

## Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Last Friday we reflected on World Humanitarian Day. Arguably the best known individual of recent times who devoted her life to the poor was Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She was born on this day, the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, in 1910, and it is appropriate that today we should reflect on her work and legacy.

Teresa was born in Skopje in what is today the Republic of Macedonia but from the age of 19 she spent the rest of her life in India. She started her religious life with the Sisters of Loreto, but on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1946 she experienced what she later described as "the call within the call". As she said: "I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them. It was an order. To fail would have been to break the faith." She began her missionary work with the poor in 1948, replacing her traditional Loreto habit with a simple white cotton sari decorated with a blue border. She also adopted Indian citizenship.

In October 1950 she was given permission to start what would become the Missionaries of Charity. From a handful of nuns this grew to become the sizable order that it is today. Over the years she opened a number of homes for the dying, for the ill and for children and the work she initiated continues to this day in a number of countries.

Teresa died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1997 at the age of 87. Even in her lifetime she was not without her critics. However, in 2003 she was beatified by the Roman Catholic Church, and shortly on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September she is to be officially canonised as a saint.

Certainly Teresa's tireless work for the poor and those in need has been an inspiration to many. She fought for those who had no power, no voice, often in the face of opposition and prejudice. She may have been short in stature but she possessed a drive and a charisma that allowed her to help so many people. She clearly saw the wider picture but she was also concerned for individuals, for small acts of compassion. As she said: "There are no great things, only small things with great love. Happy are those."

The words we heard from the book of Proverbs describe the good wife (Proverbs 31.8-10, 20, 26). The verses I selected are so apt a description of Teresa: her speaking out for the rights of the poor and needy, her opening of her heart to the poor and reaching out to the needy, her wisdom and her kindness. As a nun her husband was her Lord Jesus Christ. What she did she did in his name.

Some words of Teresa are particularly apt for us here at St Martin's: "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." Peace, both within ourselves and in our world is only possible when we acknowledge our common humanity one with another.

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Kingsley Boulton*