



MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA

August 26, 1910, to September 5, 1997

FEAST DAY: September 5

PATRON: Known informally as the “Saint of the Slums”

BIRTH NAME: Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu

HOME TOWN: Skopje, Macedonia

RELIGIOUS ORDER: The Missionaries of Charity

LIFE-CHANGING MOMENT: Before founding the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa was a sister of Loreto for nearly 20 years, serving as a teacher in Calcutta. On a long train ride—from Calcutta to Darjeeling—she experienced a powerful moment of prayer in which she received what she described as “a call within a call.” Jesus was asking her to give up the life she knew to care for the “poorest of the poor” on the streets of Calcutta. “I was to leave the convent and work with the poor, living among them. It was an order. I knew where I belonged, but I did not know how to get there.” Soon after, in 1948, she sought permission to leave her order and struck out on her own to begin this vocation.

MISSION: Mother Teresa founded the Missionaries of Charity to provide “wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor.” She began by offering food, a bath, or even just an embrace to the people she encountered in the slums of Calcutta. She wanted to serve “Jesus in his most distressing disguise.” But she couldn’t do this without a commitment to a radical life of prayer, even through the trials of a life of service and moments of doubt. Prayer helped her remember that Jesus, who suffered and thirsted on the Cross, was the same Jesus who was suffering in the poor on the streets.

LEGACY: Today the Missionaries of Charity comprise 4,500 sisters around the world. They provide basic care, like food, shelter and medicine, to vulnerable people around the world, including refugees, chronically and terminally ill children and adults, abandoned children, lepers, people living with or affected by HIV and AIDS, the elderly, and people with mental disabilities.

IN HER OWN WORDS:

“If we really want to love others, we must first begin to love one another in our own home. Love begins at home, and so from here—from our own home—love will spread to my neighbor, in the street I live, in the town I live, in the whole world.”

“Nakedness is not only for a piece of cloth. Nakedness is for human dignity, for respect. Homelessness is not only for a home made of bricks. Homelessness is being rejected, unwanted, unloved, uncared for, having forgotten what is human love, what is human touch.”

Source: “Love: The Words and Inspiration of Mother Teresa,” Blue Mountain Press

THE MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY AND CRS

Catholic Relief Services has been a friend of the Missionaries of Charity for nearly 50 years. In the early days, Mother Teresa would call up CRS and say, “I need food!” and CRS would jump to it. Mother Teresa credited CRS with providing early assistance to the Missionaries of Charity before the order was well known. Today, CRS partners with the Missionaries of Charity around the world. In Ethiopia, where the sisters have 18 homes, CRS supports their ministry by providing food, shelter and social services. CRS works on behalf of Catholics in the United States to relieve the suffering of poor and vulnerable people around the world. Get involved at crs.org/get-involved.



Photo by CRS staff

PRAYER

Mother Teresa of Calcutta,
On the train to Darjeeling
You heard what so many human hearts long to hear:
The voice of God.
Through the seed of his Word,
You built a movement the world has rarely seen
And so longs for,
A movement of mercy,
A movement of compassion,
A movement of hope shining in the darkest places.
And in each of your sisters' chapels around the world,
There hangs a crucifix:
The suffering, dying Christ
And the words, “I thirst.”
These words are a call to action.
We gaze upon your example
Walking off the safe path
To risk all in doing the will of the Lord
For the poorest of the poor.
And we hear the agonizing cry of the one
who called upon you: “I thirst.”
Have we too not heard the voice of God?
Mother Teresa, you know our hearts,
Crying for the one who cries for us.
And as we respond to this cry
In our prayers and in our works,
We ask your intercession:
Mother Teresa of Calcutta, pray for us.

Amen