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*Duplicate*

### OASIS IN CALCUTTA

"Something of Mother Theresa," we responded to the question of the young Bengali tour guide as we met in the lobby of the Oberoi Grand Hotel. He had asked, "What do you want to see in Calcutta besides the usual sights?"

He explained that naturally he was not able to arrange a meeting with Mother Theresa, that he could show us where she lived, but that he would instead take us to her first hospital in Calcutta.

The life of Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu began in Skopje, Yugoslavia on August 17, 1910 when she was born to shopkeepers. The seed of a vocation was planted in the mind of Agnes, the young socialist, as she listened to letters of Yugoslav Jesuit priests describing their missionary work in India. Later she entered the order of the Sisters of Loreto and taught for many years in India.

Her life took a different direction at the age of 56 when she received "a call within a call" while riding on a train. She described this divine decree of September 10, 1946 to her spiritual director. "The message was quite clear. I was to leave the convent and help the poor whilst living among them. It was an order. I knew where I belonged, but I did not know how to get there."

A few years later she exchanged her habit of the Sisters of Loreto for a blue and white Indian sari with a cross and formed her own order -- the Missionaries of Charity. Its primary objective was to serve the poor and needy, and the dying and destitute.

On the morning of October 17, 1976 we made our way to busy Kalighat Square not far from the Hooghly River to see for ourselves the first hospital the sisters were allowed to use in Calcutta.

Mother Theresa's determination to help the poor was relentless. She appealed many times to the city fathers for help. The Kali Temple (to the Hindu goddess Kali) is located in Kalighat Square. Quite near it is a building which had been used to house out-of-town pilgrims coming to Kali. By 1952 it had deteriorated to the point of being used only as a gambling den. The Calcutta Corporation gave this building to Mother Theresa in answer to her endless pleas. In Calcutta it was easy for the sisters soon to fill the building with the needy. Work of the missionaries was underway.

Hindu Brahmin priests did not at first take kindly to the idea of a hospital for the dying and destitute so near their temple. Stones were thrown; threats were made. It has been said that Mother Theresa -- five feet tall, her strong Slavic face set -- stood before them and said,

"If you want to kill me, kill me. But do not disturb the inmates. Let them die in peace."

Every day thousands of people mill around Kalighat Square. Big and small beggars, holy men, Hindus who make visits to the temple, and merchants who sell flower-petals to them to take to Kali rush, shove, and push. The effect is somewhat frightening.

We, too, shoved through the crowd and soon reached Mother Theresa's first hospital -- a low, one-story building -- where a sign on the door says Nirmal Hriday, the place for the pure of heart.

I was still emotionally reeling from a painful experience earlier that morning as we stood on the threshold of the small hospital. On Chowringhee Street in front of the hotel we had been approached by a three year old beggar-girl pleading with out-stretched hand as her sickly mother lay on the sidewalk with another baby in her arms. The sad memory became indelible.

There is no reception desk at this hospital. No long white corridor to lead one gradually to the sick rooms. Once inside the front door the full impact hits the visitor with immediate, shocking force. Here are the dying and destitute.

In this first large room there were about 50 men lying in rows of metal cots in various stages of sickness and dying. Bottles for intravenous feeding hung from

ropes strung across the room. I remember admonishing myself not to be sick.

The room was immaculately clean. A few young fresh-faced sisters walked from cot-to-cot administering to the needs of the men. Bandaging, feeding, comforting, touching. The scene was repeated in a second large room where women filled cots.

An outstanding realization was that there was no moaning, groaning or wailing. The atmosphere was calm, the men and women resigned.

The dream of Mother Theresa "that the dying and destitute could die in peace, in human dignity and touched for once by the love of God" was realized in front of our eyes inside these rooms.

The spiritual empire of Mother Theresa has since grown worldwide. In explaining why the Nobel Committee chose to give the Nobel Peace Prize to Mother Theresa in 1979, a member said, "Poverty and hunger and distress also constitute a threat to peace."

When she was chosen the saintly lady simply replied, "I am happy that the award recognizes that the works of love were works of peace."

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