

Breaking Open The Word of God... Foundation Day 2014

INTRODUCTION: It is my privilege today to be invited to break open this sacred word in the very place that Catherine built precisely as a response to what she heard God speak in her heart in her time... and on the very day that she founded the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.

This very house in which we gather is itself an ICON... **It is a door for us into the mystery of God's unfailing Mercy.**

Mary Ann Doyle, her first companion, recalls one incident in 1829 that illustrates Catherine's open-hearted tender mercy. Mary Ann tells of a young girl from Killarney who ran away from home because of her severe step mother, arrived in Dublin not knowing anybody and after failing to get a place to stay in the refuge run by the Sisters of Charity, she was told as a consolation that **in Baggot Street a Miss McAuley had a great house where every sort of people were let in.**

STORY: During the summer I got a lovely present of a beautiful bowl with 3 Hyacinth bulbs, compost, directions etc. When the time came I planted them carefully following all the directions... then placed them in the darkness as directed and waited...Last Sunday I took a peep. What a surprise! The whole bowl was filled with a mass of white thread-like roots... so plentiful there was no room for anything else in the bowl! And the compost and bulbs? The compost was lifted right up over the bowl with the three little bulbs snuggling in their little beds within it...

The power packed into those three little bulbs was too great to be contained within the little bowl - beautiful and all as it was... The container was simply too small!

FIRST READING

ISAIAH 48: 17-19

Thus says the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

I, the Lord your God, teach you what is good for you,

I lead you in the way you must go.

If only you had been alert to my commandments,

Your happiness would have been like a river,

Your integrity like the waves of the sea.

Your children would be numbered like the sands,

Your descendants as many as its grains.

Never would your name have been cut off or blotted out before me.

It is **The Holy One** who is speaking to our hearts... The ground we stand on is HOLY... It is Our God who is teaching us... leading us in the way we must go...

➤ **"If only you had been ALERT to my commandments..."**

IF ONLY... speaks to me of a yearning on God's part... a longing...A dream... God's Dream for us trying to come to birth in our hearts...the mystery of God's desiring at work deep inside us...

IF ONLY WE HAD BEEN ALERT to the dream of God at work within us then **we would be filled to the core with a river of happiness...** and **our future would be blessed and made fruitful...**

IF ONLY WE HAD BEEN ALERT! Then our integrity would be like the waves of the ocean - constant and true as each wave is true to the ocean from which it gets its form and shape and colour and energy and direction at every moment... **If only we had been ALERT** then it would have brought **our souls into alignment** with the truth of our life and our being...

An example here of an UNLIVED LIFE. This often looms very large when people are dying... troubling them...

I experienced it during a very serious car accident. "But I haven't lived... I'm not yet ready to die!!!"

Seems to me that the only way to live our life at all is to be alert to and live the present moment, whatever it brings, whether it be joy or pain... to embrace whatever is there with all of our heart... That is to be open to the grace of the moment... After all life and death are really interwoven into each other...

Reminds me of the poem about the Duck by Kenneth C. Kaufman:

I think my soul is a tame old duck,
Dabbling around in barnyard muck,
Fat and lazy with useless wings,
But sometimes when the North wind sings,
And the wild ones hurtle overhead,
It remembers something lost and dead,
And cocks a wary, bewildered eye,
And makes a feeble attempt to fly.
It's fairly content with the state it's in,
But it isn't the duck it might have been.

I'm not the duck I might have been! That would be such a pity! And that's what the first reading picks up...

John Moriarty - Philosopher, poet, storyteller- was interviewed on Irish Radio by Joe Duffy shortly before he died...

"When people ask me, 'Are you happy?' I say, 'that isn't quite the question...The real question is- 'Am I still growing? Have I become a finished creation? Am I dead or am I still growing? And is my life still an adventure, an adventure full of trouble, full of joy, full of pain, full of cataclysm? Am I still living dangerously?'"

So am I still growing, that's the real question, Joe."

Catherine was flesh and blood like us... She too had to learn to grow...

In 'Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy' (Mary C. Sullivan) a story is told of Catherine McAuley and how seriously she took her spiritual journey. Apparently one day she spoke sharply to a sister and when she came to realize it later, she called the sister and asked her, who else was present in the room. The sister couldn't remember, but Catherine insisted. When eventually she managed to recall the names, Catherine asked her to call each one of those sisters into the room and when they had all assembled, she knelt down humbly in front of the sister and apologised.

LOVE IS THE STRONGEST YET HUMBLEST FORCE... IT IS SOUL-FORCE...

In GRACE, the MYSTERY OF THE LIVING GOD- who is infinitely GRACIOUS- becomes present as the Spirit dwelling at the heart of existence... stirring ... moving... communicating... challenging... changing...

God's Dream is calling from within the heart and core of our being inviting us to come home to who we truly are... AND TO BECOME WHAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF BECOMING...

THE GOSPEL READING:

THE VISITATION - Luke 1: 39-56

IN THOSE DAYS: What days they have been! Her dream had been to marry like the other girls in her village... and she is betrothed to Joseph. But the Angel's invitation has changed everything... It has been disturbing for her.... Her container had been too small for God's bigger dream for the world! And Mary has let herself be moved by the Dream of God. But that didn't mean everything would be plain sailing now... Mary has to accomplish her life in the midst of struggles ... not angelically outside them. She still has to search... she feels anxious...she doesn't understand everything... she has to find her way stage by stage on her life's passage.

In this reading we see her, moving in haste... moving to a different rhythm now... measured by what is happening within her... Grace has turned her towards the world... the real world... So she hastily undertakes a long journey to visit her elderly cousin Elizabeth now six months into her pregnancy. For Mary, holiness prospers in the everyday world of the human being where people laugh and cry, are born and die... (Adapted from 'Truly Our Sister' by Elizabeth Johnson)

In Elizabeth's greeting we catch a glimpse of her alertness to the *grace of the moment*... "The moment your greeting sounded in my ear... She is awake to the MYSTERIOUS SURGE of JOY that is taking place in her... And feels the child in her womb leaping for joy! She is alert too to the Mystery that has taken place in her young cousin. Filled with the Holy Spirit she cries out with a loud voice... "Mary you are blessed and the fruit of your womb is blessed!"

"Because you believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Then the humble realization: "**How does this happen to me** that the mother of my Lord should come to **me**?" Grace is moving again in her heart... Humility is growing... amazement and wonder are filling her heart...

Grace is not confined to Mary... grace is universal... offered always and everywhere to all people. The Holy Spirit is dwelling at the heart of all human existence... at the heart of **all** existence.

Mary's response is full of wondrous joy... and deep humility... and gratitude... her happiness is brimming over like a river... She cries out in joy out of the integrity of her deepest self... She is full of the creative energy of God... No wonder! The child that will be born of her will be the long-awaited one... In Him will be seen the very face of the Eternal God... God's love will be seen, felt, touched... In Him God's Mercy will be flowing over from age to age... And He will change the course of human history...

The Second Reading:

From Catherine's letter to Frances Warde dated 17 February 1838

"You have given all to God without any reserve. Nothing can happen to you which He does not appoint. You desire nothing but the accomplishment of His holy will. Everything, how trivial soever, regarding you will come from this adorable Source. You must be cheerful and happy, animating all around you."

Here Catherine writes to her friend Frances Warde paying her an amazing tribute... and encouraging her with words of deep wisdom and theological insight. Catherine has a deep knowledge into God's loving relationship with all of creation... There is nothing distant about the God she knows... and she is so at ease in the relationship that she is utterly convinced that everything is in good hands ... coming as it is from the very **ADORABLE SOURCE**...

My own personal experience gives me an insight into this mystery at the source of all creation. When I was a small girl one of the daily tasks I had to do was to bring water from the nearby well. Our well was situated in one of the several caves on the nearby hill. As I approached the opening of the cave in question, I would bend down low and stretch my little body in under the overhanging rock until I reached the far end of the cave where the well was. It was a shallow well on the surface but deep down it seemed otherwise. This is what I found mesmerising. I would sit down beside the water and just watch... intrigued by it all. And when I dipped my container in, I would watch it slowly filling up. What always amazed me was that no matter how dry the weather, or how little water could be seen, it never failed to fill my little gallon and when I drew it out I would watch the water gurgling up from somewhere deep below replenishing the well once more. Often as I made my way down the hill, I found myself asking, "Where is the water coming from?" Those intimate moments are embedded in my memory opening a door for me into the very Heart of God... One thing I became convinced of was that there is no end to God's mercy... It cannot and will not ever fail... You can never go away empty...

As one enters the main reception area of Baggot Street, one is welcomed by a beautiful poster... Delightful to me as it resonates deeply with the story I've just related.

It reads:

'God's gracious and compassionate Mercy is the wellspring, the Source of never failing supply, for all who cherish and seek to live out of this gift of Mercy.'

Grace is not confined to Mary... or to Elizabeth... or to Catherine... Grace is universal... offered always and everywhere to all people.

We need to remember the story about the three hyacinths... and the container that was too small...

The Source of never failing supply is for all...for all...

There are quiet, profound, almost unseen happenings and blessings taking place daily. We need to shift our focus to the quiet birth taking place in quiet places... Those of us who are familiar with Kavanagh's poetry for

example, will have no trouble finding the Holy Spirit in the most ordinary places... His character, Tarry Flynn, had the eyes to see... and the heart to be alert...

Again I quote from JOHN MORIARTY... this time from his autobiography 'Nostos' (p. 505) in which we find the following story in John's own special style:

"Sometimes on May evenings I'd see great rings on the water and I'd know that a seal had come up the estuary... He'd have come up after salmon... I was standing on the far side of the road, observing, one day, when Ted Milne came along on his way to the pub. 'Don't harm him,' he said. 'Whatever you do don't harm him.' 'Well actually, Ted, I wasn't thinking along those lines,' I replied. 'I was one day in my house,' he continued, 'it was Sunday afternoon. On my way to the kitchen I looked out and saw the rings in the water. I took down my .22, I loaded it, I rested it on the sill of the window and when the head appeared I pulled and the wail that went up, till the day I die I'll never forget it. It went up, the wail I mean, it went up and around the whole world, and I didn't know till that day how big the whole world was, big as the dying seal's wail it was, and it was full of my guilt.... Never since that day,' he said, 'have I harmed anything that draws breath.'

An alternative ethic is born and growing in a quiet spot in Connemara...

God's Spirit is always stretching us beyond the comfortable limits we set ourselves, opening us to a new challenge... a new point of growth.

"Am I growing?' That's the real question, Joe!"

May we give God the benefit of believing that He is indeed leading us in the way we must go...and teaching us what is good for us and for our world at this our time.

"Blessed be the longing that brought you here and quickens your heart."from "Benedictus"

John O'Donohue