

Episode 4: The Devil's Advocates

ERIKA LANTZ: The day after Mother Teresa died, her body lay on a bed of ice in the Mother House in Kolkata. Hundreds of people stood outside in the rain. Some were crying. Inside, sisters knelt or stood around her body. They prayed the rosary aloud and approached one at a time to kiss her feet.

The chapel was too small for all the visitors who wanted to pay their respects, so her body was carried through the streets in an open coffin to a church, where she lay in state for a week. Her funeral was in a sports arena in Kolkata. Some 15,000 people attended, including dignitaries from around the world: the presidents of Albania, of Ghana, of Italy. The Queen of Spain. The Queen of Belgium. The Queen of Jordan. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

The Prime Minister of India declared it a state funeral, something usually reserved for presidents and prime ministers. A leprosy patient carried in the Eucharist wine.

Mother Teresa's personal story seems to me like a vague silhouette -- something so public, and at the same time, deeply private. As I chiseled my way through, it wasn't long before I hit something hard.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Mother Teresa's cult of death and suffering depends for its effect on the most vulnerable and helpless -- abandoned babies, say, or the terminally ill.

ERIKA: Christopher Hitchens was a political critic and author known for his blistering commentaries. Some people called them "Hitch slaps." And in the 1990s, he made a television documentary about Mother Teresa. A scathing critique. It's called "Hell's Angel."

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: Mother Teresa regards herself as mandated by heaven, which is hardly modest. She learns spiritual solace to dictators and to wealthy exploiters, which has scarcely the essence of simplicity. And she preaches surrender and prostration to the poor, which a truly humble person would barely have the nerve to do.

ERIKA: Throughout the program, Hitchens is weirdly lit. Half his face is in shadow. A massive caricature of a devious-looking Mother Teresa lurks in the background. And Hitchens is ruthless.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: She takes on the grim and tedious tones of the zealot and the fanatic ... Such a person is manifested in the shape of a demagogue, an obscurantist and a servant of earthly powers ... A presumable virgin, who also campaigns against birth control ...

ERIKA: "Hell's Angel" came out at a time when Mother Teresa was considered too virtuous to be criticized. Calls for her Sainthood were growing.

If you haven't heard some of these criticisms before, you might be thinking, "What is this guy saying? I thought everyone loved Mother Teresa." Well, it wasn't just Christopher Hitchens.

AROUND CHATTERJEE: I criticize Mother Teresa because it has to be done. Somebody has to do it. Somebody had to do it.

ERIKA: From Rococo Punch and iHeartRadio, this is “The Turning.” I’m Erika Lantz. Part Four: The Devil’s Advocates.

* * *

ERIKA: We reached out to the Missionaries of Charity sisters and sent them a list of questions we had. While a representative did respond, they declined to be interviewed.

Critics have a *lot* of complaints against Mother Teresa. And once these criticisms entered the world, they became part of her story. They still are today. I can’t go into all of them, but we’re going to look at a handful.

Let’s start by going back to “Something Beautiful for God.” That’s the 1969 documentary about Mother Teresa by Malcolm Muggeridge: the film that made her famous.

Muggeridge was convinced that a scene in his film captured a miracle

It happened in the Home for the Dying. When the crew tried to film in there, the room was so dark the director worried the images wouldn’t come out. But it turns out they did. The scene was full of light. Immediately, Muggeridge thought it was divine intervention. He declared it the “first photographic miracle.”

But to Christopher Hitchens, Mother Teresa’s critic, this “miracle” seemed too good to be true. And in “Hell’s Angel,” he included an interview with Muggeridge’s cameraman, a guy named Ken McMillan, who said it’s true, they *were* worried about the low light. But they were also using a new kind of film.

KEN MCMILLAN: Some new film made by Kodak, which we hadn’t had time to test before we left. So I said, “Well, let’s have a go.” So we shot it.

ERIKA: A month or two later, they’re in the studio looking at the footage.

KEN MCMILLAN: And eventually up came the shots of the House of the Dying, and it was surprising. You could see every detail. And I said, “That’s amazing. That’s extraordinary.” And I was going to go on to say, you know, “Three cheers for Kodak,” but I didn’t get a chance to say that because Malcolm, sitting in the front row, spun around and said, “It’s divine light! It’s Mother Teresa! You’ll find that it’s divine light, old boy!”

ERIKA: Malcolm Muggeridge couldn’t stop talking about this miracle. He called it a halo.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: And a star was born.

ERIKA: Here's Christopher Hitchens in "Hell's Angel" again.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: This profane marriage between tawdry media hype and medieval superstition gave birth to an icon, which few have since had the poor taste to question. How does the reputation of Holy Mother Teresa look if, just for a moment, we switch off Malcolm Muggeridge's kindly light?

AROUP CHATTERJEE: Well, without him, there wouldn't be any Mother Teresa, obviously, because he was the one who put her on that pedestal.

ERIKA: This is Aroup Chatterjee, a physician in London. He collaborated with Hitchens on the film "Hell's Angel." He also published a book jam-packed with his research and condemnations of Mother Teresa. For years, he spent his spare time researching "the lady," as he often calls her.

AROUP: My, whatever you call it, crusade against the lady.

ERIKA: Well, maybe to start, I wonder could you just -- if you had to summarize your overall case or perspective on Mother Teresa, what would you say?

AROUP: I consider the whole Mother Teresa bandwagon as a cult. I would say that practically everything about Mother Teresa is a result of myth and hyperbole.

ERIKA: But what fired him up in the first place?

Aroup Chatterjee grew up in Kolkata. In the 1970s, he was a medical student. And back then, he had a very different perspective on Mother Teresa.

AROUP: When I used to go to medical school on my moped every day in Kolkata, I used to pass by one of her places, and I used to see about 40 people being fed. And I would be quite thankful and happy that somebody was feeding at least 40 people. In Kolkata, *even* in her heyday, not much was known about her. It was known that she had won the Nobel prize and that she was a very good, charitable lady. So I had absolutely nothing against her. If anything, I was positive towards her.

ERIKA: Then he moved to the UK. One day, a coworker asked him where he was from. He said Kolkata.

AROUP: And then he said, "Oh, Kolkata. Do you know something? There's one person in the whole world I respect more than anybody else -- that's Mother Teresa." And I was, I was quite surprised. I said, "Why?" This is 1985. Why did she mention Mother Teresa when I said I was from Kolkata? That incident stuck to my mind like yesterday. I just, I didn't know that people synonymized Kolkata with Mother Teresa.

ERIKA: After that, he started noticing how his home city was viewed by the western world.

AROUP: I read little things about Calcutta in a very gruesome way, and it's all about poverty and leprosy and squalor -- nothing at all about anything else.

ERIKA: I recently came across a video where a bishop in Los Angeles describes Kolkata like this: "Imagine the worst garbage dump you've seen, and now think of the whole city that way."

Reports like this didn't match the Kolkata Chatterjee knew -- a thriving metropolis, a cultural hub. So when he was on a trip to Kolkata, he visited the Home for the Dying, the place he'd heard described as an oasis for the poor.

AROUP: And I was appalled that that place had given her so much publicity, and it was even called a hospice. It had less than 100 places, and it didn't have any beds, even. They had hammocks. There was no yards, no veranda, no balcony, no nothing, nowhere to stretch your limbs. You were brutally treated in there.

ERIKA: Chatterjee says he was even more shocked by the medical practices he saw.

AROUP: They routinely used to reuse needles and gloves even. That practice has stopped now.

COLETTE LIVERMORE: It was a harsh place, I think. It was a harsh place.

ERIKA: Collette Livermore was with the Missionaries of Charity for 11 years. She's the Australian sister who wasn't allowed to go home when her brother was very ill. After she left the MCs, she became a physician. But back in 1980, she was assigned to the Home for the Dying.

Colette fed and tended to patients there. She cleaned maggots from wounds and washed the bodies of people who died. One patient died in her arms.

COLETTE: The standard of medicine wouldn't have been high, and the thing I found difficult was there was no painkillers.

ERIKA: She says the sisters were often rough and cold. When people who had been on the street arrived at the home, the sisters would strip off their clothes right there in the room.

COLETTE: They were all washed in a cement washing place with no privacy and just cold water thrown over them.

ERIKA: Colette says they often cried out when the cold water hit their skin, while some visitor with a camera might be snapping photos.

COLETTE: Their hair was shaved. And I mean, I know they had lice and all that sort of stuff, but I don't know, I, I found it very harsh.

ERIKA: She says sometimes sisters even got aggressive.

COLETTE: Acting harshly to someone or hitting them, or that sort of --

ERIKA: When did you see sisters hit people?

COLETTE: In Kolkata. And I understand that it's very frustrating because, you know, if you've got desperate people trying to get things, food and such, they'll be pushing.

ERIKA: Colette couldn't get over the feeling that things could be so much better. And it wasn't the first time she felt that way.

MIDROLL

ERIKA: As a teenager, Colette Livermore planned to study medicine. But then she watched "Something Beautiful for God."

COLETTE: And I saw that movie, and I thought, "Oh! I don't need to bother being a doctor anymore, because they don't need complicated medicine; they just need food."

ERIKA: Colette joined the MCs, and it didn't take long for her to have misgivings about their medical care, including the care for sisters.

In 1977, she was assigned to a house in Papua New Guinea. She was 22. Before she left, she says no one suggested she take the medication to prevent malaria, usually taken two weeks before travel.

When she arrived, she says she saw gravestones of nuns who had died from malaria. So as soon as she had a chance, she talked to Mother Teresa about it.

COLETTE: I asked her, "Could we take something to prevent malaria?" And she said, I, I don't take anything. She trusts in God. But I could take it if I wanted to.

ERIKA: Collete decided to take it, but it was too late. One night, she felt incredibly cold.

COLETTE: My teeth were chattering. I had a terrible back pain, terrible headache.

ERIKA: She didn't go to work that day. And she wasn't getting any better.

COLETTE: I was arching, my back was arching. My tongue was coming out involuntarily, and I could have died.

ERIKA: The sisters sent for a doctor. He said it was cerebral malaria, which is extremely serious.

COLETTE: I didn't die, you'll be pleased to hear. (laughs)

ERIKA: Another time, Colette was working with tuberculosis patients in the Philippines. What she saw startled her.

COLETTE: There was a particular mistake where a wrong injection was given, and I was horrified when I asked the sister, you know, "Well, how much did you give?" And they didn't even know what dose they'd given.

ERIKA: Cross infection was a problem, since patients were mixed together in close quarters. And she says proper treatment protocols weren't followed.

COLETTE: The trouble is if you start TB medicine and stop it, and then try and start it again and stop it, you'll get resistant TB, and you won't be able to cure it.

ERIKA: Colette thinks a lot of these mistakes stem from this MC belief that the sisters shouldn't have too much expertise. Expertise is an opportunity for pride. And Mother Teresa believed ignorance was actually an advantage. Because you're a vessel for God's will.

COLETTE: It was a sort of form of magical thinking. If you obey, God's will'll be done through you in some sort of magical way. Mother used to say it was, "I'm just a pencil in His hands," like an inanimate object that does what they're told. Half the time we didn't know where we were going and we were sent away suddenly. So there was absolutely no preparation.

ERIKA: No language or cultural training.

The other thing that troubled her was how the vow of obedience affected their work. You were supposed to obey cheerfully, promptly and without question. But what if you saw injustice or medical mistakes? Do you speak up then?

One day in Manila sticks out to her. The sisters had what they called a "tahanan" -- a home for people who had tuberculosis and other illnesses.

COLETTE: And so a little boy came with his parents, and his name was Alex. And he was very sick.

ERIKA: Dehydrated and malnourished, with a fever and sepsis.

COLETTE: His skin was floppy and his eyes were sunken.

ERIKA: They weren't supposed to accept people on Thursdays, but Colette, who was Sister Tobit back then, spoke with the parents anyway.

COLETTE: And the professed sister came out in a boiling rage saying, "Tobit, what are you doing here?" I said, "Well, this little boy is very ill, and he's been rejected by the hospital. And we need to help him." And she said, "So only you know what's right." And I said, "Look, I don't really know what's right, but I just know that this little child is going to die if we don't do something. And she said, "Go back to the tahanan." And I said, "No, no, I won't." (laughs)

ERIKA: Wow.

COLETTE: And she said, "I will help him this time, but you do what you're told and go back to the tahanan."

ERIKA: So Colette did. And the child was admitted. They put him on a drip with antibiotics and fluids. That night, she snuck over to see how he was.

COLETTE: I remember carrying him outside into the night and just sort of going, "Why?! Why?!" (laughs) you know, to the blackness. Next day, he was much, much better, and yeah, he survived. So. He became a fat little thing in fact. (laughs)

ERIKA: Colette's intervention wouldn't go unnoticed.

About a month later, she says she walked into the dormitory and her bedroll was gone. Someone had removed it. No warning. No explanation. She'd been demoted from her post as novice mistress.

She says the conflict she felt inside her "pierced through her life like a thorn."

* * *

ERIKA: Mother Teresa wrote a letter in 1947. As usual, there was one thing on her mind. She said, "During the year very often I have been longing to be all for Jesus and to make other souls -- especially Indian -- come and love Him fervently."

Bringing souls to Jesus sounds a lot like conversion to me. And Mother Teresa used the word "conversion" in some of her letters.

According to Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, who edited her letters for publication, she said, "Yes, I convert. I convert you to be a better Hindu, or a better Muslim, or a better Protestant, or a better Catholic, or a better Parsee, or a better Sikh, or a better Buddhist. And after you have found God, it is for you to do what God wants you to do."

SUE WEBER: When I first joined, the energy and the spirit of the society was extremely powerful. It was never about converting people.

ERIKA: But that didn't last, Sue Weber says. She's a former MC who was a superior in the early 1990s.

SUE WEBER: The longer I stayed in the order, it started to be about converting people. It became more about, how many people did you convert?

AROUP: I heard from many, many people that this was happening on a large scale, that they were converting surreptitiously at the point of death.

ERIKA: In his book, Aroup Chatterjee tells the story of one former sister who says sisters were trained to ask a dying person if they wanted "a ticket to heaven," and if they agreed, to press a wet cloth to their forehead and quietly baptize them.

MOTHER TERESA: Not one has died without receiving a special ticket for St. Peter, we call it. Because ticket St. Peter will not let them go in.

(Doctors and nurses laugh)

Mother Teresa: So we call baptism "ticket for St. Peter."

ERIKA: This is Mother Teresa in 1992, speaking at a clinic in California.

MOTHER TERESA: We ask the person, "Do you want ... do you want a blessing by which your sins will be forgiven, and you'll receive God?" And they have never refused. So 29,000 have died in that one house from the time we began the work in 1952.

AROUP: And they were collecting the numbers because you get brownie points if you convert.

MOTHER TERESA: But it's so beautiful to see the people die with so much joy.

AROUP: And it's actually a pretty lowly thing to do -- to take advantage of somebody's altered mental state and to exploit them like that.

ERIKA: Maybe the most repeated critique of Mother Teresa is that she romanticized poverty. Christopher Hitchens put it this way: that Mother Teresa "was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of poverty."

Shantanu Chakrabarti, a professor of history at the University of Calcutta, says Westerners ate her story up.

SHANTANU CHAKRABARTI: I think the Western fascination with her was because she was using the Indian sari as a projection of her glorification of poverty -- the sari-clad women on the streets of Kolkata working among destitute people living on the streets. I think that fascinated a lot of Western people trying to project India as somewhat, you know, a place like Mars almost.

ERIKA: Aroup Chatterjee put it a little more strongly.

AROUP: The West felt so smug and so glad that this white woman who was a Catholic -- very, very rigid Catholic -- who was looking after these disgusting, desperate people in a remote corner of the world.

* * *

ERIKA: The Western interest in Mother Teresa's work led to a lot of donations. Some report tens of millions of dollars a year. But the exact amount is unclear. The MCs don't reveal their financial information, including to us. We asked. When one Forbes India reporter asked how much they receive in donations, he was told, "God knows. He is our banker."

SUE WEBER: We have a lot of money. A lot.

ERIKA: This is Sue Weber again. When she became a superior at the AIDS hospice in San Francisco, she got a checkbook for the first time. But she says couldn't really use it.

SUE: I had to go through so many channels to get like a refrigerator -- a small refrigerator to put the men's medicine in. I had I had access to an account that had over \$55 million in it. And I couldn't buy a refrigerator? As the superior of the house?

ERIKA: Colette Livermore, the former sister from Australia, put it this way: "We had plenty of money, but in the name of poverty we didn't want to use it."

Instead, they begged. That's what the sisters called it: begging. They "begged" for donated supplies, whether food or medicines or clothes. Mother Teresa believed it was a chance for the donor to come closer to Christ.

SUE: So I was told with another sister to go look at vehicles.

ERIKA: Sue remembers when she was in the Bronx, and they needed a new car.

SUE: So we get there, and we look at different vehicles and there's a small Jeep. So I call the house and I said to the regional superior, "So we found the vehicle, and this is how much it costs. Can we go ahead and purchase it?" And she goes, "No, you should beg for it." And I was like, "What?" And I said, "I'm not begging for it." I said, "We have the money." And I would have never had a problem at all to beg for anything if we didn't have it.

ERIKA: By begging for it, it's basically, um --

SUE: It's a lie! 'Cause you're basically presenting that you need something and you don't have the wherewithal to get it. Right? That's a lie.

ERIKA: Sue refused to beg for it, but she knew she had to obey her regional superior.

SUE: So I said, this is exactly what I said to the guy. So I said, "Hey, I, I'm just curious, like, would you give us that Jeep? Would you just give it to us?" And he was like, "For *free*?" And I was like, "Yeah." And he was like, "Well, don't you have any money?" And I go, "Oh no, we have plenty of money! I'm just curious if you would just give it to us." And he started laughing, and he goes, "No." And I was like, "OK!" So I called back the regional and I was like, "They won't give it to us for free." (laughs) And then we ended up buying it!

* * *

ERIKA: Mother Teresa often spoke of suffering, but critics asked, how much did she do to alleviate it? There's a particular moment in an interview on William F. Buckley's "Firing Line" on PBS in 1989, where she tells this story of a woman who had cancer. The woman was in terrible pain, but Mother Teresa told her that the pain was a sign that she had come so close to Jesus on the cross that he could kiss her.

MOTHER TERESA: And the lady, though she was in some great pain, she joined her hands together and said, "Mother Teresa, please tell Jesus to stop kissing me." (audience laughter)

ERIKA: As Mother Teresa tells this story, you can see that she's starting to smile.

What's weird about this moment to me is hearing people laughing in the background. After this woman says to Mother Teresa, "Please tell Jesus to stop kissing me," I guess it's supposed to be funny, but doesn't it also mean this person just wants the pain to stop?

The interviewer then says to Mother Teresa: Christ entered his own passion willingly. Most humans enter unwillingly into pain. Mother Teresa replies that he'd be surprised how content the poor people in India are. That on their suffering faces, you see a beautiful smile. That her work is to help them accept suffering as a gift.

Mother Teresa knew the power of a good story; she repeated anecdotes until they were parables. And she had a way with journalists. One expert said it was like she cast a spell on them. She may not have enjoyed publicity, but she saw the value in it. She was strategic about granting interviews. Sometimes she made agreements that she be allowed to review and edit material before it was published. Books about her are often full of inaccuracies -- more legend than fact.

And some of the people I talked to told me the church was more than happy to benefit from that legend.

MIDROLL

ERIKA: It wasn't only Mother Teresa who knew how to use the media. Mary Johnson says the Church saw its value, too.

MARY JOHNSON: And I do feel that the church used her. I remember, I traveled with her once to Louisiana -- the first place where the abuses of priests who were pedophiles had become known.

ERIKA: In 1985, a Louisiana priest admitted to abusing more than 30 children. He was eventually sentenced to 20 years in prison. While the trial was underway, the Missionaries of Charity opened a new house just an hour away, in Baton Rouge.

MARY: The sisters had been invited there in order to repair the image of the church. If the people in the diocese saw Mother Teresa and the sisters, that would be the example that could kind of make up for these horrible things that the priests had done.

ERIKA: It sounds like the Missionaries of Charity and Mother Teresa sort of became a PR tool for the church.

MARY: (laughs) Exactly. A PR tool, a symbol, um. And I do think that's a way of using someone.

ERIKA: A lot of people wanted to use that symbol.

After Malcolm Muggeridge's film, "Something Beautiful for God," he promoted her like crazy. He saw her potential for advancing conservative causes, especially with her stance on abortion.

He and a number of American politicians advocated for her to be given the Nobel Peace Prize. And when she was, abortion was at the center of her acceptance speech.

MOTHER TERESA: And I feel one thing I want to share with you all: the greatest destroyer of peace today is the cry of the innocent, unborn child. For if a mother can murder her own child in her own womb, what is left for you and for me to kill each other? To me, the nations who have legalized abortion, they are the poorest nations.

ERIKA: Christopher Hitchens, the man behind the documentary "Hell's Angel," he sees this speech and much of Mother Teresa's work as part of a larger, unstated political agenda to advance the goals of the church.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS: If you can give women control over their rate of reproduction and come back to that village in 10 years' time, everything will be better right away. It's the only thing that works. Well, Mother Teresa spent her entire life saying that that solution was impermissible. She waged her entire life making sure that didn't happen. So I wish there was a hell to which

she could go, because she has a lot of death on her conscience and a lot of misery and stupidity and ignorance and dirt and filth and disease, as well.

ERIKA: It just strikes me again and again how polarized these camps are. It's like you either love her or you hate her.

MARY: The image of Mother Teresa that I had encountered out in the world wasn't anything like the woman I had known.

ERIKA: Here's Mary Johnson.

MARY: Either they were people who made her out to be this complete Holy Saint and said all kinds of silly things -- like every morning she had only a banana for breakfast and she, you know, just these apocryphal stories that were absurd --- or they were people who were very, very critical, and not that there weren't things to be critical about, but who who didn't really understand where Mother Teresa was coming from at all and attributed motives to her that were not at *all* her motives.

KELLI DUNHAM: I just think if we're going to talk shit, we should talk the right shit. Right?

ERIKA: Kelli Dunham was a sister with the MCs in the 1990s. She's heard the criticisms I just laid out and has plenty of her own; she calls the MCs problematic. But on the day Mother Teresa was made a saint, Kelli posted a YouTube video critiquing the critiques.

KELLI: People complain about Mother Teresa that she urged people to accept our suffering, to say like, you know, to offer it up and also said that suffering is Jesus kissing them. OK, so on the macro, if somebody is suffering, and it's caused by somebody else's actions, especially a powerful person, and you tell them to accept that, you're obviously contributing to a system of oppression, and we should fight like hell against that. But on the micro, and this is always what people are talking about, helping somebody who's dying to find meaning in their suffering or their death, uh who are you to say like that's like not cool? That that's not good to offer them? Like, you, the non-dying person?

FR. BRIAN KOLODIEJCHUK: They could not alleviate all the poverty of Kolkata. And their focus is on the *poorest* of the poor, not the poor.

ERIKA: Father Brian Kolodiejchuk, the head of the MC Fathers, says that the quality of medical care in MC houses has improved over time. But also, that's not the point.

FR. BRIAN: You have to understand, for example, the Home for the Dying, in its context. It was set up not to be a clinic to give medical care. It was set up to exactly what it said: a home for the dying, the ones who were dying. And so that last moments to, to have some relief, some care, some human love.

ERIKA: At Mother Teresa's funeral, a cardinal put it this way. He said, "Mother Teresa was aware of this criticism. She would shrug as if saying, "While you go on discussing causes and explanations, I will kneel beside the poorest of the poor and attend to their needs."

* * *

ERIKA: After Mother Teresa died in 1997, her supporters jump-started the complicated process of advocating for her sainthood -- a process that typically starts five years after someone dies.

FR. BRIAN: The Archbishop of Kolkata went to the department, the congregation for saints, and asked if he could start already. And they said, "Hey, wait a minute. She only died a month ago. Uh, hold your horses."

ERIKA: But Father Brian Kolodiejchuk says soon Pope John Paul II waived the waiting period.

Father Brian was the official "postulator," basically the advocate for her canonization. And her fiercest critics, Aroup Chatterjee and Christopher Hitchens, they both testified. They gave the official critical perspective for the canonization process, a type of role previously known in the Catholic Church as the advocatus diaboli, or "devil's advocate." That's actually where the term comes from.

As part of the canonization process, the church needed to attribute two miracles to Mother Teresa that happened *after* her death. This is proof that she's interceding from heaven.

Reports poured in. The church researched the claims and eventually approved two miracles. They declared she cured a Bengali woman's stomach tumor and saved a Brazilian man in a coma.

Almost 20 years after Mother Teresa's death, a crowd packed St. Peter's Square in Vatican City for her canonization.

A massive portrait of Mother Teresa overlooked the proceedings from the front of St. Peter's Basilica, and a million tiny copies of the painting were passed out at the event.

During the ceremony, two MC sisters carried in a relic, a vial of Mother Teresa's blood.

And Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church, said the words to proclaim her new status.

We declare and define blessed Teresa of Kolkata to be a saint.

On her tomb in the Mother House, they engraved the words, "Love one another as I have loved you."

* * *

ERIKA: Next time, on “The Turning”:

MARY: All of a sudden, Niobe is next to me, and she’s whispering in my ear, “Sister Donata, I love you.”

CREDITS

ERIKA: “The Turning” is written by Erin Lantz Lesser and me. Our producers are Elin Lantz Lesser and Emily Forman. Our editor is Rob Rosenthal. Andrea Asuaje is our digital producer. Fact-checking by Andrea López-Cruzado.

Special thanks to Dennis Wills of D.G. Wills Books, Tariq Ali, Amy Gaines, Sarah Olender, Kathryn Joyce, Beth Anne Macaluso, Travis Dunlap and consulting producer Mary Johnson. Her memoir, “An Unquenchable Thirst,” provided inspiration for this series.

Our executive producers are Jessica Alpert and John Perotti at Rococo Punch and Katrina Norvell from iHeartRadio. Our theme music is by Matt Reed. For photos and more details on the series, follow us on Instagram @rococopunch. You can reach out via email, too: theturning@rococopunch.com. I’m Erika Lantz. Thanks for listening.