

## CHAPTER TWO



# MOTHER'S OTHER BROTHERS

The apostles' eyes were opened with the resurrection apparitions. The Gospel of Luke tells us that Jesus was "made known to them in the breaking of the bread," and "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Lk 24:35, 45). The experience of Pentecost gave them what we could call a "transfigured memory"—that is, they began to see everything in the light of the Paschal mystery, with clarity and conviction.

Something similar happens to us who try to bring home all the various experiences we have had with Mother Teresa over the years. In lingering over these memories, I renew in my own heart a deep love for God and commitment to His call. And as the four evangelists documented Jesus' life for the sake of believers yet to come, I write of Mother Teresa so that you might know this saint and follow her example of love.

## **A New Congregation**

I still remember that first meeting in the motherhouse parlor in Calcutta in March 1966. Mother wasn't a world-renowned personality then. I was still a philosophy student at St. Albert's College, and I was in Calcutta for a week to see how the newly born Pious Union of Brothers lived. I expressed to Mother Teresa my desire to join the brothers and to continue my studies for the priesthood. She was more than happy about this. She explained to me in simple terms what the brothers do and what their life-style is like:

It is God's work we do. It is not social work or humanitarian service: Whatever we do to anyone we do to Jesus, and we are called to serve the poorest of the poor people. We also try to live a simple and poor life. Many of the comforts you may have been used to have, you may not find them anymore and you must be ready to make many sacrifices.

I told her that was why I wanted to join the brothers.

A few months later I saw Mother Teresa again, on Easter Sunday afternoon, March 26, 1967. She came with the Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Albert D'Souza, for the canonical elevation of the Pious Union of the Missionary Brothers of Charity of Calcutta into a diocesan religious congregation. It was "God's Easter gift to Calcutta's poor," the *Catholic Herald of Calcutta* announced. Mother was overjoyed, and she shared her joy with all of us.

I had come from St. Albert's to spend Holy Week. The climax of the week for me was my formal entry into the Pious Union of Brothers on Holy Thursday night. The brothers had already moved to their motherhouse at 7 Mansatala Row. There were thirteen brothers at the time, counting myself.

Mother told us how she had obtained ecclesiastical recognition for the brothers—from Propaganda Fide in Rome—and also of the great responsibilities we now had. We had light refreshments afterward, then Mother and the archbishop and others prepared to leave. Mother's presence always brought much joy and great peace. As she was leaving she kept saying, "Let us thank God for this great gift, let us thank God for this new congregation, and let your life be your first form of thanksgiving. Pray for Mother. Mother prays much for all of you."

The next afternoon we participated in the blessing of the Dhappa Leprosy Centre. Mother Teresa was there, along with some sisters, brothers, and important Calcutta officials. The Gospel passage chosen for the occasion was Luke 17:11-19, Jesus healing the ten lepers.

Mother spoke to us with conviction: We should not make the leprosy patients feel rejected and unwanted; we must love them as Jesus loves them and serve them as He serves them. The more repugnant a person is, she said, the more faith we need in order to see Jesus in the person: the way we look at, the way we wash, the way we hold him or her—with tenderness, with love and compassion.

This was the first time in my life I had seen leprosy patients. To be honest, I was frightened. On my way back to Ranchi, I wondered whether I would ever be able to serve these people. Would I have the courage to face them? I needed confirmation of the decision I had made to leave the diocese and join the Missionaries of Charity.

Once back in Ranchi, I finished my final exams. Then I returned as quickly as possible—on April 7, 1967, to be exact—to Calcutta to work with the poorest of the poor.

## **Formation Year**

Twelve of us began our historical novitiate under Br. Andrew on June 2, 1967, the Feast of the Sacred Heart. After Holy Mass we knelt and prayed, and then Br. Andrew blessed us and offered us to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Mother Teresa wasn't present but sent us all prayerful greetings—welcoming, encouraging words.

For me it was like a dream being slowly realized. After my five years of study in languages, philosophy, and teaching, here I was starting the first lessons of prayers and starting this new way of life as a Missionary of Charity. All of us were beginners; there was no senior group to which we could look for examples and guidance. But there was the Holy Family of Nazareth, in which Jesus prepared Himself for His impending mission of love.

Mother Teresa had begun the Pious Union of Brothers on March 25, 1963, the Feast of the Annunciation. Two of the original brothers could not face the hardships of the life of the Missionaries of Charity, so they eventually left the little group. Br. Andrew, a Jesuit from Melbourne, Australia, stayed on, as did Br. Joseph Michael of Calcutta, who was my inspiration in the Missionary of Charity way of doing things. Br. Aloysius from Madhya Pradesh was the next longest surviving member; his two sisters were also Missionaries of Charity. Then came Br. Damien from Kerala, Br. Ignatius from Madhya Pradesh, Br. Benedict from Sri Lanka, Br. George and Br. James from Kerala, Br. Bernard from Bihar, Br. John from Kerala, Br. David from West Bengal, Br. Iswardas from Utter Pradesh, and myself from Kerala.

There were many special moments of grace during my year of formation. One of the first was when the pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima arrived in Calcutta. I saw

Mother's devotion to Mary that day. Her face lit up; she was like a little girl seeing her beloved mother after a lapse of some weeks or months.

Another occasion was Christmas Day, when we had the children's Christmas party. It was a gathering of all the street and slum children we were taking care of, over five thousand of them from various parts of the crowded and chaotic city of Calcutta. Mother Teresa and the sisters joyfully shared with all the children the beautiful Christmas gifts they had prepared, including some sports equipment. They organized races and other games for the children.

This was my first Christmas outside Catholic circles. It opened my eyes to a wider horizon. I was deeply aware of the fact that Jesus was born not only for a few Christians but for all mankind, irrespective of caste, color, or religion.

There was so much to learn—so much that my five years of seminary formation had not given me. I knew how to prove the existence of God by use of reason, but here I was seeing His love and care for all people, especially for the poorest of the poor. Philosophy taught me that every person possesses an immortal soul, but never had I thought that every person I touched, every person I served, was Jesus. It was on that Christmas Day—which for me was my first real Christmas, even though I was twenty-five years old—that the horizons of my life opened. My joy was beyond description.

All the more I began to appreciate my novitiate, the purpose of which was to help me live less and less for myself and more and more for God and for others. The words of St. John the Baptist began to make more sense in my life: “[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn 3: 30). My novitiate became a real school of living a true Christian life.

In January 1968 it happened that Br. Benedict and I fell ill with chicken pox. We were isolated from the rest of the community, up on the terrace under the water tanks, where there were two beds. My condition became quite serious.

Quite late one night, as I felt worse, Br. Andrew called the sisters' motherhouse. Mother Teresa came with Sr. (and Dr.) Gertrude right away. It was then that I experienced a mother's love in a way that I had not since I left my own sweet home. Mother was tender, concerned, loving, and caring. She and Sr. Gertrude cleaned and arranged the room, then made sure we were quite comfortable.

They repeated this care a couple times until we recovered. Mother always would say with a smile when I thanked her, "All for Jesus, Brother. You too offer all to Jesus."

"Yes, Mother, whatever you do, your tender love and concern is all for Jesus."

As my novitiate continued, I felt deeply the warmth of a mother. I sometimes questioned whether I deserved all this tender care!

### **First Vows**

After I was better, the brothers had me accompany an ill person to Mother's Home for the Dying in Kalighat, a district of Calcutta. Mother was taking care of another patient when we arrived. When she finished, she made the usual enquiries about the brothers, their life, and their work.

And then, out of the clear blue sky, she asked me whether I knew that six of the brothers were going to make their first vows after the canonical year. This was a matter of necessity, as there were no senior brothers to manage our second house in Dumdum. Mother Teresa suggested I speak with Br. Andrew about taking my vows also. I spoke with him at an opportune time, and I was added to

the number, even though I was “untimely born” as the last one in the senior group. All the others—Br. Andrew, Br. Joseph Michael, Br. Aloysius, Br. Damien, Br. George, and Br. Benedict—had been with the pious union two years or more.

In preparation for our vows, we had a wonderful eight days of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, preached by a Belgian Jesuit, Fr. Mather Shillings. The night before our profession we all wrote out our vow formula. On the morning of June 2, Msgr. Eric Barber, the vicar general of Calcutta, was the main celebrant at a Holy Mass on the terrace of the brothers’ house at 7 Mansatala Row. Mother Teresa, Sr. Agnes, and some of the senior sisters were present at this historic event: the first brothers’ profession Mass.

To my great surprise Br. Joseph Michael, the very first of the brothers to join, backed out from our line. It shocked me deeply, as he was the person to whom I looked as my example, someone from whom I could always learn something new. So just six of us made vows on that historic Pentecost Sunday, June 2, 1968. God’s ways are mysterious.

The day after our profession we all scattered, like the Apostles after Pentecost. Br. George was appointed local servant of the community in Dumdum, where for almost ten months Br. Felix, then just a candidate, had been serving; Br. Aloysius and Br. Damien remained at our Mansatala house; Br. Benedict was assigned to Watgung to work with some orphan boys; Br. Andrew would continue his work with the other novices; and I went to the Papal Athenaeum in Pune to finish my studies for the priesthood. There I would be for four years.

During this period Mother made trips to Pune, mainly to visit the sisters there. It happened that one of our professors wasn’t too happy about Mother Teresa’s opening

houses outside India, especially in Europe, plus going to the West wearing an Indian sari. So I arranged for him to meet Mother.

They talked for over an hour, after which I asked the professor, "Father, how did the talk go?" He replied to the effect that, as Mother was so convinced and clear about what she was doing, who would be able to persuade her to the contrary? But Mother told me later that they had had a very lively discussion and exchange of ideas.

### **"Something Beautiful for God"**

In April 1969 noted British correspondent Malcolm Muggeridge came to Calcutta to videotape Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity for B.B.C. London. She did not want him to focus on her but rather on the work she was doing and the kind of people she was serving. She told him, "Together let us do something beautiful for God."

This was the first film about Mother, and a book followed by the same author and under the same title, the one Mother had suggested: *Something Beautiful for God*. The life and work of Mother Teresa, till then known mainly in the East, was now going to be put "on the lampstand," where this holy woman's light would "shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (see Mt 5:14-16).

So it happened that one fine morning in April 1969, Br. Andrew told me to accompany him on his motorbike to our house in Dum Dum, which is near the International Airport in Calcutta. He told me that the television people might want to interview me. So we assembled with Mother Teresa on the balcony of the brothers' house, to receive the whole crew of Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge.

While Mr. Muggeridge interviewed Br. Andrew, Mother

Teresa and I sat and talked about the brothers and various things. Then Mr. Muggeridge wanted the brothers to go downstairs and form a line with our orphan boys. The camera focused on the boys, while the rosary beads kept moving through Mother's fingers in the room upstairs. When all was done, Mr. Muggeridge told her, "Excellent, Mother. It came out very well."

"Thank God. Let us thank Our Lady," she said.

The film crew was ready to move on to other sites. Within minutes the jeep was ready. Br. Andrew told me to go with Mother and Mr. Muggeridge; he would stay at the house. I cheerfully obliged.

As we passed the Loreto convent, Mother Teresa recalled her nineteen years there. "It was a very wonderful time," she said. "I can't forget all that Loreto did for me and how through Loreto the good Lord prepared me for this life."

In fact, Mother always used whatever she found helpful and, in accordance with the Spirit and her charism, without any scruples. She had her way of speaking and of doing things, which opened people up to God and to the Missionaries of Charity. She never pretended that everyone could live the way she lived. But she happily welcomed those who showed any interest in her work. She respected all and despised no one, while holding to what she believed to be good and true for herself and for the Missionaries of Charity.