

## Gutter to Altar

**Amplifying the power of compassion Pope Francis to declare Mother Teresa a Saint, on September 4, 2016: to be more Ablaze in the Glory of God.**

I thank God almighty and share with everyone all over the world the Cherished Memories and lasting impression of my interaction with Mother Teresa of Kolkata. I am a witness to the angel of compassion. When you walk with her, you walk differently because you know that MOTHER walked with the very deposit of God inside her soul, the very source of compassion. By words and in deeds Mother was a treasure of Compassion who has left behind us a milestone legacy. My long-standing yearning to see Mother finally arrived in the year 1994. I was blessed to work with Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta for six months from June to November in the same year. Looking back, I vividly recall those ineffaceable moments on July 4, 1994 when, together with my companions, we climbed up the stairs to greet Mother at her residence.

Face-to-face with Mother, I was dumb stuck by her radiant, glowing smile and gentle greeting. I leaned forward and kissed her palm. **I never imagined how deeply and completely that event would shape the rest of my life afterwards.** The saint I kissed is my lifelong inspiration. Very gently, mother picked up some prayer cards from the window of her room and sat on the wooden bench on the veranda. She signed one of it and gifted that prayer card saying, “thank you for coming.” The prayer card reads: ‘Mary, Mother of Jesus, give me your heart, so beautiful, so pure, so Immaculate, so full of love and humility that I may be able to receive Jesus in the Bread of Life, love Him as you loved Him and serve Him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor’. Amen. I hold on to this “treasure beyond measure.”

In the days spent in different houses of Missionaries of Charity for six months caring for the sick and dying, I could see Mother’s extraordinary nature of expressing compassion had gripped the hearts of all. She rendered lifelong service to the poorest of the poor. Mother Teresa became an icon of compassion to people of all religions. One fine morning I accompanied a Missionaries of Charity brother to give out some medicine to a family under a bridge. As we walked along, brother noticed a very sick man almost taking his last breaths. Truly, I had no courage to stay long there. However, to my surprise he told me to stay with that man until he returns with a vehicle to take the man to the home for the dying destitute at Kalhighat. I stood there helpless trying to avoid looking at the man. Shortly, thereafter, he returned in a car, we took the man in and placed him on our lap. This was my first ever such experience, just as the car stopped in front of the home for dying destitute he took his last breath on my lap. Thousands are the destitute women, men and children who have experienced a final fulfilment in the love of the extraordinary services by Mother and her associates. Mother was prepared to care for the sick, the dying, and thousands of others nobody would care for.

### Star in the galaxy of saints

With these and many more cherished memories in mind and heart, Mother to me is a “Gutter-to-Altar” saint, a shining star in the vast galaxy of holy women and men of God. Couple of times I saw her moving with sisters and children with the humility of a true servant of God. With generosity, and still greater humility she let the compassion fly over all around her. **Mother was determined to head on and wrestle with God and people to bring the greatest happiness possible.** No wonder that Mother has been recognized and acclaimed throughout the world. Her life is nobler for the sacrifices, and saintly to be a Saint. Today I am imbued with greater joy to see Mother being raised to the honours of the altar. **Remarkable is the journey from the gutters of Kolkata to the Alter of God. I feel blessed among several to have seen face-to-face, my-“Gutter-to-Altar” Saint.** Radiant face, feet committed to poor sick, and palms sanctified by the fresh touch of God have irrevocably overwhelmed me and changed the purpose of my life. *The fragrance of Mother’s heart full of love for the sick, I have no hesitation to say, is a sweet extension of God’s compassion.* In the weeks that I spent recently in Ebola stricken Sierra Leone, providing psychosocial services, I firmly felt Mother’s benign presence by my side to raise the prayers of many for safety and protection of the survivors and the bereaved kin of Ebola victims.

### The Voice of God:

**Many are the threads of hopes and despair that has knit the basket of compassion in Mother’s heart.** Mother Teresa was the youngest child of a humble Albanian family in Skopje, Macedonia. Her father passed away when she was 8, and by the time she turned 12, she knew her calling was to be a missionary. She left home at 18 to join the Sisters of Loreto, in Ireland. She chose the name Sister Mary Teresa after St. Therese of Lisieux, and a few months later, left for Kolkata, India, to join the sisters of her community. Sister Teresa took her first vows as a nun and began teaching at St. Mary’s School for girls. In 1946, while riding on a train from Kolkata to Darjeeling, heard a calling from God, She says, “I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ into the slums to serve Him among the poorest of the poor. It was an order. I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them.” Thereafter she set out to establish a community dedicated to serving the poorest of the poor. After two years of planning and prayer, devoted herself full time to her calling. She dressed in a white sari with a blue border—what would become her religious outfit for the rest of her life.

### Image of Abundant Life:

Open to the spirit’s call, Mother knew that it is offered in love and hope, with the same love and hope that led Jesus to ask, more of people than they thought they could give. Our Lord emphatically stated his purpose in the Gospel of John 10:10, “I have come that they may have life, and life abundantly.” For us as Christians, to recognize the abundance of life which Jesus spoke is essential to our wholeness. For us the mode of abundant life is modelled after the person of Jesus by his message and the way he lived. **Abundant life is characterized by the extension of compassion to all.**

Transformation in life happens when one sees for oneself that there is a new way of life: Abundant Life. The genuine sacrifice on the part of Mother demonstrated the way in which compassion has proved to draw God to sick. Compassionate Giving is an important component of, and pathway to, that Abundant Life. It implies a compassionate approach to the life of the other. It means a conscious attention to the condition of the rest of the world. Here is where I see Mother's spirituality of compassion related to people. In contrast to the general understanding of "good life," it is difficult to create an image of abundant life, for we do not find it easily prevalent around us. Yet, all of us, on the grounds and tracks we walk and run on, experience hints of abundance – breathtaking moments that ring in our hearts and call us to be more fully alive. **The illuminated journey of Mother from the gutters of Kolkata to the Altar of God is a tapestry woven with the voice of God on a moving train amidst the roar and gust of daily grind.** Visiting families living in slums, nursing those weak with hunger and dying of tuberculosis and leprosy, touched the hearts of "the unwanted, the unloved and the uncared for." Mother Teresa believed no act of kindness too small to have impact. She encouraged people to look for the needy in their neighbourhoods, even in their own homes. She cried out, "There is a terrible hunger for love. Find them. Love them." Hence, abundant life is the life of love, where the heart is full and relationships are rich. *Abundant living is a life of greater simplicity and compassionate giving.*

#### Greatness in Smallness

I grew up in a small village of Shimoga, Karnataka, in very ordinary circumstances. I witnessed a genuine example of love, watching my own mother always cook food either for a regular beggar who approached her for food or set aside rice worth for an adult for a meal later to be given to a beggar/stranger who would walk up to our home. That characterized her relationship to God in the Poor. When we look at Jesus' life we see a vibrant, passionate God engaged in the life of human. The abundance to which Jesus pointed was explicitly not the abundance of possessions, but the abundance of the restored relationship among us and, the God-relationship. This abundance made available to us in extending Compassion – literally, suffering with – is powerful and surely a hallmark of the abundant life. Mother Teresa poured out her deepest longing in the following words: **"If I ever become a saint, I will surely be one of "darkness." I will continually be absent from Heaven – to light the light of those in darkness on earth."** This righteous attitude determines the character of Mother's engagement with the poor sick. Today as I see the saint I kissed, raised to the honours of Altar by Pope Francis on 4 September, I am reminded that abundant life includes valuing the worth of children of crucified Jesus and only way to honour this gift of life is to be seized- in compassionate giving.

#### Giving our belief more power

***Living a life in love and for love Mother set a mark on millions to extend compassion.*** Despite difficulties of personal journey, Mother Teresa found the courage and dedication to continue her work with the poor. Even on days when she experienced deep despair and a crisis of faith, she got out of bed, prayed and went out into the streets to help those who

needed her. Over the years, she came to believe that this inner struggle allowed her to more fully experience her convictions and empathize with those she wished to help.

### Visit to Mother's tomb

In February 2016, after twenty years, Fr. Joy MI and I went to pay our respect to Mother. Brother Mark MC, one of the general councillors of Missionaries of Charity Brothers accompanied us to Mother's tomb to offer Holly Mass. **Mother is indeed exalting the God of Compassion.** I Pray:

O Mother,  
To live in love and for love  
To shower compassion in abundance  
To bring the greatest happiness possible  
To open up the pathway to God's Reign  
*Live.. Live.. Live..!*

O Mother,  
Strong-willed: walking on the gutters  
Firm-faith: kneeling on the ground  
Passionate-heart: feeling the pain  
Holy-palms: healing the wounds  
*Live.. Live.. Live..!*

O Mother,  
Gospel of the Land  
Cry out for us your children  
Un -to God raise our care  
Mother in me no end  
*Live.. Live.. Live..!*

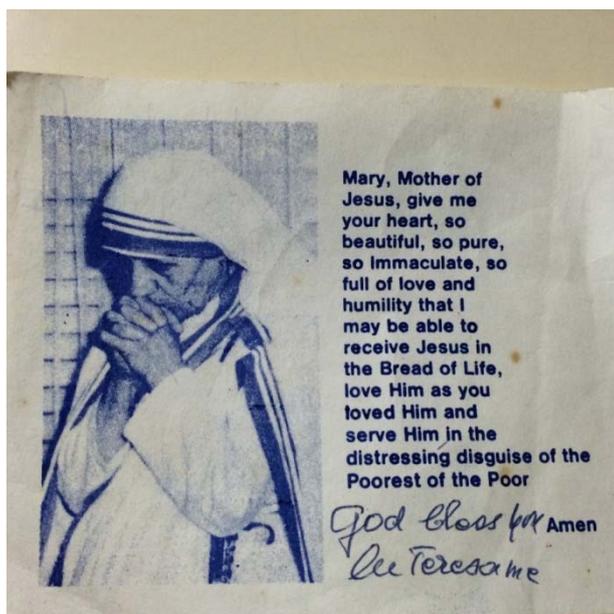
We went up to visit Mother's room and walked up and down the very same stairs and porch Mother has walked all her life. We said to each other, '**There is no end for a good person.**' Looking back there is no other personal greater experience than the days I spent with Missionaries of Charity.

### Come and Visit us from Heaven

This event in the history of Catholic Church will set a mark to recognize the value and sacredness of our call. May Mother bless our pursuit of the abundant life through compassionate giving. May the abundant life of Mother inspire and be a road map to you as you make your journey. **To hear those longings that call us all to the abundant life, I pray, O' Mother, Come and Visit us from Heaven.** Come, begin the Sacred Journey and seek the Abundant Life. We humbly beg mother to empower us for compassionate caring. **The saint I kissed is the champion saint, a shining star in the galaxy of saints.** Life happens because of You!

**Mother Teresa Bless us!**

*This is the Prayer Card, which Mother Teresa gave me on 4 July, 1994 (my first visit to Mother)*



*This Name board remains at the main entrance gate of Mother House, 54A, A.J.C. Bose Road, Kolkata where Mother is buried. To notice Mother Teresa IN: for me is a symbolic of Mother continues to live!*



*(picture taken on my visit to Mother's tomb, February 2016.)*

Stay Blessed!  
With Regards

Fr. Anthoni Jeorge Kunnel MI  
E Mail: [frkunnelantony@gmail.com](mailto:frkunnelantony@gmail.com)

Snehasadan  
St. Camillus Care home for PLHIV  
Kinnikambala post, Kaikamba  
Mangalor- 574151, D.K., INDIA  
+63 9959910713

**Fr. Anthoni J. Kunnel MI., a Camillian Religious Priest from India unwraps experiences of his days with Mother Teresa: of how Mother read the Gospel of Compassion and demonstrated values of Jesus Christ in.**

