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Saint Teresa of Calcutta: A Franciscan at Heart



Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv. was blessed to have enjoyed a 15 year friendship with St. Mother Teresa, helping connect her ministry with that of St. Maximilian Kolbe, who shared her devotion to the Blessed Mother.

"Jesus wants us to be joyful, spread His joy."

Those were the final words ever spoken by future saint Mother Teresa to Fr. James McCurry, OFM Conv., providing a fitting end to their fascinating 15 year friendship.

Fr. James currently serves as the Minister Provincial of the Our Lady of Angels Province of the Franciscan Friars Conventual,

in Ellicott City, Maryland, but on October 10, 1982 he was in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican for the canonization of St. Maximilian Kolbe, a Conventual Franciscan priest and martyr, who died in the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz. Fr. James was the leader of the Franciscan delegation from the United States and he played a prominent role in promoting St.

Maximilian's candidacy for sainthood. His presence in Rome that day led to a "chance meeting" which would change his life.

"Because of the role I had played in promoting St. Maximilian Kolbe, working towards his

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One of the nuns of the Missionaries of Charity carries a relic of St. Mother Teresa at the saint's canonization in St. Peter's Square in Sept., 2016.

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sainthood, I was given the special honor, at the Mass of Canonization, to be in the offertory procession,” said Fr. James. “That necessitated my being inside Saint Peter’s Basilica before the Mass got started. I got there quite early and I had been praying in the church and, out of the clear blue sky, who did I bump into, none other than Mother Teresa. We stopped to chat and I asked why she was there for the canonization.”

Fr. James had been aware of Mother Teresa from the time she came to prominence after her appearance at the Eucharistic Congress in 1976. He had seen her speak from a distance, but had never met this future saint prior to that day.

During their conversation at St. Peter’s that morning, Fr. James came to learn that “Mother” had a deep devotion to St. Maximilian because of their

shared consecration to the Blessed Mother, the Immaculata.

The brief meeting led to an invitation for Fr. James to speak to the Sisters of Mother Teresa’s religious congregation, the Missionaries of Charity and, from that day until her death in 1997, and beyond, Fr. James has provided retreats, talks and other spiritual services to the nuns and priests of the Missionaries of Charity. Although Mother Teresa sought council from many priests around the world, she did develop a close relationship with Fr. James, as together they authored prayers, greeted and blessed the poor and spent hours discussing spiritual issues.

According to Fr. James, Mother Teresa viewed the Missionaries of Charity as Franciscans at heart, which is a big reason why she had such a devotion to St. Maximilian. In fact, both of them both were emphatic about distributing Miraculous Medals, by the hundreds, wherever they were.

This practice inspired Fr. James, during his tenure as the National Director of the Militia of the Immaculata, to present Mother Teresa with the organization’s annual St. Maximilian Kolbe Award, an honor reserved for outstanding Catholics who promote devotion to Our Lady with the ideals of St. Maximilian Kolbe. In 1991 Fr. James visited Mother Teresa in Washington, D.C., to present the award. During his visit the two recited together the entire St. Maximilian Kolbe *Prayer of Consecration* to Our Lady and she then enrolled herself in the Militia of the

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A Miraculous Medal was never far from the sight of Saint Mother Teresa, as they were a symbol of her intense devotion to the Blessed Mother. When greeting the poor, she would have baskets of the medals, which she would kiss and give to those desperate to spend even a few moments in her presence.

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Immaculata. Later, she also wrote a reflection to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Saint Maximilian's birth, in which she spoke about St. Maximilian's sufferings and how Our Lady helped him to offer his life as a martyr.

With Fr. James in attendance at St. Peter's Basilica once again, Mother Teresa was canonized Saint Teresa of Calcutta, by Pope Francis, on Sept. 4, 2016. The experience crystalized Fr. James' reflections on his friend.

"One of the themes that Mother always stressed, not only with me but with everybody, were the two words 'I thirst,' that Jesus uttered as he was dying on the cross," said Fr. James. "Those two words more or less became the motto of the Missionaries of Charity. Mother said that her mission was to satiate the thirst of Jesus. She always seemed to have in view that image of Jesus hanging on the cross at Calvary saying 'I thirst.' By giving water to the poor, she was quenching the thirst of Jesus. By giving them bread or shelter or clothes, all of that was helping Jesus as He was presenting Himself to her in the distressing disguise of the poorest of the poor. That's the whole spirituality of Mother Teresa in a nutshell."

Fr. James last saw Mother Teresa on her final visit to her New York convent in the South Bronx. It was in June of 1997 and she was already quite feeble, with most of her time confined to a wheelchair. After the Mass which was celebrated that day, she greeted each of the priests, one by one, and Fr. James came to realize this would be the last time he would see her.

With a basket of Miraculous Medals on her lap, her last words to Fr. James were, "Jesus wants us to be joyful, spread His joy."

"It's an extraordinary grace that God had given me to have walked, and known, and rubbed shoulders with a saint like Mother Teresa," said Fr. James. "In our Catholic tradition, for someone like me as I was growing up, the saints were distant figures from the past, whom we put on pedestals, whom we invoked in prayer, loved and admired, and tried to imitate, but we didn't know them face to face.

"We hadn't heard their real human voices, we hadn't seen the wrinkles in their faces, the bunions on their feet. So, when I think of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta, I think of somebody very human whom I was graced to meet in her humanness. Whenever anyone was in Mother Teresa's presence, they knew they were in the presence of someone very holy, a deeply human holiness."

When asked if his "chance meeting" and subsequent relationship with this holy woman was pre-ordained to serve as a bridge between the strikingly similar ministries of two saints from different eras, Fr. James did not shy away from the possibility.

"Nothing in life happens by accident. It is all by Divine Providence, so I am absolutely convinced that my bumping into Mother Teresa at the Canonization of St. Maximilian Kolbe by Saint John Paul II was directed," said Fr. James. "I spoke with two saints that day. On the same day, two future saints said to this little nobody of a friar, teach us, teach others, spread the Consecration to Our Lady. Nothing in that scenario was by happenstance or chance."

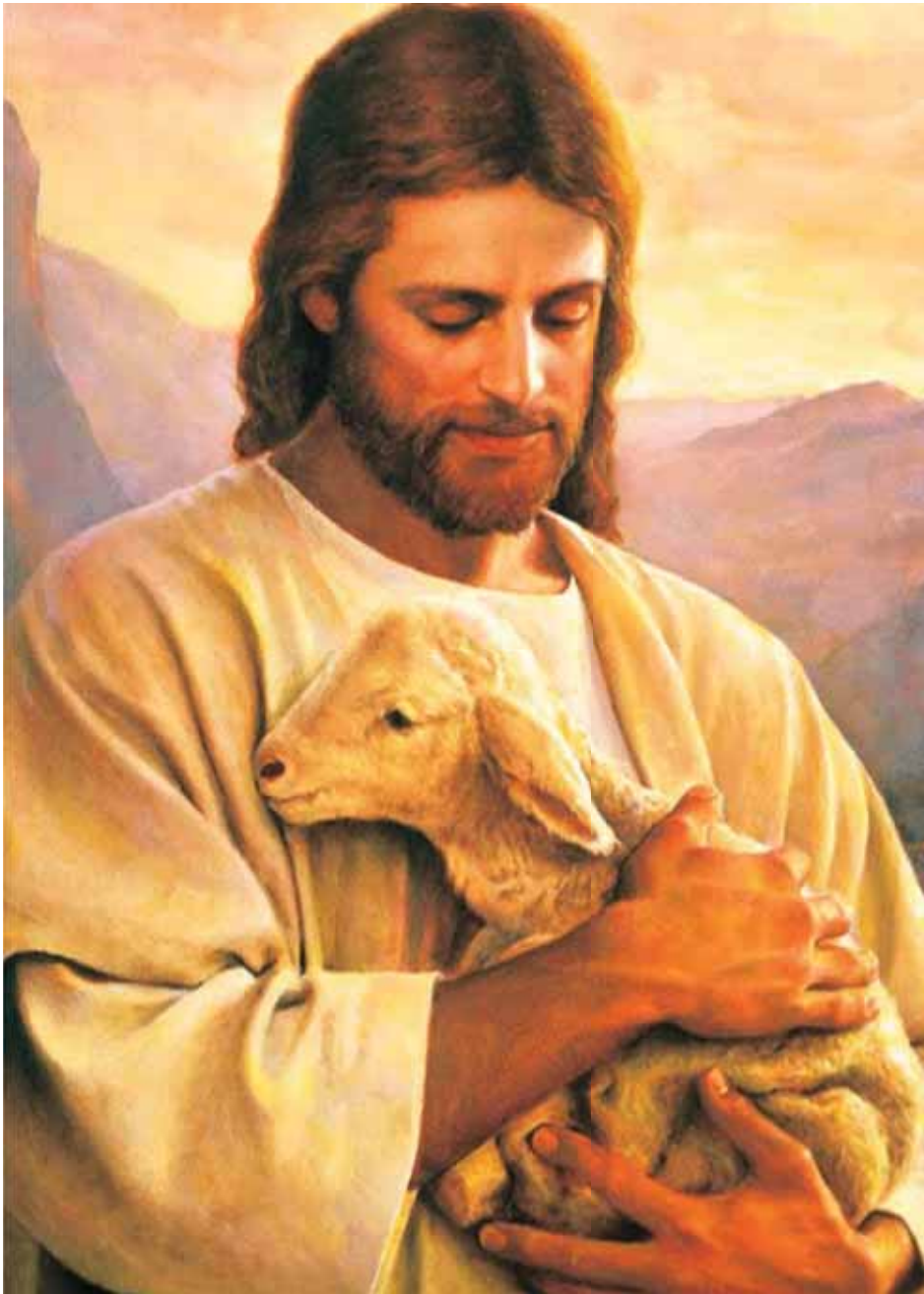
"I certainly reckon that day, the 10th of October, 1982, will be engraved in my heart as one of the most important days of my life. It gave to my life and Franciscan priesthood, a focus I wouldn't have had otherwise."



Fr. James and Mother Teresa share a warm moment during one of their frequent visits.

Jesus Our Shepherd

By Fr. Nicholas Rokitka, OFM Conv.



The image of Jesus as a shepherd can have a lot of different meanings. There is the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine sheep to search out the one who is lost. There is the image of a shepherd guiding his flock to water and food, and away from potential dan-

ger. Or maybe you think of the shepherd that weathers out the storm with his flock. It's a beautiful image that is worth a lifetime of reflection.

In John 10:27, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice... ..and they follow me." One of the vows that Franciscans and

other religious take is the vow of obedience. The word obedience comes from a Latin word meaning "to listen." Sheep would become familiar with their shepherd to the point that even if many flocks of sheep were mixed together and eating, a shepherd could call his flock and only those sheep would leave. The sheep have become so familiar to the shepherd that they know his voice. Listening to the shepherd's call is important.

Although we cannot listen to the voice of Jesus in the same way as the Apostles or disciples did, it is important that we tune in to His voice. We may all have different ideas of what that sounds like, but before we can follow the voice of the shepherd we must know his voice.

Try to think of someone's voice who is unforgettable. Maybe it's a famous singer like Frank Sinatra singing "Fly Me to the Moon," or the voice of an actor saying some iconic line, like Darth Vader saying, "Luke, I am your father." Or maybe something more contemporary like Adele, and after a few chords on the piano, you hear her sing, "Hello...it's me." There's something about who they are and what they are saying that cannot be taken away from us. No matter how hard

some may try to take that memory away from you, you will not be able to forget about Frank Sinatra or Darth Vader or Adele. This is an unlikely group of people, but it can give you an idea of what it means to know a voice.

Again, although we cannot hear Jesus' voice like the disciples did and we only have His words, Jesus speaks to us every time we hear the Gospel. And unlike Frank Sinatra or Darth Vader or Adele, who entertain us and can bring us great joy, the voice of Jesus is the only one that can bring us to eternal life.

I worry that listening to the voice of Jesus is getting increasingly more difficult. I sometimes hear stories from family who remember when there were only three channels on the television. Now there are hundreds. While the introduction of Facebook, Twitter, and other types of media can be great ways to connect people, they can also be a platform for voices which are not of Jesus Christ. For better or worse, there are just a lot more voices out there today, and that can make listening to Jesus more difficult.

With the dramatic increase of voices in the world, it's even more important that we are thinking about how we tune in to the voice of Jesus. Thankfully, we have many reliable ways to hear His voice.

The best way to listen to the voice of Jesus is the Holy Scriptures. No other voice can speak to us as clearly. The presence of Jesus Christ in the Gospels must never be overlooked.

In the Seven Sacraments of the Church, we experience the love of God in symbols and rituals.

The Church itself, with the Pope as its leader, bishops as successors to the Apostles, and the many priests and religious, continues to be a consistent and powerful voice in the world.

Saints are people either in our own lifetime or throughout history who have listened to the voice of Jesus and have given us an example to follow. St. Francis is an example who is universally recognized for his radical following of the Gospel. A modern saint like St. Teresa of Calcutta and her love of the poor certainly stands out. St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a woman who lived

*“My sheep hear
my voice... and
they follow me.”
John 10:27*

and died on American soil, listened to the voice of Jesus leading to her conversion. Her story is also a powerful example of how Jesus speaks to everyone, no matter the point in history or culture.

Or maybe it's someone in your family or a teacher or a friend. I believe there are saints living and working in our communities today.

Listening to the voice, and then acting on the voice, is our way to eternal life. And the voice of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd is still calling us. Whether we've been following Christ our entire lives, or we are still in the beginning stages of responding to Him, whether we're married, or single, or consecrated religious, the voice of Jesus Christ calls all of us, leading us to eternal life.

About Friar Nick



Friar Nicholas Rokitka, OFM Conv. currently serves as a Theology and Business instructor at Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore, Maryland. He is a graduate of St. Francis High School in Athol Springs, New York and was ordained a priest in June of 2016. He earned his BA at Hilbert College in Buffalo, NY and his M.Div and S.T.B. from The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. Fr. Nick enjoys hiking and biking.

Join the Franciscans on Pilgrimage to Celebrate The Life of St. Maximilian Kolbe

One-hundred years ago in Rome, the Franciscan Friars Conventual gave birth to the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), a worldwide movement of Marian consecration and evangelization, founded by Saint Maximilian Kolbe.

To mark this occasion, the Franciscans have organized a unique pilgrimage to the sites associated with St. Maximilian and the MI in both Rome and Poland, which will take place Aug. 7-18, 2017. Since the canonization of St. Maximilian in 1982, his fellow Franciscans have been guiding pilgrimages in his footsteps.

This 11 day pilgrimage is under the leadership of Fr. Jobe Abbass, Fr. James McCurry and Fr. David Stachurski, friars who will immerse the participants in an unforgettable experience of culture, history, religion, and spirituality - all in a relaxing and enjoyable community of Americans and Canadians. Mass will be offered daily and pilgrims of all ages are welcome.

The journey will begin Aug. 7th when the pilgrims will arrive in Rome, where they will stay in a hotel just a short walk from St. Peter's Square. The following day a welcome dinner will be held at Casa Kolbe Hotel in ancient Rome.

On Aug. 9th the first tour will take place as you visit many ancient Roman monuments, including the Colosseum, Roman Forum, Circus Maximus, Arch of Constantine and St. Peter's Basilica.

The following day, the group will make the journey to Assisi for a comprehensive tour of places associated with St. Francis, including St. Clare's Basilica and St. Francis' Basilica. On Aug. 11, the pilgrims travel from Rome to Warsaw, Poland and take in many of the sites in the city center, which has been completely rebuilt since the destruction of World War II. The tour will include visits to St. John's Cathedral and the Royal Castle Square.

On Saturday, Aug. 12, the group will drive to Niepokalanow to visit the Franciscan Friary founded by St. Maximilian in 1927. Here you will



St. Peter's Basilica (top) at the Vatican and Wawel Cathedral in Krakow are just two of the amazing stops on the MI anniversary pilgrimage.

tour a museum dedicated to his life and celebrate Mass.

On Sunday the journey continues south to Czestochowa, home of the Polish National Shrine of Jasna Gora (Bright Mountain). Over the next three days, the pilgrims will continue to visit Polish cities, making a stop at Auschwitz, the former Nazi concentration camp where St. Maximilian died, Wadowice, Krakow and Wieliczka, as we continue to tour religious and historical landmarks. The group will return to Warsaw on Aug. 17 for a day of rest before returning home on the 18th.

The cost for this All-Inclusive Tour is \$3,395 from New York and \$3,480 from Toronto with a single room supplement of \$750. Departures from other cities are also available.

For more information visit olaprovince.org or contact Fr. Jobe Abbass by email at jabbass@ustpaul.ca, or PAT TOURS at 1-800-388-0988.

St. Kateri Shrine embodies St. Francis' love of ecology



This statue of St. Kateri towers at her shrine in Fonda, New York.

In a rural area of upstate New York, 40 miles west of Albany, is a holy swath of land that connects the ministries of two extraordinary saints – St. Francis of Assisi and St. Kateri Tekakwitha – each devoted to seeing God’s Glory in the elements of nature.

The National St. Kateri Tekakwitha Shrine honors the first Native American saint and the patroness of ecology. It is directed by the Franciscan Friars, followers of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology.

St. Kateri was a Kanienkehaka Indian, commonly known as a Mohawk, who lived in the 17th century. Despite being orphaned, badly scarred and blinded by smallpox, she fought to study and practice the Catholic faith, eventually making a vow of perpetual virginity, offering herself to the Blessed Mother Mary.

She endured great suffering from illness until the time of her death at the tender age of 23. Tradition holds that her final words were, “Jesus, I love you.”

According to witnesses, within a few minutes of her death, the pock marks from smallpox vanished and her face radiated.

The Kateri Shrine was founded in 1938 by Fr. Thomas Grassman, a Franciscan and amateur archeologist. He renovated a 200 year-old barn, near the village of Fonda, NY, turning it into a museum and chapel. By 1957, the entire Iroquois Indian village had been excavated.

“Fr. Grassman found the site while looking for the area where Kateri lived,” said Bill Jacobs, the current Executive Director of the Shrine, the first layman to hold the position. “He knew it was a holy site and wanted to make sure it would be preserved.”

Concerning Kateri’s faith, Jacobs added, “Kateri took her religion and faith out into nature, carving crosses into trees or making crosses out of sticks. There are a lot of similarities in how she saw the world and how St. Francis saw the world.”

The Shrine’s mission is to serve Native Americans and First Nations, from Canada and the U.S. Two weekends each year are dedicated to these peoples, with special Masses. The highlight of these Masses are performances by the Kanienkehaka Choir, which sings hymns in native languages while dressed in traditional clothing.

With increasing interest in St. Kateri and growing numbers of visitors, the Shrine is seeking support to create more temporary housing on site.

“Many Native Americans drawn to visit the Shrine are not local,” added Jacobs. “They want to come and participate, but they need places to stay. We are working on retreat centers to allow them to stay, as well as tents and other portable housing.”

To learn more about the Shrine and St. Kateri, or to make a donation, visit www.katerishrine.com. Please consider a gift to the Shrine today.



Friar Mark Steed (third from left), spiritual director at the St. Kateri Shrine, with the Native American choir, following a Mass in 2015.



Friar Shop

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of

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A Silver Lining

After remembering family members and special acquaintances in your will, you may also wish to remember the Companions of St. Anthony. By doing so, you will honor the memory of St. Anthony and further the important mission of his Franciscans.

There are several ways to make distributions to the Companions in your will. The following are some examples which you may wish to take to your attorney.

Percentage

“I give, devise, and bequeath to Companions of St. Anthony,

_____ % of my estate for its corporate needs and purposes.”

Residue

(Whatever is left after other bequests have been granted.) “All the residue of my estate, including real and personal property, I give, devise, and bequeath to Companions of St. Anthony, for its corporate needs and purposes.”

Specific Dollar Amount

“I give, devise, and bequeath to Companions of St. Anthony, for its corporate needs and purposes.”

Specific Property

“I give, devise, and bequeath to Companions of St. Anthony, for its corporate needs and purposes.”

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