

Press Release – September 1st, 2016

The *magnificat* of Mother Theresa of Calcutta as received by Chiara Lubich

«*You do what I cannot do. I do what you cannot do*»¹, this was the usual greeting of Mother Theresa of Calcutta to Chiara Lubich every time she met her, and there have been many such occasions.

These words illustrate the “simple complexity” of their friendship, “great, intimate, profound” Lubich would say.

And this is how she described their meeting at the end of May 1997, in a poor locality of the Bronx in New York, in a cell within the convent of the Missionaries of Charity.

*“I had a long and unforgettable conversation with her. She was in bed with strong back pain, in a poor environment (...) the meeting was an exception given her precarious state of health. Private, joyful, (...) Then she started to talk and talk. She was the foundress of a Work of God talking to another foundress, less worthy, and she could communicate with her the fruits of her life: homes of contemplative life and active (...) diffusion in 120 countries, projects which were blocked by governments (...) She talked of the fourth vow which was of serving wholeheartedly the poorest of the poor, the sick until they leave for Heaven (...) It was her *magnificat*. The few minutes allowed by the doctor became twenty. It was a pity no photo was taken of the Life that there was in that room, of that conversation which had a flavour of Paradise. Then we parted, embracing each other. I will never forget that joy (...) I am happy to have known her and been so close to her. I started to pray not for her but to her for all of us”².*

And she added on another occasion: *“I realised what the Pope (John Paul II) defines as feminine genius, which lies in what is characteristic in Mary. She was not given a ministry, but (...) was herself clothed in love, in charity, which is the greatest gift, the greatest gift that comes from heaven”³.*

In a telephone conversation with the members of the Focolare worldwide on the 25th September 1997, Chiara Lubich said of her:

“Mother Theresa is (...) a towering example of the art of loving. She truly loved everyone. She didn’t ask her neighbor if he or she was Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, etc. (...)”

Mother Theresa was the first to love. She was the one who went out looking for those entrusted to her by God. Perhaps as no other, Mother Teresa saw Jesus in every person: “You did it for me”, exactly, her motto.

Mother Teresa made herself one with everyone. She made herself poor with the poor and especially as the poor. This is what distinguishes her from simply being a social worker (...) or a person who does volunteer work. She didn’t accept anything that the poor couldn’t have as well. We know, for example, that she and her sisters renounce having a simple washing machine, a renouncement that many do not understand. They say: “In our times!” But she doesn’t want one because the poor don’t have one.

She took upon herself, she identified with the misery of the poor, their grief, their sickness, their death. Mother Teresa loved everyone as herself, to the point of offering others her own ideal. For example, she invited the volunteers who spent a period of time serving in her Work to seek out their own “Calcutta” when they returned home to their countries. Because, she said, there are poor people everywhere. Mother Teresa surely loved her enemies. She never stopped to dispute the absurd accusations they made against her, but she prayed for her enemies”⁴.

Two days before, Chiara said to the community of Emilia Romagna meeting in Rimini, *“I admired Mother Theresa in a special way for her determination. She had an ideal: the poorest of the poor. And she never diverted from it. She had only one aim in life. Even in this she is for me a model of faithfulness to the ideal that God has given me”.*

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¹ Cf. C. Lubich, *Il suo “magnificat”*, Città Nuova, September 25, 1997.

² Idem.

³ Cf. Interview with Chiara Lubich by Vatican Radio on Mother Teresa of Calcutta, September 10, 1997.

⁴ Cf. C. Lubich, *Costruendo il “castello esteriore”*, Città Nuova, Rome 2002, pp. 25-28.