

# Countdown to the canonization of Mother Teresa: Our encounter with the saint



## ***Blessed Mother Teresa (1910-1997)***

Tomorrow (August 26) is the 106th anniversary of the birth of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning founder of the Missionaries of Charity.

This tiny nun, who died at age 87, has inspired countless generations of people all over the world, both Christians and non-Christians alike, who are motivated by her unconditional love and service to the poorest of the poor.

When Mother's death was announced on September 5, 1997, less than six months after she had stepped down as head of the religious order she founded in 1950, the world mourned.

### **Countdown to sainthood:**

Fast-forward nineteen years:

In less than two weeks, on September 4, 2016 at the Vatican, Pope Francis will canonize Mother Teresa as a saint of the Church in Saint Peter's Square. The next day, the nineteenth anniversary of her death, will be observed each year as the feast day of Saint Teresa of Calcutta.

It's no coincidence that the Holy Father is canonizing Mother during this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

For mercy indeed was her mission.

Not only did Mother serve the needs of the poor and the dying, but she often travelled around the world, speaking at religious gatherings and overseeing the ministry of those who also served as Missionaries of Charity.

My children and I were lucky enough to have our own encounter with Mother Teresa in 1996 in Baltimore.

### **Our encounter with a saint:**

I remember the day so clearly:

I had an unsettled feeling all morning as I taught my religion classes at John Carroll. It was May 30, 1996 and Mother Teresa of Calcutta was going to be in Baltimore later that afternoon. And I wasn't going to be there....

Mother was scheduled to attend a 3 pm Mass that day at Baltimore's Basilica of the

Assumption, our nation's first cathedral, where 35 of her Missionaries of Charity would renew their vows in her presence. This was the top story on all the local news stations, which included announcements of the closure of Cathedral Street after lunch, along with warnings about possible rush hour traffic delays later that day.

As the day progressed and the unsettled feeling persisted, I came to an abrupt realization that I simply had to stop everything I was doing and make it happen. And I came to this conclusion just 90 minutes before the Mass would start in downtown Baltimore, while I was thirty miles north of the city, in Bel Air in Harford County.

Long story short, I called the nearby Catholic grade school and asked if the secretary would have my children packed up and in the main office for an early sign-out in ten minutes. Having a free final period that day, I quickly packed up my books and made my way over to St. Margaret's, realizing with dismay that I needed to stop for gas before I got on the I-95 highway toward Baltimore City. Obstacles galore met us along the way, including every red light possible...

By the time I got to the packed parking lot located around the corner from the basilica, it was 2:50 p.m. It was actually a miracle that we made it there and found a parking spot before 3 o'clock. The kids and I jogged through the garage and around the corner to find the street closed to car traffic in order to accommodate the numerous media vans and TV satellites on location, along with dozens of reporters.

Just as we slowed our footsteps in front of the basilica, the most amazing thing happened. The doors opened and out onto the portico stepped Cardinal William Keeler, the Archbishop of Baltimore, accompanied by the diminutive 85-year old Mother Teresa. And we were there!

My children, dressed in their Catholic school uniforms — ages 7, 9, and 11 — and I were right at the bottom of the steps in direct view of a press conference with these two incredibly inspiring people. I remember being so thrilled that my old camera had been in my car, hence, I was able to take some great photos.

After the press conference, the children and I made our way in the side portico door of the basilica to an at-capacity crowd, where the very long liturgical procession was ready to begin. I told the kids to follow me closely, and we made our way down a side aisle where we found a place to stand near the front with a perfect view of the Mass.

It was amazing to be in the presence of this saintly woman, whom I had first seen in person in 1976 at the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia. She had gained much notoriety over the twenty years that followed for her work for the poorest of the poor. I was so overcome with gratitude to be there.

We watched as Mother Teresa led the vow renewal ceremony, after which she addressed the congregation, asking all of us to pray for her Sisters and their apostolate. She asked those in attendance to "give us some of your daughters" so

that her Sisters can continue to serve the poor and disenfranchised.

After Mass was over, and as we waited to leave our standing-room location, I looked over my shoulder and couldn't believe my eyes... Mother Teresa, who had recessed out with her Sisters in the liturgical line, was coming back down the side aisle toward us. Escorted by a very tall security guard, Mother walked right next to us with her hands folded as if in prayer, while making eye contact and smiling, bowing her head down gracefully toward each of my three children.

It was such a humbling experience to be so close to this holy and inspiring woman. My children were so moved. As we joyfully made our way out of the basilica to walk to our car, we saw why Mother Teresa had walked past us on that side aisle.... There in the little alleyway next to the basilica was the large motor coach bus that her Sisters were boarding. Mother was able to slip out the side door through the sacristy and then onto the bus without being overwhelmed by the massive crowd gathered out front.

I will never forget this last-minute, Holy Spirit-inspired experience as long as I live. And neither will my now-adult children!

God is good.... All the time!

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### **Read more:**

Read more and see other photos from this 1996 historic visit of Mother Teresa to Catholic Charities and to Baltimore's Basilica of the Assumption:

"Catholic Throwback Thursday: Remembering the 1996 visit of Blessed Mother Teresa to Baltimore"