



## **Canonisation of Mother Teresa**

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St Joseph's Priory Church, Queens Park  
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*"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."*

Today we gather together to celebrate the wonderful fact that the question, or doubt, expressed by Mother Teresa - *If I ever become a saint* - has now been resolved. Tomorrow, Mother Teresa will not become a saint - she already is one - but tomorrow she will be officially recognised by the Church as a saint, confirming what so many people around the world, including many gathered in this Church today, have believed for a long time.

At the most basic level the canonisation of a person represents the Church's certainty of faith that the person is in heaven enjoying the fullness of eternal life with the Lord whom they served so well during their life. It is also an expression of the Church's conviction that in the canonised person's life story we find a genuine path to holiness which we can safely follow. And lastly in canonising a person, the Church presents that person to us as one whose prayers we can confidently ask for and rely upon in our own journey of faith.

This is all captured in the Church's liturgy. In the new translation of the first Preface of Saints, which is of course a prayer addressed to God, our faith is expressed in this way:

*By their way of life you offer us an example, by communion with them you give us companionship, and by their intercession, sure support.*

This is all part of what we mean when we say each Sunday in the Creed that we believe in the Communion of Saints. As members of the community of faith which we call the Church, we all belong to each other and are responsible for each other. Death does not change this - and our brothers and sisters who have gone before us live out this belonging to us and this care for us by their constant prayer for us. In tomorrow's canonisation, the Church will confirm for us in a definitive way what so many have believed for so long: that Mother Teresa is among this number, that we can turn to her and ask her to pray for us, and that she is a sure guide for us to follow.

If canonisation means that a person is in heaven, what can Mother Teresa possibly have meant when she said, that, if she were to become a saint, she would be continuously absent from heaven? Of course she was not speaking literally, but figuratively. In a sense it seems to me she was trying to say that what had been at the core of her life on earth - to see and serve Jesus in the poorest and most abandoned of people - would continue to be at the core of her life in heaven. Her passionate love for Christ always found expression in her tender love for the discarded and forgotten people. It was her way to heaven - and it is her way in heaven.



Mother Teresa's desire to light a light for those in darkness on earth has, of course, taken on a deeper significance with the revelation that for most of her life as the founder of the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa lived without any real sense of the presence of Christ in her life. In our Catholic tradition we speak of this as "the dark night of the soul". It is a confusing and troubling reality, but one which so many people, both saints and sinners, experience. In the mystery of what are to us God's strange ways, God often seems to withdraw from those who seek to serve him, leaving them with no sense of his presence or his sustaining love. It is an extraordinary challenge to someone's faith. To feel abandoned, or forgotten or cast aside is indeed to be left in the dark and even lost in the dark. This was the painful reality of Mother Teresa's life – and yet she remained faithful.

A saint is one who lives his or her life of discipleship of Jesus with heroism, with courage and with faith. We are all called to this discipleship but we are often tempted to pick and choose which aspects of Jesus we will follow. And for many of us, for much of the time, it is the journey to Calvary and the mounting of the cross which we try to avoid at any cost. And yet, it is through the cross that we are saved and that the love of Christ is poured into our hearts. Mother Teresa instinctively knew this – and perhaps it was her own dark night of the soul which enabled her to have such deep compassion for others who were experiencing a different kind of abandonment, or lost-ness, and of darkness.

In Saint Mark's story of the death of Jesus, the last words Jesus speaks are these: *My God, my God why have you abandoned me?* In Saint Luke's story the last words of Jesus are different: *Father into your hands I entrust my spirit.* While these two expressions might seem contradictory – one a cry of abandonment and the other a cry of trusting faith – we see in Jesus that it is possible, and even necessary, to hold the two together. In his pain and fear, Jesus truly felt abandoned by God, but at a deeper level, he knew that only an abandonment of himself in trusting faith to his Father in heaven could make any sense of his life and his death. Mother Teresa, as a faithful disciple of Jesus, experienced the same seeming contradiction in her own life and she too found a way, through the grace of God, to hold her darkness and her hope together in an extraordinary life of generosity and fidelity.

In our moments of deep pain, confusion and doubt we too, with Mother Teresa and in union with Jesus, can also cry out: *My God, my God why have you abandoned me?* At such times may the Lord grant us the grace to also say, *"Father into your hands I entrust everything. Jesus, I trust in you."*