

Essay on Mother Teresa – ‘Saint of the Gutters’

“The poor give us much more than we give them. They’re such strong people, living day to day with no food. And they never curse, never complain. We don’t have to give them pity or sympathy. We have so much to learn from them.”

–Mother Teresa

Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu later on known as Mother Teresa was born into a middle-class Albanian family in Skopje, then Yugoslavia, on Aug. 26, 1910. As a child, she was called Gonxha. Her father, a businessman and member of the community council died when she was only nine years old. Her mother, Drana, raised Gonxha and her siblings, Aga and Lazar, alone. Diana Bojaxhiu earned a living by sewing and was much conscientious about the religious education of her children.

Mother Stresses Piety

The family prayed every evening and attended church daily.

“I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ into the slums to serve Him among the poorest of the poor. It was an order. I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them.”

–Mother Teresa

The children were taught to treat the poor and needy who came to knock at their door with respect and to practice charitable works. On

holidays, the family made pilgrimages to Lettice, where the Holy Virgin was venerated. Gonxha attended the lyceum, where she sang in the choir and played the mandolin.

When she was just 18 she made a vow to the church and began to work at several religious retreats in Lettice. Deciding to work in India, in 1928 she joined the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto, who were active in India. Gonxha traveled to an abbey close to Dublin, to the Loreto sister's headquarters. There she learned to speak English and began her formal religious training. She renamed herself, Teresa, after Sister Teresa de Lisieux, a 19th-century French nun, and advocate of "the little way"—accomplishing good through menial tasks.

In 1929, Teresa arrived in Calcutta. She continued to Darjeeling, at the foot of the Himalayas, where she was further trained in religious life. On May 23, 1929, she was accepted as a novice and two years later made her first vows. She spent the next 17 years teaching at St. Mary's High School in Calcutta, an elite school for the privileged, eventually serving as its principal. She fell ill in 1946 and went to Darjeeling to recuperate.

"It was in the train I heard the call to give up all and follow him to the slums to serve Him among the poorest of the poor," she recalled.

In 1948, Pope Pius XII permitted her to leave her order and she began teaching children in the Calcutta slums. Then in 1952, she found a woman "half-eaten up by maggots and rats" lying in the street in front of a hospital. She sat with the woman until she died.

Mother Teresa appealed to authorities for a building where the poor could die with dignity and was given a hostel. She began her own order, the Missionaries of Charity, which has devoted itself to

bringing people dying on the streets to the home she founded, the Kalighat Home for the Dying.

“They lived like animals,” she said. “At least they can die like human beings.” Mother Teresa soon extended her work to helping India’s lepers.

In the ensuing decades, wherever people needed comfort she was there –whether serving the hungry in Ethiopia, radiation victims of Chernobyl, or poor in the squalid townships of South Africa. In 1982, at the height of the siege of Beirut, she persuaded the Israeli army and Palestinian guerrillas to stop shooting long enough for her to rescue 37 children trapped in a front-line hospital. She created a global network of homes for the poor from Calcutta to New York including one of the first homes for AIDS victims.

Mother Teresa used her powerful voice to champion conservative values, arguing passionately against abortion, contraception, and divorce. Her fame gave her a platform, and she traveled as Pope John Paul II’s envoy to preach devotion to life. She won many awards for her humanly good works. In 1962, India granted her the Padmashree (“Magnificent Lotus”) Award. In 1971 she was awarded the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize.

Worldwide recognition for her work came in 1979 with the Nobel Peace Prize. Accepting the Nobel Prize in 1979 in the name of the “unwanted, unloved and uncared for,” she wore the same \$1 white sari that she had adopted to identify herself with the poor when she founded her order. Ethics Beyond Reproach?

“I choose the poverty of our poor people. But I am grateful to receive it (the Nobel) in the name of the hungry, the naked, the homeless, of the crippled, of the blind, of the lepers, of all those

people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone.” Said Teresa accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, 1979.

Despite her good works, Mother Teresa has received her share of criticism. Feminist Germaine Greer has led attacks on Mother Teresa’s unwavering anti-abortion stance.

When Mother Teresa accepted Haiti’s Legion d ‘ Honour from Haitian dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier and later laid flowers on the grave of Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha, many faulted her for pandering to tyrants who caused innocent people to suffer.

In 1992, she wrote to the U.S. judge presiding over the trial of Charles Keating, who had donated \$ million to her order, telling him the accused swindler “has always been kind and generous to God’s poor” and asking for his mercy. Mother Teresa brushed aside all accusations of impropriety. *“No matter who says what, accept it with a smile and do your own work,”* she said.

Mother Teresa suffered her first heart attack while meeting Pope John Paul H in Rome in 1983, and a second – nearly fatal – in 1989, after which she received a pacemaker. Her health took a marked turn for the worse beginning in September 1996. She was treated in Calcutta’s Woodlands Nursing Home for malaria as well as heart and lung complications. She died on Sept. 5, 1997, at the age of 87, having lived a life that inspired people the world over – believers and nonbelievers, rich and poor, the unknown and the famed alike.

If you pray with words, let them be filled with love and come from the deepest of your heart. Pray with great respect and trust. Fold your hands, close your eyes and lift up your heart to the Lord. Let your prayer be a pure sacrifice to God. Do not

pray loud and not too quiet. Pray simply. Let your heart speak. Praise the Lord with all your soul. Words will come like that from the bottom of your heart and you will find joy in prayer. Stop once in a while by a word and think it over, let it sink to the bottom of your heart. Keep them during the rest of the day: they will bring you peace. From "Nothing but love."

—Mother Teresa

The poor do not need our sympathy and our pity. The poor need our love and compassion. They give us much more than we give them. During a terrible time when millions of refugees fled to India, we asked for help and many volunteers came and spent some months with us, just loving, serving, giving tender love and care to our people. On their departure, they said they had received much more than they had given.

In Calcutta, some time ago, we went out at night and picked up four or five people from the street and took them to our Home for the Dying. One of them was in a very bad condition and I wanted to take care of her myself I did for her all that my love could do. When I put her into bed, she took hold of my hand and there was such a wonderful smile on her face. She said one word: "Thank you" and she died.

She gave me much more than I had given her. She gave me her grateful heart and I thought: what would I have done in her place? My answer was: I would have tried to draw some attention to myself I would have said: I am hungry or I am cold or I am dying. But she was so great, she was so beautiful in her giving. The poor are great people.

—M. Teresa

In October 2003, Mother Teresa, the humble nun known as the 'Saint of the Gutters', has been declared beatified by Pope John Paul II before hundreds of thousands of pilgrims massed in St Peter's Square. Pilgrims, tourists, Catholics, and members of other religions had been streaming into St. Peter's Square since Sunday night to see the Pope put Mother Teresa on the road to sainthood.

A number of people in the crowd, including some Indian residents of Rome, said they were not Catholic but had greatly admired the nun with a wrinkled face but a child's smile. They said that they wanted to be at what they felt was a historic event.