



“Mother Teresa in Our Midst”

On her Confirmation day in 1986, 16-year-old Theresa Lindsay received a simple white envelope from the hand of her pastor at St. Patrick’s Church in Heppner, Father Brian McGovern. It contained a lock of human hair. A friend of Father McGovern’s, a Missionary of Charity in Pennsylvania, had sent it to him after a visit to her convent by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who got a haircut during her stay. The Sisters saved the hair, and Father McGovern’s friend mailed him a lock of it.

Theresa’s Confirmation gift meant a great deal to her. Two years earlier, at the first World Youth Day in Rome, she sat with other English-speaking pilgrims and listened as Mother Teresa told them “who Jesus is to me.” This close encounter with so holy a woman made an impression on the young pilgrim from Heppner that stays with her to this day.

In the ensuing years Theresa reverently made use of her Confirmation gift to invoke Mother Teresa’s intercession for those in need. She particularly noted the “profound sense of peace” that descended upon the many deathbeds she visited with the relic in hand.

In 2001 Theresa felt moved to entrust Mother Teresa’s hair to a fellow parishioner of Our Lady of Angels in Hermiston. Marianne Farney had just learned that her stage 4 malignant lymphoma had returned to

the attack. Since she had already undergone radical cancer treatment, Marianne turned to Mother Teresa for assistance, offering daily morning prayers in the presence of the relic. Before long Marianne felt that she was getting better, and her doctors noted diminishing levels of cancer cells in the tests they performed. When I met her this year, I could not help but notice that she is very much alive!

In 2002, Father Joseph Reinig, then pastor in Hermiston, placed the hair in a reliquary to assure reverent veneration by parishioners who requested a “visit” with the relic. In November 2013 the hair was sent to the Mother Teresa Center in Tijuana, Mexico, for verification. DNA analysis confirmed its authenticity, and in January of this year Theresa and Marianne received from Rome a certificate of authentication in Latin from the official promoter of the cause for Mother Teresa’s canonization. The Missionaries of Charity returned three first-class relics in theca—a glass-covered container about the size of a quarter. The one I am holding contains two pieces of hair in the shape of a tiny cross.

Of the three thecas created from the original lock of hair, Theresa (Lindsay) Pihl will keep one for her family. The other two she has generously bequeathed to Our Lady of Angels in Hermiston and to the Diocese of Baker. It is Theresa’s “great hope” that these reminders of holiness “go out to the streets” as Mother Teresa did, in visits to the sick and the homebound or to religious education classes and youth retreats. In keeping with Mother Teresa’s deep devotion to the

Eucharist, Theresa asks that the relics find a home near the Blessed Sacrament for veneration.

“Even the hairs of your head have all been counted,” our Lord assures us. To the abandoned and the dying, to the poorest of the poor, Mother Teresa embodied this promise of infinitely attentive Love. May the hairs of her head inspire us to do the same.

