

*No Greater Love*

MOTHER  
TERESA

*Edited by*  
*Becky Benenate & Joseph Durepos*



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## FOREWORD



Mother Teresa has caught the imagination of the world not because she is a great writer or theologian, but because she is a person of immense compassion and openness. On one level she has been receptive to her calling, led first by inner promptings to enter a convent, then to focus her life work clearly and exclusively on service to the poor, and then to create her own religious community. Because of her undefended state, she feels the suffering of the world, of the old and the very young and those between. She knows firsthand the meaning of empathy and more so the profundity of pathos.

In the intimate reflections published in this

book, we learn some of the secrets of this person, often publicly recognized as small in physical stature but great in spirit, who stops to care precisely for those whom the world in general neglects. Her particular kind of Christianity, with its spiritual vision, methods of prayer, and inspiring figure of Jesus, she tells us, keeps her personal spirits and her unlimited compassion high.

To a sophisticated modern reader, some of her ideas and language, especially her piety, may seem naive and unnecessarily self-denying. As I read her thoughts, I'm led back in memory to my own early school days when I was taught by nuns to "mortify the body and the senses." But there is indeed wisdom in finding ways to silence the busy life and to become less preoccupied with self. For Mother Teresa, apparently her lifelong habit of quieting her ego through prayer has led to a vibrant life in the world and the rich development of her personality. Modern psychology has yet to discover what the religions have taught for millennia — that loss of self leads to the discovery of soul.

As I read her words, I try to hear them not as naive, but as sophisticated in a way that is largely

foreign to modern taste. Rather than avoiding suffering, she becomes intimate with it. Rather than heroically trying to overcome death, in the style of modern Western medical philosophy, she focuses her attention on a person's emotional state and sense of meaning in the last moments. She is acutely attentive, too, to the feelings of children, a strong sign, in my estimation, of a person profoundly initiated in the ways of the soul.

In current psychological jargon, insight, self-awareness, and working on one's life are central in the project of becoming a self. But Mother Teresa could teach psychologists a thing or two, as when she tells the story of a woman who underwent profound personal change when, on Mother Teresa's astute advice, she began to wear less expensive dress. Beneath Mother Teresa's straightforward faith and personal honesty lies a subtle knowledge of human motivation.

Some readers might find Mother Teresa's Christian faith, so unapologetically presented in the language of love and prayer, an obstacle. Anxious, defensive, and proselytizing religion swirls around us daily, to the point that many find an institutional

religion repugnant. To those readers I would suggest that they let go of certain literalistic and infantile meanings that they may attach to theological language, and hear the challenging message that Mother Teresa evidently senses in her faith. I can read a Buddhist exhorting me to see the Buddha-nature in an animal in much the same way I can be encouraged by Mother Teresa to see Jesus in a dying man or the mystical body of Christ in the community of humankind.

Too often religion is imagined and lived as a purely spiritual activity, sometimes as a mental exercise in belief and explanation. In Mother Teresa's life and words we find religion's soul, in the sense that her faith is inseparable from her compassion, and her compassion is never disconnected from her behavior. In a purely spiritual religion, a follower may profess beliefs loudly and intolerantly — I don't see much service to the poor and sick among those who would like us all to adopt their beliefs. When religion is largely mental, spiritual attitudes may never get translated into compassionate action in the world community.

What is absent in these passionate words of

Mother Teresa is any attempt to convert us to her beliefs. She simply describes her strong faith and tells us about her work with the poor and the sick. Her stories are obviously not meant to convince us of her religious convictions; rather, they simply demonstrate how human beings, when given the most basic kinds of love and attention, find significant transformation and discover their humanity, dignity, and at least momentary happiness.

Many describe Mother Teresa as a rare "living saint." I appreciate that sentiment. We need saints, just as we need some of the old words such as sin, grace, faith, and evil. Once, we could reflect on our experience philosophically and theologically; today we have reduced all analysis of our situation to the psychological, the sociological, and the political. These reductive ways of thinking render experience more narrow and superficial, while they give the illusion that if we could only become thoroughly hygienic we'd be free of our problems.

Mother Teresa doesn't speak or work within such a limited social scientific framework. Prayer and dedication are still relevant to her, and in them she finds her values and her life work. Thinking of

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her as a saint, we might consider her example impossible for us to emulate, but the reflections she captures in this book could show us, as she says, that we can all be saints — not without our imperfections and follies, not without our need to confess to failings daily, but nevertheless dedicated to the community of people, especially those in distress, who make up our family, our neighborhood, and our world.

— THOMAS MOORE  
author of *Care of the Soul* and  
*Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*

*On Love*

§

*Love each other as God loves each one of you, with an intense and particular love.*

*Be kind to each other: It is better to commit faults with gentleness than to work miracles with unkindness.*

— MOTHER TERESA

*By this evidence everyone will know that you are my disciples — if you have love for one another.*

— JESUS, JOHN 13:35 RSV



Jesus came into this world for one purpose. He came to give us the good news that God loves us, that God is love, that He loves you, and He loves me. How did Jesus love you and me? By giving His life.

God loves us with a tender love. That is all that Jesus came to teach us: the tender love of God. "I have called you by your name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1 NAB).

The whole gospel is very, very simple. Do you love me? Obey my commandments. He's turning and twisting just to get around to one thing: love one another.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy

whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with all thy mind" (Deuteronomy 6:5 KJV). This is the command of our great God, and He cannot command the impossible. Love is a fruit, in season at all times and within the reach of every hand. Anyone may gather it and no limit is set.

Everyone can reach this love through meditation, the spirit of prayer, and sacrifice, by an intense interior life. Do not think that love, in order to be genuine, has to be extraordinary.

What we need is to love without getting tired. How does a lamp burn? Through the continuous input of small drops of oil. What are these drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things of daily life: faithfulness, small words of kindness, a thought for others, our way of being silent, of looking, of speaking, and of acting. Do not look for Jesus away from yourselves. He is not out there; He is in you. Keep your lamp burning, and you will recognize Him.

These words of Jesus, "Even as I have loved you that you also love one another," should be not only a light to us, but they should also be a flame

consuming the selfishness that prevents the growth of holiness. Jesus "loved us to the end," to the very limit of love: the cross. This love must come from within, from our union with Christ. Loving must be as normal to us as living and breathing, day after day until our death.



I have experienced many human weaknesses, many human frailties, and I still experience them. But we need to use them. We need to work for Christ with a humble heart, with the humility of Christ. He comes and uses us to be His love and compassion in the world in spite of our weaknesses and frailties.

One day I picked up a man from the gutter. His body was covered with worms. I brought him to our house, and what did this man say? He did not curse. He did not blame anyone. He just said, "I've lived like an animal in the street, but I'm going to die like an angel, loved and cared for!" It took us three hours to clean him. Finally, the man looked up at the sister and said, "Sister, I'm going home to God."



And then he died. I've never seen such a radiant smile on a human face as the one I saw on that man's face. He went home to God. See what love can do! It is possible that young sister did not think about it at the moment, but she was touching the body of Christ. Jesus said so when He said, "As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me" (Matthew 25:40 RSV). And this is where you and I fit into God's plan.

Let us understand the tenderness of God's love. For He speaks in the Scripture, "Even if a mother could forget her child, I will not forget you. I have carved you on the palm of my hand" (see Isaiah 49:15-16). When you feel lonely, when you feel unwanted, when you feel sick and forgotten, remember you are precious to Him. He loves you. Show that love for one another, for this is all that Jesus came to teach us.

I remember a mother of twelve children, the last of them terribly mutilated. It is impossible for me to describe that creature. I volunteered to welcome the child into our house, where there are many others in similar conditions. The woman began to

cry. "For God's sake, Mother," she said, "don't tell me that. This creature is the greatest gift of God to me and my family. All our love is focused on her. Our lives would be empty if you took her from us." Hers was a love full of understanding and tenderness. Do we have a love like that today? Do we realize that our child, our husband, our wife, our father, our mother, our sister or brother, has a need for that understanding, for the warmth of our hand?

I will never forget one day in Venezuela when I went to visit a family who had given us a lamb. I went to thank them and there I found out that they had a badly crippled child. I asked the mother, "What is the child's name?" The mother gave me a most beautiful answer. "We call him 'Teacher of Love,' because he keeps on teaching us how to love. Everything we do for him is our love for God in action."

We have a great deal of worth in the eyes of God. I never tire of saying over and over again that God loves us. It is a wonderful thing that God Himself loves me tenderly. That is why we should have courage, joy, and the conviction that nothing

can separate us from the love of Christ.



I feel that we too often focus only on the negative aspect of life — on what is bad. If we were more willing to see the good and the beautiful things that surround us, we would be able to transform our families. From there, we would change our next-door neighbors and then others who live in our neighborhood or city. We would be able to bring peace and love to our world, which hungers so much for these things.

If we really want to conquer the world, we will not be able to do it with bombs or with other weapons of destruction. Let us conquer the world with our love. Let us interweave our lives with bonds of sacrifice and love, and it will be possible for us to conquer the world.

We do not need to carry out grand things in order to show a great love for God and for our neighbor. It is the intensity of love we put into our gestures that makes them into something beautiful for God.

Peace and war start within one's own home. If we really want peace for the world, let us start by loving one another within our families. Sometimes it is hard for us to smile at one another. It is often difficult for the husband to smile at his wife or for the wife to smile at her husband.

In order for love to be genuine, it has to be above all a love for our neighbor. We must love those who are nearest to us, in our own family. From there, love spreads toward whoever may need us.

It is easy to love those who live far away. It is not always easy to love those who live right next to us. It is easier to offer a dish of rice to meet the hunger of a needy person than to comfort the loneliness and the anguish of someone in our own home who does not feel loved.

I want you to go and find the poor in your homes. Above all, your love has to start there. I want you to be the good news to those around you. I want you to be concerned about your next-door neighbor. Do you know who your neighbor is?

