

MERCY REFLECTIONS

Anne Ferguson, Mission Animation for the Parramatta Sisters of Mercy

COME TO THE EDGE

Read the short poem slowly. Read it again. Play with it for a while and make it your own.

For example:

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We're comfortable back here," they said.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We're too busy," they said.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"It's too high," they said.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We're afraid," they said.

"Come to the edge," he said.

"We'll fall," they said.

"Come to the edge," he said.

And they did.

And he pushed them.

And they flew.

Then think how long you have stood at the edge waiting for a push.

Think of a time when you were pushed – and you flew!



THE 'MERCY EDGE' – Catherine McAuley

Founding the Sisters of Mercy in 1831, Venerable Catherine McAuley and her early companions ventured to the dark edges of fear, took deep breaths, then stepped blithely over thresholds into the fevered hovels of Dublin, Ireland, there to bring the compassion and healing presence of God ...

Catherine McAuley was such a transforming and transformational individual with fire in her bones. She was fifty when she took her first steps towards making her life-long dream a reality. She experienced a defining moment in realizing her vision. The novelty of an intentional community of lay women without religious vows and enclosure brought such negative attention that a friend wrote "the criticism threatened to discourage young women from joining Catherine's endeavours and thus to undermine the very stability of the works of mercy to which she was committed, including visitation of the sick poor in their homes and hospitals". She began a long deliberation on how to proceed and decided, against her previous natural reluctance, that she should become a religious sister. She set out with two others Elizabeth Harley and Mary Anne Doyle for George's Hill to serve the canonically required

novitiate year, before professing religious vows on December 12, 1831, as the first Sisters of Mercy.

She developed extraordinary skill in conflict resolution with Church authorities. She has left us a priceless legacy of over three hundred letters from which shine forth a personality of amazing translucence and heart-wrenching honesty. Her legacy of love and daring challenges us to revive our own lost dreams and strive to bring them to fruition. The life-vision of Catherine provides us with a deep story of a woman whose shining idealism, indomitable courage, prophetic persona and formidable spiritual and intellectual gifts enabled her to be a transformational figure. From her early childhood to her middle years, she made the journey from beloved child to destitute orphan. She knew first-hand what it meant to be forced to the edges of her society and culture and to experience the prejudice of being Irish and Catholic in an age of intolerance. Taking Jesus as her exemplar, she was attuned to the Father's will wherever it took her. She was transformed by it.

Catherine knew how to push the edges of what was acceptable. Loyal to proper social etiquette, she did not hesitate to do the unexpected. She approached the Duchess of Kent requesting fancy work by Princess Victoria, the future queen, whose creations helped the bazaar for the House of Mercy to be very successful.

Where do you see in the life of Catherine McAuley that 'they pushed her – and she flew'?

GOSPEL REFLECTION: THE GOSPEL REMINDS US THAT JESUS TOO WENT TO THE EDGE

Jesus was the good news in that he championed those most at risk, namely, the women and children, the sick, the blind, the lepers and the multitude of little ones (Matthew 25:31-46)

Those on 'the edge' for Jesus were

- the broken-hearted
- the captives
- those bound
- those who mourn
- the faint of spirit
- the oppressed who cannot defend themselves
- those who labour and are heavily laden
- the desperate
- the God-forsaken



- the hungry
- the thirsty
- the naked
- those who are alone (Matthew 11:3ff & Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 4:18).

Jesus taught us to see those on the edge as a sign, a sacrament of his own presence:
... for I was hungry and you gave me food...

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me". (Matthew 25:35,40).

Source: Adapted -<http://www.studenthelp.bne.catholic.edu.au/social-justice/Pages/Four-Key-Gospel-Texts.aspx>

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE FOR MERCY TODAY?

"Catherine was a woman of vision, ahead of her time and passionate for the poor. I think Mercy women stand on the edge. They're not afraid of speaking the truth and are welcoming to all people. I think that's an important lesson to teach.

- Mercy associate, Chris Somers,

I want to stand as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all the kinds of things you can't see from the centre. *Kurt Vonnegut*



And the challenge that falls to us now is to see that Mercy continues to respond to the cries of those who live at the edge of our society, reflecting the divine discontent of the God whose mission we are all called to share.

"If Catherine were alive today, 'instead of the cries of the poor children of Dublin haunting her dreams, the cries of a suffering world would have troubled her sleep. 'She would have turned her energy to global interrelationships of rich and poor, knowing that as long as in any country the poor, sick and uneducated are oppressed or marginalized, the light of the Gospel is dimmed, and peace and justice remain elusive ideals.' *Joanna Regan*

Where am I challenged to 'go to the edge'? Where are we challenged to 'go to the edge'?

MERCY REFLECTIONS



THE MINISTRY OF LEADERSHIP

ANNE FERGUSON, MISSION ANIMATION for the PARRAMATTA SISTERS OF MERCY

The Ministry of Leadership and Religious Life –

Elizabeth Davis rsm #1

April 30, 2014

Sr Elizabeth, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Mercy Newfoundland, has held a number of positions of leadership in society, in church and in community and so is well qualified to speak out of her own broad experience.

An opportunity to converse with Elizabeth about leadership recently presented itself. It began with the question 'What does the word "leadership" evoke for you'?



Elizabeth is in no doubt: 'I definitely see leadership as a particular calling, a vocation. But I think each one of us is called to leadership at different times in our lives, depending on the circumstances, depending on the experience of the moment. So it's not you're "Once a leader, always a leader". Every single one of us has within her or him that gift of leadership that can be exercised in multiple ways. I find as I go through life what leadership means to

me changes. It doesn't get better or worse, it just changes, because of where I'm responding, or how I'm responding'

Not only are individuals leaders, but so are organisations. 'We also know today that leadership is about a community or an organisation, so not only does an individual exercise leadership or experience leadership, but so too does a community or an organisation experience leadership - again, depending on the circumstances of the time.'

In thinking about leadership in her own life, Elizabeth first recalls her childhood experiences. 'There was an expectation in our family that each one of us took responsibility for the community somehow and that was a form of leadership, although as a child I could never have articulated it that way.'

Elizabeth distinguishes between natural leadership roles and appointed leadership roles, both experiences of which have been threaded through her lifetime. 'I've been blessed to be named to leadership in my paid work in health care administration and then the Congregation chose me to be one of the leaders of the Congregation at a point in its history.'

'I was put into leadership in the Congregation - my present leadership role - by the Congregation. In other words, for this moment in time the Congregation called forth from me that particular gift. I myself believe my richer gift is teaching. But right now the Congregation said, "No, the gift we're calling forth from you is leadership. And we expect you to work as a part of a leading team, not by yourself, but as part of a leading

team and we expect you to call forth what is good in our Congregation in that term", in this case, of 4 years.'

Elizabeth contrasted the experience of being called to congregational leadership with a prior experience of being selected and employed by a board to be the first president and ceo of a healthcare authority that brought together all the teaching hospitals in Newfoundland and Labrador, a total of 7,000 staff, 600 physicians.

'But the similarity, the leadership in each case, for me is that somehow a community has a task, has a vision, has a work and they need a person or a team to call forth the giftedness in them to make that happen. So at the healthcare corporation I was called to be a presence at a time of major transition, to be the one who articulated the vision, who kept us focussed on that vision, but was able to find different ways of getting to the vision that were respectful of staff, physicians, and volunteers in that setting. Today in the Congregation I'm still expected to be doing the very same thing in some ways - articulating the vision (or in our case the Chapter did that) and then I as part of that team and We the team to keep animating us, keep moving us, towards that vision.

So what lies at the heart of leadership? 'For me leadership is always about vision. It is always about persistence in coming to that vision and it is always about finding respectful healing ways of getting to that vision. And the irony is as you come closer to the vision of course, the vision is no longer vision, it becomes mission and then a new vision is emerging. So that the organic dynamism of that is always operational. When you are in leadership you have to be sensitive to that.'

'Whereas all of us live it, the leaders designated are the ones who at that moment have to be the most sensitive to it, have to be calling the whole community into awareness of it, have to be challenging the community about how they're moving towards the vision. So for that point in time you have that particular role, that particular ministry, that particular calling that is energising for that whole community to get to that vision.'

'I believe that was true for me when I was a child. My parents expected me to be a leader in the classroom, in the family...They were doing the same thing - they expected me, expected us *to see beyond what is, to always see what is possible*, [to ask ourselves] what can we do to make this better, make it fairer, more respectful, more comfortable. I was blessed. My parents had a responsibility for what I'd today call "the social fabric" We [children] were expected to go into that as well.'

'And I've been very blessed [in teaching, in healthcare] and now in my Congregation. We have a Congregation that is continuing to grow in energy and in the charism, even though we may be getting smaller in number [110 persons], but the energy and the wisdom and the hope among us is a rich gift to the Church and to our Province and Peru.'

So many people are talking about the opposite. Can you say more about growth in religious life? I firmly believe we are continuing to grow. I firmly believe we are continuing to deepen the charism in the new social reality that we're finding ourselves in. Catherine never had 110 members before she died and look what she achieved in terms of the legacy, the charism.'

'I do think that we are really in a time where we are understanding Church differently, we're understanding justice differently, we're coming into a whole new understanding of cosmology that helps us see the oneness of all creation in ways we had never imagined before. All of that is growing and we are doing that now, not alone, but in connection with other women religious, in connection with clergy and bishops, much more so with lay people. Not because we are so small that we can't do it by ourselves anymore, but we've finally realised that we're all in this journey together. And we can only do it if we are walking, thinking, working, reflecting, dreaming together. And how much richer that is than the way we thought before. So yes, I do think we are continuing to grow and the conversations we have now are so different to those of 30, 40 or 50 years ago. Not because we're better today, but because the social realities are so different today than they were then.

Are there particular aspects of the social realities that are enabling those conversations? 'Very much so', says Elizabeth. The diversity is so important. Elizabeth Johnson, the American theologian, says, "The dignity of difference is a source of blessing"¹. I'm becoming more aware of the richness diversity brings when we open ourselves –

- We have 6 generations of people living together, formed with different values. We've never seen that phenomenon on the face of the earth before. We all - each generation - have a richness, a diversity that we bring.
- The face of the family. Today we have multi-racial families, older families, families with same sex parents... And in Canada's case, for the first time in our history we have more families without children than with children. In other words, the image we have of family which is the basic community in any society has changed dramatically. That, combined with the multiple generations, creates some fascinating conversations, fascinating living. We who are baby boomers are enriched and challenged by that.
- Our growing understanding of the new cosmology and seeing that all being is connected. That's helping us understand that the very little we do can have such an impact. Think of the butterfly effect...that small motion being replicated, touching something else and touching something else again creates a major, major change. Sometimes we think what we do is so little (our Congregation is a very small one) and yet if we believe what this new cosmology is teaching us, then the little we do makes a huge difference.
- We're starting to see ecological justice and social justice are of a piece. Our Canadian Bishops quote a writer whom they don't name [Leonardo Boff] "[The](#)

cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one" and as we come more to understand that to be so, then we understand justice through a different set of eyes. Elizabeth Johnson says for women religious today there are 5 frontiers: wretched poverty, women's experience of gender-based discrimination, white privilege and racism, religious pluralism, and awareness of earth as a place of beauty and suffering in an evolving universe.² She talks about how in our time these are the

most pressing issues calling us to a response and we can't separate ecological and social justice anymore. They are all of a piece.'

(Source: http://www.mercyworld.org/news_centre/view_article.cfm?id=901)

DISCUSSION POINTS:

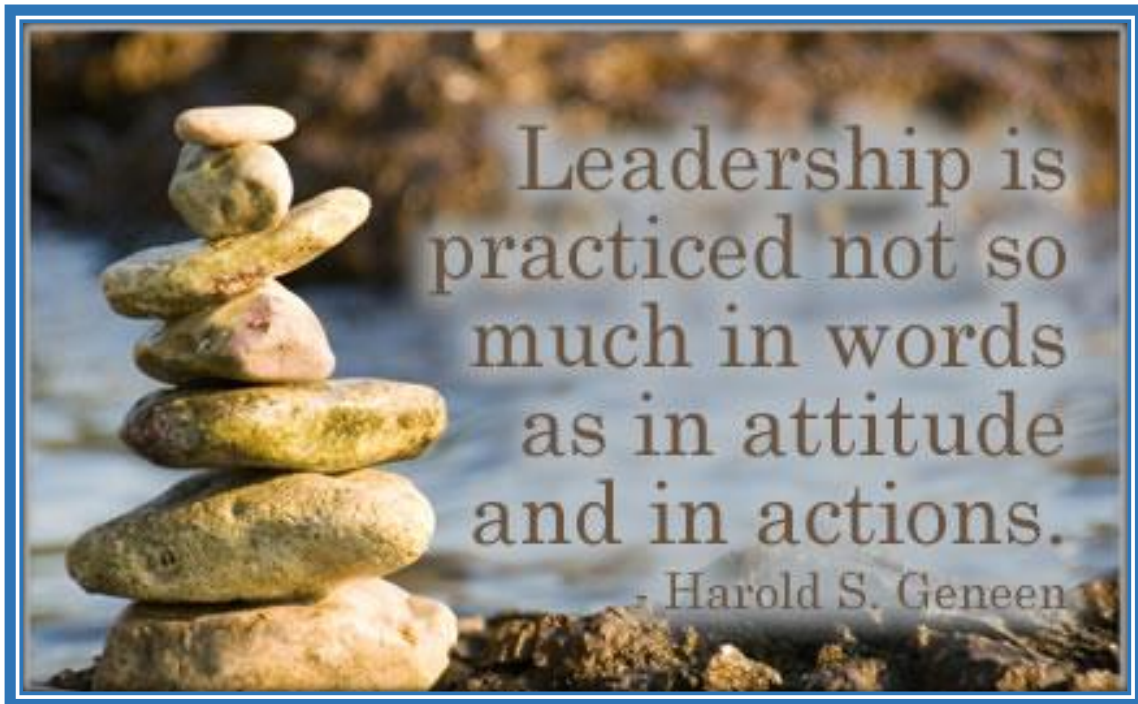
What strikes you in this response from Elizabeth Davis?
[Is there a sentence or section that stands out for you?

Did you have childhood experiences of leadership?

What impact did they have on your adult life?

Where are we, as women and men of Mercy, called to leadership in today's society?

Where are the 'growth areas' for you?



BLESSING:

For A Leader



May you have the grace and wisdom
To act kindly, learning
To distinguish between what is
Personal and what is not.

May you be hospitable to criticism.

May you never put yourself at the center of things.

May you act not from arrogance but out of service.

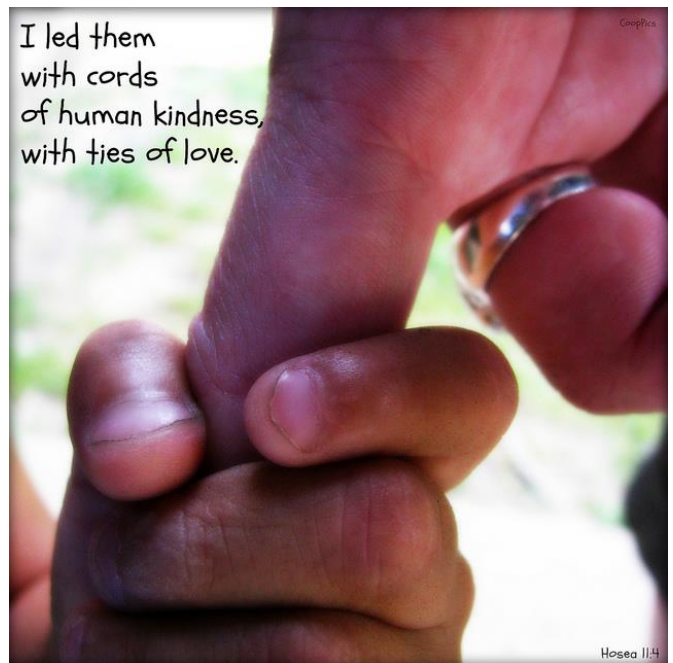
May you work on yourself,
Building up and refining the ways of your mind.

May those who work for you know
You see and respect them.

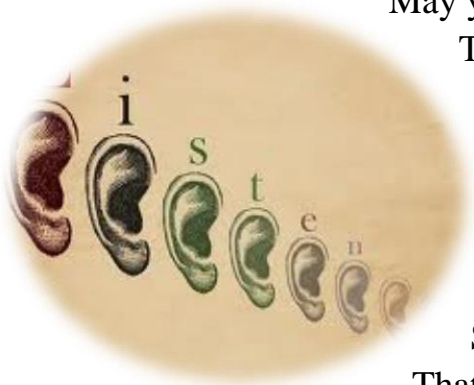
May you learn to cultivate the art of presence
In order to engage with those who meet
you.

When someone fails or disappoints you,
May the graciousness with which you
engage
Be their stairway to renewal and
refinement.

May you treasure the gifts of the mind
Through reading and creative thinking
So that you continue as a servant of the
frontier
Where the new will draw its enrichment
from the old,
And may you never become a functionary.



I led them
with cords
of human kindness,
with ties of love.



May you know the wisdom of deep listening,
The healing of wholesome words,
The encouragement of the appreciative gaze,
The decorum of held dignity,
The springtime edge of the bleak question.

May you have a mind that loves frontiers
So that you can evoke the bright fields
That lie beyond the view of the regular eye.

May you have good friends
To mirror your blind spots.

May leadership be for you
A true adventure of growth.

(By John O'Donohue from Benedictus: A Book of Blessings, Bantam Press, London)

**MERCY REFLECTION:
MINISTERING IN
VULNERABILITY
TO THOSE WHO ARE VULNERABLE**



THE VULNERABILITY OF CATHERINE McAULEY

Letter to Sr M. Elizabeth Moore

July 27, 1837

My dear Sister Mary Elizabeth

I am weary of all my travelling, and this morning I fell down the second flight of stairs. My side is quite sore, but if ever so well able, I could not leave my poor child.

Letter to Sr M Frances Warde

August 15-30 1837

My dearest Sister Mary Frances

.. Our dear Catherine (her niece) might indeed have sung in the last hours of her innocent life “oh death, where is thy sting,” for she did not seem to feel any.

I have suffered more than usual with my old pain of sorrow and anxiety.

Excerpt from “With the Stroke of a Pen”, Mary Louise Gordon, VHM, Master Certified Graphoanalyst

On occasion, (Catherine) would feel envy and hurt when slighted or ignored or when made to feel unworthy of the approval of others. ... In stressful situations, Catherine might seek escape in a change of place or occupation.

Letter to Sr M Frances Warde

March 5, 1841

My dearest Sister Mary Frances

... Sister Mary Clare Moore is a character – not suited to my taste or my ability to govern – though possessing many very estimable points. She teased and perplexed me so much about the difficulty of copying two pages, that I was really obliged to give up – unwilling to command lest it should produce disedifying consequences. She said it would take the entire Lent – indeed you can have no idea how little she does in a week – as to a day’s work, it is laughable to look at it. She will shew me three leaves, saying, I finished these today – three rose or lilly (*sic*) leaves.



THE VULNERABILITY OF JESUS:

Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Luke 9:22

And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Luke 22:39-46 : Jesus in the Garden



Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the

disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

SONG: SHE CARRIES ME

"She is a boat, she is a light
High on a hill in dark of night

She is a wave, she is the deep
She is the dark where angels sleep
When all is still and peace abides
She carries me to the other side,
She carries me to the other side...



And though I walk through valleys deep
And shadows chase me in my sleep
On rocky cliffs I stand alone



I have no name, I have no home
With broken wings I reach to fly
She carries me to the other side,
She carries me to the other side...

A thousand arms, a thousand eyes
A thousand ears to hear my cries
She is the gate, she is the door
She leads me through and back once more
When day has dawned and death is nigh
She'll carry me to the other side,
She carries me to the other side...

She is the first, she is the last
She is the future and the past,
Mother of all, of earth and sky
She carries me to the other side,
She carries me to the other side..."

Jennifer Berezan, Edge of Wonder, 1996



'I DON'T THINK MY WORDS CAN EVER DO HER JUSTICE'

Student's tribute to nun killed on MH17 flight who had dedicated her life to inspiring pupils at Sydney girls' school. Now former student Lucy Thackray pays tribute to her favourite mentor.

'Sister Philomene Tiernan was one of those all-too-rare people that made everyone she met feel special. We knew her as Sister Phil and she was the kindest person I'm sure I will ever come across. She was the loving Nanna of Kincoppal-Rose Bay school in Sydney's eastern suburbs, who seemed to possess an inbuilt radar for any homesick girl who had just arrived at the boarding school. Sister Phil had that special ability to make us all feel at home.

... Sister Phil never stopped working. She had once been a Director of Boarding and boarding mistress, responsible for caring for the boarders who came to the school from around the world. But the truth is she never really left the boarding school. She would walk through the dormitories making sure every one of the 150 girls was fine.



Today, the outpouring of grief from the school's extensive community is not just from the recent kids, but from their mothers and no doubt grandmothers as well.

She had an unwavering ability to know where everyone lived, how many siblings they had, and even the name of their favourite biscuit. How she stored all that information about those hundreds of girls is honestly a mystery.

Her last role was in religious guidance, giving prayer sessions for the girls, and offering spiritual comfort to those in need. She made every single one of them feel special.

Sister Phil was such a crucial part of the school for so many years and it's impossible to think of the community without her. In 2011, two years after I graduated, I went back to the school as a tutor. Sister Phil saw me in the library and gasped as if one of her own daughters had just come home.

It was the same every time I saw her - the same excitement and joy that I know she shared with everyone. She would envelop you in a big hug whenever she saw you and would kindly pat your wrist as you babbled on to her about your latest news.

'Well, isn't that wonderful!' she'd say earnestly. 'Oh darling, I am so proud, aren't you doing well!' It didn't matter if she had somewhere to be. She would sit and listen and every time you felt truly enriched by that experience.

She had a warm smile that never left her face and a wonderful sense of humour that comes only from a genuine love of life. She connected with everyone she came across. Generations

of Kincoppal alumni are hurting now that someone who only gave love to the world could be taken like this.

... Her entire existence was to bring good into this world. But she gave unwavering guidance and taught people that faith in God, in themselves, and in the world would carry you through the journey.

All morning I'd been thinking how tragic the MH17 crash was, but it wasn't until I heard Sister Phil's name called out in the newsroom that it all became real. This hideous crash that I'd been hearing about all morning wasn't halfway across the world, it was suddenly brought home. ... Sister Phil has lived a meaningful, beautiful life and leaves such a huge mark on the world. I hope that everyone touched by her, particularly those from Kincoppal-Rose Bay, finds strength in the messages and guidance that Sister Phil gave us all.

Thank you, Sister Phil. Rest in Peace.'

Excerpts from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2696968/She-cherished-people-Students-tribute-nun-killed-MH17-flight-dedicated-life-inspiring-young-minds-Sydney-girls-school.html>

Phil was a woman of the heart and for such women suffering comes through the heart. As one of her religious friends noted she suffered intensely with her loss of work, her family sorrows and any injustice she witnessed. She suffered, too, because she felt that her gifts were not always acknowledged and used. She gave richly to others but others also gave to her by affirming her in a way that helped to raise her spirits and enabled her to give of her best.

Excerpt from Eulogy delivered by Mary Shanahan rscj, 25 July 2014 <http://rscj-anz.org/?p=903>

FOR REFLECTION:

- ✚ How do these pieces speak to you of your own vulnerability?
- ✚ What do you hope you are most remembered for in your ministry?
- ✚ In what ways are you vulnerable?
- ✚ How does your own vulnerability enrich your reaching out to those who are most vulnerable in our society?

Sr Philomene Tiernan RSCJ had attended a Retreat in the Netherlands only days prior to boarding her flight. Each participant at the Retreat was asked to choose a Reflection and to read it to the other attendees. This was Sr Philomene's

WHAT WILL MATTER

by Michael Josephson

Ready or not, some day it will all come to an end.

There will be no more sunrises, no minutes, hours or days.

All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten, will pass to someone else.

Your wealth, fame and temporal power will shrivel to irrelevance.

It will not matter what you owned or what you were owed.

Your grudges, resentments, frustrations and jealousies will finally disappear.

So too, your hopes, ambitions, plans and to-do lists will expire.

The wins and losses that once seemed so important will fade away.



It won't matter where you came from or what side of the tracks you lived on at the end.

It won't matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant.

Even your gender and skin color will be irrelevant.

So what will matter? How will the value of your days be measured?

What will matter is not what you bought but what you built, not what you got but what you gave.

What will matter is not your success but your significance.

What will matter is not what you learned but what you taught.

What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched,

empowered or encouraged others to emulate your example.

What will matter is not your competence but your character.

What will matter is not how many people you knew,

but how many will feel a lasting loss when you're gone.

What will matter is not your memories but the memories of those who loved you.

What will matter is how long you will be remembered, by whom and for what.

Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident.

It's not a matter of circumstance but of choice.

Choose to live a life that matters. ©2003 (310) 846-4800 www.charactercounts.org M

MERCY REFLECTIONS



On Being a Person of Mercy: Inspirations from Catherine McAuley and Pope Francis

ANNE FERGUSON

SONG: POUR OUT COMPASSION AND MERCY - *Mechtild of Magdeburg*



1. Pour out compassion and mercy from the depths of your heart;
And give to the poor and the broken,
the service of your love.

Ref: In so far as you do these holy
deeds, with all the love of your soul;
Then you will resemble me, your God,
and I will make you whole.

2. If you seek out and find the stranger,
and comfort the lonely of heart;

And offer them your friendship, then my justice you impart. Ref.

3. So pour out compassion and mercy from the depths of your heart;
And give to the poor and the broken, the service of your love. Ref.

[From Woman's Song of God by Sr. Briege O'Hare OSC.]

INTRODUCTION: Catherine McAuley opened the House of Mercy in Dublin in 1827 in response to God's call to work towards empowering the poor to overcome the crushing poverty in which they lived. Her first schools were primary schools for the improvement of literacy and the teaching of the Catholic faith to those who had no other opportunity to learn.

Inspired by the vision of Catherine McAuley, we are committed to the full development and the achievement of the potential of each person, particularly those who are disadvantaged or marginalized, conducted in an atmosphere of care, respect and joy.

(Adapted from CEIST Charter http://www.ceist.ie/_uploads/_ckpg/files/ceist_charter.pdf)

As we gather, let us listen to Catherine's words:

"I leave you free to do what you think best. I am satisfied you will not act imprudently, and this conviction makes me happy"

(Together) God of Mercy, we pray that we may be living examples of Catherine's faith, burning brightly. May we be ever mindful of the Mercy traditions and values by embracing them and carrying them into the future. Bless us with the wisdom to always allow your Holy Spirit to lead us. Amen.

Reflections:



POPE FRANCIS:

Unprecedented Outreach

A mere two weeks after he was announced as pontiff, Francis washed and kissed the feet of twelve prisoners incarcerated in Rome as part of the traditional Holy Thursday rite. The unorthodox component of the ceremony was the inclusion of two women, one of whom was a Muslim. ... Francis sent personal Eid al-Fitr holiday greetings to Muslims around the world, rather than relying on his office to do so in a show of care and good will.

CATHERINE MCAULEY: Chapter 3 of The Rule, "Visitation of the Sick", (Rule 3.1, 3)

"Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master ... Let those whom Jesus Christ has graciously permitted to assist Him in the Persons of His suffering poor (Mtt. 25:40) have their hearts animated with gratitude and love, and ... ever keep His unwearied patience and humility present to their minds."

POPE FRANCIS: A Human Touch and Pastoral Approach



The "People's Pope" loves meeting and greeting the multitudes that come to see him, get his blessing, or ask for his help. He is genuinely touched by the troubles of others and has taken to making personal phone calls to reply to some letters, to the shock and delight of the people that receive them. The "cold-call pope" rang up a teenage engineering student, a rape victim, a man whose brother was killed, and a Colombian woman who works in Rome. He likes to call and announce himself simply, saying, "It's the Pope."

CATHERINE McAULEY: Her Lifetime Concerns

In a real way, the House of Mercy witnessed to Catherine's life-time concerns. Influenced by her father, a man of faith and refined social conscience, from early childhood she had demonstrated deep sensitivity to people who suffered the extremes of poverty and all her adult life she had cared for those who were destitute, denied education, meaningful employment or any other opportunity to achieve a fair quality of life.

POPE FRANCIS: Care for the Poor and Sick



Soon after he became Pope, Francis tweeted, "The Pope must serve all people, especially the poor, the weak, the vulnerable," and he's made sure to personally do so by comforting and greeting the sick after his weekly general audiences in St. Peter's Square. He moved many hearts, as pictures of him tenderly embracing and kissing some severely disfigured men showed his human concern for all people, especially the marginalized.

CATHERINE McAULEY: Letter to Fr Gerald Doyle on *Requisite for a 'Sister of Mercy'*

Besides an ardent desire to be united to God, and serve the poor, she must feel a particular interest for the sick and dying, otherwise the duty of visiting them would soon become exceedingly toilsome. She should be healthy, have a feeling distinct, impressive manner of speaking and reading – a mild countenance expressive of sympathy and patience.”

TO THINK ABOUT ...

What is Mercy?

What does it mean to be a Person of Mercy?

For yourself?

For those who will follow you?

Which quote speaks most strongly to you?

Where else do you see this spirit of Mercy being lived?

Any other thoughts ...

NOTES:



The Flame Tree
Judith Wright

How to live, I said, as the flame tree lives?
- to know what the flame tree knows: to be
prodigal of my life as that wild tree
and wear my passion so.
That lover's knot of water and earth and sun,
that easy answer to the question baffling reason,
branches out of my heart, this sudden season.
I know what I would know.

How shall I thank you, who teach me how to wait
in quietness for the hour to ask or give:
to take and in taking bestow, in bestowing live:
in the loss of myself, to find?
This is the flame-tree; look how gloriously
That careless blossomer scatters, and more, and more.
What the earth takes of her, it will restore.
These are the thanks of lovers who share one mind.¹



Growing up in a country town in south-western New South Wales, we experienced extremes of temperature; fog, heavy frosts and extremely cold winters with searing temperatures and high humidity in summer. In this semi-arid climate, plant life struggled. In our garden was one tree that, in spite of these extremes, bloomed faithfully each year. The flame tree with its spectacular red flowers covering the whole tree was a gift to us. Years later, I discovered Judith Wright's poem, *"The Flame Tree"*. Here, coupled with my childhood memories, I came to understand something more of the essence of Mercy. Wright speaks of what the flame tree knows – *"to be prodigal of my life as that wild tree."* Mercy, as we experience it as coming to us from God, is prodigal – extravagant, reckless, unrestrained, lavish, unsparing. When I recognize deep in my being that this is how God gifts me with mercy, I come to understand that this mercy can never be possessed just for myself. I am challenged to reflect the prodigality of God's mercy. In Wright's words:

*"How shall I thank you, who teach me how to wait
in quietness for the hour to ask or give:
to take and in taking bestow, in bestowing live:
in the loss of myself, to find?"*

Mercy received must become Mercy shared.

Reflection by Anne Ferguson

¹ From *The Gateway*, Judith Wright, Angus & Robertson, 1953.

WAITING WITH OPEN HANDS



<http://www.rgbstock.com/bigphoto/nOAK8om/Advent+-+Waiting> by Margaret Young

Anne Ferguson, Mission Animation, for
Parramatta Sisters of Mercy

WAITING IN THE LIFE OF CATHERINE McAULEY

It's helpful to reflect on the years of patient waiting in Catherine's life in the hope of finding some inspiration.

We used to call the Coolock years "the hidden life of Catherine McAuley" as if those twenty years were sort of an ante-room to the "public", more important phase that was coming. In reality, those years were full of activity and growth as Catherine focused on the person before her, the need before her. During this time, by responding as best she could and by looking always for better ways to respond, she amassed an amazing array of experiences as nurse, housekeeper, mentor, estate manager, teacher, student of religious doctrine and entrepreneur. By being in the moment and meeting the present need she was, unwittingly, preparing herself for a future not yet in her imagination.

There were other seasons of waiting - the years that it took to resolve William Callaghan's will, the years to build the House on Baggot Street, the time caring for her sister Mary which delayed her arrival at the House of Mercy. In each case, while Catherine waited, she put her energy to the task that was before her and learned that it is the day-to-day unfolding of our lives which shapes us rather than great events. In God's providence, the experiences and influences in all these intervals shaped her for what was to come.



Once the community was established, we see Catherine's gift of expectant waiting in her longing for time with her sisters, news of her sisters. Her letters are filled with evidence of her yearning.

Image: Sculpture of Catherine McAuley, recently installed in the garden of the ISMAPNG offices at Stanmore. Artist Gael O'Leary

To Mary Delamere: *"Of one thing, however, I am sure and seriously so that I seldom look forward to any change in this world with such happiness as I do to our meeting."* July 2, 1836.

To Frances Warde: *"I look forward with happiness to the time when I hope to see you."* April 9, 1838.

To Elizabeth Moore: *"Write soon, it is a great comfort to me to hear from you often, do not get tired, half your paper not written on, a little nonsense will be acceptable."* January 13, 1859.

When, in her name, we focus on the present, we when are intent on the person before us and the need before us, when we seek ever more loving and effective solutions to human suffering, then our waiting is vibrant and fruitful and merciful.

– Excerpts from article by Sheila Carney rsm found at <http://www.mercyworld.org/uploads/ckpg/files/Twenty%20five%20years.pdf>

Quiet

MARY OF NAZARETH WAITING

Image: *maryandelizabeth2* by Natalie Snapp



“During the weeks of Advent, we picture Mary of Nazareth waiting patiently, sometimes anxiously, for the birth of her first-born child. The act of patient, gentle waiting is a beautiful image of the young mother as she knows, with her own heart, that the child she carries is special and destined to affect many people’s lives. Aren’t these the same thoughts which go through every mother’s heart and mind

in the final weeks of pregnancy? Their baby is special; their baby will affect others in a most unique manner. Mary is seen as a perfectly human mother in Advent, waiting and listening to what she will be called to do at the time of birth.

I imagine Mary was a reflective person, a person who could sit quietly and listen to the Word of God. Her Jewish faith encouraged reflection and through its ancient history has provided many mystics, which Mary would have known about, especially from the Old Testament. It’s not easy to sit quietly and to listen for the Word of God, but during these quiet weeks before the noise and anguish of childbirth, Mary would have taken time to reflect and wait patiently. In essence, Mary would have spent time in solitude.

(Excerpt taken from Marist College Ashgrove Newsletter 2011; author unknown)

REFLECTION

Take a 'waiting approach' to these questions. Read each question, one at a time. Before answering it, allow some time of silence. Let the question float like a baby in the womb. At the end of the silence, jot down five to ten words that came to you during your time of waiting. Share with the group whatever you would like:

1. From the readings, what strikes you?
2. What are some of the things you are waiting for now?
3. Is there something you love / enjoy waiting for?
4. What do the two women teach us about waiting?
5. In ministry, what have been your richest / most memorable experiences of 'waiting'?
6. Why is waiting important? What have you learnt from waiting?
7. Where are you challenged now to take a 'waiting' stance?

WE PRAY:

I wait.

I wait for you to answer.

I wait for the first light of dawn.

I wait for you.

I wait for you.

I wait for you.

I wait.

My waiting is my prayer.

In the pain of the waiting I feel
my longing for you.

I long for you to be here.

I wait for your arrival, you who
has always been here.

In the waiting I know a larger space in my soul is being excavated.

I can feel the growing emptiness.

But I know that it will be filled
with your gracious, loving presence.

Make me ready to receive you.

I wait.



(From <http://www.nacr.org/wordpress/3878/waiting-as-prayer>)

Image: Photo of Sunrise over Bribie Island by Anne Ferguson



Anne Ferguson
Mission Animator for
Sisters of Mercy
Parramatta

AUTUMN REFLECTION: “Even if something is left undone, everyone must take time to sit still and watch the leaves turn.” Elizabeth Lawrence

MAY 2017

Invitation to Prayer:

Leader: In the fading of the summer sun, the shortening of days,
cooling breeze, bird's flight and moonlight rays

All: We see the Creator's Hand

Leader: In the browning of leaves once green, morning mists, autumn chill,
fruit that falls, frost's first kiss

All: We see the Creator's Hand

The Natural Mindfulness Leaf Exercise

Choose a leaf. This is best during the autumn season as the colours are outstanding and leaves are in abundance. It does not matter what type of leaf it is or what it looks like. Any leaf is okay.

Next hold the leaf in your hand and let your attention be absorbed by it. Really look closely at it. Notice the things about its physical characteristics. Turn it over and around and follow the patterns and form.

Describe it to yourself like you are daydreaming.

Notice the colours, textures, and shapes without judging them as bad or good, unpleasant or pleasant, beautiful or ugly.

Resist any urge to think about or assess the leaf. Simply observe it for what it is.

Do this mindfulness exercise for as long as you can. Every time you notice your mind has wandered, simply draw it back to the exercise with gentleness. Aim for observing the leaf for 5 minutes without

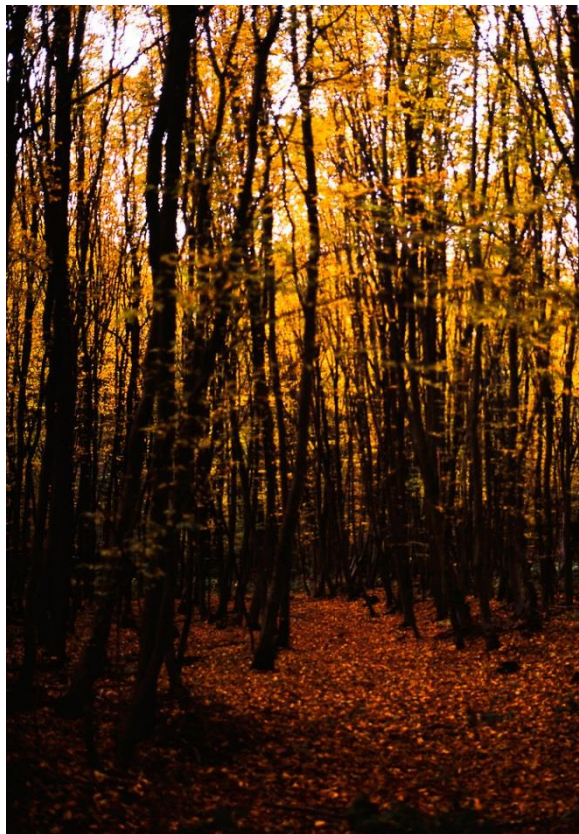


your mind wandering... ..and enjoy the moments

<http://www.ianbanyard.com/home/cotswold-natural-mindfulness/the-natural-mindfulness-leaf-exercise/>

AUTUMN: BALANCING DARKNESS WITH LIGHT

On the autumn equinox, day and night are of equal length. This signals the need to balance light and darkness within us. Far too often, we fear the dark and adore only the light.



Joyce Rupp, a Catholic writer and poet who is one of our Living Spiritual Teachers, challenges us in *Little Pieces of Light* to befriend our inner darkness: "I gratefully acknowledge how darkness has become less of an enemy for me and more of a place of silent nurturance, where the slow, steady gestation needed for my soul's growth can occur. Not only is light a welcomed part of my life, but I am also developing a greater understanding of how much I need to befriend my inner darkness."

Buddhist Gary Thorp in *Caught in Fading Light* tells a wonderful teaching story about accepting all situations where we are left in

the dark without answers:

"Once, when the Zen master Tokusan was still a student, he visited his teacher, Ryutan, just before sundown. They sat on the floor of Ryutan's hut, casually drinking tea and discussing Zen until deep into the night. At last, Ryutan said, 'Maybe it's about time you went home.' Tokusan bowed to his teacher and walked to the door. 'It's completely dark outside,' he said. Ryutan lit the lantern and said, 'Why not take this?' Just as Tokusan was about to take the lamp from his teacher's hands, Ryutan blew out the flame. Tokusan suddenly knew everything there was to know."

Thorp comments: "Sometimes there is no remedy for our situation than to begin from a point of absolute darkness. Turning off a television set and extinguishing a lantern have certain similarities; they are both abrupt and transition making, and can leave us in a different world. In darkness, we are always on our own."

REFLECTION POINTS:



AUTUMN REFLECTION: “Even if something is left undone, everyone must take time to sit still and watch the leaves turn.” Elizabeth Lawrence

MAY 2017

INSPIRATION: “WE WISH TO LIVE CONTEMPLATIVELY, AS ACTIVE ECCLESIAL WOMEN, ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE DRAWN DEEPER INTO THE DYNAMIC MYSTERY AT THE HEART OF LIFE AND MATTER.” FROM SISTERS OF MERCY PARRAMATTA CHAPTER STATEMENT 2016

Anne Ferguson
Mission Animator for
Sisters of Mercy
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your mind wandering... ..and enjoy the moments

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AUTUMN: LETTING GO

As we watch leaves fluttering to the ground in autumn, we are reminded that nature's cycles are mirrored in our lives. Autumn is a time for letting go and releasing things that have been a burden. All the religious traditions pay tribute to such acts of relinquishment. Autumn is the right time to practice getting out of the way and letting Spirit take charge of our lives.

In *Kinds of Power*, James Hillman, the elder statesman of contemporary depth psychology, challenges us to learn from others about this: "For what the actor tries to achieve on stage is to 'get out of the way' so that the character he or she is portraying can come fully out. So, too, the writer and the painter; they have to get out of the way of the flow of the work onto the paper and the canvas."



Buddhist teacher Sharon Salzberg writes in *Lovingkindness* about one of the offshoots of letting go: "Generosity has such power because it is characterized by the inner quality of letting go or relinquishing. Being able to let go, to give up, to renounce, to give generously — these capacities spring from the same source within us. When we practice generosity, we open to all of these liberating qualities simultaneously. They carry us to a profound knowing of freedom, and they also are the loving expression of that same state of freedom." Autumn, then, is the perfect season to give generously of your time and talents to others.

REFLECTION POINTS:



AUTUMN REFLECTION: “Even if something is left undone, everyone must take time to sit still and watch the leaves turn.” Elizabeth Lawrence

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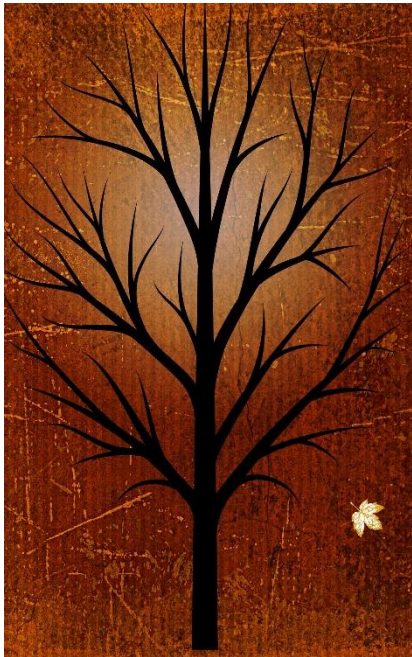


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AUTUMN: ACKNOWLEDGING IMPERMANENCE

Autumn reminds us of the impermanence of everything. We have experienced the budding of life in spring and the flowerings and profusions of summer. Now the leaves fall and bare branches remind us of the fleeting nature of all things. Jewish rabbi and writer Harold Kushner in *The Lord Is My Shepherd* suggests that when we contemplate autumn's changes, we grow more appreciative of all the beauties that



surround us:

"The poet Wallace Stevens once wrote, 'Death is the mother of beauty.' What those words say to me is that we cherish the beauty of a sunrise, of a colourful autumn, of a relationship, of a child's hug, precisely because those things will not be around forever and neither will we be around to enjoy them."

Autumn also brings home to our consciousness death and the challenge to live every day to the fullest. Susan Jeffers in *Embracing Uncertainty* gives us a spiritual practice to facilitate this twofold movement:

"I was once told that certain spiritual masters in Tibet used to set their teacups upside down before they went to bed each night as a reminder that all life was impermanent. And then, when they awoke each morning, they turned their teacups right side up again with the happy thought, 'I'm still here!' This simple gesture was a wonderful reminder to celebrate every moment of the day."

Finally, Cynthia Kneen, in *Awake Mind, Open Heart* shares an open heart practice to carry with you into autumn:

"When you are brave and have an open heart, you have affection for this world — this sunlight, this other human being, this experience. You experience it nakedly, and when it touches your heart, you realize this world is very fleeting. So it is perfect to say 'Hello means good-bye.' And also, 'My hope, hello again.' "

REFLECTION POINTS:

What strikes you as you read the article?

What is its most important message for you personally and in ministry?

SHARING - Please tell us the name of the article and the author, poet .. and a couple of points that challenged you.

What strikes you from what you have heard in the sharing?

CLOSING REFLECTION:

*"On the day when
The weight deadens
On your shoulders
And you stumble,
May the clay dance
To balance you.*

*"And when your eyes
Freeze behind
The grey window
And the ghost of loss
Gets into you,
May a flock of colours,
Indigo, red, green
And azure blue,
Come to awaken in you
A meadow of delight. ...*

*"May the nourishment of the earth be
yours,
May the clarity of light be yours,
May the fluency of the ocean be yours,
May the protection of the ancestors be
yours.*

*And so may a slow
Wind work these words
Of love around you,
An invisible cloak
To mind your life."*

— John O'Donohue from *To Bless the Space Between Us*



OTHER ARTICLES FOR REFLECTION

Song for Autumn



In the deep fall
don't you imagine the leaves think
how
comfortable it will be to touch
the earth instead of the
nothingness of air and the endless
freshets of wind? And don't you
think
the trees themselves, especially
those with mossy,
warm caves, begin to think

of the birds that will come — six,
a dozen — to sleep
inside their bodies? And don't you
hear
the goldenrod whispering goodbye,
the everlasting being crowned
with the first
tuffets of snow? The pond
vanishes, and the white field over
which
the fox runs so quickly brings out
its blue shadows. And the wind
pumps its
bellows. And at evening especially,
the piled firewood shifts a little,
longing to be on its way.

MARY OLIVER

A PRAYER FOR AUTUMN DAYS

-- adapted from Joyce Rupp

God of the seasons, there is a time for everything; there is a time for dying and a time for rising. We need your grace and courage to enter into the conversion process.



God of Autumn, the trees are saying their goodbyes to green, letting go of what has been. We, too, have our moments of surrender, with all their insecurity and risk-taking. Help us to let go.

God of fallen leaves that lay in coloured patterns upon the ground, our lives have their own particular patterns of growth. We need to see the connections.

God of misty days and harvest-moon nights, there is always the dimension of mystery and wonder in our lives, always the need to recognize your power-filled mystery.

God of harvest wagons and fields of ripened grain, there are many gifts of growth within this season of surrender. Harvest must be waited for in faith and hope. Grant us patience when we do not see the blessings.

God of geese going south for another season, it is wisdom which enables us to know what needs to be left behind and what needs to be carried into the future. We yearn for insight and vision.

God of graciousness, you believe in us, you enrich us, you entrust us with the freedom to choose life. For all of this, we are grateful.

As we experience the season of Autumn, may we allow it to speak to us of necessary change and growth and of preparation for seasons that lie beyond the Winter. Grant us an openness to the continuous process of letting go and moving on, which is part of our human condition. We know that you are our faithful companion on this journey. Your presence is blessing enough. AMEN.





Autumn, Season of Wisdom and Transformation, you are the golden season. You come, laughing out a harvest. The ripening of our crops has made the earth a dinner table, and you are the one who serves us.

You turn our faces toward the west and remind us of the transitory nature of all things. You call us to surrender. You stir up in our souls a great hunger, a yearning for transcendence. At every moment you are dying to live while we want to live without dying.

Teach us the art of surrendering that we might taste the fruit of buried seeds. Teach us to live wisely between our birth and our death. Open our hearts to all that needs transformation. Invite us to join your beautiful dance. Share with us your virtues of acceptance, obedience, and wisdom. Abide with us forever.

Transforming, honest season, you know when to let go. Teach us!

Joan Chittister, *The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey Through the Season* Joan is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania

This autumn let us pause and allow the falling leaves to remind us of the call to be vulnerable, the call to be open to the possibility of being hurt, the call to accept and to grow from the daily dyings of our days and to love as Jesus loved.

Go for a walk in the forest or just down the street if you have some trees nearby whose leaves have turned. Let your heart roam through the leaves. Think thoughts of vulnerability. Pick up a leaf. Take it home with you. Place it somewhere where you will see it often. Let it remind you of the call to be vulnerable.

Take time to browse through a Gospel. Note all the times that Jesus opened himself to hurt and misunderstanding. Allow yourself to be a bit more open and vulnerable to someone whom you love. Surrender yourself a bit more to God's power working through you. Let autumn be a time when the value of vulnerability is strengthened in your life.



The vulnerability of Jesus

Lk 4:1-13: in the desert.... where for 40 days he was tempted by the Devil

Mk 6:1-6: in his home town teaching....Many were astounded at this teaching and they took offence at him.

Mk 7:1-23: in not being understood....The Pharisees question him on not observing the tradition of the elders.

Jn 19:1-7: as he faced Pilate.... was flogged and the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head and dressed him in a purple robe.

Lk 22:39-46: in his agony.... to the Mount of Olives to pray and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

You shouldn't talk about autumn.
Autumn should be **done**.
Shuffling through dry leaves
Wading through the mud with your boots
Avoiding falling acorns

Autumn should be **smelt**
The drizzly sweet smell of soggy moss.
The dirty-but-yet-delicious smell of wet, rotting
leaves.
The almost tasty odor of leaking, drooly mushrooms

Autumn should be **seen**
Magnificent gradients, simply created by leaves,
perfectly overflowing from fresh spring green to
almost winter brown.
That beautiful soft light, which makes these leaves
shine through the trees like early Christmas lights.



Countless mushrooms in shapes that you
wouldn't even imagine.
Some of them looking like candy, as if the
candy-man discharged its stock in the
forest.
And of course, all these creatures, even the
ugliest birds, look like top models in an
autumn decor!

Autumn should be **heard**

The restless fluttering of leaves and imminent crunching of branches during a storm.
Only to be interrupted by the thud of a pine cone, or a broken branch.
Relieved birdsong, when the autumn storms have dried.
And especially this very silent silence, just before an autumn storm blows away this
years fall.

Autumn should be **felt**
I love all seasons, but autumn has this *je ne sais quoi*,
That magic...
Autumn has atmosphere
Autumn has...
...autumn is...
Nuff said!

Roeselien Raimond

CREATION AS A TEACHER

Imagine if you will that you are sitting on the bridge at Well of Mercy. The autumn season has just arrived for a visit. What gifts does she bring? The air provides a fresh coolness. The water in the stream is clearer. You see a beautiful array of colours in the trees and



you are able to see deeper into the woods as the trees drop their leaves. Flowers are fading and setting seeds for future growth. Even birds appear different as they begin migrating toward warmer weather.

The reality is that many of us won't even notice what God, through creation, is saying to us both literally and symbolically. In our

lack of awareness we may be missing the messages nature is presenting. This is the sad consequence of busy, noisy, cluttered and demanding lives. Did you find yourself reacting to the opening sentence in this reflection? Who has time to sit still? Who desires to be alone in the woods? Who wants to still their minds and enter into the quiet? My answer is people who are too overwhelmed and weary to do one more thing. People, who like falling leaves, must surrender to solitude and stillness rather than being overcome by illness. People who hear themselves saying, "My life and everything around me is so loud and demanding that I can't even think straight." People who recognize that their life is no longer flowering or that new seeds are trying to set within them. Like the clearer water of autumn's offering, what clarity am I seeking? Am I being called to flow beyond where I am into deeper waters?

I believe our lives are in danger when we fail to realize that we are guests of God and that creation is our sustainer as well as teacher. Nature has lessons to offer and will I yield to her teachings?

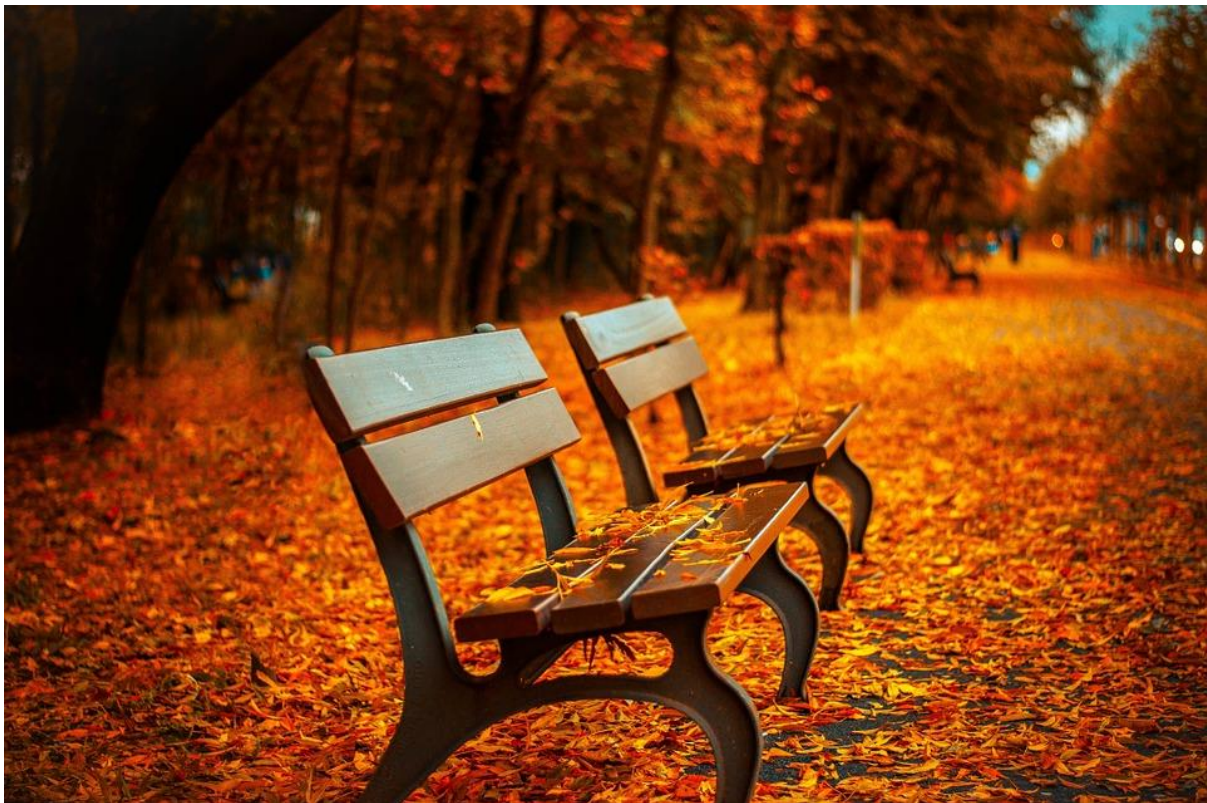
I am sitting on the bridge at the stream at Well of Mercy. Leaves are swirling about and in the deep recesses of my heart I am grieving the fact that so many lives are out of sync. As Sisters of Mercy, we are called to strive to be in right relationship with self, others, God and creation. This is not simply a call on our lives; it is a challenge for all of us. May we all pray to have the courage of falling leaves and release all that stands in the way of living in right relationship.



Sister Donna Marie Vaillancourt, RSM
Co-Director, Well of Mercy

God says to me: "Come in! Do come in! I've painted these woods gold and brown and yellow just for you...Come in and swish your feet among the crisp fallen leaves. I've created that sound just for you too...Look up...look down...look all around. Listen... smell... touch... taste. It's all for you. All!...Walk around if you wish...or stand in one place...or sit on a log...or even kneel on the carpet of leaves....I know you are busy doing all kinds of good things, but I hope you can afford a few minutes just to enjoy this special season....Do come in, my Beloved, and just be...with me."

<http://www.melanniesvobodasnd.org/three-reflections-for-autumn/>



POEM

O sacred season of Autumn, be my teacher, for I wish to learn the virtue of contentment. As I gaze upon your full-colored beauty, I sense all about you an at-homeness with your amber riches.

You are the season of retirement, of full barns and harvested fields. The cycle of growth has ceased, and the busy work of giving life is now completed. I sense in you no regrets: you've lived a full life.

I live in a society that is ever-restless, always eager for more mountains to climb, seeing happiness through more and more possessions. As a child of my culture, I am seldom truly at peace with what I have. Teach me to take stock of what I have given and received, may I know that it's enough, that my striving can cease in the abundance of God's grace. May I know the



contentment that allows the totality of my energies to come to full flower. May I know that like you I am rich beyond measure.

As you, O Autumn, take pleasure in your great bounty, let me also take delight in the abundance of the simple things in life which are the true source of joy. With the golden glow of peaceful contentment may I truly appreciate this autumn day.

Edward Hays



MERCY REFLECTION: LIVING LIVES OF BALANCE

Anne Ferguson

Mission Animation, Parramatta Sisters of
Mercy

BALANCE OF ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION IN THE LIFE OF CATHERINE MCAULEY

Catherine, a woman of prayer, understood that prayer is a gift from God and that one should beg God continually for this gift. During each day, Catherine spent a considerable amount of time communing with God. Often, she awoke early in the morning in order to rest in God's provident presence before commencing the busy schedule of her day. Catherine believed that prayer enables one to develop a spirit of service in order to carry out works of mercy. To her fellow sisters, she counseled: "We ought to give ourselves to prayer ... to obtain new vigor, zeal, and fervor in the exercise of our state."

Catherine believed that one's "whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer." She taught that one should raise one's heart to God many times during the course of a day, asking God for the grace to spend the day in God's service. Catherine maintained that prayer language should be simple and that prayer and ministry intertwine. She stressed that works of mercy are accomplished in and through prayer and prayer always accompanies works of mercy. Prayer impels one to engage in works of mercy and vice versa.

Sister Marilyn Sunderman, October 30, 2015

Soul of her Life & Ministry: Reflective Living

Catherine did not wish her Sisters to become contemplative in the accepted sense of her day. Indeed she worked tirelessly to avoid that. When she was away at George's Hill, some of her young enthusiastic followers, wanted in their fervour to imitate what they had seen contemplatives do like night vigils, long hours of prayer, etc. But Catherine went so far as to charge her Carmelite priest friend to keep an eye on Baggot St. and to ensure that the young women did not engage in these practices. When Claire Agnew tried to move in the direction of enclosure and Perpetual Adoration, Catherine clearly laid out a document, insisting that this was not the spirit of the Mercy Congregation. Catherine promoted the idea of 'contemplation in action' which was a new concept for the traditionally cloistered religious. She had learned how to utilise the activities of each hour as the matter of her reflection and she never accepted a dichotomy between contemplation and ministry. Rather, she insisted that active works must be done without losing

awareness of the presence of God, and she was convinced that the Sister of Mercy must make mission the ambience of her recollection.



The salient characteristic of Catherine's vision and entire life was an expression of love of God through service of people. Her realism led her to try and alleviate human need of every kind; her idealism convinced her that the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy are a means of closer union with God, and she compared the Sister of Mercy who does not actively serve God's people to a knife that grows rusty or a well that becomes stagnant from want of use. To neglect either prayer or apostolic service for the sake of the other would be to deviate from her founding intention.

Two practices which Catherine encouraged as a support to apostolic spirituality were 'the sacrament of the present moment' – the notion that 'what is now' is where God is for me, and the practice of silence *'The practice of the presence of God is one-half of holiness,'* she said. *'We belong to God, all in us is his. We must endeavour to keep ourselves in his presence, united with him by faith.'* To achieve a proper balance or rhythm between contemplation and action, to have the disposition of Mary to receive and ponder the Word of God and to act upon it, is a crucial challenge for us today, just as it was for Catherine and her first companions.

Mary Reynolds RSM

Image: Marie Henderson RSM, mcauleyimages.com Used with permission

PRAYING WITH ART - Johannes Vermeer: *Woman Holding a Balance*

- 1. QUIET:** Stop for a moment, breathe and simply relax.
- 2. INTENTION:** What am I grateful for?
- 3. ATTENTION:** Look over the entire image. Is there a figure, shape, colour, texture or word that calls your attention?
- 4. NOTICE:** What feelings, thoughts, or desires do you notice? What could they reveal about God and your life?
- 5. RESPOND:** Share whatever you wish with the group.



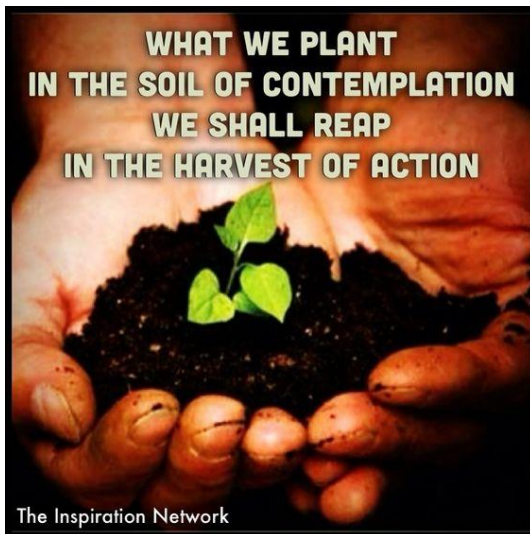
Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WO11dN0DaA>

Balancing Action and Contemplation

... Here are some principles for balancing our lives:

- Have enough interiority in life to make for mysticism, but have enough family and disruption in life to make for healthy displacement.
- Have enough interiority in life to make for soul, but have enough obligations and involvements to make for a sense of the corporate.
- Have enough solitude in life to make for enjoyment but enough dutiful work to identify you with the poor.
- Have enough withdrawal and self-care in life to safeguard health, but enough conscription and duty to let you know your life is not your own.
- Have enough of God's agenda to let you know that this world is not ultimate, but enough of the world's agenda to let you know that your task here is to help God shape the earth.
- Be enough at home to realize that your family is primary, but be enough in the world to let you know that the world is your ultimate family.

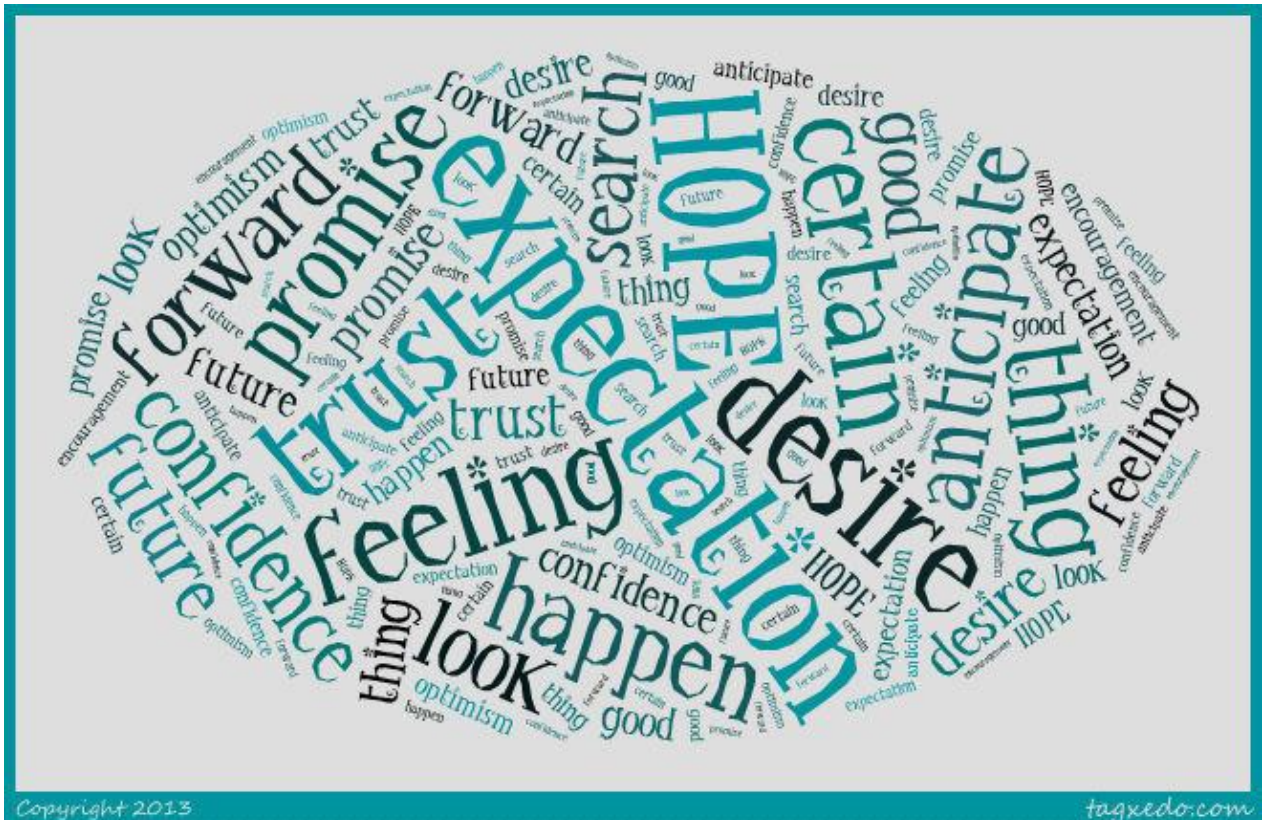
**WHAT WE PLANT
IN THE SOIL OF CONTEMPLATION
WE SHALL REAP
IN THE HARVEST OF ACTION**



The Inspiration Network

MERCY REFLECTIONS

BRINGERS OF HOPE



Our hope comes from God. May God fill you with joy and peace because of your trust. May your hope grow stronger by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Col.3:15)

Anne Ferguson

Mission Animation for the Parramatta Sisters of Mercy

Go Make A Difference

Chorus:

Go make a diff'rence, we can make a diff'rence
Go make a diff'rence in the world
Go make a diff'rence we can make a diff'rence
Go make a diff'rence in the world

We are the salt in the earth, called to let the people see
The love of God in you and me
We are the light of the world, not to be hidden, but be seen
Go make a diff'rence in the world



Chorus

2:

We are the hands of Christ, reaching out to those in need
The face of God for all to see
We are the spirit of hope, we are the voice of peace

Steve Angrisano

READING: MERCY MADE RECKLESS

God, friend to those who are sad,
bless us as we seek to become
signs of hope to a broken world.

In the interweaving of our lives,
we hear your voice in those who cry;
in the faces of those the world does not see,
we recognise your presence and your pain.

Make us true to our call,
using our gifts to do your work.
May your bounty stir us not
to security, but to reckless generosity.

To a world weighed down with sorrow
make us bearers of unexpected joy.
May your Spirit help us to turn
our talk of mercy into deeds of love.

Amen.

"The Spirituality of Hope"

It's hard to imagine a bleaker place on Earth than Bosnia in 1992. Christians, Orthodox and Muslims battled for political control. Ethnic cleansing flourished. Neighbors forced neighbors from family homesteads generations old. The fighting was hand to hand. It was a bloody, hopeless time.

Vedran Smailovic was a Bosnian. Born in Sarajevo to a highly musical family. By the age of 37 Vedran himself had become the principal cellist of the prestigious Sarajevo opera theater. But the opera theater lay destroyed now, the economy shattered. National unity disintegrated. The very definition of 'human' was now in question. Years later, Smailovic described the city in those days as "The Capital of Hell." Then, at 4:00 pm on May 27th, 1992, a long line of starving people waiting in front of the only bakery in Sarajevo that still had enough flour to make bread were shelled. Twenty-two people died as Vedran Smailovic stood at his window a hundred yards away and watched.

The next day hungry people lined up again to beg for bread—certain they would die if they didn't come to the bakery and convinced they could die if they did. Then it happened. Vedran Smailovic arrived. He was dressed in the black suit and white tie in which he had played every night until the opera theater was destroyed. He was carrying his cello and a chair. Smailovic sat down in the square and, surrounded by debris and the remainders of death and the despair of the living, he began to play the mournful Albinoni "Adagio," the one music manuscript that had been found whole in the city of Dresden after the carpet bombing of Dresden.



What's more, shelling or no, he came back to the square every day after that for 21 consecutive days to do the same thing, a living reminder that there is a strength in the human spirit that simply cannot be destroyed. Today, where he sat, there is a monument of a man in a chair playing a cello. But the monument is not to his music, as good as it is. It is to his refusal to surrender the hope that beauty could be reborn in the midst of a living hell. Even more important, perhaps, is the fact that that small sound of hope rings on still around the world.

Smailovic was called to play the "Adagio" in Seattle, in Washington, D.C. during the inaugural celebration of President Clinton, in New York City, at the Statue of Liberty and, in 1998, in Belfast prior to the signing of the peace accord in Northern Ireland. Finally, Yo-Yo Ma played David Wilde's "The Cellist of Sarajevo" in Manchester, England, in 1994 with Smailovic in attendance. Clearly, hope is a spark that once struck will simply not be extinguished.

I know out of my own experience that there is no such thing as life without struggle. I have met it, indeed, from one end of life to another. Over and over again, the foundations of life have shifted and slid away from me, sometimes only changing the mental landscape a little, at other times shattering every given I've ever assumed into a kaleidoscope of pain. I have come, like you, through the death of loved ones, debilitating illness, life-shaping disappointment and public rejection by the very institutions and people that have meant the most to me. When tragedy strikes, when trouble comes, when life disappoints us—as it surely will—we stand at the crossroads between hope and despair. To go the way of despair colours the way we look at things, makes us suspicious of the future, makes us negative about the present. It leads us to ignore the very possibilities that could save us, or worse, leads us to want to hurt as we have been hurt ourselves. When I say that I am in despair, I am really saying that I have given up on God. Despair says that I am God and if I can't do anything about this situation, then nothing and nobody can.

To go the way of hope, on the other hand, takes life on its own terms, knows that whatever happens God lives in it, and expects that, whatever its twists and turns, it will ultimately yield its good to those who live it consciously, to those who live it to the hilt. Hope is not a matter of waiting for things outside of us to get better. It is about getting better inside about what is going on outside. It is about becoming open to the God of Newness. It is about allowing ourselves to let go of the present, to believe in the future we cannot see but trust to God. Surrendering to the demands of the moment, holding on when holding on seems pointless, brings us to that point of personal transformation which is the juncture of maturity and sagacity. Then, whatever the circumstances, however hard the task, the struggles of life may indeed shunt us from mountain top to mountain top but they will not destroy us.



Life is not one road. It is many roads, the walking of which provides the raw material out of which we become hope in the midst of despair. Every dimension of the process of struggle is a call to draw from a well of new understandings. It is in those that hope dwells. It is that wisdom that carries us beyond the dark night of struggle to the dawn of new wisdom and new strength.

We always think of hope as grounded in the future. That's wrong, I think. Hope is fulfilled in the future but it depends on our ability to remember that, like Vendran Smailovic, we have survived everything in life to this point—and in even better form than we were when those troubles began. So why not this latest situation, too? Then we hope because we have no reason not to hope. Hope is what sits by a window and waits for one more dawn, despite the fact that there isn't an ounce of proof in tonight's black, black sky that it can possibly come.

An ancient people tell the story of the elder who was talking about struggle. The elder said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one." And the disciples asked, "But which wolf will win the fight in your heart?" And the holy one answered, "It depends on which one I feed."

The spiritual task of life is to feed hope. Hope is not something to be found outside of us. It lies in the spiritual life we cultivate within. The whole purpose of wrestling with life is to be transformed into the self we are meant to become, to step out of the confines of our false securities and allow our creating God to go on creating. In us.

Jack Reimer, Houston Chronicle, February 17, 2001. Reprinted in Chicken Soup for the Soul and cited at <http://www.stlukes-hou.org/Sermons/JM022501.htm>, viewed June 13, 2002.

SHARED REFLECTION:

Share the story of a time when the strength of hope was a spiritual resource that helped pull you through a difficult period.

- What do you think people mean when they say to you, "Don't get your hopes up too high?" What would be a good response to this advice?
- Does the prospect of the future fill you with anxiety or hope? Why?

How are you a life-bringer and a bearer of hope to your family, friends, community and those to whom you minister?



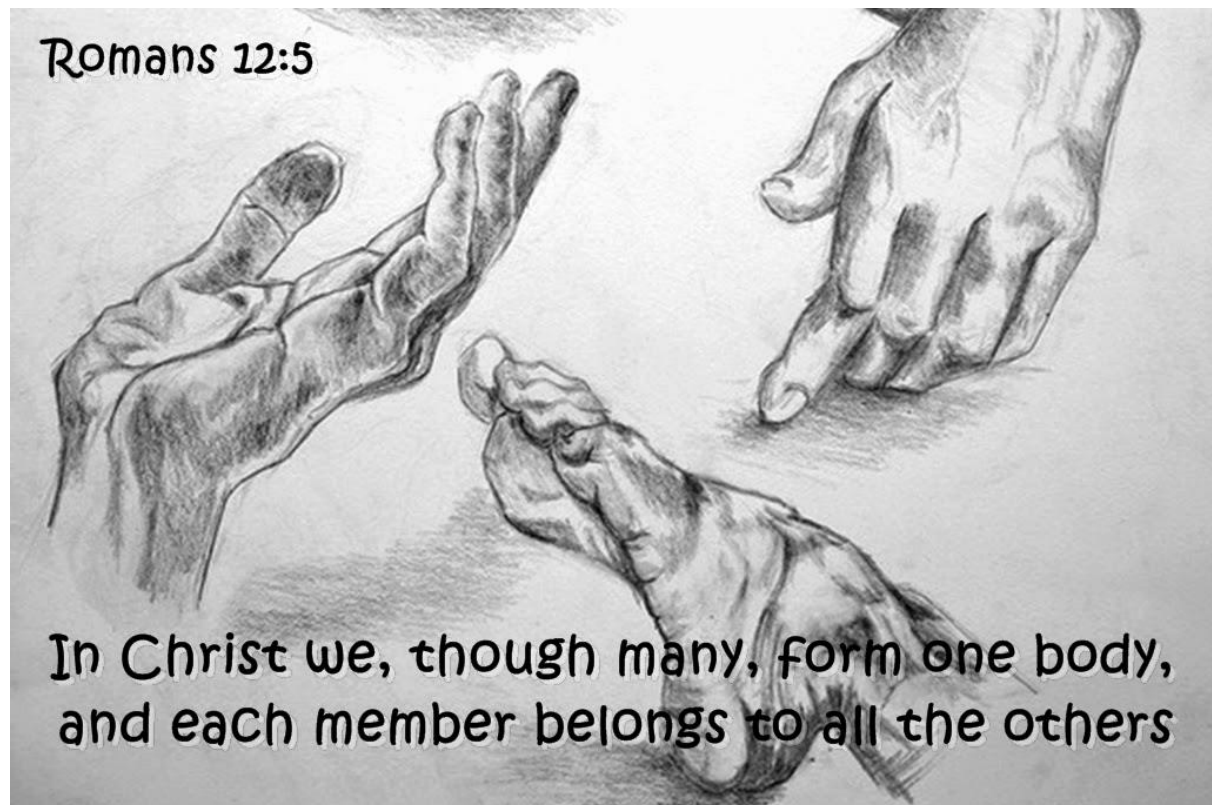
MERCY REFLECTIONS:MINISTRY: BEING CONNECTED ... BEING A CONNECTOR

Anne Ferguson

Mission Animation for the Parramatta sisters of Mercy

INSPIRATION:

Romans 12:5



In Christ we, though many, form one body,
and each member belongs to all the others

CATHERINE THE CONNECTOR



As Joanna Regan RSM expresses it: “By courageous, contagious concern for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the poor, the sick and the ignorant, she broke through the impossibilities of her time. She animated many to walk with her. She animated others at centres of wealth, power and influence to share in her heroic efforts. She connected the rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the educated and skilled to the uninstructed, the influential to those of no consequence, the powerful to the weak – to do the work of God on earth”.

Catherine’s way of assisting the poor was very ‘hands on’, but she did not stop there. She always aimed to bring the human face of suffering into the vision and consciousness of the well-to-do as a way of challenging them to share their resources with the poor. It was with this in mind that she built her convent in the ‘up market’ area of Baggot Street. The presence of the poor was not welcomed by everybody there but some hearts were eventually changed and a network of support was established, while resources were connected with human need.

FOR QUIET REFLECTION



'Clothespin' is a weathering steel sculpture, by Claes Oldenburg. It is located at Centre Square, 1500 Market Street, Philadelphia. It reminds us that connections are made through ordinary, everyday things. By exaggerating its size, the artist encourages us to value this household object. It is a simple tool that can secure a sock to a clothesline, but it is also a symbol of an embrace, reminding us of how we connect with other people.

If everything is connected to everything else, then everyone is ultimately responsible for everything. We can blame nothing on anyone else. The more we comprehend our mutual interdependence, the more we fathom the implications of our most trivial acts. We find ourselves within a luminous organism of sacred responsibility.
— Laurence Kushner in *Invisible Lines of Connection*

Everything is integral and interacts with everything else. This means that nothing is itself without everything else. There is a commonality, an integrity, an intimacy of the universe with itself.

— Thomas Berry quoted in *Listening to the Land* by Derrick Jensen

FOR SHARING

- In this ecological world of interdependence, we are all on the same team and anything done for one is done for all. What experience, practice, or resource has recently deepened or nourished your sense of being part of a team?
- Have you ever had an experience when you felt the boundaries between you and the world dissolving and you were one with the universe? Where were you and what happened?
- Where do you see a need for mercy to connect today? To form connections? To be connected?
- Is there an image, phrase, word that challenges you about being connected or being a connector?

Knowing How Our Lives Intertwine

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to kill.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to take what is not given.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to engage in abusive relationships.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to speak falsely or deceptively.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to dwell on past errors.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to speak of self, separate from others.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow not to harbor ill will toward any plant, animal or Human being.

Origin: Stephanie Kaza, professor of environmental studies at the University of Vermont and author of *The Attentive Heart: Conversations With Trees*. She practices the Zen Buddhist technique of *shikantaza* — just sitting — to find serenity and inspiration among trees. This is a shortened version of the original work.



MERCY REFLECTIONS



MINISTRY: SHARING THE SHAWL OF MERCY

*Shawls ... made for centuries universal and embracing,
symbolic of an inclusive, unconditionally loving, God.
They wrap, enfold, comfort, cover, give solace,
mother, hug, shelter and beautify..."*

Written in 1998 by: Janet Bristow Copyright ©2013

Does this front cover evoke any memories for you?

Devised by ANNE FERGUSON, MISSION ANIMATION for the PARRAMATTA SISTERS OF MERCY

SCULPTURE OF CATHERINE MCAULEY 1778 – 1841, commissioned by All Hallows' School Brisbane
Sculptor: Meleisa Judge



Words from the sculptor:

The sculpture is a wonderful metaphorical depiction of Catherine, shown in the act of giving away her shawl in response to someone in need, symbolic of Catherine's life of service in God's name.

Catherine is shown as she pauses mid-stride; imagine that her attention drawn by someone in the distance. The gesture is that of giving, as she unwraps her own shawl to give to a person in need. This is a gesture that says "I answer your need".

The shawl is a subtle yet powerfully universal symbol. Emblematic of the fabric of society, (it is) the cloth that wraps, that binds, the interwoven threads of our lives. It is a metaphor for women's labour, the invisible labour that underpins the world. Women's work is central to the social

outreach that Catherine placed at the core of her Society. Starting from the early days of providing a home to protect girls working in the city, through to establishing workshops and laundries as part of the structure of the convents and homes.*(sic)*

The offering of the shawl: When Catherine pulls the shawl from her shoulders and gives it as a gift, it becomes the symbol of nurturance, of protection, warmth and shelter. Deeply personal, it is the giving of that which was her own. This small act, this small gesture of kindness, this devotion, changes the world, just a little.

It is difficult to express an attitude of generosity in a sculpture. Eventually I decided on a simple action as the primary metaphor in the work - a woman pulling her own wrap from around her shoulders to offer it to someone in need. An apt and appropriate symbol for someone who gave away all that she owned so as to protect and care for others.

SCRIPTURE:

Ruth: He also said, "Bring me the **shawl** you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and put it on her. Then he went back to town.

Luke 3:11 In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two **shawls** must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise."

How does Scripture speak to you about Mercy?

THE SHAWL FROM CATHERINE MCAULEY'S PERSPECTIVE

- During the cholera epidemic of 1832, after the death of a woman who had just given birth, she brought the infant home in her **shawl** and put it to sleep in a little bed, probably a small cabinet drawer, in her own room. *Catherine McAuley in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries Mary Sullivan, RSM*
- Catherine looked beyond their youthfulness to see their dedication, trustworthiness and organizational ability. It did not, of course, stop her fretting over them: "Now let me entreat you," said Catherine in one of her many letters to Fanny Warde, "not to be going out... without... [wrapping] up. Have your **shawl** crossed on your chest and feet very warm." (*Catherine McAuley's Letter 1839 quoted by Sr. Penny Roker at the Mercy Associates Regional Gathering in Bermondsey on May 14th 2011*)
- In 1832, malignant Asiatic cholera struck in Dublin. The Sisters of Mercy, new and few in number at the time, quickly volunteered to nurse in one of the temporary cholera hospitals hastily set up by the government. One evening, a young mother died a victim of the disease. Catherine wrapped the woman's newborn infant in her **shawl** and carried it home with her – the earliest example we have of Mercy's response to caring for new life. <http://giving.mdmercy.com>

REFLECTION: Call to mind Catherine's simple black shawl. What does it symbolise for you? Does it offer you any new insights into her character? What feelings does it arouse in you? How might it encourage you to live and work as a truly merciful person?

Where do you see / experience the shawl of mercy being offered /received today in the Mercy world?



PRAYER:

Loving God, we pray for all those in need of your mercy.

We pray for those most vulnerable to oppression and neglect, especially women and children.

We pray for all who seek a kind word, a gentle compassionate look or the patient hearing of their sorrows.

We pray for the poor, the sick, and those in need of knowledge and wisdom.

We pray for those who are in need of safe shelter and food.

We pray for all those we serve through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. We pray for our partners in the ministry of mercy throughout the world.

Compassionate God, pour out your mercy on all your people. May they feel your touch through our hands.

Amen.



Anne Ferguson
Mission Animation,
Parramatta Sisters of
Mercy

**MERCY
REFLECTIONS**

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF MERCY

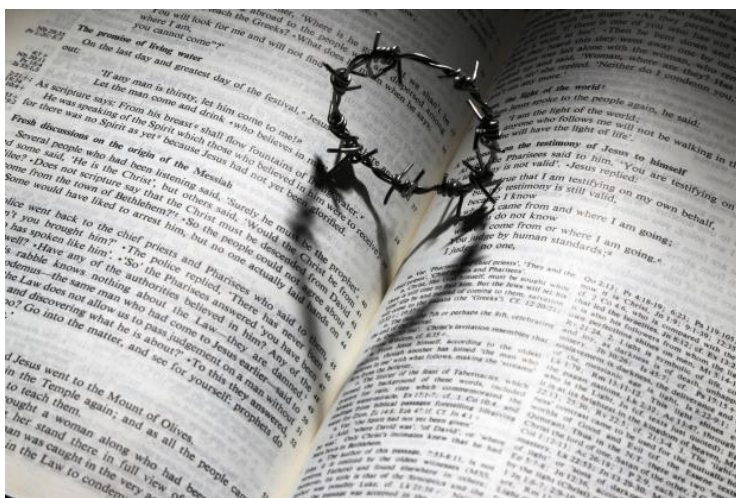
MAY 9, 2016

Ron Rolheiser, OMI

Among the Ten Commandments, one begins with the word “remember”: *Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day*”. It reminds us to recall something we already know. There are commandments of mercy written into our very DNA. We already know them, but we need to remember them more explicitly. What are they?

The Ten Commandments of Mercy:

1. Remember that mercy lies deepest in God’s heart.



Few things so much approximate the essence of God as does mercy. Mercy is God’s essence. Scripture uses words such as loving-kindness and compassion to try to define what constitutes God’s mercy, but the central biblical concept, captured in the Hebrew concept of *hesed*, connotes a relationship that loves, embraces, and forgives even when, and especially when, we cannot measure up or deserve what’s given us.

2. Remember that mercy is the essence of all true religion.

Inside religion and spirituality, within all faiths, three things try to lay claim to what’s central: *proper religious practice, outreach to the poor, and compassion*. Ultimately they are not in opposition, but complementary pieces of one religious whole. But for religious practice and outreach to the poor to be an extension of God’s love and not of human ego, they need to be predicated upon compassion, mercy. Deepest inside of every religion is the invitation: Be compassionate, merciful, as God is compassionate.

3. Remember that we all stand forever in need of mercy.

There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who converts than over ninety-nine righteous persons. Does God love sinners more than the righteous? There are no righteous persons. It’s rather that we feel God’s love more when we admit that we’re sinners. None of us ever measure up. But, as St. Paul so consolingly teaches, the whole point is that we don’t have to measure up. That’s what mercy means. It’s undeserved, by definition.

4. Remember that, having received mercy, we must show mercy to others.

We only receive and appropriate God's mercy and the mercy of others when we extend that same mercy to others. Mercy has to flow through us. If we don't extend it to others we become self-indulgent and too harsh on others.



5. Remember that only the practice of mercy sets us free.

Receiving and giving mercy is the only thing that frees from our congenital propensity to self-seek, self-justify, and judge others. Nothing frees us more from the tyranny of ego than does the practice of mercy.

6. Remember that mercy is not opposed to justice, but is its fulfillment.

Mercy, as Walter Kasper so aptly puts it, is not "a kind of fabric softener that undermines the dogmas and commandments and abrogates the central and fundamental meaning of truth." That's the accusation the Pharisees made against Jesus. Mercy is where justice is meant to terminate.

7. Remember that only the practice of mercy will make God's Kingdom come.

Jesus promised us that someday the meek will inherit the earth, the poor will eat plentiful, rich food, and all tears will be wiped away. That can only happen when mercy replaces self-interest.

8. Remember that mercy needs too to be practiced collectively.

It is not enough for us to be merciful in our own lives. Mercy is marginalized in a society that doesn't sufficiently attend to those who are weak or needy, just as it is marginalized in a church that is judgmental. We must create a society that is merciful and a church that is merciful. Mercy, alone, enables the survival of the weakest.

9. Remember that mercy calls us to do works both spiritual and physical.

Our Christian faith challenges us to perform mercy in a double way, corporeally and spiritually. The classic corporal works of mercy are: *Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, cloth the naked, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.* The classic spiritual works of mercy are: *instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the afflicted, admonish the sinner, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, and pray for the living and the dead.* God has given us

different gifts and all of us are better at some of these than at others, but mercy is manifest in all of them.

10. Remember that our lives are a dialogue between God's mercy and our weaknesses.

The only thing at which we are adequate is being inadequate. We are forever falling short at something, no matter the strength of our sincerity, good intention, and willpower. Only mercy, receiving it and giving it, can lead us out of the choppy waters of our own anxieties, worry, and joylessness. Only in knowing mercy do we know gratitude.



Pope Francis has asked us all to live a year of mercy, to contemplate the mystery of mercy "as a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace." Mercy, he believes, is the secret to putting a credible face to God, to putting a credible face to our churches, and to walking with steadiness inside our own lives.

FOR SHARING:

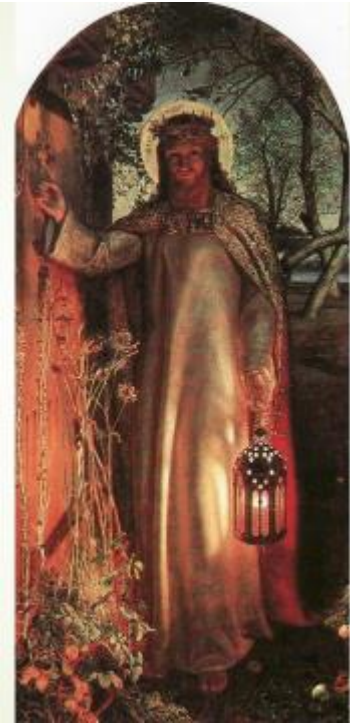
- ✚ *What struck you most in this reading?*
- ✚ *Where were you challenged?*
- ✚ *What are the implications for action?*

ALL: Lord God, you show such mercy toward your people and toward each of us. Let us be open to this mercy and to its healing effects. Assist us as individuals and as a community to be the face and instrument of your mercy to others, to develop an attitude of mercy toward all with whom we are in contact. Let us be transformed into your mercy so that our eyes, our tongues, our hands, our minds and our hearts reflect and channel your mercy. Like Pope Francis, let us be able to say, "Who am I to judge?" and like Jesus, to be able to say, "Neither do I condemn you." Let us each contribute to the *kairos* moment of mercy, this time of mercy. We ask this in your name. Amen.
Source: *Catholic Health Association of the United States*



ANNE
FERGUSON
MISSION
ANIMATION
FOR THE
SISTERS OF
MERCY
PARRAMATTA

MERCY REFLECTIONS



In these weeks, we have already – or will – mark and celebrate **Closings and Openings**.

This weekend, the feast of Christ the King, marks the closing of the Door of Mercy – yet the Door of Mercy must remain always open. As the door of the liturgical year closes, we walk through the open door of Advent.

There is a time to open and a time to close the door. Sometimes closing the door is the right choice to make because it frees us to enter a fresh dimension of growth.

How do the following reflections on “Closing the Door” challenge you to growth?

Closing Doors

I choose to close the door today,
On hate,
And violence,
On deliberate
“misunderstandings’
And on a closed mind.
These things tempt me at times
To retreat
Into an enclosed fortress
Where I am right
And others are excluded.
So I close one door
In order to open another...
Yet I wonder
Do I have the right
To close any doors at all?

Sally Coleman at Eternal Echoes

<http://www.sallysjourney.typepad.com/>

“When you get into your car, **shut the door** and be there for just half a minute. Breathe, feel the energy inside your body, look around at the sky, the trees. The mind might tell you, 'I don't have time.' But that's the mind talking to you. Even the busiest person has time for 30 seconds of space.”

Eckhart Tolle

“Close some doors. Not because of pride, incapacity or arrogance, but simply because they no longer lead somewhere.”

Paulo Coelho

“Whenever you pray, go into your room and **shut the door** and pray to God who is in secret and God who sees in secret will reward you.” Mat 6:6

- ✚ Over this past year, what closed and what opened for me?
- ✚ What has closed and what is opening within me?
- ✚ Who are the significant people who walked with me and opened doors of mercy for me this year?
- ✚ How has truth come knocking on my door this year? How has it affected me?
- ✚ What do I find most difficult about waiting when I am standing at the door?
- ✚ What do I most fear when the door closes?
- ✚ What is one new door that I hope opens for me?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Leader: A new year stands on our doorstep ready to enter our life's journey.

Response: Something in me welcomes this visitor: the hope of bountiful blessings, the joy of a new beginning, the freshness of unclaimed surprises.

Leader: A new year stands on our doorstep ready to enter our life's journey.

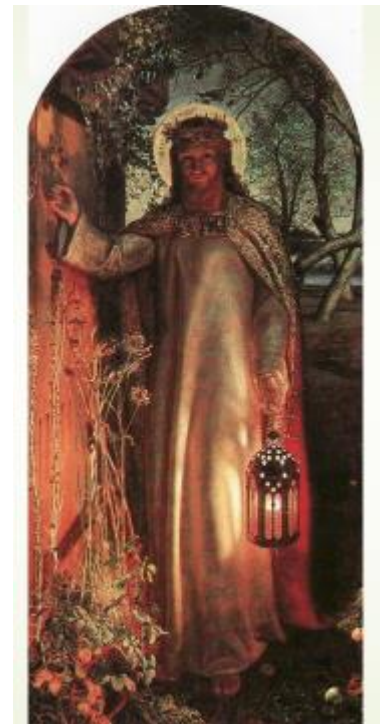
Response: Something in me rebuffs this visitor: the swiftness of the coming, the boldness of the entrance, the challenge of a year's good-bye.

Leader: A new year stands on our doorstep ready to enter our life's journey

People: Something in me fears this visitor: the unnamed events of future days, the wisdom needed to walk love well, the demands of giving away and growing.

Leader: A new year stands on our doorstep.

All: With fragile caution I move to open the door for its entrance, my heart leaps with surprise, joy jumps in my eyes, for there beside this brand new year stands my God with outstretched hand! God smiles and gently asks of me: can we walk this year together? And I, so overwhelmed with goodness, can barely whisper my reply: "Welcome in!"



(Adapted from Joyce Rupp)

MERCY REFLECTIONS

MINISTRY IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS



"Embracing Shadow Self"

I embrace all aspects of Self, shadowed and illuminated. I embrace the illuminated Self for she is my spirit realized. I embrace the shadowed Self for she reveals to me the pain and fear still needing resolution.

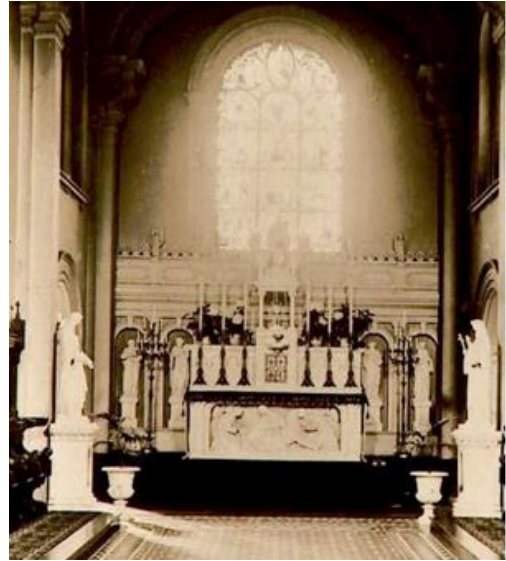
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CATHERINE AND SHADOW

Reflection 1:

"On the third day of the retreat, which dealt with a variety of events and themes in the charism, Patricia Joseph Corkery, from Merion offered a reflection on Catherine at Baggot Street. She described a time prior to Catherine's novitiate when controversy existed over these women living together, doing good works, gathering for prayer, imitating conventual life and seemingly offering competition to established religious orders. We retreatants heard the story of the day the chapel at Baggot Street was blessed. The director concluded this account with the observation that due to the controversy that raged around her, Catherine was unable to attend the ceremonies, and, the literature says, stayed in the house and prayed instead.

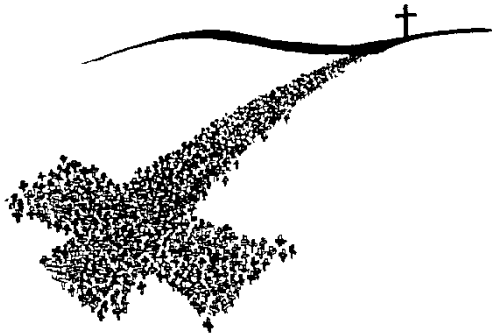
It was so striking to me to hear that in this instance, Catherine was unable to face a situation. That afternoon, in my own quiet prayer, the image of this woman and that scene came back. I found myself imaginatively wandering through the house at Baggot Street, finding Catherine who was alone in a darkened place. I was able to spend the time just sitting with her, being with her. The silence between us was rich with understanding. This "unable" was a place I understood and could share with her. As a younger person, in my reverie, I had tried trotting behind her, as she swooped into the hovels of the poor, tending every need, and I had returned from this imaginative journey crestfallen, inadequate and feeling alienated from her bountifulness. But in this darkness, in this circle of shared awareness of a moment that could not be overcome, here, we were for the first time in my experience, just sisters, and my presence could be full and entire to her reality. The God of Mercy surrounded us in yet another work of mercy.



During the course of the retreat, when the group gathered for reflection, I was able to share some of this prayer, and felt it open us up to the shadow side of ourselves and of the charism. I have used this example with people I work with both in retreats and in spiritual direction and they have in turn found comfort in it. Somehow it is a blessed relief for us to acknowledge and be with this "unable".

Image: The **chapel** is original to the house. It took five years to complete, but remains almost as designed, apart from minor alterations undertaken by John Bourke in 1858. The chapel was dedicated in 1829, two years after opening.
http://www.mercyworld.org/the_centre/index.cfm?loadref=245

Reflection 2:



... Can we, with Catherine, trust this transforming place of inability, this grace that is unbidden, uninvited and so beyond our desire or control? Can we mine its wealth and wisdom for our larger Mercy world as we search out the tools inherent in the charism that will bring us to the edges of our most authentic form? What is this work of art, its ancient expression, its modern face, its future shape that teaches us by its form and content, by its space and solidity, by the shadows that

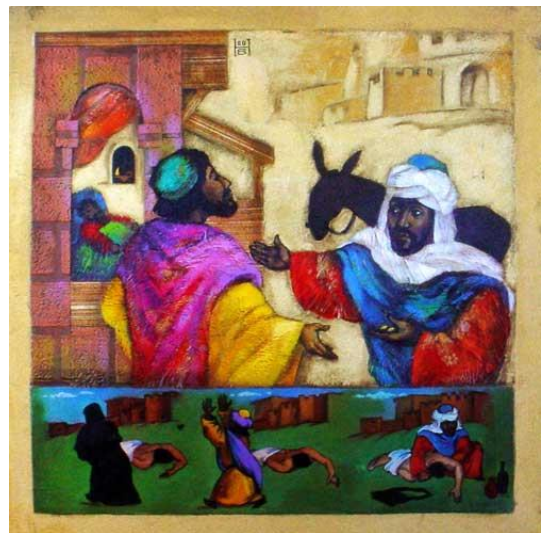
it casts, by its beauty, mystery and challenge? Where are we in our willingness to walk slowly around this sculpture, allowing our sight to expand, our knowing to deepen? Can we trust the dark empty space that yields us form? Will we eventually give this piece of creation to each other and to our world? Will we be graced by "unable?"

Source of Reflections 1 & 2 - Excerpts from "*Catherine McAuley and the Grace of 'Unable'*", Marianne Heib RSM, published in the MAST Journal, Fall 1993, vol. 4, no. 1

Reflection 3: "Too many of us panic in the dark. We don't understand that it's a holy dark and that the idea is to surrender to it and journey through to real light."

— Sue Monk Kidd quoted in *Little Pieces of Light* by Joyce Rupp

Reflection 4: "When Jesus wishes to show what it is to be an ideal, total human being, he narrates the [story of the] Good Samaritan. ... More is at stake here than mere curiosity as to which is the greatest of the commandments. This parable is a presentation of what it is to be a human being. The total ideal human being is represented as one who has seen someone else lying wounded in the ditch along the road, has re-acted, and has helped the victim in every way possible. . . . The ideal human being, the complete human being, is the one who interiorizes, absorbs in her innards, the suffering of another . . . Mercy, as re-action, becomes the fundamental action of the total human being."



Source: Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994); Art Image: *The Good Samaritan* by Kazakhstan Artist Nelly Bube.

**WHERE DO YOU STAND IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS?
YOUR OWN? OR ANOTHER? WHEN / WHERE ARE YOU
'UNABLE'?**

TIME and Space for SHARING

Suscipe of Catherine McAuley

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My God, I am yours for time and eternity,
Lord, I am yours forever.
It is you who must teach me to trust in your Providence,
Loving Lord.

You are a God of love and tenderness.



I place my faith in you.
And I ask that you grant me acceptance of your will,
loving Lord.

Take from my heart all painful anxiety.
Let nothing sadden me but sin.
And then let my delight be hoping to see your
face
God my all.

My God, I am yours for time and eternity,
Lord, I am yours forever.
It is you who must teach me to trust in your

providence,

loving Lord.

Image: Catherine McAuley by Marie Henderson rsm. Used with permission.

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(right) In *Untitled (Black and Gray)*, done in 1969 - 1970, Rothko gives us two fields of color, meeting each other without recoiling. The viewer is drawn into something that looks simple on the surface yet is actually very weighty and deep. Like the spiritual practice of shadow, this painting takes us into the realm of paradox and mystery.

