

MOTHER TERESA'S RESPONSE  
FOLLOWING RECEPTION OF  
AN HONORARY DEGREE  
JOHN CARROLL UNIVERSITY  
April 24, 1978



In the name of the poor, the hungry, and the naked, and the homeless and the unwanted, and unloved and uncared; in the name of all those who have forgotten human love, human touch, what it is to feel being wanted, having someone; in the name of all those who are sharing the beautiful work together with us, I accept this honor because in giving it to me, actually you are giving it to them. You are recognizing right here in this university the presence of the poor and in their name I am very grateful.

The poor are very great people. They are very great and wonderful. I will never forget one night a man came to our house and he said, "There is a family with eight children and they have not eaten for a long time. Do something for them." I took some rice, enough just for that night, and I went there. When I arrived, I saw the hunger in the eyes of the children.

The mother took the rice and divided it in two and went out. When she came back, I asked her, "What did you do and where did you go?" The only answer she gave, "They are hungry also." She knew that a Hindu and Moslem family next door to her were hungry. I was not surprised that they were hungry, but I was very much surprised that she knew they were hungry. And that she had the joy of sharing the gift in spite of having those little children around her without a full meal. I didn't bring more food that night because I wanted them to enjoy the joy of sharing.



The poor are the hope of salvation for mankind, for Jesus has identified with them when he made Himself the poor one. He makes Himself the bread of life to satisfy our hunger for God. He says, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you cannot live, you cannot have eternal life." He makes Himself the hungry one; He makes Himself the naked one; He makes Himself the homeless one, the sick one, to give Him the chance to be loved by us; to give us the chance to put our love for Him in a living action.

You and I have been called to prove our love for God, for God still loves the world and still sends Jesus to us through you and through me to be that love, to be that confession, to the people that he has created for greater things, to be loved and to love.

If we really want to love God, let us begin to love our neighbor. St. John says, "How can you love God whom you don't see if you do not love your neighbor whom you do see?" To be able to love as He loved we need the Eucharist. For us Missionaries of Charity, our lives have to be very closely woven with the Eucharist. To be able to see Christ in the appearance of bread only opens our faith to the reality of seeing Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor.

The other day a young Sister was dressing the wounds of a leper. We take care of about 49,000 lepers in India. There was a man terribly disfigured, full of wounds, and this young Sister was dressing his wounds. And there was a Moslem man standing by. The man told a priest, "I believe Jesus Christ is not only a prophet, I believe that Jesus Christ is God if he



can give this love, this strength, this joy, to this young Sister to touch the leper in this way."

The work that the Sisters are doing is only their love for God in a living action, for they belong to Him by their vocation. Their conviction is that nothing will separate them from the love of Christ. That's why to be able to live, to be able to love, to be able to do -- we need a life of poverty, prayer and sacrifice.

We need those four vows we take, a vow to love Christ with undivided love and chastity, through freedom and the joy of poverty, in total surrender to obedience. We need that freedom of poverty to be able to love Christ with undivided love. We need the joy of poverty to be able to understand our poor. For if we do not know what poverty is, we will not be able to love our poor.

And our law of obedience is a natural thing. If you really belong to Jesus, then He must be able to use us as it pleases Him. And our superiors appointed by the Church through our constitutions, which for us are the written will of God, those very constitutions entrusted to us by the Church so lovingly, so trustfully, they can lead us to that perfect love of God. By leading us to that love they help us to make the Church fully present in the world today.

We are not really social workers, not social workers at all. We may be doing work but we are really contemplatives in the heart of the world, for we are touching Him 24 hours. He has said so: "You did it to me. I was hungry, I was naked, I was homeless. You did it to me." What makes the contemplation



complete? That presence. If we live in that presence, then we are all for Jesus and in love with Jesus.

The work of the Sisters is very simple, and it's right on the ground. We have those beautiful homes for the sick and dying destitutes. We have them all over the place. In India now we have 70 houses, and in most of these places we have these homes. Outside of India, in the 42 or 43 houses, we do the same kind of work. When I asked the President of Tanzania for a plot of land to build a home for the dying, he asked me, "What are you going to do?" I said to him, "Only feeding the hungry Christ and giving a home to the homeless Christ." He looked at me and said, "Only that, so simple, well, you can have the land." So the land is there, and the houses are there, and our people are there enjoying the tender love and care of our Sisters.

In this home for the dying, especially the one in Calcutta, in the 25 years we have picked up 36,000 people from the streets. The 16,000 who have died so beautifully have gone straight to God because no one has died without making his peace with God. For me the greatest development of a human life is to die in peace with God. And our people die beautifully. I have never yet seen in all these years anybody dying distressed; anybody dying frightened; anybody clinging to anything. They are so free. They enjoy the joy of poverty, having nothing and yet possessing all things. Because they possess God, they possess the joy of the love of God.

They brought a man from the street once. He was eaten up alive, and yet when they brought him to the home, he said,



"I have lived like an animal in the streets, but I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for." And he did die.

Once they brought a man who was supposed to have died already. They had taken him to the burning place to cremate him. When the cremation started, he sat up and said, "I want a drink of water." So they brought him to our house for the dying, and I happened to be there. Our rule is that whoever is in the house has to attend to the patient. I saw him, and there was very little life in him so I gave him the blessing of baptism. He opened his eyes wide and gave me a beautiful smile before he died. I couldn't help but say to Jesus, "This man came for five minutes and he has already gone to heaven, and here I'm working for 60 years to go to heaven."

When we have to call for the Hindu people to come and take the Hindus; Buddhists to come and take Buddhists; whatever religion they belong to, we only have to ask for them and they do come and they take their people. In our homes we make no distinction. Anybody who has nothing; who has no friend, who nobody wants, and who has no claim on anybody or anything is most welcome to come to our home. We bring them there ourselves. This is something we have to learn -- the greatness of our poor people. They are our people, our brothers and sisters.

In our Society we take a fourth vow of giving whole-hearted, free service to the poorest of the poor. By that vow, just like obedience and poverty, and chastity, we are bound to the poorest of the poor, to Christ, in the distressing disguise of the poor. To be able to understand the poor and to be poor, every Missionary of Charity is the last one on the list of the



poorest of the poor. We belong to that group of people in the world, to the wonderful group of God because He wants us and loves us. His love is a faithful love.

It is very beautiful to see that in our young people there is a tremendous hunger for God, a tremendous hunger to give all or nothing. In our Society we have about more than 20 young girls from your families. They are so dedicated, so totally given to God. What do they want? A life of poverty, prayer, and sacrifice that will lead them to the service of the poor. Our work is only a means for us to put our love for God in a living action.

A love to be true has to be a sacrifice. To live that life, and to do that work, we must be happy to do it. As we have it in our constitutions, "A joyful Sister is the sunshine of God's love, the hope of eternal happiness. A joyful Sister is the burning flame of love of God in the world of today." Your children are there, being that sunshine.

How is it that these young people from well-to-do families, from ordinary families, some with diplomas, some with no diplomas, how is it that they are not only able to do that work but they are happy to do it. They spread joy. They radiate God's love because their lives are woven with Jesus in the Eucharist, through prayer, through sacrifice, and through that daily oneness with Him in Holy Communion.

We begin the day early in the morning at half past four, at Mass, Holy Communion, and end the day with an hour of adoration. It is surprising that we work sometimes 10 or 12 hours a day, but we have had to cut down our work to give that hour of being alone with Jesus, to continue being in love with Jesus. For the



people, our people, need Jesus. They must be able to look up and see Jesus in us, see His compassion, His love.

Like Our Lady said after her first Holy Communion, the moment she knew Jesus was with her, the moment she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Jesus came to her and what did she do? She went in haste to give Jesus to others. This was for you and for me. That's why Jesus made Himself the Bread of life, for us to eat and to give to others -- in haste, not slowly, not waiting to be asked.

Remember, love begins at home. We must make our homes, our communities, another Nazareth where peace, joy, and love reigns. If today we are having so many difficulties in the world, if today we talk of not having vocations (which I don't believe), it is due to our family life. The family that does not pray together cannot stay together. A sister who does not pray cannot stay. A priest who doesn't pray cannot stay.

It is necessary for us to live a life of oneness with Christ. We must make our homes holy and our hearts holy. Holiness is nothing extraordinary. It is not the luxury of a few. Nobody has been born holy, but we have all been born in the likeness of God to become holy. In our own home we must bring that holiness. Holiness is the joy we spread, and the love we share, and the peace we give.

Our Sisters, as I told you, work very much with lepers. We have 49,000 lepers in India, and with God's blessing every year more than 200 are cured. As soon as they recognize that they have the disease, the lepers try to contact the sisters and the treatment begins. This is a wonderful gift of God and it is a privilege for



us to be able to bring that joy of health, the joy of feeling wanted, back again into the lives of so many thousands of people.

What has caused a trust among our lepers is seeing the young Sister so fearlessly going right to them, rosary in hand, because without Our Lady we can do nothing. Since we have no watches, we use the rosary to measure the distance. When the sisters come home, I ask them, "How far was the place, how many rosaries did you say?" Sometimes they say one, sometimes three. We know it takes 15 minutes for every rosary.

We do lots of house visiting because we do not take people who have a home, even if they have only a small room like the shut-ins in New York. We do whatever is needed in their own little room. We wash them, we clean them, we give them a bath and so on, and bring Jesus into their lives.

The Sisters found a man whose room was terrible. They cleaned the place, washed his clothes, and gave him a bath, and he never said a word. Two days after, he told us, "Sisters, you have brought God in my life, bring Father also." The Sisters went and brought the priest who heard the man's confession, after 60 years. The next morning, he died.

The greatness of the priestly vocation! God had come into the man's life but he needed the priestly hand of absolution to make the connection with God. The humble work of the Sisters, through the hands of the priest, brought love, compassion, and forgiveness to the man's heart.

Our Sisters do quite a lot of work in natural family planning. We have saved many families from being misused through



sterilization. During the worst time of difficulties in Calcutta, the government recognized our work of natural family planning.

What do the people, the beggars, the lepers, the slum dwellers, say to us? "You Sisters, who have a vow of chastity, you are the best people to teach us for it is nothing but self-control out of love."

For me, abortion is the greatest poverty. Every nation of people who use it must be very poor. They are afraid of the child. They are afraid to feed one more child. They are afraid to take care of one more child. The child must die that they may live. What a terrible poverty of the family and of the nation that practices or allows abortion! It is nothing else but a murder in the womb of the mother.

We have a proof that even the mother can forget her child. But God will never forget because He has called us by His name. He has chosen us for Himself. He has curved us in the palm of His hand. He loves us so much. And so, we fight abortion by adoption. We bring joy into families that have no children, and we give parents to the children whose parents did not want them. We have saved hundreds of lives that would have been otherwise in the dustbin. These lives bring new joy, new love, new peace to the world. These children are the greatest gift of God. They give us God himself, if you only recognize the gift of God.

In Calcutta, they have a joke. They say, "Mother Teresa is always talking about family planning but she herself does not practice it. Every day she has more and more children." From everywhere children are coming now. It is beautiful to see,



beautiful little children so full of life and the gift of God, in the image of God.

I think we must come to know that in our country here we must not allow that poverty to destroy our nation. You must come to know your poor. You must come to know where they are, how they are. Our Sisters are working in New York. We have over 140 shut-ins; people who have no one, who are wanted by no one, who are forgotten, who have forgotten what it is to smile. They count the time until the Sisters come to see them, to love them, to serve them.

Last year the Sisters opened a place called "Queen's House" in honor of Our Lady. In this little house, I have never seen so much tender love for each other as the women who live there show for each other. The warmth of that love for each other, the care for each other, the hopefulness for each other, is something unbelievable.

A young American Sister has injected the joy of loving God and loving one another into them.

My prayer for you is that you open your hearts to God. Find your poverty, maybe in your own home first, and you cannot do that unless you pray. Nowadays everybody is so busy that they have not time even to smile at each other. Find that poverty in your own home first and remove it. Make your home a home of love, of peace, of joy, another Nazareth. Then you will be able to give that love, that peace to a neighbor. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Love one another as I have loved you." He has loved us with great love.

People don't need money from the rich. They need it from



those who give until it hurts. A few weeks ago I got two letters with some money inside. One was from a girl from the United States. She sent money to feed the children. She wrote, "For one month I have not used makeup, and I am sending you this money." For a young girl to go to work without makeup was a big sacrifice.

Another came from a crippled man who faces the ceiling 24 hours a day, unable to move on either side. He can move only his right hand to smoke. The only comfort he has. He sent money and said, "For one week I did not smoke, buy some smoke for your people."

In Calcutta, we have great difficulty in getting sugar for our children. I don't know how the word went around that Mother Teresa had no sugar. Anyway, a little child of four years went to his parents and said, "I will not eat sugar for three days. I will give my sugar to Mother Teresa." After three days, the parents brought him to our house. This little child could scarcely speak properly or pronounce my name. He said, "I have not eaten sugar for three days, give this to your children." This little one loved with great love. This we have to learn at the feet of Jesus, to love as He has loved us.

Especially you young people who are being trained and educated, do not forget that there are thousands and thousands of young men and women like you, of your age, who have not got what you have. Maybe they will never have what you have. Therefore, appreciate the gift of God. Let it grow and bring forth fruit, the fruit of love so that you can share the gift of God with others.

Pray for us that we may not spoil God's work. God bless you.

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