



Today, Sisters of Mercy, through Mercy International Association, use their resources to respond to issues of global poverty demonstrated in the massive displacement of persons worldwide.

Reflection on the Scriptures ~ 21 June 2013

Friday of 11 Week in Ordinary Time (I)

2 Corinthians 11:18, 21-30

Matthew 6:19-23

I am very conscious of the fact that this is a sacred day around the world—a “turning point”—the solstice (either winter or summer, depending where in the world you are—but we are here in the northern hemisphere and in the middle of the longest day of the year. I pray that all the extra light we have been enjoying in these weeks will get inside us and illumine our way for years to come.

A word that Veronica used last week gave me a jolt, and Madeline referred back to it yesterday. Being shattered! Shattered by displacement. Although Veronica used it initially as earth’s being shattered by displacement, I think we have come to see that each of us in our own way has also been shattered by displacement recently, leaving ministries that gave us life, taking on ministries that are somewhat overwhelming, coping with diminishing health, strength, energy, and grieving oh so many losses.

“Wherever your treasure is, there will be your heart too.” That is the line that leapt out at me first from today’s readings.

First I saw Madeline’s crystal heart in my mind’s eye. Crystals you could say shatter light and set a rainbow of colors dancing across the room. Being (or feeling)

shattered can even be a good thing. It just might bring colors into the world we had not imagined.

Then I heard Catherine asking, “And where is your heart?”

For decades our sisters have been answering “Centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back.”

Catherine certainly didn’t store up for herself treasures on earth. Quite the opposite! BUT she didn’t just give it away either—she invested it strategically, we would say today, in this house and in us, her daughters, for the sake of the world’s poor, sick and ignorant.

And we know she didn’t exactly have it easy. In the 10 years following the foundation of the Congregation, it seems as though she surely suffered the equivalent of the trials St. Paul lists in that passage from 2nd Corinthians. Madeline spoke yesterday about Catherine being called home from a return visit to the Galway foundation in October 1840. In a letter to Frances Ward on that occasion she wrote, “Thank God I am at rest again and now I think the name of another foundation would make me sick—but they say I would get up again.”¹ Yes, she had “get up and go” as we say in the United States. Ahead lay the foundations to Wexford, Birr and Birmingham in her remaining year of life.

In preparing for our 2011 Institute Chapter several of the Sisters of Mercy theologians were invited to prepare a theological reflection on the statement which had been developed as a theme for the chapter. These were made available to all the sisters for prayer and discernment. My reflection came out as a letter from Catherine and our foremothers. I reread it sometime last week, amazed at how it speaks to us today.

¹ Mary Sullivan, ed. *Correspondence*, p. 300.

Catherine's letters do seem to have a timeless quality about them, so why not an imagined one too. They wrote....

30 March 2011

Our very dear Sisters,

How pleased your other foremothers and I are to be with you in this time of discernment. How amazed we are to see that in your hands God's mercy truly stretches from age to age and sea to sea. Reading and praying with *Where in the World Are My Sisters?* must be both a comfort and a challenge to you all. Mercy is just about everywhere! What Frances, I and the others wouldn't have given for a bit of air travel or the benefit of your Internet! Carriages, canal boats and rough sea voyages were all we knew or frankly imagined. You have so many more resources and so much more freedom to put at the service of this holy mission of Mercy. Perhaps you find it overwhelming at times.

Your yearning to deepen your response to our merciful God, your sisters in Mercy, all the suffering people in the world crying out for Mercy—even the earth herself—moves us to write this circular letter. What we have to share with you is ever ancient, ever new. We share it as your sisters, as those who once walked the way of Mercy on earth, and now join that great cloud of witnesses at home with our dear God.

You want to go deeper, sisters? Then you must pull up anchor and cast off your moorings. What is weighing you down? Issues or ideology? Concerns about what people will say or think? Diminishing resources? Buildings or property? Consumerism? That is for your prayer and discernment. We faced them all in our time as you know, and we are with you now as you grapple with them yet again.

God alone must be your mooring. Long ago I reminded deSales that we have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back. I know you continue to pass that advice on to each other and to those with whom you minister. Now, dear sisters, we urge you to feel it and live it more deeply than ever!

While we might envy your miraculous means of transportation and communication, we certainly don't envy the complexity that living in the 21st century brings. Remember it is God's mercy that you bring through your work and hear in your prayer. It is gift! I used to encourage the sisters to spend as much time in prayer as in ministry as a reminder that it is God's work, not ours.

Finally, sisters, encourage one another at all times. It costs you nothing and could mean everything.

We know that God will bring the good work begun in you individually and corporately to perfection, perhaps not in the way you expect or want, but as God's holy wisdom works. Surrender your cares to that merciful mystery.

Your ever affectionate,

M. C. McAuley, Frances Warde,
and all your other dear foremothers

In the essay, "Catherine McAuley in the Nineteenth and Twenty-First Centuries" Mary Sullivan wrote "When Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy on December 12, 1831, there were only thirteen sisters; two of these died, two left, and two more entered within the next year. From the life, example, and effort of these eleven

have come, through the providence of God, the 9710 Sisters of Mercy in the world today. Surely these 9710 are enough to be powerfully 'Mercy in the Twenty-First Century.' If they generously welcome into their lives the Spirit's kindling of the "fire Christ cast on the earth,' they could be this even if they were only eleven"² ... or 14!

² Mary Sullivan in *Fire Cast on the Earth: Mercy in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Mary Sullivan, p. 98