

## **Blessed of Teresa of Calcutta**

St. Paul's Church

5 September 2011

Dear brothers in the priesthood, dear consecrated men and women, especially the Missionaries of Charity, dear seminarians and dear friends in Christ:

### ***Introduction***

What a blessing it is for the Church in Vancouver to be here at St. Paul's and on Cordova Street to be celebrating the feast of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. This is an especially significant and joyful occasion for marks the beginning of a new page in the history of the Church's presence in the Downtown Eastside. For 85 years, as you know, the Religious presence here was guaranteed by the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, to whom the Archdiocese and her priests and faithful, as well as the whole community, owe an enormous debt of gratitude. Unfortunately, their lack of vocations forced them to withdraw from Vancouver, a very painful decision for them and for us. They touched thousands of lives, ensuring that the love of Christ, that love which never fails and does not seek its own interests, as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 13:8,4) was ever present.

Now the Missionaries of Charity, who established their first convent here after the historic visit of Mother Teresa to Vancouver in 1988, are moving to a new home, the former convent of the Franciscan Sisters. The Church is a community of continuity – and the Archdiocese

is delighted that the Missionaries of Charity agreed to continue and ensure a visible presence of consecrated women in this section of the City. Thank you, Sisters, for moving here. If I dare say, I can well imagine that Mother is looking down approvingly at your decision to be in closer physical proximity to the “poorest of the poor” here in the DTES. To celebrate her feast day with this change in location is a great grace for all of us.

### ***Blessed Teresa of Calcutta***

Like your Foundress, you devote your energies first of all to prayer, prayer that is rooted in faith.

For Blessed Teresa, everything begins in prayer, for it is through prayer that we learn to look contemplatively at the world and to discern there, behind its enormous tribulations, the living presence of Jesus. That is your greatest gift to the Church and the community. “We are not social workers,” Mother used to say, but “we are first and foremost contemplatives.” And this contemplation, she taught us, starts from the Eucharist. It is because he is really present in the Blessed Sacrament that we can really touch him in our brothers and sisters.

### ***Eucharistic Vision***

Mother Teresa saw an intimate, indissoluble link between these two forms of the presence of Christ in our world – in the Eucharist and in the “least of the little ones.” In fact, she constantly held up as a model

to her Sisters the way in which the priest touches the Body of Christ at Mass: “this is how you should handle the same Body of Christ in the suffering bodies of men.”<sup>1</sup>

Mother told us that, beginning from the Eucharist, the powerful presence of the Risen Lord in our world, all service of others is a work of adoration. Working with and for others means adoring Jesus who took upon himself our humanity so that we can come to share in his divinity, in the “abundant life” (cf. Jn 10:10) he promised us. The real reason why Blessed Teresa, and the Missionaries of Charity following in her stead, could and can give themselves so completely to tend the bodies of those who are suffering because they “see” in them, “contemplate” with the vision of faith, the very Body of Christ.

### ***Witness to Joy***

While it is well nigh impossible to sum the secret of Mother’s spirituality, one lesson she can teach us, comes straight from the Beatitudes, when Jesus on the mountain proclaims “happy” or “blessed” those who are poor in spirit, pure in heart, gentle and merciful; and those who mourn and who hunger and thirst for what is right, who are peacemakers. If living the Beatitudes is our program for life, in imitation of Jesus, then those who follow his way are indeed “happy.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Both citations from the pamphlet by Paul Chetcuti, *Choosing to Serve the Destitute* (Dublin: Irish Messenger Publications, 1980), 11.

The Sermon on the Mount marks out the true map of our journey to the profound happiness we seek. “The eight Beatitudes are the road signs that show the way. To be sure, it is an uphill path that we take, but the Lord himself has walked it before us.<sup>2</sup> It is by walking with Christ that we can achieve joy, true joy! “The Beatitudes are promises resplendent with the new image of the world and of man inaugurated by Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Now that world is only the size of a mustard seed, but that seed contains the promise of a great tree which will, in God’s time, embrace the earth. And the Saints are those who invite us to taste a vision of the world where love proves itself stronger than suffering and death in all its manifestations.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Address at World Youth Day (25 July 2002), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 71-72.

Was not Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta an unforgettable witness of this blessedness, of true Gospel joy in our time? She lived in touch daily with wretchedness, human degradation and death. . . , yet she gave everyone God’s smile. In one of her writings, we read: “We wait impatiently for paradise, where God is, but it is in our power to be in paradise even here on earth and from this moment. Being happy with God means loving like him, helping like him, giving like him, serving like him.”<sup>4</sup> Yes, joy, true joy, enters the hearts of those who put themselves at the service of the Gospel, a Gospel which gives pride of place to service of the lowly and poor. God abides in those who love like this and their souls rejoice.<sup>5</sup>

In 1979, when receiving the Nobel Prize in Oslo, she spoke not only of the scourge of abortion – which she did forcefully and to the chagrin of the organizers – but also of the love of God: “Let us keep that joy of loving Jesus in our hearts,” she told that elite audience, “and share that joy with all we come in touch with. That radiating joy is real, for we have no reason not to be happy because we have Christ with us. Christ in our hearts, Christ in the poor we meet, Christ in the smile we give and the smile we receive.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Mother Teresa, *The Joy of Giving to Others* (1987), 143.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus (16 December 2007).

<sup>6</sup> James Martin, *My Life with the Saints* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2006), 169.

## *Light of the World*

Allow me to say a few words about the closing verses of today's Gospel, which call to mind the title of a recent biography and study of the inner life and private writings of the Blessed, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*.<sup>7</sup> The subtitle comes from an inner voice, that of Jesus, at the beginning of her call to leave the Sisters of Loreto to take up a new life in more direct service of the poor. While she was hesitating, the interior voice pleaded with her: "Come, come, carry Me into the holes of the poor. Come, be my light."<sup>8</sup> This is what Jesus, in today's Gospel says: his followers are to be light to the world. He who proclaimed himself light of the world (cf. Jn 8:12) transfers his light to those who follow him: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14), he told them. Jesus calls us to be his light. "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12).

When we live with Christ, our life is bathed in new light, setting us on the right path and sending us out to be his witnesses and his instruments. With his light, we have a new way of looking at the world and at people – a contemplative way as Mother proposed – one which

---

<sup>7</sup> Edited by Brian Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Brian Kolodiejchuk, ed., *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 44.

comes to us from him, leads us more deeply into knowing and loving him.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Message for the 17<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day (25 July 2001), 3.

In our day many of our contemporaries think and act as if God did not exist. They live without the light. Indeed, “The greatest deception, and the deepest source of unhappiness, is the illusion of finding life by excluding God, of finding freedom by excluding moral truths and personal responsibility.”<sup>10</sup> We disciples, on the other hand, must live and demonstrate to others that faith is a personal decision which involves our whole life: how we think, how we worship, how we respect the inherent dignity of everyone by loosing the bonds of injustice, undo the yoke, letting the oppressed go free, sharing our bread with the hungry, bringing the homeless into our dwellings, covering the naked (cf. Is 58:6-7).

Being the light of the world also entails that we spread everywhere the light that comes from God, not putting it under a bushel basket (cf. Mt 5:15). It means fighting darkness due to evil and sin. Hunger, oppression, homelessness and poverty are all different forms of darkness. It is a darkness, however, which can be overcome; indeed, a darkness we are commanded to dispel.

---

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Homily at World Youth Day, Toronto (28 July 2002), 2.



With his announcement of the presence of the Kingdom in our midst, Jesus makes clear that he is calling his followers to have an impact on the world. That's where we live out our discipleship. As individuals church communities, "the gifts we have – of nature and grace – should stand out, shine like neon lights or glow lamps, should make people pause, force them to stop and look and listen."<sup>11</sup>

We are called to attract others to the Lord, not repel them. Our faith should give pause to the skeptic, our hope should lend heart to the disheartened, our love cool the anger of those who resent and hate.<sup>12</sup> But we attract them to God – not to ourselves so that they like us, admire us or envy us. That's the difference between a saint and a showman.

Jesus is aware that we may be tempted to hide our faith. We might repress it in our public lives, thinking that it has nothing to offer the "real" world of work, culture, business or politics. Or we may just keep it under a basket – a "private" matter that makes no difference to society.<sup>13</sup>

By our deeds, as Jesus' disciples we influence the world for good – or for ill. We should no more escape notice than a city built on a hill (cf.

---

<sup>11</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, *Lovely in Eyes Not His: Homilies for an Imaging of Christ* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, *Grace on Crutches: Homilies for Fellow Travelers* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 156.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. John Kavanaugh.

Mt 5:14). If we fail in doing good works, we are as useless as flavourless salt or as a lamp whose light is concealed. By inviting us to be “light,” Jesus demands that we make him present in the world.

The light of our good works that we must let shine before others is not for self-glorification or a “look at how good I am” attitude. That is always a danger for us. If we want other people to see our good works, and praise us as good, saintly Christians, then we would already “have received our reward” (Mt 6:2,5). Rather, we do what we should so that by seeing goodness in our acts, others will be moved to give praise to our heavenly Father.

If the light that shines in us is authentic and not just a mask or false face, it truly is a reflection of Jesus, the light of the world.

### ***Conclusion***

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta is light to the world and to us gathered here. She is a gift of God to our world hungering after love. Entirely consumed by love for God and totally dedicated to living the Gospel among the “poorest of the poor,” she is a teacher of holiness for all of us, revealing through her wrinkled visage the face of Christ that shone in her.

The greatest gift of Mother Teresa to the Church will not be her memory, as beautiful and inspiring as it is, but that she has helped to give rise to other saints, that she has helped to awaken in us a desire to

serve Jesus without reserve and in all things. As Pope Benedict has said: “Saints normally bring forth other Saints and closeness to them, or even only to their footsteps, is always salutary: it cleanses and raises the mind and opens the heart to love for God and for the brethren. Holiness sows joy and hope, and responds to the thirst for happiness that people also feel today.”<sup>14</sup>

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta remains a shining example and sign full of fascination for our time of how a life founded on joy, the love of Jesus and profound faith even in suffering can give light to the world, that light which is Christ himself.

\_ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

---

<sup>14</sup> Benedict XVI, Address to the Postulators of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (17 December 2007).