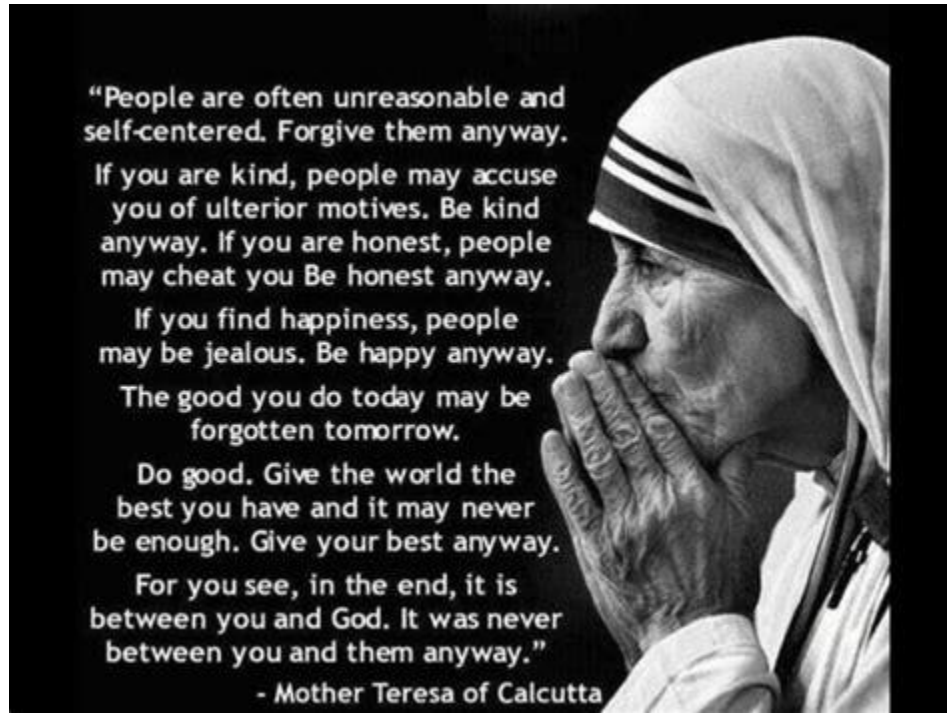


FROM FATHER JOHN: "Praise the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever; Praise the God of gods; for his mercy endures forever; Praise the Lord of lords; for his mercy endures forever; Who alone has done great wonders, for his mercy endures forever; Who skillfully made the heavens, for his mercy endures forever; Who spread the earth upon the waters, for his mercy endures forever; Who made the great lights, for his mercy endures forever; The sun to rule the day, for his mercy endures forever; The moon and stars to rule the night, for his mercy endures forever; ... Praise the God of heaven, for his mercy endures forever." (Psalm 136)



I read an article by Bishop Robert Barron a few years ago and stumbled upon it again this week. I thought I would share it with you because people often tell me that they don't feel a connection to God, or they aren't sure they are loved by God, or they feel a sense of being abandoned by God or somehow feel forsaken by God or some other similar condition in their spiritual life. This discussion happens most often in the confessional.

But we are in good company with Our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Theresa of Calcutta. Our Lord Jesus cried out as He hung on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And St. Theresa of Calcutta suffered from feeling forsaken for fifty years.

I normally tell the person who asks me about this that this type of feeling can be part of our spiritual life, and I use the example of St. Theresa of Calcutta as someone who suffered from this for fifty years. We need to remember that our prayer life and our spiritual life go through ups and downs, periods of dryness and periods of amazing spiritual connection to the Lord our God. What's important is that we consistently practice our faith, that we consistently pray to God even in times of dryness and the times when we feel all alone and that we consistently give of ourselves for the good of the people that God has put into our lives. If we succumb to the periods of dryness in our spiritual lives, we will find ourselves drifting away from God rather than growing closer God. This is why remaining consistent in our faith, in prayer and in loving acts of kindness is so important in our spiritual life.

Bishop Barron's article is entitled; *Mother Teresa, Saint of Darkness*. Bishop Barron describes how Mother Theresa suffered from this for fifty years which is remarkable given that she was arguably the holiest person of the 20th century and one of the greatest saints that we've seen in our lifetimes. Hopefully, this article will bring hope to anyone who is going through a period of dryness or roughness in their spiritual life.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.

From Bishop Robert Barron:

“Like so many others around the world, I was overjoyed to hear of the recent decision of the Vatican to canonize Mother Teresa, a woman generally recognized, during her lifetime, to be a ‘living saint.’

Mother Teresa first came to my attention through Malcolm Muggeridge's film and attendant book *Something Beautiful for God*. Of course Muggeridge showed Mother's work with the dying and the poorest of the poor on the streets of Kolkata, but what moved me the most were the images of the saint's smile amidst so much squalor and suffering. She was a very bright light shining in exceptionally thick darkness.

Mother's life reveals so many aspects and profiles of holiness, but I would like to focus on three of them.

First, she shows something remarkable about love, which is not a sentiment but rather willing the good of the other. It is fair to say that Mother Teresa went to extremes in demonstrating love in this proper sense. She renounced practically everything that, in the opinion of the world, makes life pleasant -- wealth, material goods, power, comforts, luxuries -- in order to be of service to those in need. Further, for decades, she personally reached out to the most vulnerable in one of the worst slums in the world and sent her sisters to some of the most disagreeable places on the planet. Most of us, I imagine, manage to love to a degree, but few ever express this theological virtue more dramatically and radically than she did. This is not simply admirable, it constitutes a crucial witness to the nature of love. Unlike the other virtues, both natural and theological, love has no limit. Justice, limitlessly expressed, excludes all mercy; too much temperance becomes a fussy puritanism; exaggerated courage is rashness; unlimited faith is credulity; infinite hope devolves into presumption. But there can never be too much love; there is never a time when love is inappropriate, for love is what God is, and love constitutes the very life of heaven. Mind you, in heaven there is no need for faith and hope fades away. But in that supremely holy place, love remains in all of its infinite intensity and radicality. Mother Teresa's way of life, accordingly, is an icon of the love that will obtain in heaven, when we are drawn utterly into the very life of God.

A **second** feature of Mother's holiness is her dedication to prayer. When I visited the Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata some years ago, what impressed me most was a life-size statue of Mother Teresa in the very back of the chapel, in the attitude she customarily assumed when she prayed: legs folded under her, palms facing upward, head bowed. From the very beginning of her community, Mother insisted that her sisters should engage in substantial amounts of prayer every day; and in time, she established a branch of her order dedicated exclusively to contemplative prayer. She understood something that is essential to the Christian spiritual life, namely, that the kind of love she and her sisters endeavored to practice could come only through the grace of God, only as a sheer gift. To get that gift, it was necessary to ask, to ask again, to beg one's whole life long. Without this explicit connection to God and his purposes, their work, she knew, would turn into mere do-goodism, and the egos of her sisters would inevitably assert themselves. Saints, those who embody the love that God is, are necessarily beggars.

I remarked above that Mother Teresa struck me as a light in the shadows. How mysterious, therefore, that she herself once said, ‘If I ever become a saint, I will surely be a saint of darkness.’ She was referring to something that only a handful of people knew in her lifetime, that for upwards of fifty years, Mother Teresa experienced the pain of the absence of God. The living saint often felt abandoned by God or even that God does not exist. Once a visiting bishop was kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament with Mother and her nuns. A note was passed to him from the saintly foundress, which read, to his infinite surprise, ‘Where is Jesus?’ That she

lived through this crucible for decades, even as people routinely saw her as the very paragon of holiness, shows forth a third dimension of her saintliness. To be a saint is to allow Christ to live his life in you. Indeed, St. Paul said, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me;' and this means the whole Christ. Jesus was a person of service to the poor and needy, and Mother certainly embodied this aspect of his life; Jesus was a person who prayed intently and for long periods of time, and Mother participated in this dimension of his existence. But Jesus was also the crucified Lord, who said, at the limit of his suffering, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' To allow Christ to live his life in you is, therefore, necessarily to experience, to one degree or another, the absence of God, to undergo the agony of the crucifixion in all of its dimensions. St. John of the Cross, the greatest mystical theologian in the Church's history said, quite simply, that there is no path to holiness that does not lead through the cross. Though it is a high paradox, the fifty-year darkness that Mother endured is, therefore, one of the surest indicators of her saintliness.

Saints exist for the Church, for in them we see the very *raison d'être* of the Church, and this is why canonizations are always joyful affairs. So let us rejoice in this new saint whose love, prayer, and very darkness, are light for us."