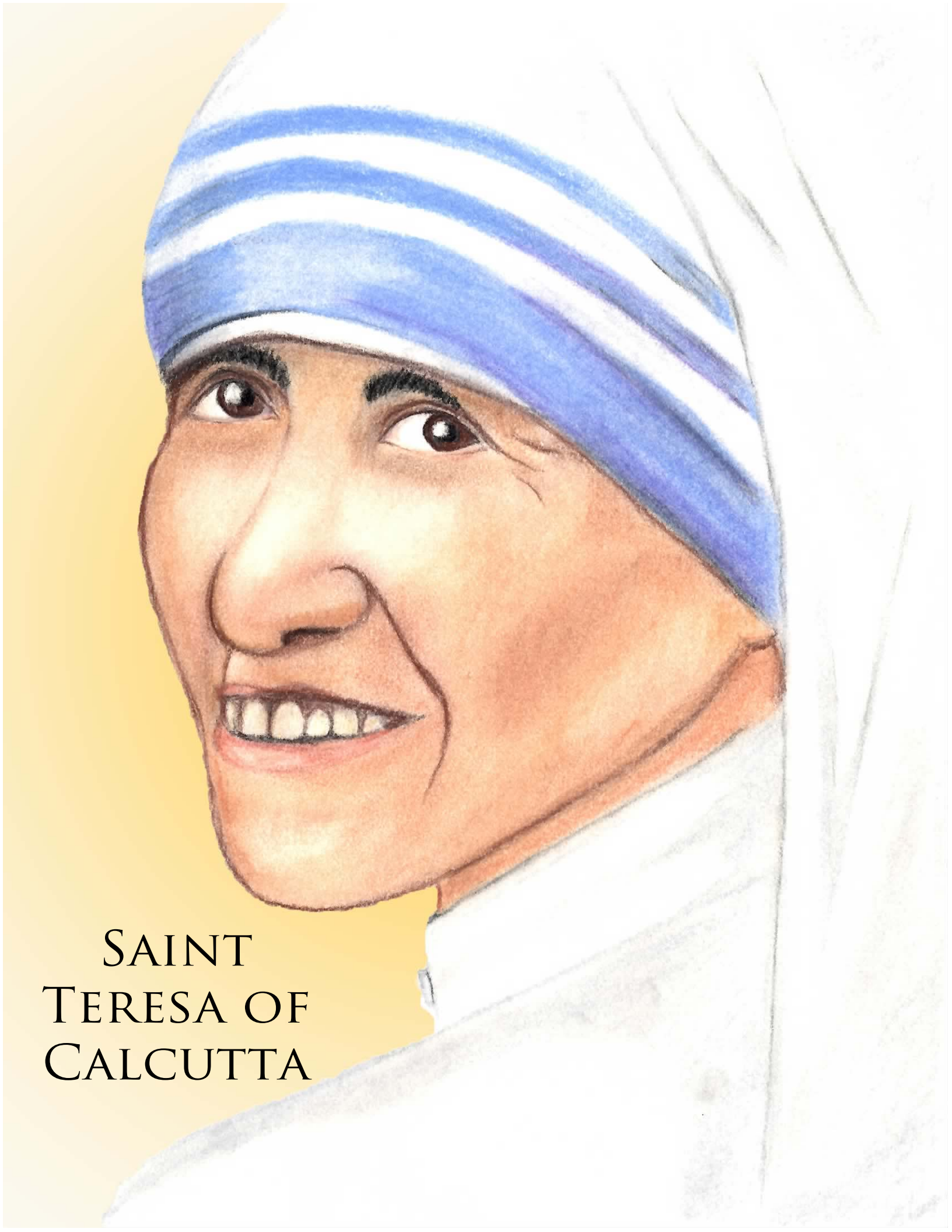




SAINT
TERESA OF
CALCUTTA

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Saint Teresa of Calcutta



St. Teresa of Calcutta, or Mother Teresa as she is still known by many, was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu on August 26, 1910, in Skopje, Macedonia, which is in Europe. Her father was a well-respected businessman, and her mother was a very religious woman. Sadly, when Agnes was eight years old, her father died, leaving her mother to take care of the children. In order to do this and make money, she opened an embroidery and cloth business.

Agnes spent most of her free time involved in her parish. She loved the Church and felt God calling her to a special life within the Church. When Agnes was 18 years old, she left her home and moved to Rathfarnham (Dublin), Ireland, to join the Order of the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto. On October 12, 1928, she entered the community, becoming what is called a “postulant.”

After a year learning English in Ireland, Agnes was sent by the Loreto Order to India in 1929. Upon her arrival, she entered the Novitiate in Darjeeling, at the base of the Himalayan Mountains. This is a special year of training or formation that all men and women who enter religious life go through before professing religious vows. Religious vows are like marriage vows in that they are promises people make to God to be true to their vocations.

Agnes professed first vows at the end of her Novitiate on May 24, 1931. The vows she professed were of poverty, chastity, and obedience so she could more closely follow Jesus. At that time, Agnes chose the new name Teresa, after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Religious sisters and brothers often choose new names as they enter religious life. These new names are to be a tangible sign of their new way of life. This is why everyone knows Agnes as Mother Teresa today.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Mother Teresa taught and worked in administration at Saint Mary's Bengali Medium School, a girls school in Calcutta. She was greatly moved by the condition of the many poor people surrounding the convent and the school.

On September 10, 1946, on a train journey from Calcutta to Darjeeling, Mother Teresa received what she termed the “call within a call.” She felt God calling her to do more to help the poor around her. This calling eventually led her to create a new Order, the Missionaries of Charity, which is a congregation of religious sisters committed to serving the poor. On October 7, 1950, the new congregation was officially created in the Archdiocese of Calcutta. Later on, groups of religious brothers, religious priests, and lay co-workers were also added to the Missionaries of Charity Family.

Mother Teresa’s goal was “to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus on the cross for love and souls” by “laboring at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor.” The work that Mother Teresa and her sisters did was work that many others did not want to do, including comforting people who were dying in the streets, giving care to people with AIDS, and feeding the homeless and people struggling with addictions. They lived and worked mostly in the slums. They truly cared for the people who were forgotten by society but not forgotten by God. Their service was a tangible sign of God’s love for those people. It inspired many other people all around the world to do more to help the poor.

Throughout the following decades, the Missionaries of Charity grew. The growth began in India, and then spread throughout the world – Europe, Africa, Australia, the Middle East, and North America. By 1979, there were 158 Missionaries of Charity foundations. That same year, Mother Teresa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The mission kept growing!

From the late 1980s through the 1990s, Mother Teresa travelled across the world for the profession of novices, opening of new houses, and service to the poor and those suffering from disasters. New communities were founded in South Africa, Albania, Cuba, and war-torn Iraq. By 1997, the sisters numbered nearly 4,000 members, and were serving in almost 600 foundations in 123 countries of the world.

Despite increasing health problems and getting older, Mother Teresa continued to travel and minister to the poor and needy. Mother Teresa died on September 5, 1997, at the Missionaries of Charity’s Motherhouse in Calcutta, India. Hundreds of thousands of people from all classes and all religions, from India and around the world, came to pay their respects.

Mother Teresa listened closely to God’s call, bravely answered it, and changed the world because of it. On October 19, 2003, Pope John Paul II beatified St. Teresa of Calcutta, marking the first step toward her canonization as an official saint. On September 5, 2016, Pope Francis canonized St. Teresa of Calcutta.



“Being unwanted, unloved, uncared for, forgotten by everybody, I think that is a much greater hunger, a much greater poverty than the person who has nothing to eat.”

- Saint Teresa of Calcutta



Supplemental Materials on Sainly Models

Saint Teresa of Calcutta



Saint Teresa of Calcutta

Born: August 26, 1910

Died: October 19, 2003

Canonized by
Pope Francis
September 5, 2016

Interesting Facts

- One of her famous quotes is: “We can do no great things, only small things with great love.”
- St. Teresa was fluent in five languages.
- In 1979, St. Teresa received the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Likely Student Questions:

How many siblings did she have?

She was the youngest of five children born to her parents, but only three survived – her older sister, older brother, and herself.

Why did she go to Ireland to join an order?

She was intrigued by the missions, and the Sisters of Loretto were known for their missionary work in India. She also went there to learn English.

Couldn't it be said that she just joined the convent to get away from a hard life?

Life as a religious sister is extremely difficult. No one can read the story of her life and say that it became easier for St. Teresa after she joined religious life.

What is a postulant?

A postulant is someone seeking entrance into a religious order or someone who is spending time with an order to determine if it is truly his or her vocation.

Why did she get sent to India?

That was one of the places where the Sisters of Loretto had a novitiate, which is special year of training for people living the vocation of religious life. She went there for novitiate because she wanted to work in India. She was sent to do her training where she was going to work.

Why is it called a “medium” school?

It is a school where English is used as the “medium of instruction.” There are many areas where English is not the first language of the students, and yet the school’s classes are taught in English.

Can anyone start a religious congregation?

The Holy Spirit can move any person in the Church to found a new religious congregation, but as in the case of St. Teresa, that person must receive permission from the Church, which comes usually from the local bishop, to begin the community.

(Continued ...)

Likely Student Questions Continued:

What kind of health problems did she have?

Starting in 1983, when she was 73, she had multiple heart attacks, pneumonia, malaria, and a broken collarbone (one year before her death).

Why did she choose those countries to open new communities?

Perhaps she felt that was where there was the most need and where she felt the Spirit calling them to serve. For example, her community came to the United States, even though it was the richest country in the world materially. St. Teresa said it was poor spiritually as a result of its material wealth.

Discussion Questions:

Imagine leaving your family, your first language, your country, and your culture just to follow a “call” or a feeling that you are doing what God wants of you. What kind of faith or courage would that take?

St. Teresa must have been a very prayerful person to be able to have the faith and trust in God to embark on such an adventure. Only in frequent conversation with God can we come to know His voice and hear His call.

How many of you have thought, “That’s too hard. God wouldn’t want that of me ...”? Or: “I just don’t feel like I can. God will understand...”? How does this compare to the giant choices that St. Teresa made?

Frequently! We are programmed to justify our actions – one more cookie won’t hurt ... – and to strive for comfort. Catholicism is counter-cultural and encourages us to practice discipline and to challenge ourselves for the sake of building God’s kingdom by making God known, loved, and served.

Imagine feeling as if you have followed your call and you are living your vocation, only to be called to a different way of serving in that vocation. In what way could that be confusing? How could that be an extra challenge?

It would be very confusing as we sometimes consider our discernment about what God’s will is for us to be over once we “discover our vocation.”

(Continued ...)

Discussion Questions Continued:

St. Teresa had already joined an order. For her to take another scary, giant step seems like an unexpected challenge. In these times, it is important to remember our vocation is more about who God is calling us to be, rather than what God is asking us to do. What we do might change many times within the course of our vocations.

What is it that could have driven St. Teresa on to serve so generously and tirelessly, despite many obstacles? Do you think you have the same kind of drive? Could you?

St. Teresa had great determination, faith, and a strong prayer life. She and her sisters used to measure distances by rosaries. For example, it might take them three rosaries to get to the city center from their home. They also spent a set time in prayer daily. They could not go out to serve others if they did not know for whom they were serving. If we are to have the same drive to serve, we must have the same personal relationship with Jesus by coming to know and love Him.

How does St. Teresa's life show that one person's choice to be faithful to God can impact so many others in bringing them closer to God?

Like Mary, St. Teresa said "yes" to each of God's calls to serve those in greatest need, so many people were helped. She was able to be the driving force and the conduit of God's grace, mercy, and love in the world. She inspired many others to know, love, and serve God in religious life.
