

This week, we'll focus on the example and words of a third great teacher of Marian consecration: Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She's notable for the way she puts Marian consecration into context. In other words, while de Montfort and Kolbe give us the main details of Marian consecration, Mother Teresa helps us to see it more fully within the big picture of a most intimate relationship with Christ. Although we won't immediately begin reflections on her devotion to Mary, we'll get to them soon enough.

DAY 15: Lover of the Heart of Jesus

Who is Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta? She's easy to understand. All we really need to know are two words: "*I thirst.*" These words of the Heart of Jesus, spoken from his agony on the Cross, were Mother's whole concern, her everything — and the same could be said of Our Lady. The deepest desire of the hearts of both Mother Teresa and the Mother of God is to satiate the thirst of the Heart of Jesus for love and for souls. In this sense, Mother Teresa's life is a revelation of the Heart of Mary and presents one of the richest expressions of Marian consecration. We'll reflect on the details of this revelation and example during many of the days that follow, but first let's ponder an overview of her life as a whole.

Mother Teresa's home parish in her native Macedonia was fittingly called "Sacred Heart." Fittingly, because as she herself said, "From childhood, the Heart of Jesus has been my first love." This love may have begun when, at the age of five, she received the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus for the first time. On that occasion, she experienced the Lord's own burning thirst for souls. Over the years, this thirst grew and blossomed into a conviction at the age of 12 that God was calling her to be a missionary. When she was 18, she joined the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (The Loreto Sisters) and applied to go to their missions in Bengal, India, where she was sent the next year. After a year of novitiate, Teresa was assigned to the Loreto community in Calcutta and appointed to teach at St. Mary's Bengali Medium School for girls. The new sister would serve there for more than a decade and a half.

Mother Teresa's years at St. Mary's were happy ones. She was a joyful, generous, hardworking sister. In fact, she was so generous with the Lord that, with the permission of her spiritual director, she made an extraordinary vow: to refuse Jesus nothing. Five years later, Jesus tested this vow in a big way. On September 10, 1946, while on a train to her yearly retreat, the 36-year-old sister experienced what she described as "a call within a call." The details of this call became clearer in the subsequent weeks and months through a flood of mystical experiences that included visions. At the heart of this call was *the burning thirst of Jesus for love and for souls* and a plea to Teresa to found the Missionaries of Charity religious congregation.

Regarding the latter, as if to remind her of the vow she had made, Jesus kept repeating to her, "Wilt thou refuse?"

Mother Teresa did not refuse the Lord. After her retreat, she spoke with her spiritual director and, with his permission, contacted the bishop. When the bishop hesitated to approve her plans, she wrote to him: "Don't delay, Your Grace, don't put it off. ... [L]et us take away from the Heart of Jesus His continual suffering." In the same letter, she repeated this idea, "Let us bring joy to the Heart of Jesus, and remove from His Heart those terrible sufferings." Eventually, the bishop gave his approval, and Mother founded the Missionaries of Charity, whose general purpose she described as follows: "To satiate the thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for Love and Souls."

From the beginning of the new congregation, Mother Teresa began to experience "such terrible darkness" in her soul "as if everything was dead." At times, it seemed unbearable, and she frequently found herself on the brink of despair. In 1961, she received a light in this darkness. After a conversation with a holy priest, she realized that her painful longing was actually a share in the thirst of Jesus: "For the first time in this 11 years — I have come to love the darkness. — For I believe now that it is a part, a very, very small part of Jesus' darkness and pain on earth." Teresa's experience of darkness and painful longing continued to the end of her life. She found the strength to persevere because, as her spiritual director put it, she realized that the darkness was actually a "mysterious link" that united her to the Heart of Jesus.

What about us? Do we yet realize the mysterious link between the darkness we sometimes experience in our own lives and that of the Lord's suffering? Let us ponder Mother Teresa's words on suffering that come from her own experience and so, like her, become better lovers of the Heart of Jesus:

Suffering has to come because if you look at the cross, he has got his head bending down — he wants to kiss you — and he has both hands open wide — he wants to embrace you. He has his heart opened wide to receive you. Then when you feel miserable inside, look at the cross and you will know what is happening. Suffering, pain, sorrow, humiliation, feelings of loneliness, are nothing but the kiss of Jesus, a sign that you have come so close that he can kiss you. Do you understand, brothers, sisters, or whoever you may be? Suffering, pain, humiliation — this is the kiss of Jesus. At times you come so close to Jesus on the cross that he can kiss you. I once told this to a lady who was suffering very much. She answered, "Tell Jesus not to kiss me — to stop kissing me." That suffering has to come that came in the life of Our Lady, that came in the life of Jesus — it has to come in our life also. Only never put on a long face. Suffering is a gift from God. It is between you and Jesus alone inside.

Today's Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary.

Help me to find the love of the Heart of Jesus hidden in the darkness.