



Fifth Annual Christmas Lecture 2025

Saturday, December 13, 2025

by

Rev. Dr. John Felix Raj, SJ



PARASMANI

Centre for Research & Social Outreach

Ratan Pally, Santiniketan

(A Unit of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata)

Fifth Annual Christmas Lecture 2025

On 13.12.2025

At

**Parasmani Centre for Research and Social Outreach
Ratan Pally, Santiniketan**

Programme Schedule

- 11:00 a.m. : Registration
- 11:25 a.m. : MC welcomes the guests
- 11:30a.m. : Baul song
- 11:35 a.m. : Inauguration
- 11:40 a.m. : Talk on "**Mother Teresa: A Hymn of
Compassion and Love**"
- 12:20 p.m. : Q/A session
- 12:35 p.m. : Vote of Thanks
- 12:45 p.m. : Lunch

Mother Teresa

A Hymn of Compassion and Love

Fathers, Friends, Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we gather to celebrate the life and legacy of a remarkable individual who embodied the spirit of peace and compassion.

Mother Teresa, a Catholic nun and missionary, dedicated her life to serving the poor, the sick, and the marginalized. She received the Pope John XXIII Peace Prize in 1971 for her work with the poor, and her efforts to promote peace. This was one of her first major papal awards, given to her by Pope Paul VI. Her tireless work earned her global recognition, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

The Indian government honored Mother Teresa with the Bharat Ratna award in 1980, one of India's highest civilian honors, for her humanitarian work. The Reserve Bank of India honored her legacy by featuring her image on a ₹5 coin.

Compassion in Action

Let me share with you a powerful anecdote that showcases Mother Teresa's commitment to peace and compassion: It is about Mother Teresa's Encounter with a Dying Woman:

According to her biography, Mother Teresa found the woman covered in maggots, with only her face clean. Despite the woman's dire condition, Mother Teresa took her in and cared for her with love and compassion. As she nursed the woman back to some sense of dignity, the woman expressed gratitude and referred to her impending death as a beautiful passing, saying, "I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for." This anecdote showcases Mother Teresa's unwavering commitment to serving the poorest of the poor and bringing peace to those in dire need. This is the Power of Small Acts.

For Mother Teresa, her work was not just a calling but a way of life. She considered herself a humble instrument in God's hand, a pencil that wrote

letters of love and kindness to those in need. This profound humility and willingness to serve guided her tirelessly in her pursuit of peace.

She was a teacher for excellence and if there is one lesson she taught the world, that is compassion!

Early Life and Calling

Born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu (pronounced as Gonja Boyajeeu) on August 26, 1910, Mother Teresa passed away on September 5, 1997 at the age of 87. At 18, she left her home in Macedonia to join the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland. She then arrived in India in January 1929, marking the start of her devoted missionary work. She completed her religious training in Darjeeling in 1931 and returned to Calcutta to work as a teacher and later a principal at Loreto School for girls.

During this period, she became increasingly disturbed by the poverty she witnessed outside her convent which led to a profound shift in her life.

A Life of Service

A profound spiritual calling during a train journey to Darjeeling in 1946, which she described as "a call within a call," (a turning point), compelled her to serve the poorest of the poor. She left her teaching position at Loreto School in 1948 and went on to establish the Missionaries of Charity in 1950, a congregation dedicated to caring for the most vulnerable members of society.

Jesuit Influence on Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa once said, "I will always have time for the Jesuits." This affinity was reciprocated when a Jesuit Pope, Pope Francis declared her a saint on September 4, 2016.

The connection between the Jesuits and Mother Teresa dates back to her days as a Loreto Sister, a congregation inspired by the Society of Jesus. The Constitutions of St. Ignatius and his spiritual exercises significantly influenced her spirituality and life.

Mother Teresa often sought Jesuits as retreat preachers, spiritual directors, and confessors for herself and her sisters. Several Jesuits from the Calcutta Province, including Archbishop Ferdinand Perier and Cardinal Trevor L. Picachy, maintained close ties with her.

One notable Jesuit was Fr. Celeste Van Exem, Mother Teresa's earliest advisor and supporter. He played a crucial role in discerning the authenticity of her experiences and guiding her through the process of establishing the Missionaries of Charity. Fr. Van Exem also contributed significantly to writing the Congregation's Constitutions and served as a confessor and instructor.

Another prominent Jesuit writer, Fr. Edouard Le Joly SJ, penned numerous books on Mother Teresa, translated into over 25 languages. He worked closely with her for more than 25 years.

Nobel Lecture and Peace Advocacy

Mother Teresa's work on peace was multifaceted and far-reaching. She delivered a powerful Nobel Lecture on December 11, 1979, in Stockholm, Sweden, where she emphasized the importance of peace and the need to protect human life. In her lecture, she highlighted abortion as a significant destroyer of peace, describing it as "a direct war, a direct killing – direct murder by the mother herself". She also emphasized the importance of love beginning at home and advocated for natural family planning, teaching people self-control out of love for each other.

Pope John Paul II and Mother

During Pope John Paul II's 1986 visit to Kolkata, Mother Teresa did accompany him in the open Pope mobile. One notable anecdote is that Pope John Paul II held Mother Teresa in high esteem, often referring to her as a model of service and love. Their relationship was marked by mutual spiritual support and admiration.

In fact, Mother Teresa received significant support from Pope John Paul II for her missionary work, and he granted her requests for support and guidance. Their bond was rooted in their shared commitment to faith and serving the poor.

Peace Begins at Home

As Mother Teresa often said, "Peace begins with a smile." This simple yet profound statement highlights the importance of spreading joy and kindness in our daily interactions. Her mission went beyond the confines of her congregation, the Missionaries of Charity, as she reached out to people of all faiths, backgrounds, and nationalities.

During one of my encounters with Mother Teresa, I visited her for an interview at Mother House. Despite being informed that she was in a state of silence and contemplation, I requested the sister at the reception to notify Mother Teresa that a Jesuit from St. Xavier's College had arrived. Promptly, she emerged with a warm smile, greeting me with profound words: "I am meeting God in you. Your presence is not a disturbance; it is an inspiration." The interview that followed was enriching, leaving me with a sense of great joy and deep satisfaction. This poignant encounter underscores Mother Teresa's remarkable ability to perceive the divine presence in every individual, embodying her spirit as a contemplative in action. She was for me a Hymn of the Universe.

Reflections on Peace

Mother Teresa's path to peace was rooted in her deep spirituality. She once said,

The fruit of silence is prayer;
The fruit of prayer is faith;
The fruit of faith is love;
The fruit of love is service;
The fruit of service is peace.

This powerful reflection underscores the interconnectedness of contemplation, faith, love, and service in promoting peace.

One day in 1996, as a young priest, I took my parents to Mother House to meet Mother Teresa. She greeted them warmly, expressing gratitude for their sacrifice in offering one of their sons to the priesthood. As a token of appreciation, she blessed them and gifted each a rosary.

When it was my turn, I hesitated, saying, "Mother, I don't say the rosary." Her gaze intensified, and she asked, "What kind of priest are you? Don't you have devotion to Our Lady Mary?" Before I could respond, she placed a rosary in my palm, her eyes burning with conviction. "Say the rosary every day," she instructed, "and pray for the Church and the world." Her words, infused with a deep sense of purpose, resonated within me. From that moment on, I made it a point to pray the rosary daily.

Promoting Peace

When asked about promoting world peace, Mother Teresa would often respond, "What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love

your family." This response highlights the importance of starting with small acts of love and kindness in our own families and communities. By doing so, we can create a ripple effect of peace that extends far beyond our immediate surroundings.

Mother Teresa's work was guided by her profound understanding of human interconnectedness. As she said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." This reminder emphasizes the need for empathy, compassion, and mutual understanding in building a more peaceful world.

Her legacy extends far beyond her remarkable achievements. She showed us that peace is not just the absence of conflict but a state of being that can be cultivated through selfless service, empathy, and kindness.

As she often said, "Spread love wherever you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier." This philosophy guided her interactions with everyone she met.

Mother Teresa's Fight against Leprosy

In September 1957, Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity launched their mission to care for people affected by leprosy, establishing mobile clinics to reach those in need. By the mid-1960s, a permanent leper colony, Shanti Nagar ("Town of Peace"), was set up near Asansol, India, providing a safe haven for those ostracized by their families and society.

As the Missionaries of Charity expanded their efforts, they operated multiple centers and mobile clinics, offering medical care and support to leprosy patients. Mother Teresa also created a Leprosy Fund to educate people about the disease and combat the stigma surrounding it.

One of her most poignant quotes continues to resonate even today: "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted." This powerful message highlights the human rights violation that perpetuates prejudice and discrimination against people with leprosy.

Mother Teresa and Jyoti Basu

Despite their ideological differences, Jyoti Basu, the former Chief Minister of West Bengal, shared a remarkable friendship with Mother

Teresa rooted in their love for the poor. Basu often described their relationship, saying, "We both share a love for the poor." He ensured her requests were addressed promptly, allowing her to interrupt cabinet meetings if needed, and provided land for her charitable activities. On one occasion, he even requested her help in providing shelter for destitute women in prison.

Their mutual respect was evident in their visits and gestures. Mother Teresa would visit Basu during his hospital stays, offering prayers and blessings, while Basu would discreetly visit her and inquire about her health. Basu's office had standing instructions to grant Mother Teresa an audience without delay, reflecting the priority he gave to her requests.

Basu's admiration for Mother Teresa's work was evident in his words: "She makes me a bad Marxist since she makes me believe in godliness." After Mother Teresa's passing, Basu attended her funeral procession, despite staying away from the funeral mass due to his differing religious beliefs.

A notable anecdote highlights Basu's pragmatic approach to governance and his respect for Mother Teresa's humanitarian work. When a minister criticized Mother Teresa for picking up the poor and destitute from the streets, claiming it highlighted poverty, Basu responded, "She's doing what we, as Marxists and leaders, should be doing. If we start doing our job properly, I'll ask her to stop or join us."

Another instance of their lighthearted relationship was when Mother Teresa approached Basu for a favor, and he responded with a smile, "Mother, you come to me for favors and I grant them, but I know you and your sisters will still vote for the Congress party."

Mother Teresa and Mamata Banerjee

Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, shared a close and respectful relationship with Mother Teresa. Mamata often recalled their interactions, highlighting Mother Teresa's kindness and compassion. One notable instance was when Mother Teresa called Mamata at midnight, seeking help to protect the Missionaries of Charity from local troublemakers. Mamata immediately intervened and resolved the issue, demonstrating Mother Teresa's trust in her.

Mamata Banerjee's government celebrated Christmas in a big way in

Kolkata, and she attended midnight mass, showcasing her respect for Christian traditions and efforts to promote communal harmony. Their relationship might also be seen in the context of Mamata's efforts to reach out to minority communities, particularly Christians, as part of her political strategy.

Mother and Diana

Mother Teresa and Princess Diana shared a deep commitment to serving the poor and promoting peace, despite their different backgrounds and approaches. Princess Diana learned from and admired Mother Teresa. After visiting Mother Teresa's convent in Kolkata in 1992, Diana described the experience as "profound" and said it gave her the direction she had been searching for. Diana was deeply moved by the sisters' songs and found solace in their company. This encounter had a lasting impact on her life and charitable work.

Diana often spoke highly of Mother Teresa, and her butler, Paul Burrell, revealed that praying with Mother Teresa gave Diana the strength to cope with her separation from Prince Charles and the accompanying media scrutiny. Burrell noted that Mother Teresa's influence helped Diana develop a sense of independence and identity beyond her royal role. Their legacies continue to inspire people around the world to work towards creating a more just and compassionate society.

A Lasting Legacy

Mother Teresa's life was a testament to the transformative power of love and compassion. She worked tirelessly to bring peace to individuals and communities, irrespective of their background, religion, or nationality. Her work in the streets, slums, and hospitals of Calcutta is a shining example of her dedication to serving the poorest of the poor.

On June 20, 1985, President Ronald Reagan presented Mother Teresa with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour in the United States, at a White House ceremony. This prestigious award recognized her tireless work with the poor and marginalized around the world. First Lady Nancy Reagan looked on as President Reagan praised Mother Teresa's selfless dedication, saying, "Most of us talk about kindness and compassion, but Mother Teresa, the saint of the gutters, lives it."

President Reagan commended Mother Teresa's work, noting that her life had inspired many Americans to become personally involved in helping the poor, and praised her order, the Missionaries of Charity, for spreading love and peace worldwide.

The ceremony highlighted Mother Teresa's global impact, as she was described as a "citizen of the world" who transcended borders and nationalistic considerations with her selfless service.

Mother's Commitment and Bravery

Mother Teresa's commitment to peace and service led her to some of the most challenging places on earth, including war-torn regions. While there is not specific information on her visiting Palestine for dialogue between countries, her actions in Beirut, Lebanon, during the Siege of Beirut in 1982 showcase her bravery and dedication. She brokered a temporary cease-fire between Israeli forces and Palestinian guerrillas to rescue 37 children trapped in a front-line hospital. Accompanied by Red Cross workers, she navigated the war zone to evacuate the young patients, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to saving lives and promoting peace.

Although Mother Teresa's work was not limited to Palestine, her efforts in conflict zones like Lebanon highlight her tireless advocacy for peace and humanity. Her legacy continues to inspire people worldwide to work towards creating a more peaceful and compassionate world. Mother Teresa's actions serve as a powerful reminder of the impact one person can have when driven by a deep sense of purpose and compassion.

As we reflect on Mother Teresa's life, we are reminded of the importance of living a life of purpose and meaning. She once said, "We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do." This statement highlights the impact that small acts of kindness can have on others. By incorporating these acts into our daily lives, we can create a more peaceful and compassionate world.

Mother Teresa's legacy continues to inspire people around the world. She showed us that even the smallest acts of kindness can have a profound impact on others. As we strive to create a more peaceful world, let us remember her words: "Do small things with great love." By doing so, we can make a significant difference in the lives of those around us.

Canonization

Mother Teresa was canonized a saint by Pope Francis on September 4, 2016, in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City. The ceremony was attended by tens of thousands of people, including 15 government delegations and 1,500 homeless individuals from Italy. She was recognized for her selfless service to the poor, particularly through her founding of the Missionaries of Charity. The Vatican acknowledged two miracles attributed to her intercession: the healing of Monica Besra, an Indian woman with a brain tumor, and Marcilio Andrino, a Brazilian man with multiple brain abscesses.

Mother Teresa - Criticisms

Critics of Mother Teresa's work, including the Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), have raised several issues. Some key areas of criticism include:

Conversion, Poor medical care, Mother's associations, Her hardline Catholic view, Donations, Lack of addressing the root causes of poverty, Political stance.

Mother Teresa's response to criticism has been widely acknowledged. I have often highlighted her remarkable grace and steadfastness in the face of detractors. Undeterred by her critics, she likened herself to Jesus having a Judas among his followers, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to her cause.

Mother Teresa was sometimes challenged about the long-term effects of her humanitarian ministry. For example, she was asked, why give people fish to eat instead of teaching them how to fish? She had a quick response: "But my people can't even stand. They're sick, crippled, demented."

Bengal's Role

In Kolkata, Mother Teresa is often affectionately called "Ma Durga" due to the striking similarities between her life's work and the qualities embodied by the Hindu goddess Durga - strength, compassion, maternal care, and dedication to serving the poor.

Her Nirmal Hriday home's proximity to the revered Kalighat Temple, dedicated to Goddess Kali (a fierce aspect of Durga), further reinforces this cultural comparison, highlighting how her humanitarian efforts were

deeply rooted in local religious and cultural values.

I want to emphasise here the close connection between Mother Teresa and the city of Kolkata. The city played a pivotal role in her journey to selfless service to humanity and finally to sainthood by embracing her compassion and making her a symbol of celebration. She was the joy of Kolkata, which is why it is known as the city of joy.

I believe Mother Teresa would not have been declared a saint in the same way if she had lived and worked in a different city. Kolkata's character as a "City of Joy" and its inherent pluralism made her a local saint even before the Vatican declaration.

Calcutta has a special devotion to female deities, particularly Durga and Kali, due to Bengal's strong tradition of Shaktism which reveres the divine feminine as a powerful, nurturing, and protective force.

Exhibitions and Legacy

In a humble effort, The Goethals Library and Research Centre at SXC had hosted an exhibition of paintings on Mother Teresa at St. Xavier's College in October 2016 to keep alive Mother Teresa's philosophy and started the project of preserving paintings that depict her work and life.

The event was a follow-up to a symposium and part of the celebrations marking Mother Teresa's canonization. The exhibition, titled "A Tribute to St. Teresa of Calcutta," showcased around 90 paintings by several eminent artists.

Funeral Service

Mother died on September 5, 1997. Her funeral service was a grand affair, befitting her stature as a global icon of compassion and service. The Indian government organized a state funeral with full honors on September 13, 1997, at the Netaji Indoor Stadium in Calcutta. Dignitaries from around the world, including Hillary Clinton and Corazon Aquino, attended the ceremony.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, representing Pope John Paul II, delivered the eulogy, praising Mother Teresa's extraordinary spiritual vision, love, and service to humanity. The service included speeches by Indian government officials and traditional Indian music and prayers.

Burial

After the funeral service, Mother Teresa's body was taken in a procession to the Mother House, the headquarters of the Missionaries of Charity, where she was buried. The burial site is a simple tomb within the Mother House complex, marked by a white marble slab bearing the inscription, "Love one another as I have loved you." The tomb has become a place of pilgrimage for people of all faiths, seeking inspiration from her life and legacy.

Growth of the Missionaries of Charity

As of January 2025, the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by Mother Teresa, had about 5,750 sisters serving in 760 homes across 139 countries.

When Mother Teresa passed away in 1997, there were 3,914 nuns and 594 homes in 126 countries. The number of houses and sisters, as well as their global presence, has grown significantly since the order's founding with 12 members in 1950.

Conclusion

In my biography, "Magis Mantra," Prof. Prabhad Datta pens a heartfelt chapter about my association with Mother Teresa, showcasing my deep admiration for her selfless service to the poor and marginalized.

Mother Teresa's life stands as a testament to the transformative power of love and compassion. May her legacy inspire us to be beacons of peace, spreading joy and kindness wherever we go.

As we reflect on her remarkable life, let us strive to follow her example, embodying the values of love, kindness, and compassion that she embodied. In doing so, we can create a more peaceful and harmonious world, where everyone can live with dignity and respect.





Father Felix Raj with Mother (Saint) Teresa of Calcutta in 1994.

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The Reserve Bank of India honored Mother's legacy by featuring her image on a ₹5 coin.

Mother Teresa: A Timeline

- 1910 : Born Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu in Skopje, Macedonia
- 1928 : Joined the Loreto Sisters, taking the name Sister Teresa
- 1931 : Began her career as a teacher at Loreto School in Kolkata, India
- 1937 : Took her final vows as a nun
- 1946 : Experienced a profound calling to serve the poor, often referred to as a "call within a call"
- 1950 : Founded the Missionaries of Charity
- 1952 : Established Nirmal Hriday, a home for the dying and the destitute in Kolkata
- 1957 : Began working with leprosy patients, eventually founding Shanti Nagar, a leper colony near Asansol, India
- 1971 : Received the Pope's Peace Prize
- 1979 : Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her selfless service to humanity
- 1980 : Honoured with India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna
- 1982 : Rescued 37 disabled children from a Beirut orphanage during the Lebanon War
- 1985 : Received the Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in the United States
- 1997 : Passed away on September 5th, leaving behind a legacy of love, compassion, and service to the poor



Rev. Dr. John Felix Raj, S.J. (born 1954) is a Jesuit priest of the Calcutta Province, renowned for his multifaceted contributions to education, administration, and philanthropy. As the founder Vice-Chancellor of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, and former Rector and Principal of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, he has left an indelible mark on the academic landscape.

Fr. Felix Raj's academic expertise spans Development Economics, Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization, with a strong focus on Spirituality, Leadership Skills, and Training. His commitment to education extends beyond the classroom, with initiatives like "**College to Village and Village to College**" and "**One Rupee Revolution**," which have pioneered innovative approaches to learning.

A dedicated philanthropist, Fr. Raj has been associated with numerous NGOs and has engaged in various charitable activities. His leadership has been instrumental in the expansion of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata, including the establishment of the **Raghampur rural campus** and the construction of **twin hostels** in 2014 respectively.

During his tenure as Principal, he introduced new undergraduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. courses, cementing the college's reputation for academic excellence. His vision and leadership were crucial in shaping the values and framework of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, which has become a model for alumni participation.

Fr. Raj's achievements have been recognized with eighteen prestigious awards, including the **Banga Bibhushan** and **Siksha Ratna** awards from the Government of West Bengal. He has authored and co-authored **twelve books** and presented papers at numerous national and international conferences.

In August 2012, former West Bengal Governor M.K. Narayanan paid tribute to Fr. Raj's remarkable qualities, highlighting his distinctive blend of administrative skill, spiritual devotion, and intellectual depth. Narayanan hailed him as a "true icon in education."

In January 2024, on the occasion of his golden jubilee as a Jesuit, Mamata Banerjee, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of West Bengal congratulated him, saying: "This milestone is a testament to your dedication and unwavering commitment throughout your illustrious career. Your long and inspiring leadership at St. Xavier's has been marked by zeal and passion, earning the institutions a pride of place in the whole of India."