

Reflection for the Commemoration of Catherine's Life and Death 11th November 2015

November is a month that opens with reflections on death, beginning with All Saints (November 1) and All Souls' Day (November 2) and those of us in Mercy remember and celebrate Catherine's life and death today the 11th. We do not commemorate Catherine's life and death so as to stay in the past but we remember her legacy for today. What I have chosen to remember is Catherine's "unique vow of whole-hearted service of Christ in the poor."¹ It is interesting to note that Catherine said she never intended to become a nun, all she wanted was to do was serve the poor, because that is what God was asking of her.² Therefore, an option for the poor was then and is now central to the Mercy way of life.

Both of the biblical readings speak about the poor. In 1 Kings 17-18, the prophet Elijah goes to a foreign town and asks a widow woman for hospitality. With meagre resources of drink and food, Elijah reassures the widow that, because of her sharing with him, the God of Israel would provide for her needs. When the widow of Zarephath, despite her poverty welcomes the stranger, Elijah, reveals himself as a man of God. In welcoming the stranger, one welcomes the divine. Both the widow and Elijah are changed by the encounter.

In Gospel reading there is an explicit link between faith and life. Worshipping God involves direct contact with those on the margins, those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked or in prison. We see that service to the poor has to be concrete and real. The community must not only focus on the poor in their midst but also those outside of their community. In verse 40: it says "in so far as you did this to one of these, you did it to me", this same passage reminds the reader that when we offer food and drink to the least, we offer it to Christ, even when we do not recognise Christ in the other, the stranger. Catherine in her lifetime welcomed the stranger and responded to the needs of the poor and marginalised in very concrete ways.

Our world today is a very different from one that Catherine lived in. We live in a globalized world where the Spirit stirs, but where there is increasing violence, millions of people on the move, poverty and inequality, ecological calamities, and religious conflicts. We know that all of life is interconnected and is very fragile. It is out of this context that we in Mercy are called to prophesy through what Pope Francis calls "*mercy-ing* without limits."³ We are not the owners of Mercy but we do have a responsibility to embody the charism that Catherine entrusted to us as we respond to the urgent cry of our earth, as well as to the cry of the poor today.

Pope Francis has announced the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy beginning on December 8th this year. We in the International Mercy World are embarking on a Kairos moment for this Jubilee of Mercy by undertaking a worldwide reflection process so that

¹ Mary Angela Bolster, Documentary Study for the Study for the Canonization Process of The Servant Of God, Catherine McAuley in Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy, 948.

² Carmel Bourke rsm, A Woman Sings of Mercy p. 19

³ Pope Francis' motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo* "Mercy-ing without limits"

we can discern together globally a shared response to the human and other than human cry for Mercy in our world today. This reflection process will take place across forty-four countries and six continents. It offers us an opportunity to refresh our theologies. To “reflect on how the new cosmology can shed light on our basic religious beliefs and understanding, and how our religious sources shed light on the new cosmology.” It will enable us to search together for ways to respond to the cry of Earth and the cry of poor within this new reality.⁴ As we celebrate the life and death of Catherine today we ask her blessing on all of us so that we may continue to be women of courage, willing to risk opening wide the door of Mercy so that all those wishing to find Mercy may enter and go out renewed.

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⁴ Sr. Elizabeth Davis, *Wisdom Circles*, in *Mercy Enews*, 4 November, 2015.