

I Was Told a Joke by

Mother Teresa

Occasionally, I would drive Mother Teresa when she came to London.

The Missionaries of Charity had a minibus. I was a volunteer driver for their errands and night run, offering food and help to homeless people.

On one occasion, some of the nuns asked me to ask Mother to tell the story about the donkey. There was a pecking order and they couldn't ask her over the head of a superior.

When we had finished the rosary and were heading for the Southall convent, I said, 'Mother, what is the story you tell about the donkey?'

At this, she became animated and began, 'There was this businessman and he was out in the country going to an important meeting when his car began giving him trouble.'

'Oh,' I thought, surprised, 'this is a joke rather than a holy story.'

Mother continued, 'The car wouldn't go any further and so he went to the nearest village and explained, "I have to

get to an important meeting. Have you got a vehicle – any kind of vehicle – that will get me there?"

'The villagers said all they could offer him was a donkey, but it was contrary. It would answer to only two commands: "Thank God" for "Go" and "Alleluia" for "Stop".

'In desperation, he accepted the donkey and rode it out of the village, only for the donkey to pick up speed. They were heading for a cliff and the businessman was terrified.'

At this point, we had arrived at the

convent in Southall and the superior was standing on the kerb, waiting to greet Mother.

But Mother hadn't finished the joke. She carried on, 'They came to the edge of the cliff and the man was trying to remember the villagers' instructions.

'Alleluia,' he shouted, and the donkey stopped. He was so relieved he said, "Thank God."

Mother turned, smiling, indicating with her hand the man's fall – and the nuns loved it.

Veronica Whitty

Game for a laugh: Mother Teresa, San Francisco, 1987

