

# SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA

## *A Saint for our Time*

**M**OTHER Teresa of Calcutta caught world-wide attention. She is a saint for Christians, and is much venerated by atheists, unbelievers, Hindus and Muslims.

Mother Teresa ministered to the poorest of the poor, but her outreach was vast and all-encompassing: those who have lost faith or who live as though God did not exist, young people without values or ideals, families in crisis, the ill and the imprisoned, before refugees and immigrants, the weak and defenceless in body and spirit, abandoned children, the elderly who are on their own. As Pope Francis said in his homily on the occasion of her canonisation: 'Her mission to the urban and existential peripheries remains for us today an eloquent witness of God's closeness to the poorest of the poor.'

She received the Nobel Peace prize for her work in 1979. When receiving the prize she said: 'Works of love are works of peace; love of neighbour is a great medicine'.

She challenged the caste system in India. She chose as the religious habit for her order, the Missionaries of Charity, the pale blue sari, the colour of the untouchables, the lowest, most marginalised people in India.

She, along with her sisters, worked for fifty years, from 1946 to 1997, in the streets, with the poorest of the poor, among the marginalised and the sick, in the slums of Calcutta, in the shantytowns lacking any hygiene services. She founded houses of hospitality.

She was noted for her joy and enthusiasm, and for being down-to-earth.

She was very conscious of the dignity of every human person. She saw Christ himself in them. She knew that God is pleased by every

act of mercy because in the brother or sister that we assist, we recognise the face of God which no one can see.

She said: 'Each time we bend down to the needs of our brothers and sisters, we give Jesus something to eat and drink, we clothe, we help and we visit the Son of God ... Just as the Lord has come to meet me and has stooped down to my level in my hour of need, so too do I go to meet him.'

She helped make India understand that Christianity is a religion of peace, a valuable message as there is much intolerance towards minorities and Christians in India.

As Pope Francis said in his homily at the Canonisation: 'She made herself heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognise their guilt for the crime—the crimes—of poverty they created.'

Mother Teresa accomplished much, but believed she did little. But that did not discourage her. She said: 'We know only too well that what we are doing is nothing more than a drop in the ocean. But if the drop were not there, the ocean would be missing something.'

Mother Teresa was aware that one of the severest forms of poverty consists in the sense of being unloved, unwanted and despised. She saw this as a form of poverty found also in those countries and families that are less poor — a poverty that is experienced as an inner emptiness, having lost meaning and direction in life, of loneliness.

It is very fitting that attention should be given to Mother Teresa, an 'Apostle of Mercy', in this Jubilee Year of Mercy. Her message was that everyone is infinitely loved by God—people were to realise their own worth and how precious they are to God.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor