

Dear Friends,

Many saints and other religious figures speak of a moment in their lives when they became aware of what God wanted from them. For Mother Teresa, now St. Teresa of Kolkata, this happened on a train journey in India in 1946. As a Loreto nun she had been teaching in India since taking her vows in Ireland, following the inspiration of St. Therese of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries, whose unfulfilled desire had been to work as a missionary. Mother Teresa had chosen Teresa as her religious name in honor of St. Therese and committed herself to India as her missionary home. The conviction that came to her in her train journey was that she now needed to devote her life to those who were poor by living in India among them.

The rest of her life was spent in carrying out the vision of how this living and working among those who were poor should be carried out, and by the time she died in 1997 her Missionaries of Charity numbered over four thousand sisters spread throughout the world. Her own spiritual life was a journey of dryness and darkness, very similar to her inspiration St. Therese and also St. Teresa of Avila. She remained faithful to the end and is now canonized in recognition of her faithfulness and unceasing dedication to those who were poor.

The disciples of Jesus had many moments of decision-making in their time spent with Jesus. To start with came their spontaneous response to his calling, and at the end there was their betrayal of him before his crucifixion. The moment described in today's Gospel comes halfway thru their journey with him. Jesus has talked with them, healed and performed other miracles, and now he turns to them to see what they have learned from their experience. Jesus is talking about the idea of a church and what such a gathering might be, so it makes sense that down thru the ages the Church has used this text to affirm the leadership of St. Peter and his successors as bishops of Rome.

When Jesus questions them as to what they think about him it is Peter who makes the leap and declared him to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God." For this leap Jesus confirms Peter as the rock on which he will build his Church.

Neither St. Peter nor St. Teresa of Kolkata found the paths they had chosen in their moments of illumination easy to follow. As we have observed, St. Peter was immediately rebuked by Jesus for misunderstanding the Messianic role and he would eventually follow his master to death by crucifixion. Mother Teresa was attacked by different social groups, whether because of her support of Catholic teaching on abortion and contraception or for her seeming to ignore much modern thinking on medicine and care. She was also troubled by an inner dark night of the soul.

If we follow in their footsteps we too will find ourselves confronted by challenges that come from both outside ourselves, whether personal or social, and from within, the conflicting struggle to decide at times which road is the right one to take. Good spiritual direction and prayer help. St. Peter and St. Paul chipping away in his ear from time to time, and Mother Teresa was assiduous in her regular prayer, confession and reception of spiritual direction. Christ does not leave us alone in our pursuit of his will, which will involve challenges to our understanding as well as our strength and commitment.

Your friend in Jesus  
Msgr. Zach