

This Day in History... September 5, 1997

World Bids Farewell to Mother Teresa

After decades of serving the poor in the harshest conditions, Mother Teresa passed away on September 5, 1997. Mother Teresa is remembered as one of the most compassionate and dedicated figures of the 20th century. Known for her work with the poor, the sick, and the dying, she devoted her life to those who were suffering. Her faith made her a global symbol of charity, and her legacy continues to inspire people of all faiths and backgrounds.

Mother Teresa was born on August 26, 1910, in Skopje, a city that was then part of the Ottoman Empire and is now the capital of North Macedonia. Her birth name was Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu. She grew up in a deeply religious Catholic family. Her father died when she was only eight years old, leaving her mother to raise the family. Despite the hardships, her mother set a strong example of kindness, often helping the poor in their community. These early experiences shaped Anjezë's sense of compassion and her desire to live a life of service.

At the age of 18, Anjezë decided to dedicate her life to God and joined the Sisters of Loreto, a Catholic order of nuns focused on education and missionary work. She traveled to Ireland to learn English, and then to India, where she began teaching at a school in Calcutta (now Kolkata). She took the name Sister Mary Teresa, after Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries. Later, when she took her final vows, she became known as Mother Teresa.

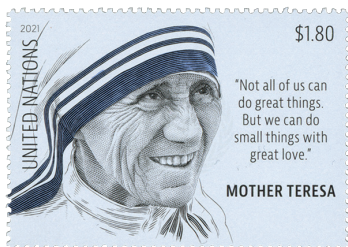
For nearly 20 years, Mother Teresa taught at St. Mary's High School in Calcutta. She enjoyed teaching but felt a growing call to serve the poor who lived outside the school walls. In 1946, during a train ride to Darjeeling, she experienced what she described as a "call within a call." She felt that God was asking her to leave the convent and dedicate herself to caring for the poorest of the poor. This decision would change the course of her life and the lives of countless others.

In 1948, after receiving permission from church leaders, Mother Teresa left the convent and began her new mission. She exchanged her traditional nun's habit for a simple white sari with a blue border, which would become her trademark. She received some basic medical care and went into the slums of Calcutta to help those who were sick, hungry, and dying. At first, she worked alone, but her dedication soon attracted other young women who wanted to join her.

In 1950, she founded the Missionaries of Charity, a new religious order dedicated to serving "the poorest of the poor." The organization started with just a handful of nuns but grew quickly. The Missionaries of Charity opened homes for orphans, centers for people with leprosy, and hospices where the dying could spend their final days in dignity. Mother Teresa insisted that every person, no matter how poor or ill, deserved love and respect.

Her work gained worldwide attention, and people from all over the globe came to volunteer or donate to her mission. Despite the praise, Mother Teresa always emphasized humility and said she was simply doing God's work. Her message was clear: even small acts of kindness could make a big difference in the world.

Mother Teresa's efforts did not go unnoticed. In 1979, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her humanitarian work. She accepted the award "in the name of the poor" and asked that the money for the traditional Nobel banquet be used to help the needy. Over the years, she also received many other honors, but she remained focused on her mission rather than the recognition.



2021 United Nations stamp honoring Mother Teresa.



Mother Teresa bought her sari (outfit) for just \$1.

However, Mother Teresa was not without critics. Some questioned the quality of medical care in her facilities, with accusations that they lacked basic hygiene practices and that painkillers were often withheld as human suffering was glorified. Others argued that her views against abortion and contraception were too strict, furthering the problems of overpopulation and limited resources in the regions she worked. Additionally, there were claims of her missions performing baptisms on the dying without their consent. Despite the controversies, she was admired by millions.

Mother Teresa continued her work even as her health declined in the 1990s. She suffered from heart problems and eventually stepped down as head of the Missionaries of Charity in 1997. She died on September 5, 1997, in Calcutta, at the age of 87. Her death was mourned around the world, and thousands attended her funeral, including world leaders and ordinary people whose lives she had touched.

In 2003, Pope John Paul II beatified her, the first step toward sainthood.

In 2016, she was officially canonized as Saint Teresa of Calcutta by Pope Francis. Today, the Missionaries of Charity continues her work in over 130 countries, serving the poor, the sick, and the dying.

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