

“Creating many Ripples”
 Homily for 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time
 September 4th 2016
 Wisdom of Solomon 9:13–18b
 Psalm 90:3–6, 12–17 Philemon 9–10, 12–17
Gospel Luke 14:25–33

In December 1982 Malcolm Muggeridge became a Roman Catholic. What made this event so significant was the fact that for much of his life, he was either an atheist, in his younger years, or an agnostic, during midlife. He was born in 1903 and was received into the Church at age 79.

With the passing of the years he came to have a greater respect for Christianity but because of his love for the deadly sins, especially pride, gluttony and lust he did not think he could rightly represent the Christian faith and so did not convert.

By the nineteen fifties he was one of the best known British journalists in the world, a status that increased even more after the advent of TV.

In the late sixties he went to Kolkata to meet Mother Theresa. Instead of being angry, Muggeridge’s heart melted as Mother Teresa forced him to wait for hours while she tended to the sick and the dying. Instead of having to fend off the intensity of this tiny nun’s love for the poorest of the poor, he embraced her indelibly by writing *Something Beautiful for God*.

After his conversion Muggeridge remembered Mother Teresa of Kolkata, whose selfless work for India’s destitute he first told the world about, had a dramatic transforming effect on his life. Seeing the light of God illuminate the nun’s wizened face, seeing her complete trust in God, Muggeridge saw as never before “the pathetic condition of his worldly cynicism”.

Mother Teresa taught Muggeridge that it was not all the good deeds of the world which finally mattered, but in whose name they were performed. Welfare programs served a purpose, but Christian love was for a person. Christianity is not about numbers, it is about a man who is also God.

This inspired the woman affectionately known as “The Saint of the Gutter”. She so readily saw Jesus in those whom she loved that she understood that while:

“I alone cannot change the world, I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.”

While we slept, unless you were watching it live, the Mass of Canonization of Mother Teresa began at 2:30 am Mountain Standard Time. The Church’s newest “Saint Teresa of Kolkata” is a woman who embodied the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel.

33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

When this verse is seen in light of today’s readings we are called to join Saint Teresa and give up

1. possession of our intellect,
2. possession of our right to being slighted
3. possession of our lives.

In the Reading from Wisdom we are called to give up possession of our intellect. I do not mean by this that we are to stop thinking. Rather we are to place our intellect in the service of God, realizing that apart from God we cannot understand him or his purposes.

So our reading begins with the questions:

*¹³For who can learn the counsel of God?
Or who can discern what the Lord wills?*

The question is then answered in the last verses of this passage with another question:

*Who has learned your counsel,
unless you have given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?*

Unless our intellects are formed by the wisdom God

*¹⁴the reasoning of mortals is worthless,
and our designs are likely to fail;*

Why is this?

*¹⁵for a perishable body weighs down the soul,
and this earthly tent burdens the thoughtful mind.*

These lines express the idea, common in Greek philosophy, that the immortal soul is imprisoned inside the mortal body; both are composed of material substance, but the soul is of much lighter stuff, and when the mortal body dies, the soul is released, and like a cork in water, floats upward. This earthly tent refers to the perishable body (or, “body that some day will die”). “Thoughtful” can be interpreted as “anxious, full of care.” The author is saying that we cannot learn about God’s plans based on reason alone, because no matter how active and inquisitive our minds are, they are still burdened down by the body.

Because our mortal bodies are temporary structures made of earth and lie heavy on our souls; they put limits on what our minds are able to discover. This is why we need to give up possession of our intellect so that it can be offered in the service of God.

St. Teresa offered her intellect in the service of God. One of the discoveries made since her death by reading her journals was just how intense was her interior struggle. From 1949 to her death in 1997, with the exception of a 6th month period in 1958, she experienced the “Dark Night of the Soul” She likened her interior state to that of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane or Jesus cry from the Cross: “My God my God, why have you abandoned me?”

Yet in spite of this interior struggle she offered her intellect to God trusting in his loving kindness and goodness even though her earthly tent burdened her thoughtful mind.

Not only did St. Teresa give up possession of her intellect she also gave up possession of her right to be slighted. The story is told of the day she went with a small child to a local baker and

begged some bread for the hungry lad. The baker spat full in Mother Teresa's face. Undaunted, she calmly replied, "Thank you for that gift to me. Do you have anything for the child?"¹ Repeatedly she gave up possession of her right to be slighted.

In our reading from Paul's letter to Philemon Paul is urging the recipient of his letter to give up his right to be slighted. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon had in some way wronged him and was now in Paul's company. During that time Onesimus had become a Christian. Paul is now sending Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter in which he writes these words:

yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—

Paul is appealing to Philemon to give up his right to exact punishment upon Onesimus because of the love of Jesus. He goes on to write:

"I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

Paul expresses clearly his affection for Onesimus, referring to him as "my own heart". He desires for Philemon to understand that this slave is to be treated with dignity and worth because of his inherent value as a child of God. Others who were not Christians might discard such a slave, but not Philemon. Rather he was to welcome him

"no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."

It was this that St. Teresa so clearly saw in the poorest of the poor and so gave up possession of her right to be slighted and offered such insults it in service to the Onesimus' of Kolkata

Saint Teresa could give up possession of her intellect and her right to be slighted because she was willing to give up her very self for Jesus. She said farewell to her native Albania as a teenager and never again saw her or her homeland again. She literally chose to so love Jesus above her family and to count the cost of going to war for her saviour so that she built a tower that cost her everything.

Now we are not necessarily called to follow the particulars of St. Teresa's life but we are to be inspired to follow the shape of her life. For there are so many today whom St. Teresa saw, especially in the material Western World, whose lives are so impoverished because they had no sense of the councils and wisdom of God.

Those of us, who like St. Teresa, have been given the riches of our Catholic faith are to be ministers of light in the world of darkness by giving ourselves to Jesus as we offer him our

¹ Father Barron, Robert. Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith (p. 51). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

intellects, right to be slighted and our very lives to him in discipleship.. When we do this we can in our own way and in our places of influence

cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples.

Saint Teresa gave herself to Jesus and created many ripples. This is because she understood that to be a Saint in the modern world was:

*to be willing to enter into the darkness of this world
so that from heaven she would be a saint of light
to those of us who are still in n darkness on earth.”*

She so lit up the life of Malcolm Muggeridge that he realized:

It is precisely when every earthly hope has been explored and found wanting, when every possibility of help from earthly sources has been sought and is not forthcoming, when every recourse this world offers, moral as well as material, has been explored to no effect, when in the shivering cold the last twig has been thrown onto the fire and in the gathering darkness every glimmer of light has finally flickered out; it is then that Christ’s hand reaches out sure and firm.”

Saint Teresa of Kolkata pray for us that will be inspired to surrender possession of our intellect, rights to be slighted and very life to Jesus and so “cast stones across the waters to create many ripples”.