

09/04/16 23 C

-- Today, in Rome, Pope Francis is celebrating the canonization of Mother Teresa of Calcutta as a saint of the Church. Many of us know the outlines of her story. She was originally a Sister of Loretto, teaching in India. She had left her home in Albania and taken traditional religious vows.

-- In September, 1946, she felt a strong call from the Lord to leave teaching in order to minister to the poor and dying of Calcutta. She even experienced visions over the coming months. So she went to her superiors.

-- They told her to weigh the pros and cons of taking this step, but the call remained strong even though the odds seemed against her. It became clear that she would have to leave her order, her current family, to take up this new ministry. It would be risky, but she did it.

-- The rest is history, but it took many years to develop. It even took several years to get approval for her new order. But they worked to care for the destitute and dying.

-- And her sisters lived very simply, without many comforts, but faithful to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament to give them strength for their ministry.

-- She took up her cross to follow Jesus, and she led many to do the same. She treated the people she ministered to with care, giving Christian love without demanding Christian conversion. She would have those who died buried as Hindus or Muslims if that was their faith.

-- In this she acted as St. Paul would have his followers do. When he wrote his friend Philemon about his escaped slave, he asked him to receive him back as a brother, not his property.

-- When Jesus calls us to "hate" those we are close to, he's not asking us to despise them. He calls us not to treat them as our property, not to cling to them. For we have a greater goal in life than possessing things or people, even children or loved ones.

-- Mother Teresa lived that out, even after she became a “celebrity” and Nobel Peace Prize winner. But many other people who will not be canonized by the Church have done that.

-- There are many people who care for disabled or chronically sick spouses with little reward for their efforts. There are people of modest means who give sizable amounts of their income to sponsor children in the third world.

-- And, yes, there are priests I have known who’ve taken difficult assignments they didn’t seek because their bishop and personnel board needed them to do that.

-- These and countless others take up their crosses daily to follow the Lord. All of us have some crosses in life—often much smaller but heavy nevertheless—which we are called to bear. The weight of these is not so much in their magnitude as it is in their persistence.

-- But, considering whom we profess to follow, should we expect anything different? Jesus took up his cross every day of his life and ministry, and he gives us the strength to do that as well.

-- We are not alone. We have his strength. We have the example of the saints, from the earliest apostles to Mother Teresa and others in our day. And we have the support of God’s people in the Church.

-- May we set our sights on following the Lord wherever he leads us. May we prefer God’s life to all else, especially anything or anyone who might lead us away from God’s everlasting life.