



## **190th Anniversary Of The Foundation Of The House Of Mercy Homily Notes Of Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin Archbishop Of Dublin**

**24<sup>th</sup> September 2017**

We celebrate the 190th anniversary of the opening of the House of Mercy. The term "House of Mercy" refers not just to a physical building. It is something more. It is a symbol of the entire charism of Catherine McAuley: a building of welcome for the poor and a building from which mercy is brought in innumerable ways into the lives, especially of those who need to experience mercy.

We celebrate the memory of Our Lady of Mercy and we turn to Mary, as she is the one who brings our intentions before her son. We know that from the very first moments of the Gospel. At the wedding feast of Cana, we see how Mary is the one who makes known to Jesus the needs others.

At the wedding feast of Cana, we see also how Mary is the one who makes known to us the path of Jesus. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, she remained the one who always stood by him and accompanied him. Today she accompanies us on our search for Jesus.

On our own, we often tend to create our own idea of Jesus. When that happens, we do not allow Jesus himself to enter into our lives and challenge us and change us.

"My thoughts are not your thoughts"; the Lord reminded us in the first reading, "my ways are not your ways". God turns many of our values upside down and leads us to view life and its values in a new way. The first thing we have to do in our search for God is to let God surprise us.

The Gospel of the labourers teaches us that Jesus ranks people in a manner different to the way we do. Jesus surprises those labourers who were called at the last moment by giving them the same salary as those who had been working all the day.

To our modern sensitivities, this Gospel message may seem curious and puzzling, even unjust. It is certainly very different from our world when everything is measured in its minimum details and you get exactly what you deserve or pay for, nothing more, and nothing less. Our modern world tends to recognise usefulness and places those it considers less useful on its margins. Our culture prizes wealth, prosperity, and celebrity. Jesus however prizes humility, generosity, and integrity. His logic is different to ours.

The Master in the parable is not unjust. Those who began at the early hour receive a full salary, the same as they would have received the day before had they been working, and the same as they would have received the following day for the same

hours.

Jesus is not unjust. What emerges from the Gospel reading and what is important for us to remember is that Jesus is not simply just: he is above all generous.

As we look back on the history of the followers of Catherine McAuley, we can see that generosity was a real characteristic of its history. The characteristic of mercy is to witness to Jesus whose love has always been superabundant and gratuitous.

I worked for many years with an extraordinary Vietnamese Cardinal who had spent almost fifteen years in prison, much of it in solitary confinement. Not long after he came to Rome Pope John Paul II asked him to preach the annual retreat to the Pope and the Cardinals. He went off to work on his texts and while he was working, I was asked by the Secretariat of State to get from him an outline just of the titles of his talks so that they could be inserted into the printed programme.

I knew when I sent on the list that it would not be long before I would receive a phone call. One of the titles was "Jesus was stupid". You can imagine the reaction that a title like that would evoke within the Vatican. The Cardinal told me to tell those who were anxious about the title to read the parables of mercy in the Gospels. "Tell them", he told me, "about the woman who lost the small coin and turned her house head over heels until she found it. What did she do then? She gave a party for all her neighbours that would have cost about a thousand times what the small coin was worth". Jesus mercy and compassion always go way beyond our categories, so much so, that they make the logic of Jesus look stupid to the meanness and calculation of our narrow minds. The generosity of Jesus knows no bounds.

In being generous, we become God-like. In being generous, we become like the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, a God who is always outgoing and loving. Our God is not a God closed in within his divine nature. He reaches out to us, he communicates to us. He reveals who he is by loving us, especially in his giving of himself in Jesus Christ who was prepared even to die out of his love for us.

One of the many images, which Pope Francis likes to use, is that of the doors of the Church. He reminds us that the doors of our Churches must remain open so that people can enter and encounter the healing power of Jesus. They must be doors that are not one-way, that do not tempt us to remain enclosed within the Church building as a Church of just the comfortable and the like-minded. The Pope stresses above all that the doors of the Church must be open so that those who encounter the message and the love of Jesus in word and sacrament can go back out again into our challenging world bringing a witness to the care, the generosity and the love of Jesus.

May this anniversary of the opening of the House of Mercy be an occasion for us to learn from the good things of the past and develop the ability to discern what is enduring and what is passing in our world, following the logic of Jesus and his boundless generosity that goes way beyond our narrow human categories.

Mary, Mother of Mercy, be present among us and in this House of Mercy today and above all in a future that will be for many a harsh world, which needs more than ever the enriching, and renewing power of the Mercy of your Son.