

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Born. St Teresa of Calcutta, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, was born in Macedonia on August 26, 1910.



As a child. Her parents, father, Nikola, and mother, Drana, were devoted Catholics. Agnes' father died when she was 8 years old, and Agnes and her mother became very close. Agnes' mother was deeply committed to care for the poor as a response to her faith. She often welcomed those less fortunate into their home, offering hospitality and care. Agnes worked alongside her, learning from her mother that all people, especially those who have nothing, deserve care and love.

Becoming a religious sister. When Agnes was 12 she first felt a *calling* to religious life. Six years later, in 1928 aged 18, Agnes decided to become a *nun* and moved to Ireland to join the Sisters of Loreto in Dublin. She took the name Sister Mary Teresa after Saint

Thérèse of Lisieux. The Loreto Sisters (also known as The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary) were founded by Mary Ward, a woman from Yorkshire, in 1609. They were, and are, dedicated to the education of girls and established schools all over the world.

Moving to India. In 1929, as a *novitiate*, Sister Mary Teresa travelled to Darjeeling, India. Two years later, after making her *first vows* she was sent to Calcutta (now Kolkata), where she taught history and geography at Saint Mary's High School for Girls.

On May 24, 1937, Sister Mary Teresa took her final vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Loreto sister. As was the custom for Loreto nuns, after taking her final vows she took the title 'Mother' and became known as Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa continued to teach at Saint Mary's, and in 1944 she became the school's principal.

Mother Teresa's life in Calcutta was one of working to alleviate the hardship of the poor through education, however, in 1946, Mother Teresa felt a further call, this time to leave teaching and work in the slums of Calcutta aiding the city's poorest and sickest people. Since Mother Teresa had taken a vow of obedience to the Loreto Sisters, she could not leave her *convent*

without official permission. In January 1948 she finally received approval to pursue religious life in a new way and so in August of that year Mother Teresa left the Loreto Convent in the blue-and-white sari that she would wear in public for the rest of her life. After six months of basic medical training, Mother Teresa went into Calcutta's slums to help the poorest of the poor.

Founding a religious community. Joined initially by twelve former pupils, by 1950 Mother Teresa had established a new religious order of Sisters called the Missionaries of Charity. Their mission was to care for (in Mother Teresa's words) "the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers; all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to society and are shunned by everyone."

Today the order has over 4,500 Sisters running orphanages and homes for those dying of AIDS. They run charity centres worldwide caring for poor and homeless around the world. They are easily recognised in the Blue and white sari Mother Teresa herself wore.

The order itself has also grown. In 1963, Brother Andrew founded the Missionary Brothers of

Charity; in 1979 a Contemplative branch of the Brothers was added. In 1984 an order of Priests, the Missionaries of Charity Fathers, was founded.

All those committed to life as a Missionary of Charity (abbreviated to MC after their name) live a simple life of poverty. Sisters, brothers and Priests commit themselves to life with few items: a few pieces of clothing, simple plates and cutlery, sandals, a crucifix, and a set of rosary beads. They live without television, radios or items of convenience. They neither smoke nor drink alcohol. They beg for their food.

Honours during her lifetime.

In 1979 Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work.

Death. She died on September 5, 1997.

Becoming a saint. The process which leads to someone being declared a Saint in the Catholic Church is a little bit like a trial.

First, someone mounts a case to argue that the person they nominate is worthy of being called a Saint. Others, called the 'devil's advocate', are then appointed to look

into the person's life to see if there is any reason they could not be given this honour. If they can find nothing then the process can continue. Two miracles, unexpected cures that cannot be explained by scientists, must be attributed to the person. That means that people begin to pray to the 'candidate' and the Church waits to see if their prayers are answered. In 2002 the Vatican recognised that a woman was cured after she prayer to Mother Teresa to intercede for her. Mother Teresa was then declared 'Blessed Teresa of Calcutta' on October 19, 2003 by Pope John Paul II. She was half-way there! A second miracle was attributed to Mother Teresa in 2015 when a man was healed of a brain tumour after praying to Blessed Teresa.

With two miracles now accepted by the Church Mother Teresa was *canonized* on September 4, 2016. Pope Francis led the canonization mass, declaring to the thousands of people who had gathered in St Peter's Square, that 'after due deliberation and frequent prayer for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother bishops, we declare and define Blessed Teresa of Calcutta to be a saint, and we enrol her among the saints, decreeing that she is to be venerated as such by the whole church.' Pope Francis spoke about Mother Teresa's life of service in his homily. 'Mother Teresa, in all aspects of her life, was a generous dispenser of divine mercy, making herself available for

everyone through her welcome and defence of human life, those unborn and those abandoned and discarded,' he said. 'She bowed down before those who were spent, left to die on the side of the road, seeing in them their God-given dignity. She made her voice heard before the powers of this world, so that they might recognize their guilt for the crime of poverty they created.' He called on everyone to follow the example of St Teresa. 'Mercy was the salt which gave flavour to her work, it was the light which shone in the darkness of the many who no longer had tears to shed for their poverty and suffering,' he said. 'May she be your model of holiness.'

Mother Teresa was often called 'the saint of the gutters' during her lifetime. Despite the amazing work she did, and the enormous legacy she left behind, Mother Teresa was modest about who she was. She said of herself, 'By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, an Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the Heart of Jesus.'