



Reflection for Remembrance Day at MIC, 11 November 2016

Today is a very special day.

This Eucharist, in this place is a very special celebration

It is the one hundred and seventy fifth anniversary of the death of Catherine McAuley

We stand on the cusp of the closure of the Jubilee year of Mercy

Before God what do these celebrations mean to you here and now in the depth of your heart?

Once again the readings draw us into the heart of our merciful God in the company of Jesus, Paul and Catherine.

The gospel inexorably draws us into an encounter with the living God of Mercy and then it invites us to go out and be Mercy

St Paul, in turn does the same

while Catherine McAuley points us in the direction of simple practical ways by which we can **be Mercy in the ordinary round** of every day.

(Following Jon Sobrino)

When Jesus wanted to show what it means to be a **complete/total human** being, he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan, We are not told what the Samaritan was thinking but we do see him in action. The Samaritan's heart was **wrenched open** by the plight of the man in the ditch; the seed of Mercy was activated in him; he

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responded with compassion and in doing so he **became neighbour to the person in need and enhanced his own humanity.**

As with all parables, as we read we are drawn into the inner dynamic of what is taking place in the human situation described in the story - here the story of the Good Samaritan and we are invited by Jesus into an inner journey of reflection, challenge, surrender and transformation.

On this inner journey, the initial question for us shifts from “Who is my neighbour” (as asked by the teacher of the law, who was a very good living man) to the more challenging one of taking personal responsibility for **asking myself**, “to whom must I be neighbour” in the present moment. When/with whom/in what circumstance is my heart “wrenched within me”

As with Jesus in his time,

As with Catherine in her time

We, in our own time and place, are surrounded by people for whom we can be neighbour/for whom we can be Mercy

- People who have been robbed, battered,
- People who are homeless, addicted, fleeing for their lives,
- People who are victims of human trafficking, sex tourism,
- People who are inwardly devastated and who sit empty in the middle of material abundance,
- people who are housebound, lonely, disabled – the list goes on.

Being “**neighbour**” means having the eye, the heart and the courage to reach out to the one in need. As Pope Francis said in *Misericordia Vultus* – having the courage to look my brother and sister in the face, in openness and trust, because then ***the seed of mercy is activated in me. I become someone who is shaken up by the other person’s need and then I become neighbour to him/her.***

As we are all too aware, the danger for us is that we will “pass by”, we will not look, because of fear or indifference or unwillingness to face the consequences for ourselves of becoming involved.

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When we turn to St Paul -

we find that his **letter to Philemon** is indeed a call to **merciful forgiveness** in which he outlines the characteristics, the actions and the motives of the person who is capable of being merciful.

Paul calls on Philemon to be merciful, to move beyond justice to forgiveness, to take Onesimus back, not merely to his former position as a slave but as a dear brother in the Lord, something that was a very counter-cultural thing to do in the circumstances of the time.

In the verses which we have just heard,

Paul animates Philemon to be his best self, to be merciful –

in his sincere praise and encouragement of Philemon, Paul is actually describing Philemon as the type of person who will forgive and restore with dignity

and so Paul can be certain that Philemon will rise to the occasion to be Mercy, Paul expects nothing less from him, and in consequence we might say that Philemon expects nothing less from himself..

Catherine McAuley from whom **our second reading is sourced**, shines as an example of someone who did not “pass by on the other side”, she was someone whose “heart was wrenched within her”, she was someone who was consistently neighbour to those in need.

In her life she consistently exemplified the characteristics of the person who is capable of mercy as outlined by Saint Paul to Philemon,

- she had strong faith in Jesus Christ,
- a deep personal love for people, those with whom she lived, and she reached out in love to the poor,
- she was uninhibited by a fear of what such a reaching- out might entail for herself.

In her own rather poetical description of Mercy which we have just heard we find that;

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like Paul before her and Pope Francis after her, Catherine aligns forgiveness not only with justice but even more so with Mercy – *not soon provoked, it easily forgives;*

like Paul, she sees and recognises how important mercy is for serenity and peace in human relationships – *is all to all and with a look relieves; soft peace it brings wherever it arrives/removes our pains and crowns with peace our lives*

and like Paul, she does not shy away from the demand of mercy that calls forth a courage that finds its source in and relies entirely on the strength of God – *nor yields to fear, nor knows exacting pride.*

Just as Paul encouraged Philemon and drew the best out of him, Catherine McAuley was well known for her animation/encouragement especially of those who were her early companions. Most of these women were much younger than she was but her respect, trust and confidence in them brought out the best in them - excellent characteristics that enabled very young women in their twenties to brave uncertainty, obstacles and danger in unknown places, often far away from their home shores, for the sake of the Gospel of Mercy.

Whom do we encourage to be their best selves, to go the extra mile and be bearers of the gospel of Mercy in a world that longs for good news?

In conclusion

On this the anniversary of her death

We could say that **Catherine McAuley died a death that any Christian might hope and pray for and which every Christian must admire.** We might ask ourselves what was the secret of the transformation from an overwhelming fear of death at the time of her mother's passing, when she was twenty years of age, to the serene and gentle surrender of her being, all that she had all that she was, into the hands of a loving merciful God when her own time came forty three years later? I wonder if it was something to do with a profound realisation that all comes from God and all returns to God.

November 11th 2016 - one hundred and seventy five years on from the death of Catherine McAuley, we continue to remember and to celebrate this remarkable and holy woman of Mercy.

What inspiration do you take from this celebration today that will carry you forward into the celebration of life and death in the year that opens before us?

November 11th 2016 – we are just nine days away from the conclusion of this special year - this Jubilee of Mercy.

We know that Mercy is always before us but we are also aware that this focussed highlighting of being *merciful as the Father is merciful* has been a time of great blessing and encouragement and even greater challenge for us.

We will close our Holy Doors, we will remember and give thanks.

What has been God's gift to you in this Holy year?

For what do you give thanks personally?

For what do we give thanks as a community?

Maybe one of the greatest gifts that we have received is the recognition of how completely we are enfolded in the loving heart of the God of Mercy, how all encompassing is our own need for Mercy and how difficult it can be for us to receive Mercy, we who are so good at doing Mercy!

At this precious moment of the Eucharistic celebration on the anniversary of the death of Catherine McAuley, on the threshold of the closure of the Jubilee Year of Mercy we pray;

- that each of us in her own heart, **would give thanks** for the specific gifts of Mercy received during this year
- that we might receive **the grace**, through Catherine's intercession, to be effective channels of the Mercy of God, receivers and sharers, as we leave this hallowed place and travel on into the future. Amen.

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