

MOTHER TERESA – A WOMAN OF COMPASSION.

Hebrews 11 is a divine mandate to listen to people's stories.

It is a passage of Scripture that references story after story of faith; one person after another – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and on and on it goes.

The unmistakable implication of this chapter is that if we hear about the faith of others, and seek to imitate them, we are enabled to **“lay aside every weight and run with endurance the race that is set before us.”** {**Hebrews 12:1**}

Their example helps us to run our race.

God has always used human agents and their stories to stir and encourage his people.

Reflection on the stories of the faithful is one of the major ways through which we are able learn the wisdom of God's ways.

Listening to the stories of people from another time safeguards us from what **C. S. Lewis** called **‘Chronological snobbery;’** the foolishness of thinking that our age and time is the sum of wisdom.

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Being a student of people's stories is an **exercise in theology.**

Theology which is, at its simplest, seeking to know God, emerges from these real lives devoted to His cause.

Being a student of people's stories is an **exercise in psychology.**

It deepens our understanding of human nature, including, hopefully, our own.

Being a student of people's stories is an **exercise in prophecy.**

Prophetic vision involves not just foresight {future} or insight {present} but also hindsight {past}.

Thus far in our series we have considered –

- **G. K. Chesterton** – a lesson in warmth, wit and whimsy.
- **C. S. Lewis** – a baptized intellect and imagination.
- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** – a man of courage.

This morning I want to wrap up this short series by looking at **Mother Teresa – a woman of compassion.**

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Mother Teresa was born in that cauldron of ethnic and religious strife within Europe, the Balkans. She came into the world on August 26th 1910 in the town of Skopje, {pronounced ‘Sko Pye’} modern-day Macedonia.

The baby girl was actually named Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, {Pronounced **AG-ness GOHN-jay Boh-yah-JOO.**} the third child of a family that was Albanian, part of the 10 percent of the Albanian population who were devoutly Roman Catholic. She had an older brother, Lazar, and an older sister, Aga.

Mother Teresa’s own mother was called Dranafllë (almost always shortened to Drana) Bernai.

She came from a prosperous, middle-class family in Prizren, nowadays the predominantly Serbian town of Pristina.

Mother Teresa’s father, Nikola Bojaxhiu, {Boh-yah-joo} was a successful businessman; a partner in a Skopje {sko-pye} based building construction company and an importer of wholesale foods.

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Mother Teresa described their father, Nikola, as a financially generous man who gave away money and clothing to the poor and who actually preached to his children the virtues of charitable generosity.

Mother Teresa told an Albanian Roman Catholic friend much later, **““Papa used to say, my daughter, never accept a mouthful unless it is shared with others.”**

Nikola Bojaxhiu {Boh-jah-joo} was active in Skopje’s {Skopje} civic affairs. He was a communal council member in the town, a strong believer in the value of education for both women and men, and a passionate Albanian patriot.

His Albanian Nationalist sentiments may have been, in the end, Nikola’s downfall.

In 1919, he visited Belgrade for discussions with other Albanian civic leaders. There was a banquet or some other major meal and something went terribly wrong soon afterward with Nikola.

By the time he had returned to Skopje by train toward the middle of the evening seriously ill with internal hemorrhaging.

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Some doctors at the time speculated that the symptoms of his illness suggested poisoning.

He was operated on the following day at the hospital in Skopje, but he did not survive.

Nikola was only forty-five years old at the time. Agnes was just nine.

The emotional loss of their father for Aga, Lazar, Agnes, and their mother, must have been devastating, but the financial blow was even greater.

Nikola's business partner ran off with the company funds, leaving the entire burden of supporting the family on Drana.

She was a resourceful woman, and was soon earning a living by embroidering bridal gowns and costumes for various festivals.

Drana was devoutly Catholic and she presided over family prayers every evening, and ensured that the children attended private elementary school and then religious instruction in the Sacred Heart Church.

Lazar {sometimes called Lazzaro} once commented,

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“Sometimes my mother and sisters used to live as much in the church as they did at home, they were always involved with the choir, religious services, and missionary topics.”

As a child, Mother Teresa was apparently shy and introverted.

She was also a disciplined, thoughtful little girl who didn't seem to mind helping her brother and elder sister whenever they asked her assistance.

In spite of the loss of her father at an early age she recalled that she adored her childhood.

She once said,

“We were all very united, especially after the death of my father. We lived for each other and we made every effort to make one another happy.”

Her mother's instinctual charitableness, the daily prayers, the frequent visits to the church, which was almost next door, and the summer pilgrimages to Letnice, {a prominent local shrine} must cumulatively have nurtured in young Mother Teresa's mind the seeds

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of a desire to serve God to the exclusion of everything else.

She was about twelve she said, when she first realized she wanted to do this. She explained later:

“I was still young; perhaps 12 years old, when in our family circle I said for the first time that I wanted to belong wholly to God.”

A local priest, Father Franjo Jambrenkovic, had a significant impact on young Agnes and opened her eyes for the first time to the concrete possibility that she might become a missionary.

It was probably Father Jambrenkovic’s keen interest in missions that finally pushed Mother Teresa down the path to India.

By the time she was thirteen, she made a point of meeting any missionaries who returned to her own area, and she listened raptly to their stories. She helped organize concerts and other gatherings to raise money for the missionaries, took part in prayer meetings for them, and showed a growing sense of direction toward a life wholly dedicated to God.

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By the time she was seventeen, the sense of God's call upon her had reached a certain point of urgency.

He now decided to spend an extra two weeks during the family outing to Letnice in the hope of hearing clearly from God.

She wanted to be a missionary, but she did not particularly want to become a nun.

As a Roman Catholic, however, it would have been impossible for her to go anywhere in the world as a layperson, and the priesthood itself, of course, was closed to women.

She asked Father Jambrenkovic,

“How can you know when the Lord is calling you into some vocation?”

“You can know by the happiness you feel,” he told her.

She was later to talk about the call of God in this manner,

“If you are glad at the thought that God may be calling you to serve him and your neighbor, this may well be the best proof of your vocation. A deep joy is like the

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compass which points out the proper direction for your life. One should follow this even when one is venturing upon a difficult path.”

This reminds me of **Frederick Beuchner’s** wonderful words describing the call of God,

“The voice we should listen to most when we choose a vocation is the voice that we might think we should listen to least, and that is the voice of our own gladness. What can we do that makes us the gladdest; what can we do that leaves us with the strongest sense of sailing due north and of peace, which is much of what gladness is. Is it making things with our hands out of wood, or stone or paint or canvas? Or is it making something we hope like truth out of words? Or is it making people laugh or weep in a way that cleanses their spirit? I believe that if it is a thing that makes us truly glad, then it is a good thing and it is our thing and it is the calling voice that we were made to answer with our lives.”

I suspect that we Protestants, who have sometimes made out that the will of God is the hardest thing; the

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most unpleasant thing, should meditate long and hard on these thoughts regarding gladness.

The turning point in her difficult decision-making process seems to have been August 15th 1928.

Her time of prayer at Letnice was more anguished than ever before and yet more filled with joy. By the time she returned home, Agnes knew what she had to do.

“It was at Letnice that for the first time I heard God’s voice,” she recalled later.

When she told her mother of her intentions, Drana went immediately to her room and stayed there for twenty-four hours, no doubt pouring out her heart to God in anguish at the price she herself would have to pay.

When she finally reemerged, though she had probably wept copiously behind the closed door, her emotions were under control.

“Put your hand in His hand in His hand and walk all the way with Him,” she told Agnes simply.

Agnes Gonxha {Gohn jay} Bojaxhiu, {Boh-jah-joo} the future Mother Teresa, had only just turned eighteen.

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She wanted very much to go to the Calcutta area of India, so she joined a Catholic order called, 'The Sisters of Loreto,' in order to be sent there.

She left Skopje on 25th September 1928 and was not to return until 42 years later. She did not know that she would never see her mother and sister again.

She went to Ireland for initial training and then on to India, docking in Calcutta on January 6th 1929.

She initially was stationed in Darjeeling, in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains for the first formal stages of religious life.

She formally became a novice in the Sisters of Loreto and took the name 'Maria Teresa.'

She worked initially in a hospital in Bengal and then as a teacher in a girls school located in the heart of Calcutta.

Mother Teresa loved teaching from the start. Her outgoing personality made her a popular teacher.

She took her final vows after nine years in 1937 and not long after was appointed the Principal of St Mary's school.

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Though she had obviously seen firsthand the poverty of Calcutta, and it grieved her to the quick, in most respects, in the comfort of the school compound she was more or less isolated from India's urban poverty and its dirt and disease.

In 1943 the catastrophic effects of the war launched by Japan at Pearl Harbour in 1941 hit Bengal, in the form of terrible famine. An estimated two million Indians died in the famine.

After World War II, the pressure on Britain to grant independence to India created a new crisis of uncertainty on the subcontinent. At issue was the longtime rivalry between India's Muslims and its dominant Hindu majority.

Violence flared and more than 5000 people perished on the School's doorsteps.

Mother Teresa was appalled. A turning point was to occur in her life two months after this.

It was aboard the small-gauge mountain train that wound its way up the Himalayan foothills on the way to Darjeeling, that Mother Teresa clearly heard the call that

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was to transform her life and ultimately that of thousands upon thousands of the poor throughout India and the rest of the world.

It was 10th September 1946.

Mother Teresa said she heard ‘a divine summons, a **“call within a call,”** as she put it later.

She described the incident on many occasions,

“While I was going by train from Calcutta to Darjeeling to participate in spiritual exercises I was quietly praying when I clearly felt a call within my calling. The message was very clear. I had to leave the convent and consecrate myself to helping the poor by living among them. It was a command.”

In another version she said that the divine command was specifically,

“To follow Him into the slums—to serve Him in the poorest of the poor.”

“I understood what I needed do, but I did not yet know how to go about it.”

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Back at Darjeeling for her retreat, she struggled in prayer for clarity on how to proceed. She was confident enough of the divine call to discuss it with the other Loreto Sisters in Darjeeling.

Many were shocked, however much they respected Mother Teresa. It would require special permission from the Mother General of the order for a nun to work outside the walls of Loreto in any capacity.

Beyond this initial hurdle was the complex chain of Catholic ecclesiastical command starting at the very top with the Catholic Archdiocese of Calcutta.

Unless every link in this complex chain of authority was connected Mother Teresa's "call within a call" would remain unanswered.

God might indeed have spoken to Mother Teresa, but if the hierarchy of the Catholic Church itself didn't cooperate, it would be next to impossible for her to obey what He had said.

She waited until July 1949 {2 years} until that final permission came for her to proceed.

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She got some basic training in health/medical care and then began her work with less than one US dollar to her name.

She sought out the location in one of Calcutta's poorest shantytowns, Moti Jihl.

Beginning with a school for the children, she launched her ministry to the poorest of the poor.

Mother Teresa realized that she would have to try to provide simple medical treatment to the poor wherever she found them.

She had no sources of medicine whatsoever when she started, so she would sometimes walk into a pharmacy with a long list of what she needed, wait until all of the regular customers had been attended to, then present her list with a smile to the manager. Would he be willing **“to do something beautiful for God?”** she would ask, using a phrase that came to characterize her approach to how people should give to the work.

Again and again, the pharmacists would comply; she would be given the medicines for free.

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The needs were overwhelming and one issue that gnawed constantly at her was would anyone else actually want to join her in this new ministry?

In February 1949 a former student of Mother Teresa's, a Bengali girl from a prosperous family, named Subashini Das, joined her ministry.

Before a year was out, some ten girls had joined as aspirants, almost all of them former students of Mother Teresa at St Mary's.

None of them would receive any payment at all for their work. Their sole personal wealth was two saris, coarse undergarments, personal toiletries and a prayer book.

They followed a disciplined daily way of life: up very early for prayer and Mass, then a breakfast of Indian chapatti flat bread and tea. They would be out in the slums in the morning, back at noon for a meal and a time of rest and spiritual reflection, then return to work once more until early evening. There would be a short period of spiritual reflection before supper, more prayer, and bed around 10:00 P.M.

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Mother Teresa drafted a constitution for the new
“Society of the Missionaries of Charity,”

The Missionaries’ purpose was this:

“To fulfill our mission of compassion and love to the poorest of the poor we go: -

- **Seeking out in towns and villages all over the world even amid, squalid surroundings the poorest, the abandoned, the sick, the infirm, the leprosy patients, the dying, the desperate, the lost, and the outcasts.**
- **taking care of them,**
- **rendering help to them,**
- **visiting them assiduously,**
- **Living Christ’s love for them,**
- **Awakening their response to His great love.”**

It could all be summed up in this declaration, as the constitution made clear:

“Our aim is to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus Christ on the cross for love of souls by the profession of the

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evangelical counsels and wholehearted free service-to the poorest of the poor.”

Today, next to the large crucifix behind the altar of every Missionary of Charity Chapel there are the words, **“I thirst.”**

These are, of course, the real words of Christ on the cross, but to Mother Teresa they have always expressed Christ’s desire, indeed His yearning for us to love Him. **“Jesus is thirsting for our love,”** she has often said, **“and this is the thirst for everyone, poor and rich alike.”**

She famously commented that serving the poor was, in fact, **“Serving Jesus in a distressing disguise.”**

By physically caring for, cleaning up the wounds, and washing the unclean bodies of these near-death human beings, she explained, **“we are actually touching his body. It is the hungry Christ we are feeding, it is the naked Christ that we are clothing, it is the homeless Christ that we are giving shelter.”**

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The Missionaries of Charity expanded their work into more than twenty Indian cities; today, they have more than seven hundred sisters working there.

In the 1960's the word world opened its doors to Mother Teresa.

By 1979, the year in which the Nobel Peace prize was conferred on Mother Teresa, the Missionaries of Charity had opened sixty-one new houses outside of India in some twenty eight countries, ranging from Brazil to Tanzania, and in cities as diverse as Liverpool and Lima, Peru.

Mother Teresa visited every single one of the locations before a home was begun.

Other international awards piled up:

- The Nehru Award for International understanding from the Indian government in 1972.
- The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion in 1973.
- The Mater et Magistra from the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi in 1974.

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- A medal coined in her honour by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN in 1975.
- The Albert Schweitzer Prize in 1975.
- For a while a bewildering array of honorary degrees were also bestowed on her.

Her fame, she always said, was her peculiar cross, yet it also enabled her to have a deep impact on a curious variety of people, ranging from the queen of England and Princess Diana (who was reportedly buried with a crucifix given to her by Mother Teresa), to big financiers and even Communist Party bosses.

She always refused any payment for herself or her nuns, or any property ownership of any kind except where, without it, the work of the Missionaries would not be permitted.

When the Knights of Columbus in the U.S., a high profile Roman Catholic private institution, offered a considerable monthly sum, she replied:

“I prefer the insecurity of divine providence.”

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“The greatest danger we could encounter would be to get rich,” she often said.

She was so honoured by her now native India that she was given lifetime flight privileges on Air India and sometimes other airlines. She was also given a permanent free pass aboard the Indian railroad system. {They thought it was a blessing!!}

But her fame inadvertently, created problems whenever she traveled, resulting in a paradox. For many years, she insisted on flying economy class everywhere she went. Once she became instantly recognizable, however, ordinary passengers would be so intrigued by her presence or would so much want to talk to her, even touch her, that the airliner’s aisles became totally blocked, preventing movement by other passengers or the normal work of flight attendants.

The result: She eventually agreed to travel first-class to avoid the disruption caused by her fame.

Mother Teresa’s obvious saintliness as a servant of the poor did not protect her from some vigorous, and sometimes vicious, public criticism.

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It has come from left and right, religious and secular, Hindu and Christian.

After she received the Nobel peace prize some militant Hindus objected, saying that **“her sole objective is to influence people in favor of Christianity, and, if possible to convert them.”**

Christopher Hitchens, a left-wing journalist and an vicious critic Christianity in general and of Mother Teresa in particular: has complained, on the basis of reports to him from former Missionaries of Charity workers, that the sisters have sometimes clandestinely “baptized” the very sick on their deathbeds while pretending to wipe their brows with a damp cloth.

Why this, of all things, should upset Hitchens, a self-described “convinced atheist,” is a mystery.

In 1994, the BBC in London aired a Channel Four documentary called “Hell’s Angel,” in which Hitchens unveiled a vicious assault on Mother Teresa.

She was, he said, **“the ghoul of Calcutta,” “dangerous,” and “sinister.”**

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“The woman was a fanatic and a fundamentalist and a fraud, and millions of people are much worse off because of her life, and it’s a shame there is no hell for the bitch to go to.”

In one instance, he called Mother Teresa a **“fanatical, lying, thieving Albanian dwarf.”**

Hitchens’ sneering and sexually suggestive book, with its intentionally derisive title, **“The Missionary Position,”** is a diatribe chiefly against the Christian faith itself.

According to Hitchens the chief fault of Mother Teresa, whose universally admired persona he mocks, is that her work is **“nothing but a fundamentalist religious campaign.”**

Ironically, even some Christians, admittedly a very small, very narrow group, have developed a sort of cottage industry on the Internet trying to prove that Mother Teresa is not a Christian at all, but some sort of syncretistic groupie of every belief system that’s out there.

As Mother Teresa approached the end of her days, skeptics and faithful alike were still trying to second-

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guess the very core of her motivation and inspiration, as well as what inspired thousands of followers in the same direction all around the globe.

Her answer to this question was always the same:

“Jesus.”

In the hospital in Rome in June 1983, after her fall and physical near collapse, she he wrote a brief meditation in answer to the question, “Who is Jesus to me?”

“Jesus is the Word made Flesh, Jesus is the Bread of Life,” she starts off, conventionally enough for any orthodox Catholic, or Protestant or orthodox Christian, for that matter.

She went on:

“Jesus is my God

Jesus is my spouse

Jesus is my Life

Jesus is my only Love

Jesus is my All in All

Jesus is my everything.”

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Mother Teresa died on 5 September 1997 – the same week in which Princess Diana was killed in a car crash in a Parisian tunnel.

She was granted a state funeral by the Indian government in gratitude for her services to the poor of all religions in India. Her death was mourned in both secular and religious communities

At the time of her death, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity had over 4,000 sisters, and an associated brotherhood of 300 members, operating 610 missions in 123 countries.

What can we learn from Mother Teresa's life of compassion?

Again, there are any things we could speak of – let me pick three very briefly.

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Firstly, I think her life is, in miniature, a lesson to the worldwide church on how God intends his people to bring change to the world.

As we read through the New Testament, we quickly realize that Jesus did not die on the cross simply to save us from hell and get us into heaven, although His death on the cross makes both of these things possible.

Jesus also died to make us into a holy people whom He could use to change His world.

If we are to be at work in the world in the name of Christ, the question that concerns us is how?

How do we change the world?

By what means do we seek to alter the structure of society?

In what ways do we give expression to the love of God in the social institutions of the modern world?

Recently many Evangelical Christians have concluded that in order to be in a position to bring change to the world the Church needed political authority and power.

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We saw the rise of the Moral Majority movement in the US and the beginnings of Christian Political parties in our own nation – in order to gain the power needed to turn our nations back to Christ and Christian values.

There are those who think that without some form of coercive power, it is impossible to get anything done in today's world. They are convinced that the powerless cannot expect to make the world –better or worse.

I am not here debating the rightness of the positions taken by these Christian leaders, nor am I condemning their desire to create a better society.

I think however, that they have been seduced into thinking change comes through the exercise of power – in this case political power.

I believe this is a serious mistake that will, in the long run, hurt the witness of the church and significantly diminish its authority.

Power and authority are not the same thing and when power increases usually authority diminishes at the same rate.

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Jesus chose not to exercise power in order to bring change.

Jesus had power sufficient to force all of us to our knees, to destroy all the evil in society, and make all things right again. Yet He chose not to save the world through the exercise of power but rather to change it through His love.

That self sacrificial love resulted in moral authority in people's lives which open the door for change.

The irony is that the more one gives to others in love, sacrifices for the well-being of others, and suffers for the cause of righteousness, the more one grows in moral authority.

Nelson Mandela had tremendous moral authority while having no political power – through his sacrifice.

Mother Teresa has walked the same pathway as her Master.

She commanded no army, she sat in no parliament, she had no wealth; and yet when she spoke, the world listened.

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Mother Teresa possessed no power in this world, but— she did possess great moral authority and her words carried great weight and produced tremendous change.

Her authority was established by her willingness to sacrifice in the service of others.

Authority comes from sacrifice; the greater the sacrifice the greater the authority.

That's why Jesus has all authority in Heaven and Earth.

If you went out into the street and asked people to name three Christians – I suspect the Pope, Billy Graham and Mother Teresa would top the list.

If you then asked them to rank them in order of importance; in order of who they most respected it would have Mother Teresa at the top.

Why?

Sacrificial service. It creates moral authority which opens the possibility of real influence and significant change.

I think that the church must learn this lesson.

Francis Schaeffer once commented that,

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“The Church is God’s final apologetic.”

Propositional truth is fine; we need right doctrine, but ultimately people won’t listen to us because we have all our ‘propositional ducks’ in a row.

They will listen when they see we love them and serve them.

Love on display in the form of sacrificial service is the most convincing apologetic of all.

Mother Teresa stands as a testimony to this truth.

The second thing I think that Mother Teresa teaches us is the need to have the correct motivation for serving the poor.

For her it was a one word answer, “Jesus.”

It wasn’t the dire need of the poor.

It wasn’t that there is so many of them.

It wasn’t a Western European response to guilt.

To her they were “Jesus in a distressing guise.”

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In touching them she was touching him.

It is easy for us, in relatively prosperous New Zealand to feel mildly guilty about what we enjoy. We know that we have so much compared with the rest of the world.

Well intentioned preachers make it even worse when they say things like, “That extra coffee, that DVD, the money you spent could have been saved and you could support a world vision child!”

It’s possibly true and I do commend to you the idea that you look at supporting a child, but not out of guilt.

Guilt is a cheap and nasty motivator that Mother Teresa would have nothing to do with.

She didn’t serve because she felt guilty and she never used guilt as a motivator to get others to serve the poor.

She simply claimed that if you filled your life with Jesus, sacrificial service would mark your life as it marked his.

She didn’t recommend that you travelled to India to serve, but that you simply crossed your street or perhaps simply the passage way in your home.

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Serve where you find yourself, motivated by the idea that since you are doing it for, **“These, the least of your brethren, you are doing it to him.”**

Let me illustrate it this way.

There are two ways to keep a balloon afloat.

If you fill a balloon with your breath, then the only way to keep it in the air is to continually smack it upwards.

That’s how religious guilt works.

It repeatedly smacks you.

“Don’t spend that!”

“Get busy with this.”

“Feel bad about them!”

You come to church and I tell you, “Be more generous.”

“Give more to the poor.”

It’s all designed to smack you back into spiritual orbit.

There’s another way to keep the balloon in orbit.

Fill it with helium.

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It floats on its own – no smacking required.

Seeing the beauty of Jesus, and then seeing that same beauty reflected in the people we serve keeps us soaring upwards.

It's not about guilt, but love.

It's a motivation that is lasting.

One reporter who companied with Mother Teresa for a day in Calcutta's slums found himself exhausted and completely rung out emotionally by the mountain of needs she had faced.

He said to her,

“I wouldn't do what you do for all the money in the world!”

She simply smiled at him and said,

“Neither would I.”

She had found another completely satisfying reward system that was entirely foreign to this young man.

Pope John Paul II asked:

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"Where did Mother Teresa find the strength and perseverance to place herself completely at the service of others? She found it in prayer and in the silent contemplation of Jesus Christ, his Holy Face, his Sacred Heart."

I want to finish by commenting on the fact that Mother Teresa had some great struggles with her faith; the faith she so beautifully lived out for so many years.

All of the people we have considered in this short series had very difficult and dry times in the outworking of their faith journey; read **C. S. Lewis' "A Grief Observed,"** or **Bonheoffer's poem, "Who Am I?"**

There are wrenching doubts, painful observations, agonizing questions.

Mother Teresa, for all her saintliness, was no exception.

Her letters, published posthumously clearly show a soul in agony at times.

"Come be my Light," is the title of the book published after her death.

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Let me read from one of the endorsements,

“During her lifelong service to the poorest of the poor, Mother Teresa became an icon of compassion to people of all religions; her extraordinary contributions to the care of the sick, the dying, and thousands of others nobody else was prepared to look after has been recognized and acclaimed throughout the world. Little is known, however, about her own spiritual heights or her struggles. This collection of letters she wrote to her spiritual advisors over decades sheds light on Mother Teresa's interior life in a way that reveals the depth and intensity of her holiness for the first time. It is a moving chronicle of her spiritual journey—including moments, indeed years, of utter desolation. She emerges as a classic mystic whose inner life burned with the fire of charity and whose heart was tested and purified by an intense trial of faith, a true dark night of the soul.”

Having question, even significant doubts doesn't disqualify you from faith.

It is a part of the faith journey.

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You don't have to stop ministering and serving because you struggle.

You sometimes hear people say things like,

“I'm a hypocrite because I have these doubts; these struggles. I'm going to stop going to church, stop serving until I get them sorted.”

You know what's going to happen. You might as well say your farewells now!

Walk through the 'stiffness. If you sit down you will stiffen up and be incapable of walking at all.F

Let me finish by quoting the ever so quotable **C. S, Lewis.**

He speaks about what he calls, **“The Habit of Faith.”**

“Just as the Christian has his moments when the clamour of this visible and audible world is so persistent and the whisper of the spiritual world so faint that faith and reason can hardly stick to their guns, so, as I well remember, the atheist too has his moments of shuddering misgiving, of an all but irresistible suspicion that old tales may after all be true, that something or someone from outside may at any moment break into

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his neat, explicable, mechanical universe. Believe in God and you will have to face hours when it seems obvious that this material world is the only reality: disbelieve in Him and you must face hours when this material world seems to shout at you that it is not all. No conviction, religious or irreligious, will, of itself, end once and for all this fifth-columnist in the soul. Only the practice of Faith resulting in the habit of Faith will gradually do that.”

Mother Teresa battled with faith questions, but she continued her practice of faith and developed the habit of faith.

There is much we can learn from the example she has left us.