

MOTHER TERESA SHOWS FAMILIES HOW TO BE HOLY

Interview With Author Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle

By Genevieve Pollock

NEW YORK, MARCH 18, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Mother Teresa encouraged working with the poor not only in the slums of India, but primarily in our own families, says the author of a new book about the nun.

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle is the author of the recently published "Mother Teresa and Me: Ten Years of Friendship" (Circle Press).

She spoke with ZENIT about her experiences with Mother Teresa, now recognized as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, and the ways in which the nun taught the Missionaries of Charity, the congregation she founded, and others to love Christ in the poor.

Mother Teresa encouraged O'Boyle, a wife and mother, to live her vocation well and to help other families thrive. Over the years, the author has also written other books with this goal, including "The Heart of Motherhood: Finding Holiness in the Catholic Home," "The Domestic Church: Room By Room," and "Grace Cafe: Serving Up Recipes for Faithful Mothering."

As well, she is a host for Eternal Word Television Network, and will soon be premiering a new series, "Everyday Blessings for Catholic Moms."

O'Boyle has written for several newspapers and magazines, and maintains various personal blogs, including a new saints' Web site for youth.

In this interview with ZENIT, she spoke about the holiness of Mother Teresa, and the ways in which her teachings can be implemented in families today.

ZENIT: In one point in your book, you talk about Mother Teresa's unshakeable faith coupled with a feisty attitude; in another part you mention that she was called extraordinarily ordinary. Yet you also say that you have no doubt about Mother Teresa's eventual canonization. What makes you so certain? How does the normality of your relationship affect your belief that she is a saint?

O'Boyle: My relationship with Mother Teresa was certainly normal but I feel that it was extraordinary as well because I never had a doubt that I was visiting and corresponding with a living saint.

I saw great holiness in everything about Mother Teresa -- in her speech, her posture, her demeanor, the "glow" about her that radiated Christ's love, peace, and joy.

I knew that she truly lived the Gospel of Matthew: "Whatever you do to the least of these that are in my family, you do to me."

She lived her life, her every moment to satiate the thirst of Christ for souls.

She prayed that Jesus would live through her while she also served the Jesus living in all she met, which of course was from that same Gospel message (Matthew 25: 31-46): "You did it to me." Since her life echoed the crux of that passage I just knew that she was an absolute living saint who brought countless souls to God.

I also knew about her deep prayer life centered on the Eucharist as well as her intimate devotion to our Blessed Mother.

And even with all of this holiness, she wasn't an abstract saint from hundreds of years ago and no stranger to the realities of modern life. She met each person right where they were coming from and ministered to them at their unique level and state of life.

ZENIT: You describe how Mother Teresa saw Jesus in the face of each poor person, and this was the reason behind all of the work that she did and taught her Missionaries of Charity to do. How did she teach people to see others in this way? Many of us have a hard time seeing Jesus in our own family members, let alone the social outcasts of the world. Is there something she told you that helped you to understand her secret?

O'Boyle: Yes, the answer is very simple: Jesus taught us all how to see him in others in the Gospel of Matthew.

He taught us that everything we do to others we do to Jesus. Mother Teresa believed this concept wholeheartedly and served Our Lord in everyone.

Mother Teresa often said that it is far easier to serve or love Jesus in strangers and outcasts than it is to serve him in our own families, easier to give a dish of rice to a poor person on the other side of the world or to a complete stranger than to give that "dish of rice" to someone who is starving for love right under our own roof.

In very simple ways, she taught others to do the same as she did. She would simply raise up her hand and holding up each finger she would say, "You-did-it-to- me," in this manner teaching us that we can even be reminded of our duty to love Jesus in others every time we look upon our hands.

ZENIT: So many of us are surrounded by those "creature comforts" that Mother Teresa rejected for herself and her missionaries. Yet, especially when the economy is tough, we could all use her example of trust in Divine providence. Could you say more about the way she lived this virtue, and how modern families can live it as well?

O'Boyle: Blessed Mother Teresa would not own or use anything that she considered to be unnecessary or extravagant in her daily life and would not allow the Missionary of Charity Sisters to either.

She believed that they shouldn't own or use anything that the poor didn't own themselves.

They don't use the things that we might consider to be staple items, such as carpeting, hot

water, and fans or air conditioning.

She wanted the sisters to truly understand the plight of the poor and also felt that to be free of belongings would also allow the soul to be free to cling to Our Lord for everything, as well as help one to develop a deeper and more genuine love for God.

Modern day families might consider how they can live with a little less.

If we had less material objects to worry about, we might find that we have more time to tend to essential things and to be more present to one another.

Families today can pray together for an increase in faith, hope, and love. They can pray to offer their lives to God in full surrender, accepting God's holy will in their lives, asking him for all of their needs.

As Mother Teresa and her nuns have felt a deep freedom in giving their lives completely over to God and accepting whatever he gives them, families can strive to emulate that virtuous way of living as well.

ZENIT: Mother Teresa told you that your first apostolate should be to your family, husband and children, and she also placed importance on your writing for mothers, women and families. Why do you think she emphasized this?

O'Boyle: Mother Teresa often said, "Love begins at home."

That's where God puts us -- right in the middle of our family's life, right in the heart of the home. She instructed others to focus on the ones that are in our midst, starting with our families and then to reach out to others in need.

She knew that we shouldn't run off to do charity work when we may have family members at home needing our presence.

Yes, Mother Teresa encouraged me to write for women and families because she was acutely aware of the breakdown of the family in our day and the fact that we need to help and

encourage the family -- the vital cell of society.

We need to steer mothers and women in the right direction so that families will be protected from further breakdown.

Mothers and women in general can use much encouragement in a world that tears down the family, promotes killing our own unborn children through abortion and abortifacients, and euthanizing the elderly. We must pray and help the family.

ZENIT: You often brought your children, even at a young age, while following Mother Teresa in different venues around the country. How did you see your children affected by their nearness to holy people? Did they ever protest these religious events?

O'Boyle: I always felt that I should bring my children as near to holiness as possible as I raised them.

I brought my children to daily Mass whenever I could, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and near to any living "saint" I knew!

They never protested. It was their way of life. We must train our children in lives of holiness and prayer so that it will become as natural as breathing to them.

ZENIT: Mother Teresa said that we need to take care of the poor in our own homes first, but it seems easier sometimes to send a monetary donation to Haiti. How would she suggest that we go about taking those steps toward reaching out to the "poor" around us?

O'Boyle: "Love begins at home," she would say.

It is much easier to write out a check or even venture out to do charity work in some far-off land but it would be wrong to neglect our own families in the process.

To reach out to the "poor" around us we only need to open our eyes and hearts to see where there is a need.

Do we have a child that requires more of us, a spouse who feels neglected? Is there someone who is cranky but is really starving for our love? Do we have elderly parents who are lonely and crave a visit or some attention?

We have to trust Our Lord that he knows what he is doing in putting us together with our family members and neighbors. We all help to work out one another's sanctification too.

I believe that it starts first thing in the morning in the words of the Morning Offering, giving everything over to Our Lord so that he will sanctify all of our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of the day.

We must also respond with love to each person we meet along the way, particularly the ones who contradict us, antagonize us and annoy us!

God calls us to holiness in the here and now of our lives right in the nitty-gritty details.

On the Net:

Works of Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle: <http://web.mac.com/dcooperboyle/Site/Welcome.html>