

Katharine Drexel was born into a wealthy family that taught her it is better to give than to receive. Katherine's father and stepmother helped her to understand the obligation to share wealth with the less fortunate. We are stewards of God's gifts. They are entrusted to us for a time and we are not owners of them.

As a wealthy young heiress, she traveled widely and saw firsthand the great poverty throughout the nation. She used her considerable fortune to fund missionary and educational work among the poorest members of Native Americans and African Americans communities throughout the nation.

Katherine's travels also took her to Rome in 1887 where "she met Pope Leo XIII and asked him to recommend a religious order that could send missionaries to the institutions she was funding. He suggested that Drexel might undertake the missionary work herself."<sup>i</sup> Taking very earnestly the advice of the pope and bringing everything to prayer, she realized that she needed to give more than money. "With great courage and confidence in God's grace, she chose to give not just her fortune but her whole life totally to the Lord."<sup>ii</sup>

"My trust is in you, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' In your hands is my destiny" (Ps 31:15b-16a). In 1891, Katharine Drexel took final vows with the Sisters of Mercy in Pittsburgh. A few years later, she helped to establish the order of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

She continued to use her wealth to create new schools for Native Americans and African Americans across the United States. "Drexel and 15 of her fellow sisters set up a school for Native Americans in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1894. This was followed by the creation of other schools throughout the Southwest... Drexel's order also opened many schools for African-American children."<sup>iii</sup> The secondary school for African Americans that she began in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1915 later became Xavier University.

Mother Katherine lead the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament until 1937, when health caused her to step down and allow others to lead. She died in 1955 at the age of 96. At her Canonization, Pope John Paul II noted that she taught the sisters "a spirituality based on prayerful union with the Eucharistic Lord and zealous service of the poor and the victims of racial discrimination. Her apostolate helped to bring about a growing awareness of the need to combat all forms of racism through education and social services. Katharine Drexel is an excellent example of that practical charity and generous solidarity with the less fortunate."<sup>iv</sup>

Through the wealth that she inherited and that sustained her work with the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, she gave almost 20 million dollars to those in need. "No greater treasure can be found in this world than in following Christ with an undivided heart and in using generously the gifts we have received for the service of others and for the building of a more just and fraternal world."<sup>v</sup> Or in the words of Jesus, "Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:26b-28).

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<sup>i</sup> [biography.com/religious-figure/saint-katharine-drexel](http://biography.com/religious-figure/saint-katharine-drexel)

<sup>ii</sup> [vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20001001\\_canonization.html](http://vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20001001_canonization.html)

<sup>iii</sup> Biography

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid, JP II

<sup>v</sup> Ibid