

Why is it necessary for us, as Catholics, to dedicate our lives to service? One fundamental reason is because of the life, bursting full of freedom and opportunity, that has been given to each of us by God. Jesus revealed this important truth to us through Scripture, saying: “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). God’s generosity towards us is what should compel us, like magnets to metal, to reach out to those in need. However, while this compassionate action is our responsibility, it is not a forced obligation. We must choose, utilizing our gift of free will for good, to help others. Many of us unconsciously turn away from the people who need our assistance the most, or fail to lend a hand to someone when there is no one there to witness us doing it. Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Phyllis Bowman, and Mother Angelica are three incredibly strong Catholic women who avoided these patterns of apathy, and instead sculpted their lives around putting the needs of others first.

Saint Teresa of Calcutta, or Mother Teresa, spent her childhood years in Macedonia, where she was raised by her devout mother after her father died when she was eight years old. At age eighteen, she left home for Dublin, Ireland, where she became a nun and assumed the name Teresa, in honor of St. Therese of Lisieux. She was then sent to India by her convent, where she taught and served until September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1946. At this time, she randomly received what she referred to as, “the call within a call” from God. He prompted her to form the new congregation of the Missionaries of Charity, a religious institution within her archdiocese. From the 1950s through to the 1980s, Teresa expanded the institution immensely, first throughout India and then eventually opening houses in Australia, the Middle East, and North America. In 1979, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her dedicated work. Saint Teresa continued to work tirelessly, opening new houses in communist and war-stricken countries, where the

Missionaries of Charity provided hope and refuge for its thousands of members. When her health began to decline, Mother Teresa continued to do service for the poor and needy until she died at the Motherhouse on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

Phyllis Bowman is known today as one of the most influential and peaceful Catholic pro-life activists. At first, Phyllis belonged to the Jewish faith she had grown up surrounded by and was not against abortion, as she saw the struggles women with unplanned pregnancies faced while she worked at a hospital. However, upon researching the causes of disabilities in babies that have not yet been born, she took a distinctly pro-life stance and also converted to Catholicism as an adult. Phyllis prioritized making her pro-life “battle for the baby” mission inclusive of people of all different religions and backgrounds. She was influenced and inspired by the holy teachings of Blessed Pope Paul VI and Saint Pope John Paul II, which gave her the strength to continue against the opposition she faced. In 2003, Bowman founded the Right to Life Charitable Trust, which reduced abortion rates by offering emergency medical assistance internationally to women in difficult situations. As she neared the end of her life, Phyllis, like Mother Teresa, continued her charity work until she passed away.

Rita Antoinette Rizzo, later to be known as Mother Mary Angelica, grew up in a ghetto with an abusive father and a mother who struggled with mental health issues. Her father eventually left, and as a result, Rita was forced to mature quickly, undertaking all of the household duties her depressed and suicidal mother could not carry out. However, she experienced two miraculous encounters in her life that lead her into a loving relationship with God. Running on her way to catch the bus, Rita did not see a car racing towards her and felt two hands pick her up and place her safely on a median, while the car driver later recounted that he had never seen anyone jump so high. Additionally, in 1942, Rita experienced a miraculous

healing from stomach condition as a young adult. Rita became a nun at age thirty and joined a convent, where she was named Angelica. While exploring her faith, Angelica wrote numerous booklets and recorded a multitude of tapes, in which she talked or wrote about discovering the Catholic identity. Once she realized that she could touch the souls of millions through her messages, she created EWTN, a small start-up Catholic television program. Within a few years, Mother Angelica had become an influential presence on both radio and cable networks. Her work sparked a sharp increase in the number of Catholic programs throughout all parts of the country, making it possible for many more people to hear Scripture, the Good News, and more general information about the Catholic faith. Additionally, her example inspired a growth in the number of women who joined her order of nuns.

God intended for service to change and inspire us for the better, as it did for Mother Teresa, Phyllis Bowman, and Mother Angelica. When we make a commitment to serve others, as Jesus did, it can be viewed as “giving up our time.” However, I believe we gain just as much, if not more, from helping others as the people we are aiding do. In my freshmen year of high school, I volunteered at an assisted living community for the first time. Just as soon as I had introduced myself to the volunteer coordinator, a resident had coincidentally come to be taken to Mass at the church across the parking lot. I brought him in his wheelchair to Mass and kept him company afterwards, week after week, and I slowly began to learn more about him and his life. By conversing with him, I learned that he was a veteran, that he loved to fish, how old his kids and grandkids were, but most importantly, I learned the ability I had to make an impact on someone else’s life. One Sunday as we were on our way to Mass I asked him what the best part of his week had been, to which he replied that it was that moment right then, on his way to Mass, with me to take him and talk with him.

Since this experience, I have continued to volunteer and tried to model my life around helping other people. Oftentimes, I feel that some high schools students do not believe that they can really make an impact through service, because they do not see that just offering time and talent can be revolutionary in that it brightens someone's day. Through making connections with people who are lonely, homeless, poor, disabled, or in other forms of need, not only is your Catholic faith enriched, but your character is as well. Once you begin to truly engage in your service commitments, it creates a domino effect in your life. Taking the first step by signing up to help someone, and showing up channeling the open-mindedness of Catholic role models like Mother Teresa, sets off that first "domino." From there on, you will have the privilege to impact the lives of others, and in seeing God's love in them, you will begin to allow others to see God's presence in you.

## Works Cited

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