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Thanksgiving Mass for the canonisation of Mother Teresa: eyes open to suffering, embraced with compassion

Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Square this morning to give thanks for the canonisation yesterday, Sunday, of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, attended by thousands of pilgrims from all over the world including many men and women religious of the order she founded, the Missionaries of Charity.

"Mother Teresa liked to define herself as 'a pencil in the hand of the Lord'. But how many poems of charity, compassion, comfort and joy this little pencil was able to write! Poems of love and tenderness for the poorest of the poor, to whom she consecrated her existence", said the Cardinal in his homily.

The recently proclaimed saint "opened eyes to suffering, and embraced it with a gaze of compassion. All her being was challenged and moved by this encounter, which in a certain sense pierced her heart, following Jesus' example, which was moved by the suffering of the human creature, incapable of getting up again alone". The saint of the slums of Calcutta discovered in the face of Christ Who made Himself poor for us, to enrich us with His poverty, and responded to His boundless love with an immense love for the poor.

But Mother Teresa also knew that one of the most terrible forms of poverty consists in the awareness of being unloved, unwanted and despised. "A form of poverty present even in those countries and families that are less poor, even in people belonging to categories that have access to means and opportunities, but which experience the interior emptiness of having lost meaning and direction in life, or who are violently struck by the desolation of broken bonds, of the harshness of loneliness, of the feeling of being forgotten by all or of not being of use to anyone".

This led her to identify unborn children whose very existence is threatened as "the poorest of the poor". "Indeed", continued Cardinal Parolin, "each one of them depends, more than any other human being, on the love and care of the mother and the protection of society. The unborn child has nothing of his own: all his hopes and needs are in the hands of others. She therefore bravely defended the life of the unborn, with the frankness of word and linearity of action that are the luminous sign of the presence of the Prophets and the Saints, who kneel before none other than the Almighty, who have inner freedom as they have inner strength, and do not bow before the fashions or idols of the moment, but are reflected in consciousness enlightened by the sun of the Gospel".

“In her, we discover that happy and inseparable combination of the heroic exercise of charity and clarity in the proclamation of truth; we see constant industriousness, nurtured by the profundity of contemplation, the mystery of good performed in humility and tirelessly, the fruit of a love that ‘hurts’”.

“In this respect”, the Secretary of State remarked, “she affirmed in her famous address upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Oslo on 11 December 1979, that ‘it is very important for us to realise that love, to be true, has to hurt. It hurt Jesus to love us, it hurt him’. And, giving thanks to present and future benefactors, she said, ‘I don’t want you to give to me from your abundance, I want that you give to me until it hurts’”.

“I believe that these words are like a threshold and, once we cross it, we enter into the abyss that surrounds the life of the Saint, in those heights and those depths that are difficult to explore as they closely follow the sufferings of Christ, His unconditional gift of love and the deep wounds that He had to endure”, observed Cardinal Parolin.

“Another of the seven words pronounced by Jesus during His agony on the cross, she wanted to be written in English in every house of her Congregation, beside the Crucifix: ‘I thirst’. Thirst for fresh, clean water; thirst of souls to console and redeem from their ugliness, to become beautiful and pleasing to the eyes of God; thirst for God, for His living and luminous presence. ‘I thirst’: this is the thirst that burned in Mother Teresa, her cross and her exaltation, her torment and her glory”.

“When Mother Teresa left this earth for Heaven, on 5 September 1997, for several long minutes Calcutta was without light”, he said. “On this earth, she was a transparent sign that pointed to Heaven. On the day of her death Heaven wished to offer a seal to her life and to communicate to us that a new light had been lit above us. Now, following the ‘official’ recognition of her sainthood, it shines even more brightly. May this light, that is the everlasting light of the Gospel, continue to illuminate our earthly pilgrimage and the paths of this difficult world”.
