

I was fresh off a plane from one of my missionary trips, the hardest one yet, when on a hot summer morning on June 28, 1986, I attended a breakfast at the Omni Hotel in downtown Miami, where Mother Teresa was the guest speaker. She stood there in her crisp white and blue sari, all 4 feet 11 inches of her, barely breaking over the podium, speaking softly and slowly, but her message echoing powerfully the words of our Lord.

When I first heard she was coming to Miami for this event, I was excited but doubtful that I would get my hands on a ticket to be able to attend. The $15 tickets for this event were not easy to come by. Most of the tickets went to leaders from a cross section of religions, others to political leaders, and the rest to members of various anti-abortion groups in South Florida, with all the proceeds going to the Miami Right to Life, which was sponsoring the event. But I immediately began my quest for one. I, along with some of my church friends, made various inquiries throughout the archdiocese and followed all roads that lead to possible tickets, but our efforts, regardless of how connected and involved some of us were, proved to be in vain. I resigned myself to the fact that I was not going to be attending this event, and figured I would just hang out at the hotel that morning and try to get a glimpse of her. As you might have guessed, however, God had other plans for me. I received a call from a friend who had pulled off the impossible, and found myself all of a sudden holding a golden ticket.

As I sat at my table in the ballroom of the hotel that morning, it didn't hit me at first where I was, what I was about to witness, or what I was about to listen to, because the excitement of just being there clouded my mind. The room was full to capacity. Everyone was chatting while we were being served, engaged in various topics of conversation, but mainly anticipating what had brought all of us there. Some people actually ate. I couldn't (strange enough as that may sound). To this day, I can't remember what was served. I mean, the possibility of seeing in person this Nobel Peace Prize recipient, this queen of missionaries, this living saint, was just overwhelming — who could eat? Mother Teresa was not at her table during that time. As one of her spokespeople later explained

during a press conference, she was absent from her table during the meal because she didn't eat in public.

When the time came for her to make her entrance, I remember you could hear a pin drop. She was escorted into the room and was accompanied to the podium by then Miami Mayor, Xavier Suarez. I remember feeling a lump in my throat when I first saw her, how old, petite and fragile she looked. And the indescribable aura that filled the room.

Mother Teresa spoke that day about her work with the poor and about many experiences she had with people she had encountered throughout the world. She recounted how she had seen people die for lack of a glass of water, and spoke of a different kind of poverty, what she referred to as "hunger for love." She also spoke about AIDS victims, and what a lonely disease it had become. Most of all, though, she spoke about, and strongly condemned, abortion. At one point saying words she had been known to repeat over and over, "If you don't want the child, give it to me. I want it."

Those present listened to her with such attention, almost in awe. How could we not? She instilled such reverence and respect from people while leading an incredibly humble and committed life. Mother Teresa heard and felt a clear calling from Jesus Christ, something almost enviable, because how many of us are worthy of hearing that? And she answered that calling in a way that is, I think, unattainable to us average souls. With a body so small in stature but a spirit so large in faith and compassion, she was able to accomplish things in ways I can't even begin to fathom. Her life is an example to us all, in more ways than one, and I, for one, take comfort in knowing that even she, during certain times in her life, faltered in her faith and lived through dark nights, and still managed to stay true to God's plan. Such hope in that for us unholy people.

I recall one moment in particular during her speaking, when she shared an anecdote about a poor child giving her his candy to give to an even poorer child, and connecting that to one of my own experiences during my then most current missionary trip. It was then that it hit me, where I was, and what I was experiencing right at that moment. It was

incredible how in a roomful of people, that whole experience felt so personal to me. Like she was talking directly to me. There are moments you remember all your life, this was one of those moments.

Some of what she recounted that day, I am currently reading about in "Come Be My Light." A powerful book containing a collection of her private writings. My reading this book is actually what prompted me to put down in writing my recollection of my experience that summer day in 1986. I have shared with my friends throughout the years such experience, and have been asked many times if I got to meet her personally. And the answer is no, I did not meet her personally. Nor did I get close enough to shake her hand. I would have liked to. But I felt that day, as I do today, that I didn't need to. Because that living saint of darkness, as she was known to many, radiated an unusual kind of energy throughout that room, and a beam of it reached me and touched me personally. My faith was fortified by her presence and by the sound advice I heard from her that remarkable and unforgettable day — that day when I found myself in the same room as Mother Teresa.

> "If I ever become a saint — I will surely be one of 'darkness,' I will continually be absent from heaven — to light the light of those in darkness on earth."
> *– Mother Teresa, September, 1959*

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