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MOTHER TERESA

AMERICA | SPECIAL CONTENT

PREVIEW EDITION

Ask about Mother Teresa (1910-1997) and people from around the world will know exactly who you are talking about. What was so extraordinary about this “saint of the gutters?” The same woman who spent much of her day cleaning the wounds of the “poorest of the poor” is also seen in countless photos with heads of state. After her death, when her private letters and correspondence were collected, many were shocked to learn of her battle with spiritual darkness. How could someone revered as a saint not feel God’s presence for long periods of her life? Mother Teresa seems to have anticipated these questions: “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.”

St. Teresa of Calcutta was active in the media age. Her life and her work were recorded in movies and television segments. Perhaps that can help explain the enduring interest in her inner life and private spiritual journey. While many people know what she did and recognize the great works of Missionaries of Charity that she founded, her private prayer life with its long periods of darkness are just as important to her story. As Father James Martin noted, “Mother Teresa’s life reminds us that holiness is a goal for all believers, even those given to doubt.”

Our editors have gathered a collection of articles to help you dive deeper into the life of this fascinating modern saint.

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In My Soul: The long dark night of Mother Teresa

BY JAMES MARTIN, SJ
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Perhaps Catholics should not have been surprised by the revelations in *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, a new collection of letters by the saint of the gutters that show her astonishing battle with spiritual darkness. Reports of her dark night had been circulating since 2003, when Brian Kolodiejchuk, a priest member of the Missionaries of Charity and postulator for her cause for canonization, published on the Catholic Web site Zenit.org a series of articles about her struggles. That same year, in the journal *First Things*, Carol Zaleski wrote an article entitled “Mother Teresa’s Dark Night,” which quoted selections from her letters. So some information about Mother Teresa’s interior struggles with darkness, doubt and despair have been available to the general public for several years.

What is new about *Come Be My Light* is that it gathers together the bulk of letters, which reveals the full measure of her inner turmoil. For the first time readers will learn that Mother Teresa suffered this relentless aridity for roughly 50 years—with one brief respite—until her death in September 1997. “In

my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss—of God not wanting me—of God not being God—of God not really existing,” she wrote to a confessor in 1959.

According to Father Kolodiejchuk, these letters were gathered from the files of bishops, priests and spiritual directors to whom Mother Teresa wrote and who had retained them. In a recent interview, Father Kolodiejchuk noted that although Mother Teresa had hoped the letters would be destroyed, the gathering together of such writings is an essential part of the canonization procedure. The letters are also a critical resource for the Missionaries of Charity as they seek to understand more fully the distinctive spirituality, or charism, of their founder.

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BILL MCCORMICK, S.J.

Saint of the Darkness: An interview with the promoter of Mother Teresa’s cause for sainthood

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