



## Mother Teresa's Respect for Life

"Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life," Pope Francis declared as the Jubilee Year began. It is "the force that reawakens us to new life"; "the path which . . . Christians must . . . travel"; "the bridge that connects God and man." In Christian hospitality the world should find "an oasis of mercy."

No one in our time brought these words more convincingly to life than Mother Teresa of Calcutta, as Pope Francis recognized in choosing to name her a saint in the heart of the Jubilee Year. This October, with her holiness held high for imitation, Respect for Life Month invites us to be, like her, an awakening force, a sure path, a connecting bridge, for those crushed in spirit by the culture of death.

In the view of Mother Teresa, "the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child." Not surprisingly, the casualties of that war keep mounting. For once "we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people"—especially men—"not to kill one another?"

From legalized abortion the father learns "that he does not have to take any responsibility at all for the child he has brought into the world." And a father so instructed by his culture "is likely to put other women into the same trouble. So abortion just leads to more abortion."

From this dark social reality Mother Teresa drew a stark political conclusion: "Any country that accepts abortion is . . . teaching its people . . . to use . . . violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion."

To deter a woman from taking abortion's self-destructive path, Mother Teresa sought to persuade her that "love means to be willing to give until it hurts," reminding her that "Jesus gave even His life to love us." In short, "the mother who is thinking of abortion should be helped to love; that is, to give until it hurts her plans, or her free time, to respect the life of her child." And the same holds true for the child's father; he "must also give until it hurts."

When the path of abortion is taken, however, "the mother does not learn to love"; nor does the father. "Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love."

Very likely, such a country teaches the false lessons of contraception as well. Mother Teresa strongly advocated natural family planning instead. One poor woman came to her with words of gratitude for what she had been taught: "You people who have practiced chastity, you are the best people to teach us natural family planning because it is nothing more than self-control out of love for each other."

To this loving self-control contraception does not set itself in service, Mother Teresa pointed out. "In destroying the power of giving life through contraception, a husband or wife . . . turns the attention to [himself or herself] and so . . . destroys the gift of love. . . . In loving, the husband and wife must turn

the attention to each other, as happens in natural family planning, and not to self, as happens in contraception. Once that living love is destroyed by contraception, abortion follows very easily." Abortion, in turn, "brings a people to be spiritually poor, and that is the worst poverty and the most difficult to overcome."

As together we chart our nation's direction this election year, we should take to heart the prophetic diagnosis of the Saint of Calcutta. "We cannot solve all the problems in the world, but let us never bring in the worst problem of all, and that is to destroy love. And this is what happens when we tell people to practice contraception and abortion."