

MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY CONTINUE TO EXPAND

SR. M. NIRMALA TELLS OF THE GROWTH OF THE ORDER AFTER MOTHER TERESA'S DEATH AND HER OWN EXPERIENCE AS A SUPERIOR GENERAL

■ BY BARBARA MIDDLETON

Mother Teresa's earthly life came to an end. Do you sense help from her, spiritually, in guiding your order, and can you give me an example of that?

SISTER M. NIRMALA, M.C.: All the time. Mother lived the life of a Missionary of Charity heroically. We have seen the example she gave us. We have her instructions, our Constitutions and her prayer. When we pray she answers. And now the book *Mother Teresa, Come Be My Light* has come out. It is a tremendous guidance for us.

All the major spiritual writers agree that doing God's will is the highest form of sanctity. How can we do God's will?

M. NIRMALA: By accepting what God gives us and giving what He asks of us from moment to moment with a big smile.

What has been the growth in the order since Mother died?

M. NIRMALA: The society is growing. We have expanded in more places. We have entered into 14 new countries. We have opened 166 new houses. So all together today we are in 134 countries, and 757 houses. The number of professed sisters, which has grown, is around 1,000. And we have vocations, 265 novices. And in the pre-novitiate, 425.

But we need more vocations because there are many invitations from the bishops around the world asking for



Sister M. Nirmala, M. C., Superior General of the Missionaries of Charity.

sisters, so we need to meet those needs. We ask for prayers for more vocations.

As we have grown ten years older now, we have naturally grown also in little more experience, and little more depth in prayer. As Mother is not physically on earth to take us by our hand, we are learning to stand on our feet trusting in the Lord, and in the prayer and guidance of our Mother from heaven.

What's the secret of always keeping our heart full of charity?

M. NIRMALA: Allowing God to live in us and love through us.

What was your first meeting with John Paul II like as superior general of the Missionaries of Charity?

M. NIRMALA: That was an interesting meeting. When Mother took me to the Vatican and introduced me to Holy Father John Paul II, saying, "Holy Father, she is the new superior general now, I am free!" Holy Father said, "Mother, you are the Foundress!" and blessed both of us.

John Paul II and Mother Teresa were great friends. Myself, I called them "twin souls." Can you expound on their friendship?

M. NIRMALA: Friendship of Holy Father John Paul II and our Mother Blessed Teresa of Calcutta was based on their tremendous love for God, His Church and His people. Both of them had tender love for Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and respect for people of all religions. Both

were great and courageous missionaries and traveled all over the world. Wherever Holy Father could not go, Mother went. Mother always shared with Holy Father the news about her new foundations and number of branches and vocations in our society. Holy Father took great interest in her mission and visited our home for the dying destitutes in Calcutta and also our home in Jamaica. He also gave Mother a house in the Vatican to start a home for the service of the poorest of the poor – *Dono di Maria*.

Mother had a great love for the Vicar of Christ and his mission. She was obedient to him and to his teachings and was a great support to him.

Holy Father had a tender affection for Mother, deep reverence for her and was inspired by her and her mission of love.

Mother was the only blessed who lived, worked closely with him and died during his pontificate, who was beatified by him.

On March 13, 1997, you were elected to succeed Mother Teresa. What were your thoughts on that day? Was that overwhelming to you, Sister?

M. NIRMALA: Yes, it was! But the Lord prepared me, during Mass just before the election, to accept whatever



comes. So that grace that I received at that Mass helped me to accept this, trusting in God's mercy, and also trusting in my sisters' cooperation, and the prayers of Mother and the sisters.

Besides Blessed Teresa and John Paul II, who are your favorite saints?

M. NIRMALA: Saint Francis, the Little Flower, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross. These are the main ones. I love the saints.

Fr. John Hardon was a teacher and confessor to the Missionaries of Charity. Can you make a comment on what impression you had of Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.?

M. NIRMALA: Father John Hardon was a man of God and a great scholar. He was a holy priest filled with charity, zeal for souls, and obedience, especially

obedience to the Holy Father. He had great love for the Church. He was a true son of St. Ignatius of Loyola, a true Jesuit who worked for the greater glory of God and good of souls.

Is there something, Sister Nirmala, you would like to tell us that we didn't ask you today?

M. NIRMALA: Keep up the good work you are doing. It is God's work!

Thank you, Sister Nirmala! ●

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