

# Saint Mother Teresa

## Raymond Rajabalan

Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun who devoted her life to helping India's poor, has been declared a saint in a canonization Mass held by Pope Francis in the Vatican.

Pope Francis delivered the formula for the canonization of the Albanian-born nun -- known as the "saint of the gutters" -- before huge crowds of pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square in Vatican City on Sep.05 th morning.

Applause broke out before he completed the formula of canonization, in which he declared "Blessed Teresa of Calcutta to be a saint." Speaking in Latin, Francis said that "after due deliberation and frequent prayer for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother bishops, we declare and define Blessed Teresa of Calcutta to be a saint, and we enroll her among the saints, decreeing that she is to be venerated as such by the whole church."

Catholics -- including hundreds of blue- and white-robed nuns from the Missionaries of Charity sisterhood founded by Mother Teresa -- had gathered from around the world to attend the canonization of the church's newest saint, just 19 years after her death.

A huge portrait of Mother Teresa, whom the church credits with having performed two miraculous cures of the sick, hung from St. Peter's Basilica during the colorful ceremony.

Francis: 'May she be your model of holiness'

Pope Francis then delivered a homily, in which he praised Mother Teresa -- "this emblematic figure of womanhood and of consecrated life" -- for her charitable work.

"Mother Teresa, in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for everyone through her welcome and defense of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded," he said.

"She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity. She made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime of poverty they created."



Pope Francis praised Mother Teresa as a model of compassion to Catholics worldwide.

For the newly-sainted Teresa, he said, "mercy was the salt which gave flavor to her work, it was the light which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering."

She was an example to volunteers around the world, he said. "May she be your model of holiness."

In a departure from his scripted remarks, he noted that people "may struggle" to refer to her as "Saint Teresa." "With great spontaneity, I think we will continue to call her Mother Teresa," he said.

Prayers were then delivered in a number of languages, including Albanian, Mother Teresa's native tongue, and Bengali, the language of Kolkata, where a special Mass was celebrated at the Missionaries of Charity Sunday. A prayer was delivered in Chinese for persecuted Christians around the world.

About 1,500 homeless people from across Italy were bused into the Vatican to be given seats of honor at the Mass -- and be served a pizza lunch by nuns afterward.

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### **Speeding up sainthood**

Most of the Catholic Church's saints or blessed people are honored decades, if not centuries, after their deaths. Traditionally, there is a mandatory five-year waiting period before formal evaluation of a candidate for beatification can begin.

Mother Teresa's devotees began pressing the Vatican soon after her death to speed up the nun's sainthood cause, saying her holiness was clear to many around the world. Pope John Paul II granted the special dispensation in 1999, and the procedure began. The pope waived the waiting period in part, some believe, because of her fame and reputation.

John Paul II further paved the way for her beatification in 2002, when he approved a miracle attributed to Mother Teresa after her death.

The approved miracle involved Monica Besara, a 30-year old Kolkata woman who said praying to the nun cured a stomach tumor. The Vatican committee said in October 2002 that it could find no "scientific explanation" for the woman's recovery.

"I took doctors' medicines, threw up and was in a lot of pain. But when I prayed to Mother Teresa from my heart, Mother Teresa blessed me and now I am healthy," Besra told CNN last week.

"My entire village and I am very happy that she is being made a saint."

Pope Francis formally announced that Mother Teresa would be declared a saint in March 2016, when he recognized a second miracle attributed to her.

A Brazilian man with multiple brain tumors was healed after loved ones prayed to Mother Teresa to heal him, according to Avvenire, a newspaper affiliated to the Catholic Church.

### **'Saint of the gutters'**

Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in 1910, Mother Teresa set up her Missionaries of Charity in the slums of Kolkata in 1950 and made her headquarters in the Indian city for nearly half a century.

Her small figure, often in a white-and-blue sari and sandals, became familiar around the world. She died in Kolkata in 1997 at age 87.

Earning global recognition for her unending work and compassion for the poor, Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee said her spirit and the respect she had for the worth and dignity of human beings inspired constructive efforts to do away with hunger and poverty.

## Early life

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Macedonia, on August 27, 1910. At the time of her birth Skopje was located within the

Ottoman Empire, a vast empire controlled by the Turks in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Agnes was the last of three children born to Nikola and Dranfile Bojaxhiu, Albanian grocers. When Agnes was nine years old, her happy, comfortable, close-knit family life was upset when her father died. She attended public school in Skopje, and first showed religious interests as a member of a school society that focused on foreign missions (groups that travel to foreign countries to spread their religious beliefs). By the age of twelve she felt she had a calling to help the poor.

This calling took sharper focus through Mother Teresa's teenage years, when she was especially inspired by reports of work being done in India by Yugoslav Jesuit missionaries serving in Bengal, India. When she was eighteen, Mother Teresa left home to join a community of Irish nuns, the Sisters of Loretto, who had a mission in Calcutta, India. She received training in Dublin, Ireland, and in Darjeeling, India, taking her first religious vows in 1928 and her final religious vows in 1937.

One of Mother Teresa's first assignments was to teach, and eventually to serve as principal, in a girls' high school in Calcutta. Although the school was close to the slums (terribly poor sections), the students were mainly wealthy. In 1946 Mother Teresa experienced what she called a second vocation or "call within a call." She felt an inner urging to leave the convent life (life of a nun) and work directly with the poor. In 1948 the Vatican (residence of the pope in Vatican City, Italy) gave her permission to leave the Sisters of Loretto and to start a new work under the guidance of the Archbishop of Calcutta.

## Founding the Missionaries of Charity

To prepare to work with the poor, Mother Teresa took an intensive medical training with the American Medical Missionary Sisters in Patna, India. Her first venture in Calcutta was to gather unschooled children from the slums and start to teach them. She quickly attracted both financial support and volunteers. In 1950 her group, now called the Missionaries of Charity, received official status as a religious community within the Archdiocese of Calcutta. Members took the traditional vows of poverty, chastity (purity), and obedience, but they added a fourth vow—to give free service to the most poor.

The Missionaries of Charity received considerable publicity, and Mother Teresa used it to benefit her work. In 1957 they began to work with lepers (those suffering from leprosy, a terrible infectious disease) and slowly expanded their educational work, at one point running nine elementary schools in Calcutta. They also opened a home for orphans and abandoned children. Before long they had a presence in more than twenty-two Indian cities. Mother Teresa also visited other countries such as Sri Lanka, Australia, Tanzania, Venezuela and Italy to begin new foundations.

## Dedication to the very poor

Mother Teresa's group continued to expand throughout the 1970s, opening new missions in places such as Amman, Jordan; London, England; and New York. She received both recognition and financial support through such awards as the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize and a grant from the Joseph Kennedy Jr. Foundation. Benefactors, or those donating money, regularly would arrive to support works in progress or to encourage the Sisters to open new ventures.

By 1979 Mother Teresa's groups had more than two hundred different operations in over twenty-five countries around the world, with dozens more ventures on the horizon. The same year she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. In 1986 she persuaded President Fidel Castro (1926–) to allow a mission in Cuba. The characteristics of all of Mother Teresa's works—shelters for the dying, orphanages, and homes for the mentally ill—continued to be of service to the very poor.

In 1988 Mother Teresa sent her Missionaries of Charity into Russia and opened a home for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS; an incurable disease that weakens the immune system) patients in San Francisco, California. In 1991 she returned home to Albania and opened a home in Tirana, the capital. At this time there were 168 homes operating in India.

## Saint Teresa

Despite the appeal of this saintly work, all commentators remarked that Mother Teresa herself was the most important reason for the growth of her order and the fame that came to it. Unlike many "social critics," she did not find it necessary to attack the economic or political structures of the cultures that were producing the terribly poor people she was serving. For her, the primary rule was a constant love, and when social critics or religious reformers (improvers) chose to demonstrate anger at the evils of structures underlying poverty and suffering, that was between them and God.

In the 1980s and 1990s Mother Teresa's health problems became a concern. She suffered a heart attack while visiting Pope John Paul II (1920–) in 1983. She had a near fatal heart attack in 1989 and began wearing a pacemaker, a device that regulates the heartbeat.

In March 1997, after an eight week selection process, sixty-three-year-old Sister Nirmala was named as the new leader of the Missionaries of Charity. Although Mother Teresa had been trying to cut back on her duties for some time because of her health, she stayed on in an advisory role to Sister Nirmala.

Mother Teresa celebrated her eighty-seventh birthday in August, and died shortly thereafter of a heart attack on September 5, 1997. The world grieved her loss and one mourner noted, "It was Mother herself who poor people respected. When they bury her, we will have lost something that cannot be replaced."

## Legacy of Mother Teresa

In appearance Mother Teresa was both tiny and energetic. Her face was quite wrinkled, but her dark eyes commanded attention, radiating an energy and intelligence that shone without expressing nervousness or impatience. Conservatives within the Catholic Church sometimes used her as a symbol of traditional religious values that they felt were lacking in their churches. By most accounts she was a saint for the times, and several almost adoring books and articles started to canonize (declare a saint) her in the 1980s and well into the 1990s. She herself tried to deflect all attention away from what she did to either the works of her group or to the God who was her inspiration.

The Missionaries of Charity, who had brothers as well as sisters by the mid-1980s, are guided by the constitution Mother Teresa wrote for them. They have their vivid memories of the love for the poor that created the phenomenon of Mother Teresa in the first place. The final part of her story will be the lasting impact her memory has on the next generations of missionaries, as well as on the world as a whole.





