

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

October 6, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

Sharing Mother Teresa's Mystical Relationship with Mary

I have made an effort, since I began writing my Spiritual Ponderings, to dedicate my writings to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the month of October. My relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary and my understanding of why the Church holds her in such high esteem constantly improves because of this. I would like to share with you this month some thoughts from a book titled: *Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady: Sharing Mother Teresa's Mystical Relationship with Mary*. The book was written by Joseph Langford, MC the founder of the male order of the Missionaries of Charities and a close friend and possible spiritual director to Mother Teresa. My reflections will be in normal font and quotes from the book will be in bold.

Mother Teresa lived with her heart in heaven and her hands buried in the worst this world could offer.

As I read this line a few years ago, the image of Mother Teresa being a spiritual spy of sorts came to mind. Her heart and allegiance belonged to the kingdom of God but she spent her time in places where love (and God since God is love) seemed to be absent. She was a soldier behind enemy's line working to bring love to those forgotten by the world. She is a reminder to me that God does not desire people to suffer but He desires us to fight this battle against evil and bring love into the areas where He seems absent.

Her detractors, dissatisfied with her low-tech, nonpolitical efforts at charity, demanded that she provide the poor with the latest in medical science, and that she raise her voice to challenge corrupt structures and social injustices.

I do find some comfort knowing that even Mother Teresa had detractors. So often people like to criticize those doing good in an effort to avoid having to commit to doing good themselves. I do believe that Mother Teresa knew that what people needed most was love and not scientific discoveries could never give people that.

Mother Teresa's inner darkness was a hidden laboratory of love. Darkness was the school in which she learned to cling to God even in his felt absence, in which she served the pain of others rather than being lost in her own.

Either at the end of her life or shortly afterwards, it became known that Mother Teresa went through some very dry times spiritually. Courageously, she strived to continue on doing God's will proving to God that she loved him more than the good feelings that He may grace here with. When I hear of someone with this type of spiritual life, I think of two things. The first is that love is wanting what is best for another person even if it requires a sacrifice on my part and therefore Mother Teresa was a woman who loved God deeply. She was like a wife who remained with her husband after he was diagnosed with ALS or after he was involved in a bad car accident that left him paralyzed. The second thing I think of is how often I stop praying when I do not feel God's presence. I feel like I am doing something wrong and therefore God is mad at me. I think the story of Mother Teresa's dryness teaches us that sometimes, dryness in prayer is actually God inviting us to a deeper intimacy.

Not a few agnostics, along with believers whose faith is not as rooted or resilient as hers, have stumbled over the accounts of other Teresa's dark night of faith, seeing it as a spiritual crisis, or even a sign of her hypocrisy. But a careful reading of her personal letters show that , while her widely publicized but little understood darkness was indeed a challenge, it never placed her in crisis. Just the opposite—it carved out more and deeper space in her soul for the One she loved and served without seeing. Mother Teresa's darkness was not a tomb of spirit but rather a sacred womb from which new life emerged. Her darkness was a crucible of faith, hope, and love in which Mother Teresa became Saint Teresa.

I believe the above quote echoes what I wrote above. We also see this in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it was at the moment when God seemed most absent to her – her Son, Jesus, dying on the Cross – that God made her the mother of the Church and all its members including you and me.

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October 13, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

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It was in 1947, at the end of a year and a half of extraordinary and almost daily revelations in which Jesus showed Mother Teresa what he desired from her, that she was shown a vision in three parts, symbolizing and summarizing all that she had been told since boarding the train for Darjeeling. This vision was of great importance for her future mission and that of her Missionaries of Charity, and it deserves our close attention.

In the first scene of the vision, Mother Teresa was shown the painful plight of the poor, and the yet greater inner poverty that was hidden beneath their material poverty. She was shown a large crowd of the poor of every kind, young and old. They were all reaching out to her as she stood in their midst, calling out for her to save them, to bring them to the one Savior – to Jesus.

In the second scene, Mother Teresa saw again the same crowd of the poor. This time she could make out the great sorrow and suffering in their faced. Our Lady was there in the midst of them, and Mother Teresa was kneeling at her side. Mother Teresa was turned toward the suffering children and so could not see Our Lady's face, but she heard her say: *"Take care of them—they are mine—Fear not. Teach them to say the Rosary—the family Rosary and all will be well. Fear not—Jesus and I will be with you and your children."*

In the third and final scene, Mother Teresa was shown the same crowd yet again. This time they were covered in darkness. There in the midst of an anguish crowd that seemed unaware of his presence, was Jesus on the Cross. Our Lady was before him "at a little distance." Mother Teresa saw herself there as well, not as an adult but "as a little child" standing directly in front of Our Lady as they both face the Cross. Our Lady's left hand was on Mother Teresa's left shoulder, supporting her, and her right hand was holding Mother Teresa's right arm, outstretched toward the crucified Jesus. Jesus then said to her: *I have asked you. They have asked you, and she, My Mother, has asked you. Will you refuse to do this for me—to take care of them, to bring them to me?"* –

Notice the invitation of God through the Blessed Virgin Mary and then through Jesus. There is no intimidation or forced used by either. God never forces us to do His will. Notice the words "Fear Not." The words "Be not afraid" is the phrase that is found most in the Bible.

I think that it is important that Mother Teresa's vision is what we call "private revelation" and we do not have believe that she had this vision in order for us to be saved. I personally do believe that Mother Teresa had this vision.

Finally notice the Blessed Virgin Mary's request that Mother Teresa would teach us about the rosary.

These vision encapsulated Mother Teresa's call, in her inner life as well as in her external work, for the rest of her life. Three elements in particular would come to characterize her life's mission: the plight of the poorest of the poor, the ongoing Passion of Jesus crucified in his Mystical Body, and the presence and role of Our Lady at the foot of the cross.

Mother Teresa chose to imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of the Cross as her role model. At this moment Mary was about to become poor as well as because her Son was going to be taken from her. Who would take care of her? Through her focus on Christ, she emerged with John to take care of her. If we focus on God during bad times, He will get us through the tough times as well.

This hidden presence of the Lord in the poor and the suffering, not only of Calcutta, but of the world, in our neighborhoods and under our own roofs, was in Mother Teresa's estimation, the reason for their singular dignity, their true "greatness".

I think that it is important to point out that Mother Teresa chose to answer God's call. These visions did not brainwash her. And her "yes" to God would be something that she would have to renew each and every day of her life. Do you renew your "yes" to God this morning?



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October 20, 2019

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She kept herself, in the words of the Church Father, "juxta crucem cum Maria," mystically next to the Cross with Our Lady. This became for her, as Jesus suggested to Martha and Mary, the one thing necessary (see Luke 10:42).

What is my goal in life? Hopefully to love like God's love in other words to become a saint, in other words to become Holy.

What is your favorite Bible story or image? One of my favorites, is St. Peter in Luke 5. St. Peter has just pulled ashore the huge catch of fish and tells Jesus to depart from him because he (St. Peter) is a sinful man. I love the honest confession and I love all the more that Jesus responds along the lines of "No, I will not depart, instead I want you as a coworker." I know that I am a sinner and it is only through God's grace that I get to do what I do.

We see exemplified in the lives of Both Mother Teresa and Juan Diego four important attitudes of soul necessary for Our Lady to intervene in our lives. Let us look at these in turn.

1. HUMILITY, POVERTY OF SPIRIT, SIMPLICITY. This first requirement is characteristic not only of Juan Diego and of Mother Teresa but of all those chosen by Our Lady in her subsequent apparitions. As we approach our own relationship with Our Lady, we must be here, standing before her in a spirit of simplicity, poverty of spirit, and the kind of childlike littleness without which we shall not enter the kingdom of God (see Lk 18:17).

2. TRUST. The second prerequisite is one of simple faith in the presence, power, and role of Our Lady in God's plan, with total trust in her, the trust of a child.

"Let each sister choose the Immaculate Queen of Heaven for her Mother. She must not only love and venerate Her, but fly to Her with childlike confidence in all her joys and sorrows."

Mother Teresa always held a rosary in her hand, even when doing something else. People would ask her why she held a rosary when she was obviously not praying it. She answered that this was her way of reminding herself that she was holding Our Lady's hand, a hand she had never let go of since her vision of 1947.

3. HUMBLE OBEDIENCE. The third requirement is an obedient and humble spirit. She who had freely said, "Let it be to me according to your word (Lk 1:38) asks the same of her children. We see this attitude in Juan Diego, who never criticized or complain about the reluctant bishop to whom he was sent. WE see it also in Mother Teresa, who while being called "Mother by millions and proclaimed "the most powerful woman on earth" by the United Nations' secretary general, was like a child in the presence of the Holy Father, whom she consulted as often as she could.

4. CONTEMPLATION. The fourth prerequisite is the development of a contemplative attitude, in prayer and in life, a sense of childlike wonder at the beauty of God's creation and the majesty of his being, an ability to marvel at his gifts and blessings, and to take nothing for granted. –

When I see a list like the one above, I like to also think about what is not included in the list. How often have I halted my journey to holiness by being prideful or by making things overly complicated? How often have I damaged my relationship with God by not trusting Him although He is deserving of nothing but trust? How often have I rebelled against God despite the fact that I know that every time that I have rebelled in the past, I have gotten hurt? Remember that my getting hurt because I have rebelled against God instead of accepting His will with humble obedience has not come from God punishing me but rather from refusing to do what God knew was best for me? Finally, how many times have I gotten into trouble because I have rushed into things without taking the time to pray and discern God's will?

The close and intimate relationship with Mary enjoyed by Juan Diego and Mother Teresa is not reserved to saints. We, too, can enter the same pattern of Marian grace. There seems to be three steps in this dynamic of grace, three

essential stages in our relationship with Our Lady; encounter, listening, and consecration. While these are more explicit in the story of Juan Diego, they are equally present and important, if more hidden, in the life of Mother Teresa.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to enter into our lives, help us listen to her and to consecrate us to God.

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October 27, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

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I have dedicated, along with the Church, the month of October to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is hard to believe that October is now almost over. My Spiritual Ponderings this month come a book titled: *Mother Teresa: In the Shadow of Our Lady: Sharing Mother Teresa's Mystical Relationship with Mary*. The book was written by Joseph Langford, MC the founder of the male order of the Missionaries of Charities and a close friend and possible spiritual director to Mother Teresa. My reflections will be in normal font and quotes from the book will be in bold.

Ever practical, she wanted not only to insist on the importance of Our Lady for her Sisters and followers, but to explain how Our Lady supplied for their spiritual inadequacies and brought them to holiness and intimacy with God. This she categorized in what she called the "Spirit of the Missionaries of Charity Society," and she formulated it in three states of soul: (1) loving trust, (2) total surrender, and (3) cheerfulness or cheerful giving.

I have come to believe people are like onions in that we have layers. As we address one issue and peel it away, another issue arises. Sometimes an issue that I have thought was handled sneaks back into my life. Sometimes, it feels like I have to start all over again but while I may facing a similar problem or a reoccurring temptation, I am stronger now than I was the last time I faced it. I could see that quite clearly moving to Epiphany to become pastor their eight years ago. I would say that I was in stage 1 – loving trust. As time moved on, I felt more and more comfortable there and began to know what I could do to serve the people better and what bad habits I was going to have to overcome. I think this would be stage 2 (total surrender). I then moved on to stage 3 where I was truly happy to be there and Epiphany felt like home. (There were days where I would slide back and forth between the stages but overall I think that the above was a fair assessment.) Having been at St. Joseph for two years, I feel like I am moving into stage 2 and I hope to move into stage 3 with more time and prayer. I think others have similar experiences changing jobs, moving homes, starting at a new school, etc. It is comforting to know that Mother Teresa went through the same stages and it is nice to know that I can count on the Blessed Virgin Mary to assist me as she did Mother Teresa.

Our Lady listened to one voice, God's voice instead of the thousand others, voices that spoke of terrible dangers, of impossible situation, of misunderstanding, persecution, rejection, injustice, and unspeakable pain that awaited Jesus in his Passion. She heard but one voice. In this she is not only our mother but our model. She wants to give birth to this same spirit of trust and surrender in us, even as she did for Mother Teresa. Mary's humility at not insisting to know and understand gave her tremendous freedom, and gave God the freedom to use her.

I have to remind myself often that trusting in God is not the same as approving of God's plans before they are put into practice. I think that would be more advising verses trusting.

Mother Teresa is ever teaching what Our Lady modeled for us: that we cannot pray satisfactorily by staying on the surface of our soul. This leaves us like a paper cup on the surface of the sea, buffeted by the waves and wind of distraction. If instead we go deeper, like a diver seeking precious pearls, we find peace and treasure. Pearls do not float on the surface. We can spend all day in the water, just as we can spend all day in prayer, and go home with nothing, unless we pierce the depths.

We hear in the Gospels how Mary pondered the things that happened to her in heart. While she did not know God's plans for her, she trusted that every moment of her life meant something and revealed to her something about God. I think we can say the same thing about Mother Teresa. She insisted that every sister in her order do a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament every day before they began their duties. The few times, that I was asked to celebrate Mass for

them and see them before the Blessed Sacrament, was always awe filled times. There was just a power-an energy in the room that I could not describe.

As we come to this deeper place of the heart, we open ourselves to the activity of the Holy Spirit. If we allow him to do his work in silence, we will perceive that something is happening at a deep level of our being. We begin to realize that only God can love us this way. No mere human can give us this much love, nor place that love so deeply in our being.

God's love changes everything. I pray that you will take the time to experience God's love.

