teresa and her band of sisters were even “compared to the devil & the work as his work” (p 143). Yet, “The conviction that she was doing ‘God’s work’ was the anchor that enabled her to weather this storm” (p 143)
- Mother Teresa understood that our goal is to become a saint and to bring as many others with us to heaven as we can: “I want to become a saint, by satiating the thirst of Jesus for love and souls.—And there is another big desire— to give the Mother Church many a saint from our Society.” (p 144). We discussed that all who are in heaven are saints. We, too, can be saints regardless of whether we become a canonized saint (formally recognized by the church). Msgr. Matz asked us of this too: to live as Christ asks – to be Christ-centered– and to be disciples for Jesus, bringing others to the truth of Christ through the Church.

A prayer from Mother Teresa

Who is Jesus to me?

Jesus is the Word made Flesh.

Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Jesus is the Victim offered for our sins on the Cross.

Jesus is the Sacrifice offered at the Holy Mass for the sins of the world and mine.

Jesus is the Word – to be spoken.

Jesus is the Truth – to be told.

Jesus is the way – to be walked.

Jesus is the Light – to be lit.

Jesus is the Life – to be lived.

Jesus is the Love – to be loved.

Jesus is the Joy – to be shared.

Jesus is the Sacrifice – to be offered.

Jesus is the Peace – to be given.

Jesus is the Bread of Life – to be eaten.

Jesus is the Hungry – to be fed.

Jesus is the Thirsty – to be satiated.

Jesus is the Naked – to be clothed.

Jesus is the Sick – to be healed.

Jesus is the Lonely – to be loved.

Jesus is the Unwanted – to be wanted.

Jesus is the Leper – to wash his wounds.

Jesus is the Beggar – to give him a smile.

Jesus is the Drunkard – to listen to him.

Jesus is the Retarded – to protect him.

Jesus is the Little One – to embrace him.

Jesus is the Blind – to lead him.

Jesus is the Dumb – to speak for him.

Jesus is the Crippled – to walk with him.

Jesus is the Drug Addict – to befriend him.

Jesus is the Prostitute – to remove from danger and befriend.

Jesus is the Prisoner – to be visited

Jesus is the Old – to be served.