

## LOVE UNTIL IT HURTS

### *One of the most 'uncomfortable' speeches ever made*

The National Prayer Breakfast is an event held annually in Washington DC for the political, social, and business elite to assemble and build relationships. The most important part of the event is the morning speech to be delivered by a speaker whose identity is kept confidential. In 1994 Mother Teresa took to the stage and delivered one of the most 'uncomfortable' speeches ever made during that event. The audience included the President and the First Lady, Bill and Hillary Clinton, the Vice President and Mrs. Gore

A tiny elderly Catholic nun stood among the top influential policy and opinion makers talking about God's love and its consequences for our lives. She did not tremble. Instead, she invited everyone to pray together the prayer of Saint Francis, "Lord, make me the instrument of peace". At first, the congregation did not join. She paused and reminded them that they have that prayer in front of them. Then, she asked whether they were ready to pray now. To make the powerful of this world to pray together was in itself quite an extraordinary achievement. But it did not end there.

She quoted two passages from the Scripture. The first was the last judgement (Matt 25:31-46) in which she stressed the famous statement: "Whatever you did for the least of my brethren, you did it for me". The second one was from the first letter of John: "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). Then, she pointed out that this love-charity begins at home: "family that prays together stays together".

One day she visited a house for the elderly. They had everything - excellent care-takers, good meals, and TV sets. Yet, there was no joy and everybody was looking towards the door. They were waiting for their sons and daughters to visit them, but nobody was coming. Then, she challenged those powerful people, busy and focused on success, whether or not there was someone at their home waiting for them, waiting for a sign of their love.

Then, she moved to a more controversial topic. “The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion”. You could imagine how the pro-choice people in the audience felt. If it were you or me, we would be silenced or booed immediately. Yet, nobody interrupted her. When she finished presenting the reason why destroying a child in mother’s womb is such a terrible crime, many people in the audience applauded, but not all. Some - you can guess who - felt extremely uncomfortable. But, she did not mind. She continued.

She moved to artificial birth control. “If you do not want the child, please give it to me”. She said that there are many families waiting for a child. Adoption was her solution to the problem of abortion. But, she said: “I never give a child to a couple that has used contraception”. Contraception is selfish, love is selfless. It welcomes a new life as the gift from God. Again, you could guess how those who advocated contraception felt. Commenting on the entire speech, Peggy Noonan - author and former presidential speech writer - said: “When she was finished, there was almost no one she hadn’t offended” (Time Magazine, Sept 15, 1997).

I admire her courage but I am particularly struck by this question: ‘Are you willing to love till it hurts?’ Am I willing to love till it hurts? Families are disintegrating, marriages break apart, commitments are revoked, because we are not willing to love till it hurts. We love others till it is convenient, but Jesus loves us till the cross.

Sensing how challenging it must have been for those powerful people to be lectured about the truth and morality, she ended up on a lighter note. Once, she visited a woman suffering terribly from a cancer. In order to console her, our Saint said that this sickness was only the kiss of Jesus, that she had come so close to the Cross that Jesus could kiss her. The woman joined her hands as in prayer and said: “Mother Teresa, please tell Jesus to stop kissing me.” Everybody laughed and the atmosphere eased.

Twenty four years have passed since that speech and yet its content remains as explosive now as it was then. “Love until it hurts. You must love with your time, your hands, and your hearts. You need to share all that you have”. Saint Mother Teresa reminded us the truth of the Gospel. Christian life is a journey from selfishness to selflessness. Jesus paved the way and invited us to follow.

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