

One day, Mother Teresa took in a woman off the streets of Calcutta. Her body was a mess of open sores infested with bugs. Mother Teresa patiently bathed her, cleaning and dressing her wounds. The woman never stopped shrieking insults and threats at her. Mother Teresa only smiled.

Finally, the woman snarled, "Sister, why are you doing this? Not everyone behaves like you. Who taught you?"

She replied simply, "My God taught me." When the woman asked who this god was, Mother Teresa kissed her on the forehead and said: "You know my God. My God is called love."

It was for her a true way of life, of always listening to God, and discerning but also putting into action what God was telling her to do.

She learned this love at an early age. Her mother would extend an open invitation to the city's destitute to dine with her family. "My child, never eat a single mouthful unless you are sharing it with others," she counseled her daughter. When Agnes asked who the people eating with them were, her

mother uniformly responded, "Some of them are our relations, but all of them are our people."

Going to a convent-run primary school, she discerned as a teenager the calling to religious life, and in her 20s she was assigned to teach at Saint Mary's High School for Girls, a school run by the Loreto Sisters and dedicated to teaching girls from the city's poorest families. She took her final vows in 1937, taking the name "Mother" as was customary for her order. But then in 1946, God had more plans for her.

She was riding in a train from Calcutta to the Himalayan foothills for a retreat when she said Christ spoke to her and told her to abandon teaching to work in the slums of Calcutta aiding the city's poorest and sickest people. After nearly a year and a half of lobbying, she finally received approval to pursue this new calling. After six months of medical training, she went for the first time into Calcutta's slums with no more specific goal than to aid the "unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for." She had a small group of nuns follow her and they often had to beg for income and food. Eventually she started a leper colony, an orphanage, a nursing home, a family clinic and a string of mobile health clinics. In 1971, Mother Teresa

traveled to New York City to open her first American-based house of charity, and in the summer of 1982, she secretly went to Beirut, Lebanon, where she crossed between Christian East Beirut and Muslim West Beirut to aid children of both faiths. In 1985, Mother Teresa returned to New York and spoke at the 40th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly. While there, she also opened Gift of Love, a home to care for those infected with HIV/AIDS. Indeed her whole life was about loving all without exceptions, just as Jesus loves us.

Her work for the poor is well known. But what was also a constant in her life was her deep love for the Eucharist.

“The Mass is the spiritual food that sustains me—without which I could not get through one single day or hour in my life,” she said.

The Eucharist was the spiritual hinge that united her mystical life of prayer to her daily devotion to the poor and outcast. Visitors to her home for the dying in Calcutta were often surprised that their first stop was the eucharistic chapel. Jesus, she would tell them, was “the Master of the house”—and his presence was the reason for her work.

This was one of her most important lessons—that we, like the first Christians, should see the mysterious connection between Christ’s presence under the guise of bread and wine and his presence in the poor. “In the Mass we have Jesus in the appearance of bread, while in the slums we see Christ and touch him in the broken bodies, in the abandoned children,” she said.

But the Eucharist was also a big reason for her “call within the call.”

Until the release of letters she wrote, it was known only that on September 10, 1946, Mother Teresa was riding on a train when she heard a voice speaking to her heart. But, with the release of her private letters from this period, it is now known that she continued to hear Christ’s voice in the weeks following that initial encounter on the train. Always the voice came to her during Mass or while she was on her knees after receiving Communion. She described how the voice she heard in the Eucharist gave her the blueprint for what would become the Missionaries of Charity.

“I want Indian Missionaries—Sisters of Charity—who would be my fire of love amongst the very poor, the sick, the dying, the little street children,” Jesus told her. She wrote these letters to secure the Archbishop’s permission to answer Jesus ’call.

“These desires to satiate the longings of our Lord...go on increasing with every Mass and Holy Communion,” she wrote.

She also wrote: “Just as Jesus allows himself to be broken, to be given to us as food, we too must break, we must share with each other.”

In those early eucharistic “visitations,” Jesus told Mother Teresa that she was to bring him to the poorest of the poor. And in taking Christ to the poor, she wanted us to rediscover “Christ, in his most distressing disguise.”

In the poor, she taught us, we meet Jesus—not a reminder of Jesus, not a symbol of Jesus, but Jesus himself, face-to-face, hungering for our love, thirsting for our kindness, waiting to be clothed by our compassion: “The shut-in, the unwanted, the unloved, the alcoholics, the dying destitutes, the abandoned and the lonely, the outcasts and untouchables, the leprosy

sufferers—all those who are a burden to human society, who have lost all hope and faith in life, who have forgotten how to smile, who have lost the sensibility of the warm hand-touch of love and friendship—they look to us for comfort. If we turn our back on them, we turn it on Christ, and at the hour of our death we shall be judged if we have recognized Christ in them, and on what we have done for and to them.”

Mother Teresa took Jesus 'words on faith to heart —that he would remain with us truly until the end of time, that he would come to us in the bread and wine we offer on the altar, and that when we look into the eyes of the hungry, the homeless and the unwanted, we'll find his eyes looking back.

In recent times, I suspect many people have asked where is God. When we see the suffering of so many augmented; those impacted by the Corona virus; and many others impacted by the isolation. Mother Teresa famously went through periods of her faith being challenged too, seeing the suffering constantly all around her, and sometimes not feeling the closeness of God. But through it all, she trusted, knowing God was still with her. Ultimately, in 1961 Mother Teresa found some relief from her interior turmoil through the counsel of Joseph Neuner, S.J., who suggested that her dark night might

be one way God was inviting her to identify with the abandoned Christ on the cross and with the abandoned poor. He also reminded her that the very longing for God itself came from God. For the first time in this 11 years, she wrote the Jesuit theologian, "I have come to love the darkness."

Indeed, one of the things that strikes you with the Passion is the sense of abandonment Jesus must have felt at that moment; trusting, but not fully understanding. Jesus gave Mother Teresa this same cup too, and while there was pain, ultimately through it all she still trusted God was with her, the light dispelling the darkness even if at times it was hard to see that light.

Tonight on Holy Thursday, we celebrate the light that God gives us in the form of the food for the journey through life, the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, we have the Passover of Jesus to the Father in that Jesus becomes present in the Body of Christ. In the signs of bread and wine, we eat his Body and drink his blood. We remember, but we also remember that Jesus is with us on our journey through this life, through every high and every low.

It's particularly difficult not being able to receive Communion tonight for so many. But what we must remember too is that even though we might not

be able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist tonight, that God does not forget us. What we need to do is to allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus so that we can in turn see things as He sees them. Jesus washes our feet, and when you are watching at home this Mass and on Good Friday, looking upon the Eucharist and Cross, my hope is that you would allow yourself to be loved. Think for a moment how much God cares for you. Think for a moment about the things that cause you pain; your anxieties; your sins; your struggles. And realize you do not have to hide them from God, but that Jesus loves you more than you can ever imagine. It's why Jesus washes the feet of His disciples, performing the action of a slave, loving them to the end. His love is without limit, until his death, and is the prelude to what He will accomplish on the cross.

But here's the thing with that. As we let Jesus love us, we will come to love like He loves. Allowing our feet to be washed means identifying with that action of Jesus and allowing it to influence us so that we can then extend that action out into the world, like Saint Mother Teresa. What Jesus shows us is that we are not just the recipient of having our feet washed; as Mother Teresa knew, expressed to the woman she gave comfort to when the

woman was angry at her, it is the measure of how we are to love, of how we are to live now.

Now, you might notice we aren't doing the washing of the feet tonight at this Mass. That was a directive from the Holy See, because so many parishes like ours have no congregation and as such no feet to wash. But that does not mean that feet are not being washed. Instead, right now, feet are being washed in homes between family members, in the kindness being shown by neighbors who offer to shop for one another, in hospitals and nursing homes where people are cared for, in the supermarkets where workers keep shelves stocked, and in the countless acts of love and kindness people are doing for one another. And that's because deep down, what so many people recognize is that our God is indeed called love.

On this evening as we recall the Last Supper, remember that even if you aren't here to receive Communion, Jesus is still coming to you and is in your heart and is with you now. But also remember that each one of us has the ability to bring such good into the world each in our own way. So what is Jesus challenging you to do now? Who is He challenging you to reach out, to forgive, to show more attention and love to? Who do you know that

needs their feet washed? As Mother Teresa said: ““It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing. It is not how much we give, but how much love we put in the giving.” Each one of us is capable of this, and while we see suffering of so many right now in the world, we also see something far more powerful than a virus - the love that each one of us is capable of in actions of mercy as we use that love to dispel the darkness and replace it with hope. May Jesus do the same for you, and may we use the love He gives us to make a difference in the lives of one another.