

Why You Need to Heed This Love-Filled Lesson From Mother Teresa

One of the most powerful talks I have ever read was Peggy Noonan's report of Mother Teresa's comments at the 1997 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., just before she passed away. Mother Teresa spoke on many topics that day, and many who covered her speech focused on her pro-life comments. Unfortunately, they missed a deeper teaching on caring for eternal souls. While in the United States, Mother Teresa visited a nursing home for the elderly and was impressed with how well the residents were physically being taken care of but saddened to see that they didn't smile. They sat lifelessly.

Care Comes at Many Levels

There is physical care, and then there is caring for the soul. Mother Teresa recognized the difference instantly when she looked into the eyes of the elderly patients. She recognized spiritual poverty as being more significant than physical poverty, even though it was physical poverty that she had become famous for combating. She said, "Neglecting to love brings spiritual poverty." And then she went further:

Are we willing to give till it hurts to be a family—a family of God? If we are not willing to give whatever it takes to do good to one another, sin is still in us. That is why we, too, must give to each other until it hurts. It is not enough for us to say, 'I love God.' I also have to love my neighbor. St. John said that you are a liar if you say you love God, and you don't love your neighbor. How can you love God, whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor, whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live? And so, it is very important for us to realize that love, to be true, has to

hurt. I must be willing to give whatever it takes not to harm other people, and, in fact, to do good to them. Otherwise, there is no true love in me, and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me.

Taking Up God's Heart for People

Throughout our lives, Mother Teresa's words need to be revisited time and time again. It is this caring for all mankind at all stages of life that needs to be pondered. Personal or political agendas need to be set aside, and the heart of God needs to be the priority.

Our souls are eternal. Physical bodies die, but souls are immortal.

As a national board member for the Salvation Army here in the United States, I see selfless men and women who care deeply not just for man's momentary physical needs, but for their spiritual and eternal souls. It is a deeper love that comes when one knows the truth of God's promise. It comes from endless sacrifice and a willingness to walk into the lives of the suffering. They peer into the mire of man's physical shell and see what God sees—a pearl of great price.

I am privileged to travel to countries where God's light is dim and must be kept underground because of religious persecution. I witness missionaries devoted to selfless love. Devoted to bringing light and hope as God's hands extended even under threat of persecution and death. Their love comes from supernatural places deep inside, and it is powerful and changes culture. I have had the honor of visiting Mother Teresa's ongoing Sisters of Charity mission sites in Calcutta, India (where she is buried and a museum exists to her legacy), and in Cairo, Egypt, in a part of the city predominately occupied by Christians called Garbage City. It is the city's garbage dump and is where the Sisters of Charity care for abandoned children with physical issues and widows left in

poverty. Both of these locations are places of caring. Both places have an unnatural peace that defies understanding when you enter them.

Peggy Noonan's comments about Mother Teresa's speech ended with this:

She finished her speech to a standing ovation and left as she had entered, silently, through a parted curtain, in a flash of blue and white. Her speech was a great success in that it was clear and strong, seriously meant, seriously stated, seriously argued and seriously received. She spoke with a complete indifference to the conventions of speech giving, not only in her presentation reading the text as if she were reading some dry old document aloud, rarely looking up, rarely using her voice to emphasize, rarely using inflection, expression or gesturing. She softened nothing, did not deflect division but defined it. She came with a sword. She could do this, of course, because she had a natural and unknown authority. She has the standing of a saint. May you pursue and achieve such standing as you think and work and write and speak.

Mother Teresa's directness was powerful and provoking to all who were willing to hear. Sadly, many did not. But her words are still relevant and empowering for us today if we will listen. I would encourage you to read her comments in their entirety. She was a small woman of stature, but bold as a giant. May we all remember that souls matter and "give until it hurts" to those we meet along life's journeys. {eo}

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