

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

(1910 Skopje, Macedonia – 1997 Kolkata, India)

“I was hungry and you gave me to eat” Mt 25:35

Young Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu wants to teach poor children as a missionary in India. At the age of 18, she joins the Loreto Sisters in Ireland. She learns English there. A year later she boards a ship to India. The trip takes months. Once there, she starts learning how to be a nun and a teacher. She learns Bengali – the language of eastern India. As she becomes a nun, she takes the name of Teresa (after St. Therese of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries). She also becomes a teacher, and later the principal of a school for rich Indian girls in Calcutta (today: Kolkata). Now people call her “Sister Teresa”.

Many saints lived their lives watching their dreams being shattered and yet staying faithful to God. Did Anjezë's dream come true? In your life, do you follow God's call?

World War Two brings famine and epidemics to India. Sister Teresa lives comfortably on the school premises. Her students come from rich families who can pay for food, good-quality buildings and nice gardens. One day Sister Teresa leaves the premises to take a trip. She is horrified to see filth and poverty everywhere. Very thin, hungry people steal food wherever they can. On the streets lie hundreds of people who are so sick of hunger and cannot walk any more. When she looks closer, she realizes many of the lying people are already dead. Flies swarm around the bodies. Rats scurry between them. No one cares. She hears God telling her to go and help the poor. Jesus's words: “I was hungry and you gave me to eat” became her life's motto.

What is your life's motto?

Nobody supports her new idea. Even the bishop tells her to forget it. She is a white woman from Europe. There is no way she can just go and stay with poor Indians. People will reject her. She may get hurt. Sister Teresa insists and the bishop finally allows her. She gets training in medical assistance. She puts on a white sari with three blue stripes – a dress of poor women who sweep the streets. She moves into a small hut in the Kolkata's slums. Using a stick on trodden ground, she teaches the neighborhood children reading and counting. Children flock to her “school”. Education means better jobs which means more money for their families. Soon enough a huge surprise happens – 12 of her former students from the rich school decide to leave their families and their comfortable lives behind and join her in the slums. The community of Missionaries of Charity is formed. Sister Teresa becomes Mother Teresa. The sisters decide to live for the poorest of the poor. In order to be witnesses of God's love for the poor, they share their lives. Each sister owns three saris (one to wear, one to wash one to mend), a Bible, a notebook, a pencil, a plate and spoon, a pair of sandals.

Are you capable of saying no to one comfortable thing in your life for a week? E.g. no TV, no warm water, no iced drinks?

With growing numbers, sisters can extend their help to many people. They search for abandoned babies in trash cans and then look for families who would love to adopt a child. They provide simple medical services to the sick. They gather dying people from the streets and transfer them to homes where they can die in dignity. They set up centers for lepers where they can provide medical help and work for them.

You may not have God's calling to help lepers or teach poor children. You may have a calling to reach out to people in need who may look "normal" and yet need you: your older aunt who lives alone, the neighbor across the street, a student in your school who gets teased. Very likely it is your little brother who needs your love and your time. Just tear your eyes away from the screen for 15 minutes.

Mother Teresa has many critics. They say she should get involved in politics to combat poverty. She answers: "You guys go ahead and sit in conferences that seem to go on for years. In some distant future, maybe you will solve the problems. In the meantime, I will respond to the needs that people have right now." They say she should construct state-of-the-art hospitals with the generous donations that people give her. She answers: "Modern hospitals will turn us into administrators and businesswomen. We will no longer be in touch with the poorest and the neediest. You guys save your money and build hospitals yourselves. Manage them and do business. We will send to you our poor. In the meantime, I will stay with them and share their lives."

[When did you receive kindness from someone this week? Take a moment to thank God and to bless the person.](#)