

Mother Theresa - Lyfe story

Born: August 26 1910 in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia (then the Ottoman Empire)
Died: September 5 1997 (aged 87 in Calcutta, India)

Agnesë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, an ethnic Albanian, knew from the age of twelve that she would commit herself to what Catholics refer to as the 'religious life'. She lost her father when she was eight and left home to join the Sisters of Loreto as a missionary when she was eighteen.

The commitment and devotion required of her in her new life meant that she never saw her mother again. In 1931 she took her religious vows as a nun and gave herself the name that has become synonymous with sacrificial care for the poor: Teresa. The implications of a simple life lived in service to the poor have been astonishing. Mother Teresa was a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, received a state funeral in India and a Gallup poll conducted in 1999 saw Mother Teresa as the most admired person of the 20th century.

A decisive moment in Mother Teresa's life came during a retreat in Darjeeling, India where she felt called by God to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. This is the embodiment of the word that most aptly describes Mother Teresa: compassion. The root of the word compassion is the Latin *compati* which means 'to suffer with'.

Mother Teresa established, with the blessing of the Vatican, the Missionaries of Charity. Their mission was to care for 'the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, 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.' Originally this order was comprised of thirteen nuns. Today, there are more than 4,000 engaged in the daily act of compassion, serving the poor in over 450 locations around the world.

Such was the authority she gained from a simple life of service that Mother Teresa was able, in a remarkable series of events, to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine during the siege of Beirut in 1982 in order to rescue 37 children that were trapped in a hospital.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), said that 'In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service.' Mother Teresa's compassion was not something that existed alongside her spirituality but rather was the outworking of her spirituality.

Further resources

Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: A Complete Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperOne, 1998).

Mother Teresa and Thomas Moore, *No Greater Love* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2002).