

Breaking Open the Word

Opening of the Doors of Mercy for the Year of Mercy
Mercy International Centre, 64a Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2, Ireland
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What an amazing delight we have today – to celebrate the start of a full year focused on the charism of Mercy! Mercy is something very near and dear to each of our hearts as women and men of Mercy, people who have committed our lives to embodying the spirit of Mercy in the tradition of Catherine McAuley.

The word MERCY is so rich in our scriptural and Mercy traditions, and today's readings and music highlight so many aspects of that which we desire to be steeped in. In my pondering of these words, there are three distinct movements that are revealed, and the interplay among these three movements is like a spiral moving us ever deeper into the experience of Mercy.

In the first movement, we experience ourselves as recipients of God's mercy. Mercy is, in Pope Francis's words, 'the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us.' As we allow ourselves to be met by God, we experience God's compassionate touch and, as Catherine did, find 'a God of love, a hidden God, whose healing grace helps [us] transcend [our] frustrations, bitterness and weaknesses.'

Knowing ourselves as loved by God and recipients of God's healing Mercy, our lives and our hearts are transformed and we are led into the second movement of Mercy revealed in today's readings: we are willing and able to enter into the pain of others, feel deep compassion for them, and render merciful service – 'opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society.' The first reading highlights that these actions of Mercy are actions of friendship and solidarity that address both immediate wounds and the structural, societal conditions that create them; and the second reading reveals that they are not done as acts of beneficence but out of our gratitude to God for mercy received.

Having received God's mercy and then having extended God's mercy to the world around us, we are led into the third movement revealed in today's readings: a new and deepened experience of God who is incarnate in human form. We too ask as the virtuous did in today's Gospel passage, 'Lord, when did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?' and we too will hear 'in so far as you did this to one of the least of my brothers and sisters you did it to me.' In having our eyes opened and seeing God incarnate in our world today, we begin the spiral anew to experience God's compassionate, merciful love of us and our world.

So as women and men of Mercy who have already committed ourselves to being a merciful presence of God in our world, how can we deepen our experience and expression of Mercy in this Year of Mercy? I'm struck by the language of sight and seeing found in the first reading and gospel accounts: 'Lord, when did we see you...?' and 'Let us open our eyes and see...'

As women and men of Mercy, hopefully our eyes are already open to see the misery of the world. Maybe for us in this Year of Mercy the invitation is to cultivate practices that assist us to see more deeply and more broadly.

In the Japanese art of Aikido, there is a practice called 'soft eyes'. To look at the world with soft eyes means that we widen our vision and take in more of the periphery, to see more of the world including most especially that which is at the fringes. With soft eyes we see the whole field of vision and not simply the individual discrete objects or tasks in front of us at any given moment in time. With soft eyes we see wonder and beauty and can open ourselves to mystery and revelation. With soft eyes we see patterns of inclusion and exclusion. With soft eyes new possibilities of response are opened up to us. With soft eyes we can respond with mercy not just to the person in front of us, but also to the system and structure that creates that person's need. With soft eyes we can move ever deeper into this spiral of Mercy and be ever more fully transformed by our experience of God's mercy. With soft eyes we become agents of God's mercy and partner with others in transforming our world.

Oh may we look upon each other and the world around us with soft eyes.