

24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 8:27-35

We all know St. Teresa of Calcutta—Mother Teresa. We know her because she embodied that of which St. James wrote: “Faith... if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead” (*Jam. 2:17*). She was accused of proselytising or of forcing people to become Catholics. Thanks be to God there were and still are conversions to Christ but no conversion can ever be forced. Those men and women of Calcutta who converted to the Faith did so not only because of the words of Mother Teresa but because of her works, which were words made alive.

Mother Teresa’s first clinic was a former Hindu temple, which she turned it into a hospital for the poor and dying. The local Hindu leaders were angered by the use of a former temple by Catholics. They argued that Mother Teresa and the Sisters were holding secret Baptisms of Hindus and Moslems. At one time the neighbours became so enraged that gangs were formed to attack the house and the Sisters. As they took the poor and the dying into their care they were attacked with mud and stones. Eventually the police commissioner ordered the closure of the house. So Mother Teresa invited him to visit the house. When he stepped through the doors he saw lying across the floor sick and dying and abandoned people being tended to by the Sisters who knelt beside them, not preaching to them or forcing them to convert, but cleaning their festering wounds, bathing them, and feeding them.

The police commissioner turned around and walked outside where a riot of locals were gathering ready to destroy the house. He looked at them and said that he would order the house to be closed only when its neighbours persuaded their own wives and sisters to take over the work of the nuns.

Amongst the abandoned babies and children of the dumps Mother Teresa found an old woman living off the garbage lying in the streets dying of a fever. The woman said to Mother Teresa: "My son did this to me." Mother Teresa said: "I begged her: you must forgive your son. In a moment of madness, when he was not himself, he did a thing he regrets. Be a mother to him, forgive him. It took me a long time to make her say: 'I forgive my son.' Just before she died in my arms, she was able to say that with a real forgiveness. She was not concerned that she was dying. The breaking of the heart was that her son did not want her. This is something you and I can understand."

The work of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity is work that is born of the Gospel of Christ. It is reflective of all that Our Lord taught and it is a way that many men and women have been drawn to Christ.

By virtue of our Baptism each of us is to participate in the work of God; in creation, redemption, and sanctification. This isn't a choice for us, it is a demand of Baptism. God has never sought to live outside of our lives but to be a part of our lives. This is what the incarnation is all about; God's longing to be close to us. It isn't God who is distant, it is we who are distant. By the birth and raising of children, by our respect for animals, by our care for our environment, we co-create with God. By our forgiveness and seeking of forgiveness, by our giving people a second and a third and a fourth chance, by our recognition of the abilities of others, we co-redeem with God. By our patience amidst anger, by our gentleness amidst fury, by our courage amidst cowardice, we co-sanctify with God.

To be a Catholic is tough work and to be a good Catholic is back-breaking but it's the best life possible and the most exciting. We should make known all that we have heard and learned to the world not simply by our words but by our lives. St. Francis of Assisi said: "Preach the Gospel everywhere. Use words if necessary." Let us learn how by seeking the intercession of St. Teresa of Calcutta who lived the words of St. James that faith without works is dead (see *Jam. 2:17*).