

**Mother Theresa  
spoke to former Lasallian Students  
in August 1976 in Malta (1/2)**

*This intervention was published in the Institute Bulletin number 219 of the fourth tri-mester of 1976. We are reproducing it as a tribute to and remembrance of Mother Theresa of Calcutta, who, on various occasions, was in contact with our Institute. Our intention is that the intervention be made more available to different areas of the Lasallian Family.*

*A wonderful story in which Divine Providence has had a hand.*

*We wanted to speak about the important subject of sharing suggested by our Canadian friends.*

*At the time Mother Theresa was in Rome so we went to invite her. Mother Theresa is quite simply used to giving of her all and said she would do her best. However, there were difficulties as she had to be in Philadelphia for the Eucharistic Congress.*

*She was located by Brother Superior at her new residence where she was living incognito. He went personally to ask her. Her missionary sisters insisted that she was fatigued and besieged on all sides, that she would be returning from Jordan on the 28th and that on the 30th she had to be in Yemen. How could she possibly help us?*

*But she could and would. Within a few hours of returning from Jordan she was on her way to Malta where for an hour she explained to us, simply and enthusiastically, how she understood the Gospel, what being a Christian meant to her. She followed this up by answering our questions simply and straightforwardly, with common sense and evangelical devotion.*

*All present felt the impact of the words of Christ and of his message of love. And a few hours later, this woman, who forgets rest in order to serve the poor, the sick, the dying and the hungry and to give the favour of her speech to those who ask it, words authenticated by a life of devotion to others, was on her way to Yemen.*

*The Malta Congress will be indelibly marked in the minds of all who assisted by the memory of this remarkable and humble woman who, like Christ, does good wherever she goes.*

*Mother Theresa of Calcutta addressed the Sixth World Congress of Lasallian Federations at the Grand Hotel Verdala, shortly after her arrival on the afternoon of Monday, August 30.*

This is a transcript of Mother Theresa's talk at the Grand Hotel Verdala.

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I am very grateful to God to be with you tonight and to bring to you the joy and the gratitude of our people, the poor, Christ in the distressing disguise of the poor. You are gathered here today for a wonderful and great purpose to find means and to find ways how you can put your love for God in a living action; for faith in action is love and love in action is service and if you put that faith into a living action of love, that brings us face to face with God Himself, with Christ Our Lord.

Sometime ago a Hindu gentleman was asked «What is a Christian?» And he gave a very simple and very strange answer. «A Christian is giving». And right from the very beginning we find that it is really just giving. God loved the world so much that He gave His Son - the first giving, the first great giving, and His Son was given to a human being because he wanted to become one of us in all things except sin. Again there is a giving. Christ that was given to a woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the spotless Virgin, and she in all her humility, in all her emptiness, she, on receiving Christ, the first thought was to give Him.

As a handmaid of the Lord she went in haste to give Him and we know what happened to St. John when he received; when his first contact was with Jesus, he leapt with joy. The giving of Mary brought joy into the life of St. John and into his family, his father and mother. But as if this giving, the first giving, was not enough, Christ made Himself Bread of Life. He wanted to give Himself to us in a very special way; in a living way, in a simple way, because it is difficult for us human beings to love God whom we don't see. So He made Himself Bread of Life to satisfy our love for God, our hunger for God; for we have been created for greater things. We have been created in his image, that is: to love and to be loved.

And so He made the condition in the giving. Unless you eat my Flesh and drink my Blood you cannot live, you cannot love, you cannot give. The condition was clear and so simple that even a child knows how to eat bread. A dying person knows how to eat bread. Bread the simplest food in the whole world for a human being and the cheapest thing so to say and Christ made Himself in the Bread of Life.

But it seems that giving was not enough for Him. He wanted to give something more. To give us the chance to give to Him: to give us the opportunity to put our love for Him in a living action after we have eaten the Bread of Life. So He made Himself the hungry one: He made Himself the naked One: He made Himself the homeless One and he says: «I was hungry, you gave me to eat». «I was homeless, you took me in». «I was ignorant and you taught me». «I was lonely and you were my companion, you understood me. You gave me your understanding love». And again He made that a condition of life.

At the hour of death He is going to judge us: what we have done to the poor. What we have been to the poor. «I was hungry and you did not give me to eat», hungry for love, hungry for bread, hungry for justice, hungry for that human dignity and you passed me by. And naked, naked for that respect, for justice, for acknowledging that he too is one of us -created by the same loving hand of God, To love and to be loved. Homeless not only for a room made of bricks but homeless through sheer loneliness; the shut-ins: the unwanted, the unloved; the uncared; the leper; the blind; the lame; where are they? Do I know them? This is why you have gathered here today, to acknowledge that these people, you have received and these people turn to you now. Do you know them? Do you know the poor of your own home first? Do we know that maybe in my own home, in my own community, there may be somebody who is feeling very lonely, very unwanted, very handicapped. Do I know that? Maybe my husband, my wife, my child is lonely in my own home. Do I know that? Where are the old people today? They are put in institutions. Why? Because they are unwanted, they are a burden... I remember, sometime ago I visited a very wonderful home for the old people and there it was: they had everything and there were about 40 there. They were all looking towards the door. There was not a smile on their faces and I asked that sister in charge of them. I said, «Sister, why are these people not smiling? Why are they always looking towards the door?» And she very, very beautifully had to answer and give the truth. «This is every day they are longing for somebody to come and visit them. They are always looking. Maybe my son, maybe my daughter, maybe somebody will come and visit me». This is great poverty and I remember also, once I picked up a woman from a dustbin and I knew she was dying. I took her out and took her to the Convent. She kept on saying, repeating the same words «My son did this to me». Not once did she utter the words «I'm hungry»; «I'm suffering». But she kept on repeating «My son did this to me.» It took me a long time to help her to say «I forgive my son» before she died a long time. This is poverty. Do I know? Does anybody in my home, in my neighbourhood, in my work, where I work, the people I deal, do I know them? Do they know me? This is something that Hindu gentleman said so beautifully. Christian... Christian is a person who gives! And we have to learn that. That is why you have all gathered here, to learn the «giving». Not to give because you have to give, but because you love to give. I always say to the people: «I don't need your abundance, I don't want you to give me from your abundance. Our poor people don't need your pity, they don't need your sympathy. They need your love and your compassion.» And to be able to do that we need a life of prayer. We need a life of sacrifice. Our sisters and brothers dedicated their lives totally to the Poorest of the Poor. We take a special vow of giving whole-

hearted free service to the Poorest of the Poor. For us, that person, that hungry one, that naked one, that homeless one, that dying one, is Christ in the distressing disguise. Christ cannot deceive us. And that's why our lives have to be woven with the Eucharist. Christ in the appearance of Bread and Christ in the distressing disguise of the Poor is Jesus and that is why we are not social workers. A Christian cannot say «I am a social worker by doing just a little bit of work». A Christian, he or she, believes that he is feeding the hungry Christ, he is clothing the naked Christ, he is a contemplative right in the heart of his own home, of his own life, in the world itself. That is why I call our sisters and brothers contemplatives right in the heart of the world, for there they are touching Christ 24 hours. Christ cannot deceive us and He has made that a condition for our future life in Heaven. «Come, You blessed of My Father because I was hungry, I was naked, I was homeless, you did it to me».

The poor are very great people. The poor are very wonderful people and I can assure you that we receive much more from them than we give to them.

I never forget during the Bangladesh suffering: we had ten million people in Calcutta and round Calcutta and I asked the Government of India to allow of other Congregations to come to our aid, to help us because we were working the whole time and they allowed them to come, about 15 or 16 different sisters came to help us and each one, on leaving India, leaving Calcutta, said the same thing: «I have received much more than I have given and I can never be the same person again, because I have touched Christ, I have understood what love is; what it is to love and to be loved.»

One of the Senators of United States said when we were talking about food and things like that and he said it in public: «If today we turn our back to the poor we are turning it to Christ». And so with you, who have come from so different countries, if you are really, truly sons and daughters of this wonderful, great Institute of Brothers who dedicate their lives totally to giving Christ to you; to helping you to touch Him in each other; to love Him in each other; to love one another as Jesus has loved each one of you. For that is the only condition He has made. Love one another as I have loved you and we know how He loved. He gave His Life; He gave his mother before he died. Jesus likes the continual giving and so you, who have learned, you who have been taught by people who have dedicated their lives totally to Christ, who have given their lives totally to Christ; to give that light of Christ in your lives. You now, it is your turn to light that Light in the lives of others.

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