

Legacy of Love — Part 2 of 2

Written by By Suzanne Hammons Voices of the Southwest
Friday, 16 September 2016 08:08



Mother Teresa's sisters uplift the unwanted people of Gallup

Now, on one Tuesday evening, Sr. Auxilia and the other Missionaries prepare Casa San Martin for the evening meal, as they do each day. The food they serve is donated or funded by various stores and agencies in the area, and the sisters try to make each serving as generous and nutritious as possible.

Tonight's menu is roast beef, broccoli, pasta salad, and bread. As several sisters busy themselves in the kitchen, two more go to the front door. First, a moment is taken to say a prayer before a statue of St. Joseph, and then the door is opened.

One sister prepares to search bags for contraband, and the other instructs the crowd gathered outside the door.

"Women first, then the men!" she says.

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One man, entering, crosses himself.

“Thank you, sisters! God bless you!” he tells them, before finding a seat.

I’m interested in hearing from these people – I want to know why they are here, what circumstances forced them into this hard lifestyle. But it doesn’t go quite the way I planned in my mind.

Of the four people I spoke to, only one was able to answer my questions, and that, only sporadically. The others, through a combination of years of alcohol abuse or mental illness, can’t seem to carry on a basic conversation.

One lady tells me of her literal visions of Jesus, and a sinister cabal out to ruin her life, tied to what she calls the “New World Order.”

Another man breaks my heart. He looks to be in his 70s. He has lost all of his teeth except one, and has only one eye. He also seems to be hard of hearing. When I ask him where he is from and what he needs, he only repeats, “I’m a veteran,” and talks about tours in Vietnam and Europe.

A third man actually makes me uncomfortable at points. It’s clear that repeated years of alcoholism and homelessness have taken a permanent toll on his body and mind. If I nod at something he says, he might suddenly turn hostile, only to smile again a minute later.

“Jamie,” as he gives his name, is more cognizant than the others. He appears to be transgender, but even after gentle questioning, it is not clear which way he is transitioning. When he first sees me and my camera, his instinct is to duck his head and cover his face with his hands.

“Don’t show my picture!” he says.

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A short time later, he changes his mind, and suddenly gets up and approaches.

“Okay,” he says. “I want to do an interview.”

He’s had a hard life, especially since the recent death of his mother, and with her, the crumbling of any kind of emotional support. So he comes to the shelter often, describing himself as fiercely protective of Gallup’s homeless population.

“These are my people right here,” he says, gesturing to the room.

And the Missionaries of Charity? What does he think of them?

“They’re *my* sisters!” he says, then laughs. “I see them on the street and I wave to them. And I love [the Virgin] Mary, and Jesus. Jesus is my brother.”

The exact nature of his relationship with the others is a bit hard to figure out, though. At one point during the interview, another man approaches, and Jamie immediately snaps at him, “Get away from the camera, this is my interview!”

Soon after, a commotion is heard across the room as two men aggressively step toward one another, shouting obscenities. With no hesitation, one of the sisters rushes over.

“Hey! Hey” she says. “No fighting! Sit down.”

Faced by this small, 5-foot-tall woman, the men step back and take their seats, chagrined. Order is restored.

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The situation here is tough to fully comprehend. Many of these people are truly needy, and display gratitude for the kindness they receive from the sisters.

Others, however, allow their actions and words to push back against the world. It can be difficult to relate to them with compassion, on a human level. They can be hostile or incomprehensible. Many of them, minds and bodies ravaged by years of neglect and living on the streets, would never be capable of holding any kind of employment, or even living on their own, without constant supervision.

But in each of them, the sisters see the face of Jesus.

“They’re fallen, so somebody has to lift them up, see?” says Sr. Auxilia. “Mother [Teresa] always said, ‘We are here for poorest of the poor,’ who have no one. Here we have so much [of a] drug problem, alcohol, no? Nobody likes them. For them we are here.”

She’s not simply referring to food and shelter. The Missionaries of Charity view physical needs as secondary next to spiritual needs. Of course, physical needs are not neglected, but the sisters’ true goal is bringing salvation to people cast aside by society. [MmBctBof4y4](#)”
target=”_blank”>Try watching this video on [www](#).

“We try to lift them up, not only materially, but also spiritually or emotionally, yeah? Because you see, nobody has talked to them,” observes Sr. Auxilia. “But whenever they see us, they always ask us, they always come close to us, always wave to us. They need somebody to help them, see?”

Another sister adds, “We are hoping in the future they will come up, by the help of the Holy Spirit, so they can come up from their alcoholism. So that is our future goal, to help them to go to Heaven. That is our main aim, is salvation. Mother Teresa says always, ‘We send them to Heaven.’”

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The sisters are, of course, overjoyed that their foundress, who many of them met and knew personally, is now officially recognized as a saint. The canonization is not a surprise to them, however.

“The Church recognizes her higher level, no?” says Sr. Auxilia. “But Mother actually, she doesn’t want to be high, she wants to be humble, see? She wants to stay humble. But it’s not Mother’s intention, but God, and God is raising her up.”

In Gallup, the debate regarding homelessness and alcoholism continues. The sisters who followed Mother Teresa from across the world are not interested in debate. For them, the path forward is clear.

Every day, they open their doors.

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