

I Loved Jesus
in the Night

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Teresa of Calcutta

A SECRET REVEALED

PAUL MURRAY



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I Loved Jesus in the Night: Teresa of Calcutta—A Secret Revealed

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*To be in love
and yet not to love —
to live by faith
and yet not to believe.
To spend myself
and yet be in total darkness.*

Teresa of Calcutta



Mother Teresa's sandals

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FOREWORD

MOTHER TERESA DIED IN 1997. Since that time, in slow and gradual leaks, astonishing evidence has emerged concerning her long dark night. This evidence (her 'deepest secret' as she called it), now that it has been fully revealed, has been for many people the cause of considerable shock and bewilderment. Questions unthinkable even a few years ago have begun to be raised, and not only by the secular media but also by a number of concerned believers. Is it possible, they ask, that Mother Teresa was somehow deceiving the world for years, feeling compelled to hide the truth of her distress? Or was she simply suffering from a form of depression? Or did she, in fact, actually lose her faith in the end?

When, a number of years ago, I first began this work, my intention, apart from noting down a few personal recollections of Mother Teresa, was to offer a brief reflection on the mystery and meaning of the 'darkness' which she endured for so many years. That still remains my intention. But now, in the light of

FOREWORD

all the bewilderment and confusion which has arisen of late, I have an added hope: namely, that this small book might serve as the beginning of an answer to some of the most recent and most urgent questions concerning Mother Teresa's dark night.

I am well aware, of course, that there are many other people whose knowledge of Mother Teresa is far more extensive and more profound than my own. Nevertheless, with the conviction that any kind of direct, personal knowledge of a great saint – however modest or limited that knowledge might be – is of manifest value, I have thought it worthwhile here to include, in these pages, a brief record of my meetings with 'the saint of Calcutta'. My principal aim in doing this is so that those among my contemporaries who find themselves drawn to the figure of Mother Teresa, but who never had the opportunity of meeting her when she was alive, by reading over the few small stories and anecdotes contained in this book, will be able to encounter her, for the space of an hour, perhaps, not as an abstract figure of holiness from the past – a revered figure in stone – but as I knew her: a living woman, a living saint.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE TEXT OF THE PRESENT WORK WAS, for the most part, completed more than three years ago. My debt of gratitude, therefore, extends back in time to those generous friends who were among the first to encourage me in the task, and also to those few who, with scrupulous care and attention, read over some of the early drafts. I am especially grateful to Fr Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, Mary Redmond, and Fr Philip McShane, OP. Thanks are also due to a number of the Sisters of Mother Teresa, the Missionaries of Charity, who were generous in sharing with me something of their first-hand knowledge of the saint, and also to two outstanding priests who knew her well over a number of years, William G. Curlin, the Emeritus Bishop of the Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina, and Fr Josef Neuner, SJ, who was one of the Mother Teresa's early spiritual directors. To Fr Brian Kolodiejchuk, MC, and to the Mother Teresa Centre, I owe a unique debt of gratitude for permission to quote extensively from the writings of

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mother Teresa. Apart from a number of comments or observations which I heard directly from Mother Teresa, and which it is a pleasure to record, the voice heard for the most part, in these pages, comes from the 'private writings' of the saint. Other people to whom I am indebted for their encouragement include Ed Martin, Susan Portieri, Fr Luke Dempsey, Fr Jim Quigley, Fr Michael Champagne and Sr Kathy Wolff. Finally, the photographer responsible for almost all the images on the inside pages of the book is an old acquaintance of Mother Teresa, Ciro Casella. My heartfelt thanks to him.



Mother Teresa and Paul Murray

I

A Teaching about Hunger

I HAD MY FIRST GLIMPSE OF Mother Teresa more than thirty years ago. The place where we met was an unexpected place: not in the streets of Calcutta among the poorest of the poor, not in a hospice for the dying, or in an orphanage for small children, but in a normal-sized university classroom in Rome. Like almost everyone else in the world, at that time, I had heard stories about her great goodness and love for the poor. But nothing could have prepared me for the impact she made on me at that first encounter. She spoke for just over thirty minutes, beginning her talk with a prayer and ending with a prayer. Together with my fellow students, I had listened, over the months, to many words being spoken in that particular classroom. But I had never realised that words of such simplicity and candour could so deeply penetrate the mind and heart.

It is almost impossible to describe the quality of Mother Teresa's voice. Her words, when she spoke, were not the expression of thoughts merely, or even of convictions, but somehow the expression of her entire being. She spoke slowly, her voice grave for the most part, and yet never mournful. Once or twice she repeated a sentence or two from the New Testament, but her first words were about hunger: 'Jesus has made the hunger of the poor His hunger and their thirst His thirst. He is that close to us. Will we turn away?' Then she quoted from the First Letter of St John: 'How can you say you love God whom you cannot see if you do not love your neighbour whom you can see?' She spoke, for a few moments, of the extent of suffering in the world and of the great hardship which the poor have to endure. But she went on, at once, to say that perhaps the greatest hunger in the world, the most terrible anguish, was not physical poverty or deprivation. It was the anguish of not being wanted, of being forgotten or rejected, of having no one.

Three years later, on 10 June 1977, I met Mother Teresa again, in Cambridge, England, and this time I was able to speak with her for a few moments alone. What struck me at once was something which has been remarked on many times over the years by those fortunate enough to meet Mother Teresa, and that is

A TEACHING ABOUT HUNGER

the radiant joy which shone in her face, a joy which, from moment to moment, seemed to illumine her every expression. At the time I wondered if I had ever, in my whole life, met anyone so radiant.

2

The Radiance, the Darkness

MOTHER TERESA DIED ON 5 September 1997. Since then new information has begun to surface concerning the details of her own interior life. And this information has surprised and even shocked many of those who lived close to her for years, and thought they knew her well. For it now emerges that, in marked contrast to the shining, external radiance of Mother's presence among us, her *inner* world (the unseen, hidden places of her mind and heart) were, for many years, and to her own great bewilderment, caverns of a seeming emptiness, zones of an almost total darkness. No wonder she could exclaim in a letter written once to a priest: 'If I ever become a saint – I will surely be one of "darkness".'¹ This darkness was not, as will soon become clear in the pages which follow, an experience of depression or despair. Rather it was the shadow cast in her soul by

THE RADIANCE, THE DARKNESS

the overwhelming light of God's presence: God utterly present and yet utterly hidden. His intimate, purifying love experienced as a devastating absence and even, on occasion, as a complete abandonment.

3

'God Wants to Use Nothing'

SINCE MOTHER TERESA'S DEATH IN 1997, apart from the revelations concerning the 'dark night' which she endured for so long, one other remarkable secret has come to light, a secret which, with characteristic modesty, she tried for years to keep hidden. It now appears that, as well as being a woman of enormous practical kindness, Mother Teresa was also the recipient of a series of mystical visions and locutions. She experienced these graces immediately, or almost immediately, before beginning her work in the slums for the poorest of the poor. Jesus was asking her directly, and in a most vivid way, to change her life utterly, and asking her also to establish a new religious Society or Community of Nuns: 'I want Indian Nuns, Missionaries of Charity, who would be My fire of love amongst the poor, the sick, the dying and the little children.'¹ At that time (the

year was 1946), Mother Teresa wrote: ‘In all my prayers and Holy Communions He is continually asking, “Wilt thou refuse ... ?”’² Alarmed at the thought of what was being asked of her, and conscious of her own littleness and weakness, Mother Teresa replied: ‘My own Jesus – what You ask is beyond me – I can hardly understand half of the things you want – I am unworthy – I am sinful – I am weak.’³ But, by way of response to these words, at some point later in the interchange between them, she hears Jesus saying to her: ‘You are I know the most incapable person – weak and sinful but just because you are that – I want to use you for My glory. Wilt thou refuse?’⁴ And again: ‘Fear not. It is I who am asking you to do this for me – fear not – even if the whole world is against you, laughs at you, your companions and Superiors look down on you, fear not – it is I in you, with you, for you.’⁵

The fact of being chosen for this particular work, in this particular way, was a matter of continual astonishment to Mother Teresa. I remember her remarking on three or four occasions: ‘In this age, more than in any other, God wants to use *nothing!*’ ‘Nothing’ I discovered, as time passed, was a word she liked to use a lot. On another occasion she declared: ‘Father Paul, when you discover you’re *nothing*, rejoice!’ Here, as much as the accent of joy,

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the note of liberation is telling. For what Mother Teresa means by 'being nothing' is in no way connected to the cold imprisonment of self-mistrust, or to what is called nowadays 'low self-esteem'. It is true Mother Teresa always approached God in deep poverty of spirit. But, at the same time, with an equal profundity of spirit, she trusted absolutely in his love for her. Yes, there were trials she had to undergo, and there was darkness to be endured; and, yes, at times she made mistakes.⁶ But, for all that, she was his 'little one', his spouse, his beloved. At the close of a strikingly beautiful meditation, composed when she was seriously ill in hospital in June 1983, she wrote: 'Jesus, I love with my whole heart, with my whole being. I have given Him all, even my sins, and He has espoused me to Himself in tenderness and love.'⁷