

## MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY - CONTEMPLATIVE

" To do ordinary things with  
extraordinary love for the  
greater glory of God "



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*Interview with Fr. Sebastian Vazhakala M.C. (Vatican Radio)*

*"The Church, the bride of Christ, the Church, our Mother. We can glorify God through the Church, in the Church, under the Church by our fidelity to the gift that the Church has entrusted to us: the gift of acceptance of us, of our hands to serve and our hearts to love.*

*We must not spoil the Church by our selfishness and sinfulness, for we all together make the Body of Christ, the Church. And at present our Holy Father is a real Father to each one of us if we own that fidelity. That strength of faith that he is trying to give to each one of us will help us to love the Church and to serve the Church with a pure heart". (Mother Teresa)*

*1) How do you feel when you hear or read Mother Teresa's words?*

I feel very much at home as she brings me back many memories of the past. It is like listening to my own mother. There is the real conviction that comes from her own heart and from her everyday life. When Mother Teresa saw a person in need she didn't ask what others are doing or not doing but asked herself what she could do, and simply did what she could. And when she was unable to help that person she would ask somebody else who could help her to do that. But she would never leave anyone feeling uncared for or unloved or unwanted. She always took care of them then and there, not waiting for a better tomorrow or simply brooding over the past.

*2) You were the co-founder with Mother Teresa of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity Contemplative. Can you say something about it?*

Jesus, our Divine Master, wants the Contemplative Branch of the Missionaries of Charity to love and serve Him in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor in joyful praise, thanksgiving, intercession and reparation. This is done mainly through prayer, penance and works of mercy both spiritual and corporal; thus to satiate the infinite thirst of Jesus on the Cross for love of souls. Since it is never the will of our Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost (cf. Mt 18, 14), Jesus wants us to go in search of the lost sheep *calling them to repentance*. He wants us *to instruct the ignorant while counselling the doubtful*. There are so many *sorrow-filled people to be comforted*. Amazingly enough *to bear wrongs patiently and to forgive injuries* are spiritual works of mercy; as is *praying for the living and the dead*.

In the evening of life when we appear before God we will be judged according to the works of mercy: *"Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, you gave Me to eat, I was thirsty, you gave Me to drink, I was a stranger, you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was ill and you comforted Me, in prison and you came to visit Me. Then the*

*just will ask: Lord, when did we see You hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, ill or in prison? I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it to Me*” (Mt 25, 31-46). Therefore whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, take care of the sick, visit the prisoners, *we do it to Jesus*. The Jesus whom we contemplate, love and adore in the Bread of Life, with respect, faith and devotion is the same Jesus whom we are called to meet, love and serve with the self-same respect, faith and devotion, in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor. *“How could it be otherwise, since the Christ encountered in contemplation is the same who lives and suffers in the poor?”* (V.C. 82). Our Constitution also says: *“From the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament we go to the presence of Jesus in the poorest of the poor and vice versa”* (R. 5).

The word *“contemplative”* then, need not only be explained and understood in a purely traditional sense, but it can also be explained, understood and lived in a different way. There can be new approaches to the whole concept of *“contemplation”*, and a new way of living one’s contemplative vocation. We can also be walking contemplatives; contemplatives on the road. As prayer is a necessary means for continual contact with God, so any and every authentic love-filled activity of man can also be a means of union with God. There can be pure mental contemplation and there can also be active contemplation; even more, there can be real contemplation in action. A genuine contemplative is also a true missionary. This can be seen in St. Thérèse of Lisieux who has been proclaimed the patroness of the missions together with St. Francis Xavier. The former was a contemplative missionary while the latter a missionary contemplative. The modality or the way and manner of contemplating can be different, but the essential elements are the same. Contemplatives must not only know the techniques of contemplation, but must have the ability to use any material for contemplation, even so-called *“profane”* or *“worldly”* realities. In this context we can learn again from St. Thérèse, who writes: *“I accept all distractions for the love of God, even the wildest fancies that cross my mind”*. This is the acid test of a true contemplative. With humility and serene confidence a contemplative Brother tries to transform the profane into sacred. He not only purifies it but then even perfumes it with the virtues of faith, hope and charity: the result is a profound and deepening sense of peace and joy, which is part of an ongoing process that ends with the Beatific Vision.

Our holy Catholic and apostolic Church then, is built on prayer, penance and works of mercy: all of them contribute to her basic structure. If prayer is the life breath of the Church, sacrifice and penance are the skeleton and works of mercy the flesh. Therefore there must be a harmonious balance between these basic elements.

*“Let prayer, penance and works of mercy be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defence, a threefold united prayer in our favour”* (cf. St. Peter Chrysologus’ Sermon 43. Office of Readings for Tuesday, Lent, week 3).

Our mission is to do ordinary and simple things with extraordinary love, because many people are trying to do a lot of good things and a lot of big things, but there are very few people who really are interested in doing small things and in doing them with great love, with a smile, with peace and joy in the heart. It may hurt me, but that hurt brings me joy, because that person whom I am trying to help is in need and I am helping him.

What we do is the work of God, and Mother Teresa from the very beginning was very convinced that all what we do is Gods' work, and therefore He takes care. We are His instruments like a pen in a writer's hand and He writes with us a message of love to the world. We are "God's love letters".

Then we have the Lay Missionaries of Charity (LMC) for the lay people, who are living in the heart of the world consecrating their everyday life to God. They are now in over 30 countries.

*3) Is it difficult to be a follower of Mother Teresa in today's world? She was a great lady but she was tough. Not everybody can be a follower of Mother Teresa.*

Actually we are not followers of Mother Teresa, we are followers of Jesus, and Mother Teresa followed Jesus very closely and loved Him with all her heart. She tried to know Jesus better and better every day, tried to love Him more ardently and serve Him more closely in the poorest of the poor. Serving the poorest of the poor Mother always said: you must love until it hurts you. Love is always in a certain sense a tough thing because you don't do the things which you like to do but you must do the things which the person is in need of. One time I was working in the home for the dying in Calcutta and one man was brought into the house and Mother Teresa was there with me. I told Mother Teresa: "There is no sense in taking this man in, because as he gets a little better he goes out; this had happened 10 to 15 times". She looked at me and said: "Fr. Sebastian, what is important is not what you did yesterday or what he is going to do tomorrow. The question is whether he is in need of your help now". I said: "Yes Mother". Then she said: "Do it. So don't waste your time asking how many times you have helped this person or that person but what this person is in need *now*. And then do it".

Mother Teresa had her strong convictions. When people have strong convictions and they are very clear about them, they will be very demanding out of love. I saw she was a very tough woman but full of love and therefore the toughness disappears in the light of love.

I met her first in 1966, when I was doing my philosophy in the seminary Then I came to Calcutta to meet her again. What attracted me was not the person of Mother Teresa, because she was not famous then and I didn't know her much, but what touched me was the work she was doing and the kind of life she was leading, which was so close to the Gospel:

*"I was hungry and you gave me to eat,  
I was thirsty and you gave me to drink,  
I was homeless and you took me in,  
I was naked and you clothed me"*

and then: *"as long as you did it to the least of my brothers, you did it to me"*

or: *"Even a cup of cold water in my name, you do it to me".*

This kind of thing is in the Gospel and I saw Mother Teresa doing this and her life was so simple. She not only worked for the poor but she worked with the poor. That means she wanted to experience the poverty of the poor. It is very easy to go and work for the poor and then lead a very comfortable life. She tried to live a very simple life, like the poor, and helped them. When you are full of love, you are not thinking about your own problems and difficulties, but you are trying to help the people out of love for them.

We try to live a life of strict poverty, but in a community it is more difficult to stick to the spirit but we always try. One must be convinced of the Spirit, personal conviction, inner conviction that comes from contemplation and prayer. That's why we spent 4 to 5 hours a day in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. We love Him and adore Him in the Bread of Life and then we love Him and serve Him in the poorest of the poor. So the contact with the poor is helping us to remain poor.

We also take the fourth vow of wholehearted free service to the poorest of the poor and this helps us to keep our Spirit. And we examine, we try, we review, we have discussions, we have sharing, all these things will help us always to come back to the right path, but each person has at the same time to walk towards Jesus as far as he can do it.

Besides we have the Constitutions, we have the poor with us who help us not to deviate much from our Constitutions. We also need your prayers that we may not spoil God's work.

*4) What is the status of the process for beatification of Mother Teresa?*

I am not the postulator although I am the official witness. I think they are proceeding very very fast with her cause. However, if you really want to know her, you must know what kind of person she was; the way she practised the virtues, how she lived and worked etc. I was told by the postulator that miracle necessary for the beatification, is being studied at the Diocesan level. The witnessing is finished, but the historical commission's work of collecting and gathering all that Mother Teresa has written and spoken in public is still to be completed; there will be many volumes at the end. In God's own time her beatification will be celebrated on earth while Mother Teresa herself continues her mission of saving souls from heaven above!

God bless you.

*Fr. Sebastian Vazhakala M.C.*