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190 years

A House of Mercy

1827–2017

25 years of MIA

1992–2017

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We are grateful to our Mercy authors for articles which have resonated, nourished, inspired and challenged us over the course of 2017 as we continued to address 'the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor'.

2017

READINGS FOR MERCY

In the 190th anniversary year of the opening of the House of Mercy on 24 September 1827, the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Mercy International Association on 12 October 1992, the outcomes of the Mercy International reflection Process (MIRP) and the ongoing call to the ministry of Mercy.



**MERCY INTERNATIONAL
REFLECTION PROCESS**

Flaming the Fire of Mercy: Creation Waiting in Eager Longing



Mercy: A Vision that Continues to Evolve – Mary Reynolds rsm

In the dawning days of the 2017, I found myself drawn to the Clare Augustine illustration of the nativity, which had been uploaded to our website to mark the Feast of the Epiphany. Its resonance with the visit of the Magi is evident, but surprisingly the images of the three wise men Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar are replaced by three women, dressed in the Mercy habit, complete with celebratory church cloaks.



One of the great gifts of art is that it does not impose facts or time frames; the viewer has the freedom to create both. Availing of that freedom, it led me on a journey of imagining who these wisdom figures might be. Wise women and women of vision are closely related and so very quickly I found myself connecting with three major vision moments in our Mercy story which we will celebrate in 2017. Firstly, we will celebrate the 190th anniversary of the opening of the House of Mercy, Sept. 24th 1827; secondly the 25th anniversary of the establishment of [Mercy International Association](#) in October 1992 and this year we will launch the outcome of the world wide discernment of the '*cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*' through the [Mercy International Reflection Process](#). So taking artistic license, I imagine each of these three women representing a vision that continues to evolve and inform our search for a deeper experience of God's mercy in our own lives and a

commitment to *'keep alive the founding spirit of Catherine among peoples of the world most in need of God's mercy and compassion'* as well as a renewed care for our common home.

Following a vision is quite like following the star and in 2017 we at Mercy International invite you to engage the journey of following the star, looking back on how the star has led us to the point at which we have now arrived and looking forward to the journey ahead to which the star may be pointing. Over the last few years we have been journeying together in very privileged contexts. In 2014, we discovered anew our capacity to interconnect at enhanced levels as we celebrated as a global Mercy family the [20th Anniversary](#) of the opening of Mercy International Centre. In 2015 we celebrated the [Year of Consecrated Life](#), which called us *'to wake up the world'* and last year, we had the [Jubilee Year of Mercy](#), calling us to *'be merciful like the Father'*. Nourished by such rich experiences, perhaps now is the time to join the three wise women at the crib in deepening ourselves in the vision that gives direction to our lives.

No doubt the first of the three women must surely represent Catherine and the early founding women of Mercy. Mercy was the motivating power underlying Catherine's vision. For her, Mercy in the form of a compassionate practical response to need, was where she believed she was called by God. She initially understood her call or vocation in terms of working as a laywoman, doing good among the poor in her city of Dublin but her understanding of the direction her life was disturbed, enlarged, opened to the 'more' of God's will for her by the request/directive of the Archbishop of Dublin that she give canonical status to her charitable undertaking or hand it over to another canonically established Congregation. Catherine feared that the poor would be denied the comprehensive services that no other group was offering, so she agreed to place her community canonically within the greater community of the Church. 'God', she said, *'can bend and change and form and reform any of his creatures to fit them for the purpose he designs'*. She institutionalised her vision in the Rule of the Congregation, describing Mercy as *"the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ for those who wish to follow his example"*. She saw the Mercy response as multi-dimensional and in her singleness of purpose she turned out to be a pioneer in many areas. Her focus obviously was on doing the very best she could for the poor of Dublin, putting flesh on the vision with no thought of her own security in any of the transactions she entered into. Her vision met with opposition from some members of family, church and society. However in spite of the pain inherent in that, she did not surrender her hopes and dreams to the fateful limitations others tried to place on her. Furthermore the abundance, joy and love so evident in her life witnessed powerfully to what Pope Francis calls *'The Joy of the Gospel'*. As she matured this weaving of joy and pain was expressed through a profound trust in the Providence of God expressed so well in her [Suscipe](#).

Two short statements of Catherine capture the essence of her vision. She said that all she wanted was *to make some lasting efforts for the relief of the suffering and the instruction of the ignorant'* and when asked what was the prerequisite for a Sister of Mercy, she took as

given *'an ardent desire to be united to God and serve the poor'*. Heidegger tells us that our future comes to meet us out of our past. The vision of Catherine McAuley in its transparent simplicity is as apt to inspire and challenge today, 190 years later, as it was in her lifetime. She is a very real example of what it means to be a conduit of God's loving and compassionate Mercy in the world. She understood and lived the conviction that Christ has no body now but ours and exemplified that each one of us brings our own unique gift to living that vision in the place and time in which we find ourselves

The second figure for me represents the women of vision, especially Sr. Mary Trainer with the support of Sr. Sebastian Cashen, who in 1998 began a dialogue with the Sisters of Mercy worldwide, raising the question: *'If Catherine were alive today what would she have us do with the House of Mercy she founded at Baggot Street. What are your dreams?'* The dreams sent in from the various national conferences around the Mercy world revealed a remarkable convergence of desires and hopes, centring on heritage, pilgrimage renewal, service of the poor and the bonding of the Mercy family. While shared dreams sent spirits soaring, the realities of the Baggot Street plant (damp, cold and structurally challenging) and the challenges of listening and discerning the Spirit speaking in 'diverse tongues and cultural experiences' kept feet very much on the ground. Indeed if anyone, in December 1992, when the first steps of the renovation began, wanted to parallel their experiences to that of ['The Journey of the Magi'](#) as imagined by T.S. Eliot, they might have found several resonances:

*A cold coming we had of it
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter. With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly*

But as with the Magi, the star continued to draw the searchers on and in October 1992 Mercy International Association (MIA) came officially into being, the Memorandum and Articles of the Association were signed and the House of Mercy at Baggot Street passed from the Dublin Congregation of Mercy to Mercy International Association by Deed of Transfer. The vision statement that directs MIA today acknowledges that *'God's gracious and compassionate Mercy is the wellspring, the source of never failing supply, for all those who cherish and seek to live out the gift of mercy'*. It challenges us to *'use our resources to respond to issues of global poverty demonstrated in the massive displacement of people worldwide'* and it sees the role of Mercy International Centre as offering *'a diversity of programmes, enhanced communication and outreach efforts in relation to global action'*. MIA's [vision](#) and dream is to *'to keep alive the founding spirit of Catherine among peoples of the world most in need of God's compassion and mercy'*.

The third wisdom figure, one might say, is the descendent of the first and second wise women. For me she represents the [Mercy International Reflection Process](#) (MIRP).

Launched on 8th December 2015 this process provided us with a profound call to explore Mercy anew in a world in which the other-than-human together with the human, cry out for mercy. Groups from all around the world responded -vowed members, associates, partners in ministry, friends and people from diverse backgrounds who walk the path of Mercy. People of all ages, from youth to late adulthood and from places across the length and breadth of our world as far apart as Newfoundland and New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Peru, and myriad places in between entered into *'the grace and challenge of this contemplative space'* and sought *'to discern together globally a shared response to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor, thus flaming the fire of Mercy in themselves and in our Universe.'* Like the Magi, there was a star to guide, a star with several beams of light: Personal experience, knowledge and concerns; Social, scientific, environmental, political, cultural and economic realities; Biblical, theological, spiritual, ecclesial, mercy traditions , and other wisdoms and traditions. The star was particularly bright as it beamed the inspiration of [*Laudato Si'*](#), the riches offered through the [Voices](#) and the many resources, news and reports offered through the [special section](#) on the Mercy World website and the weekly [Mercy e-News](#).

By December 12th, most MIRP groups had articulated a vision for a new engagement and developed action plans to bring about change. In March 2017 the Guiding Team, the national co-ordinators and others will gather once again in Baggot Street to discern together what the outcome of this process is calling us to at a global, national and local levels. We wait in anticipation for the 'something new' that is being birthed. Perhaps with T.S. Eliot again, we will find ourselves reflecting

*Were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt*

The gifts offered by the Magi may become pointers to where we are being called.

Gold, in all ages, has served as an article and store of enduring value. It holds its value over long periods of time even as other goods and commodities rise and fall. **What is of enduring value in Mercy that we are being called anew to embrace?**

Frankincense, when flamed or burned produces an aromatic smoke that rises up into the air. **How will we 'flame the fire of Mercy as creation waits in eager longing?**

Myrrh was one of the ingredients used in the sacred anointing of people and symbolises consecration and active service of God, humankind and all of creation. **To what actions are we being called as we respond to 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor?'**

We can be sure of one thing – our experience of the process and our discernment of the outcome will call us on new paths. Like Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar who were led home by a different way, like Catherine who discovered that *'God can bend and change and form*

and reform any of his creatures to fit them for the purpose he designs', like the MIA leaders in 2006 who saw a need once again to focus its vision in light of changing realities in the member congregations and the world; we will set ourselves a new challenge. Hopefully with the Magi we will be able to echo:

*We returned to our places, ...
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation*

2017 will be a year to focus our vision anew. Among the opportunities we will offer are:

- Weekly introductions to the mission of Mercy as it is being lived in [the 40+ countries](#) in which Mercy ministers today, keeping alive the founding vision of Catherine.
- Ongoing invitations to vowed members, associates, partners in ministry, youth and friends of mercy to engage with us in our programmes and global action initiatives
- Engagement with the outcome of the [Mercy International Reflection Process](#).

Our wish for the year is that we will not close the Door of Mercy and that we will continue to hear the challenge so well expressed in the questions posed to us by Elizabeth Davis rsm:

Will you as doorkeeper hold wide the door to invite Mercy to come in to be with us?

Will you as doorkeeper hold wide the door to invite those who are hungry, thirsty, imprisoned, sick, strangers, or naked to come in to find Mercy?

Will you as doorkeeper help us find new ways of being Mercy on an Earth and among a people crying out for justice?

Will you as doorkeeper guide us into a holy place of contemplation and vision?

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Email: [Mary Reynolds rsm](#)

Image: *Clare Augustine Moore's illuminated version of the Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy. It comes from Chapter V 'Of the Vow of Poverty'. © 1992 MIA*



Be Bold For Change
International Women's Day 2017

International Women's Day 2017 has chosen the theme ***BE BOLD FOR CHANGE.***

When I thought about the theme for this special day celebrated by women around the globe and contemplated all that is happening in our world, I was drawn to Edwina Gateley's poem, inviting "***we the people***" to live with HOPE, despite the darkness and despair that seems to be all around us. Edwina says:

There is a heaviness permeating our globe,
 and we, it seems,
 are stumbling in this dark place,
 blinded by its shadows and
 longing for a spark of light.
 Even Mother Earth
 senses imminent rape from
 threats of fracking, mining,
 digging, pipe lines, pollution
 and more.
 Grieved
 I ran to the woods
 to hide.
 Where are You, merciful God?
 Where is Your mercy now
 for a broken people
 and a hurting world?

And from the very soil, the trees,
 the air and every living creeping,
 crawling, flying, walking,
 swimming creature

rose the whisper, thunderous:

Here.

Here I am –
hiding with you...

Hush.

Here I am.

We must cuddle together,
to share our pain
and we will plot together
to birth
new life...

(Advent 2016)

“And we will cuddle together to share our pain and we will plot together to birth new life.” Isn't that the boldness and daring that has always permeated our lives as women and men of Mercy?

When I reflected on the poem and the day we are commemorating, I was quickly drawn back to the Dublin of Catherine McAuley's day and how she “cuddled” with others to do something about the injustices and poverty of her day, birthing the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine became what we would call today a civil rights figure, focusing especially on the plight of women and girls. Today, thousands of her supporters/people across the globe follow in her footsteps, speaking up and standing up for women and girls who are used and abused by systems all over the world.

International Women's Day is a time of celebration and reflection. We celebrate the significant progress that has been made in building a positive environment for gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. To date, 187 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and over 120 have adopted national plans of action for gender equality. Countries emerging from conflict are incorporating provisions for gender equality within their constitutions while others are adopting laws and policies to strengthen women's access to health, education and employment opportunities and to end impunity for gender-based violence. And women are increasing their representation in high-level decision-making in most areas of life.

But on this day especially, we have to ask what impact these laws and policies have made in the day-to-day lives of women, especially poor women, on the ground?

On International Women's Day, we remember the women garment workers in sweatshop factories providing cheap clothing for those of us who live in the western hemisphere. We remember victims of trafficking used and reused to feed greed. We remember women denied the right to hold public office because of archaic laws which give the position to someone less qualified and with nearly 3

million popular votes less. We remember women in the church denied their voice. We remember all the hidden women who do groundbreaking work and go unrecognized year in and year out.

On a day like today, it is important to look at the terms and conditions in which so many women and men work to earn their living – for wages that are too meagre to enable them to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Statistics across the globe indicate that poverty still has a **woman's face** and that women and girls are entering the workforce in greater and greater numbers. However, rather than benefiting from the new opportunities opened by globalization, women are less likely than men to hold paid and regular jobs and more often work in the informal economy, which provides little financial security and no social benefits. Nearly 330 million working women earn less than \$1 a day – and make up 60 per cent of working people who are still living in poverty; and this inequality is passed on from generation to generation, with girls rather than their brothers being pulled out of school to help make ends meet.

This is a critical moment in the struggle for women, one which cannot be unlinked from larger political and economic shifts and especially as far-right political groups seem to be on the rise. The much-lauded Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), endorsed by the world's leaders in 2000, which promised gender parity in primary and secondary education by 2005, have never been achieved and now a new round of goals launched in 2015 are also off target!

To bring change to the lives of women on the ground, women need to be **BOLD FOR CHANGE** and take power into their own hands!

We, Sisters of Mercy and especially our women at the coalface, are already steeped in bold strategies for empowering women and girls. There are many examples of this across the globe but because of limited space I will highlight three or four examples which all underline the importance of our campaign on International Women's Day.

1. Focus on Haiti

Focus on Haiti (FOH) is certainly an example of a group of Sisters of Mercy huddling together to take action! Catherine's dream is very much alive in FOH, a group of Sisters of Mercy, Associates and Mercy friends who have been ministering with the Religious of Jesus and Mary and the people of Gros Morne, Haiti. They were responding to a Chapter question: *"God of Mercy, of Wisdom and Mystery, where do we need to be led now to come to both a deeper response to our Critical Concerns and a radical embrace of our identity?"*

Challenged by this question, a group of Sisters knew in their hearts that Catherine would be present in the poorest country in the Western hemisphere – Haiti.

FOH has been cultivating partnerships with the community of Gros Morne, Haiti. For example, FOH supports the agro-forestry program by providing the salary for the agronomist and his assistant. One of the practices which devastated the country was the cutting down of the forests for fuel and cattle-grazing areas. Through the agro-forestry program, the people have received education regarding the impact of this practice and have planted over 100,000 trees on the hills of Gros Morne. The agronomist and his assistant also have oversight for training local Haitians in goat husbandry and a community hen project. Both of these programs, along with the reforestation and community gardens, have not only provided the community with a sustainable land and food sources, but are developing a micro-economy to allow women to have some source of income.

FOH is also in the process of developing a women's project, which will include components of education, financial literacy and business skills to empower women in Gros Morne. Catherine would be so excited to know that her vision for solidarity with women – and therefore their children – is alive and well in Haiti! (Mid-Atlantic News, October 2, 2014)

2. Ireland

The work in Creation Spirituality and Environmental Education being undertaken by Mercy Sisters across the globe is another example of the groundbreaking work being undertaken.

As Nellie McLaughlin teaches and believes...

"It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story."

(Thomas Berry, "The Dream of the Earth")

Nellie says that when we consider our present global reality and allow ourselves to be touched by the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor echoing through life as it unfolds, we are urged to be bold, to work for change so that all beings may feel more at home in our common home. The boldness called for is systemic in nature. I understand it as the invitation for us humans to come home to our true selves and our rightful place in the magnificent web of life. Many of us have disconnected from our deepest roots, resulting in widespread divisions, injustices and impoverishment in the community of creation. Let us dare to reconnect in the context of our evolving and expanding universe of almost 14 billion years, which is exciting and hope-filled, while challenging our perceptions of reality, our attitudes and values. All is evolving, consciousness is expanding, nothing is static and unchanging – our faith, spirituality, theology and the socio-economic, political, religious and cultural systems.

Our foundress, Catherine, intuited this: *"The transcendent God chooses to be revealed in the here and now."* Nellie explains: "Core to my ministry in creation

spirituality and environmental education is: *'I have come that you may have life, life in abundance'* (Jn.10:10). The focus is on the bigger picture, the abundance, awe, complexity and wisdom of God's creative energy pulsating in all of creation. This is the mystery at the heart of life, the unity and oneness manifest in the harmony in right relations: with self, God, people and all creation. In this context we explore the divisions and injustices of our time: climate change, loss of biodiversity, social inequality and the plight of the most vulnerable among people and species. We seek to preserve the living systems of our planet – sun, soil, air, water and equitable social relationships – for the health and prosperity of all. In living these relationships we come to see that the inner and outer journey are one, leading to wholeness of self and the wellbeing and service of the common good as we continue to respond to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor."

May we, like Teilhard de Chardin, come to realise more fully that *"we are not human beings on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on a human journey."*

(Nellie McLaughlin, RSM NP Ireland)

3. Sudan – Nuba Mountains

The work of Sisters of Mercy Nicole Rotaru and Cathy Solano from the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, Australia, in a war-torn district of the world, bears witness to Catherine's legacy of standing with the most vulnerable.

"Living in a state of constant alert is 'normal' for the Nuba people. At the sound of an Antonov or a jet everyone runs to a foxhole for protection. Thousands of people have died or suffered horrendous injuries from flying shrapnel released by the bombs. The latest weapons deployed by Bashir in May 2016 are Sukhoi-25 jets releasing parachute-retarded bombs that do not all explode on impact. Many women and children have been shredded to pieces because they climbed out of the foxholes thinking they were safe. It is heart-wrenching sitting on the side of the bed of the wounded... words are inadequate; there is but shared silence and the meeting of eyes." (Sister Nicole)

The genocide that is happening on a very regular basis in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan, is a reminder on this International Women's Day 2017 of the need to huddle together and then question "WHY are national governments not calling rogue governments to account?" At the opening of the General Assembly at the UN over 12 years ago, the then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said:

"Today, the rule of law is at risk around the world.... Too often it is applied selectively and enforced arbitrarily.... Throughout the world, the victims of violence and injustice are waiting for us to keep our word. Turning words into

action is our only hope for a common future: our only hope of realizing Dag Hammarskjöld's vision of living in peace under the laws of justice.”
(Kofi Annan, Opening of General Assembly 2004)

4. Partnering Women Religious with UNICEF

UNICEF and other *rights* organizations have a long history of partnering with religious communities of all faiths on a wide range of issues that affect children. Religious communities, as many of our members can testify, are uniquely positioned to promote equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable children and their families. Their moral influence and extensive networks give them access to the most disenfranchised and deprived groups, those which international organizations and governments are sometimes unable to reach effectively. Women Religious with a gospel framework shaping their call to community service are key to UNICEF's new partnership of service to vulnerable children. This new and emerging partnering has great potential towards a more sustainable effort throughout the world.

In conclusion – and while much more could be written – today is the day when women the globe over come together to speak truth to power. We call for a Global Coalition of Women Economic Decision-makers, committed to making change happen in the lives of ordinary women and men on the ground.

To move from numbers to influence, from a numerical to a strategic presence in decision-making, we need to use our extensive networks and years of service and speak of our experiences and our work for gender equality and women's empowerment. To do this, we need to continue to empower grass roots and women's organizations and co-workers to exercise a watchdog function. They can then help to make sure that national resources are allocated all the way to the ground, bringing realities and strategies from the ground to inform policy direction. And we need to bring underrepresented and excluded groups, such as HIV+ women, women informal workers, indigenous women, women survivors of violence, rural poor women into the development process.

Be Bold For Change! Huddle together and plot for a different world and do what you can in your local area to make change happen!

Deirdre Mullan RSM, PhD
Partnering Women Religious with UNICEF
March 8, 2017

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<http://www.mercyworld.org>

Water for the World

A Reflection on World Water Day 2017

by Mary C. Sullivan, RSM

Afearsome question could well be on our lips at the end of our human days: “Lord, when was it that we saw you thirsty and did not care for you?” And Christ may then have reason to answer: “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Matt. 25: 44-45). He may also ask us: How come you in the 21st century did not read “the signs of the times,” did not take seriously the basic and universal right to water, and did not hear the cry of vulnerable peoples who “have no access to clean drinking water” (Laudato Si’, #28)?

How come you continued to drink bottled water (when you experienced no true emergency), and how come you wasted water and polluted it with your unneeded chemicals, while “each day a thousand children die[d] of water-related diseases” (Pope Francis, “The Human Right to Water,” Pontifical Academy of Sciences, February 24, 2017)? How come you did not alter your own lifestyle and your personal, institutional, and governmental habits?


The well of Earth's water is the most necessary and precious material gift in the Creation of our planet. In his Canticle, Francis of Assisi praises God for Sister Water, for “greatly useful, lowly, precious, chaste is she.” Astro-scientists continually search for signs of water on other planets, knowing that only where there is water are living organisms possible.

Most of us are not scientists and were not educated as scientists. Nonetheless, as the Mercy family we are profoundly committed, from our very founding, to the removal of debilitating ignorance. Such ignorance may presently include our own personal and communal ignorance about Earth, about current global conditions, and about water.

Therefore, we must now study and learn the current and harsh realities surrounding water, that humble substance that sustains all created life – all plants, all animals, all human beings, and all food. The United Nations World Water Reports and other environmental studies will help us. And then we must strenuously act and advocate, for the protection and just management and governance of Earth's water.

World
Water
Day





Through the Mercy International Reflection Process, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of us have been contemplating the gift of water. But contemplation and reflection, no matter how reverent, are not enough. “Our right to water is also a duty to water...an inseparable duty.... God the Creator does not abandon us in our efforts.... But the work is up to us, the responsibility is ours” (Ibid).

So, if we truly wish to take Matthew 25: 31-45 seriously, we must not only alter our personal and communal lifestyles, which often give priority to our own “convenience” and “comfort.” We must also act “to bring about political and juridical commitments” to support the universal right to water (Ibid.). We must put our words and realizations to work – to defend safe, clean water and slake the thirst of the millions who do not have it at all, as in Somalia today, and the millions more who do not have it at the twist of a kitchen faucet.

To act on behalf of water is a complicated and difficult task. Competing economic and political interests often do not place Matthew 25 at the top of their decisive criteria. Moreover, the sheer magnitude of what’s to be advocated can overwhelm us; or worse, short-sighted indifference can shade our consciences. Then water is contaminated by fertilizers, detergents, and needless cosmetics; impervious corporations drain aquifers to bottle water for profit, or contaminate them with the waste from fracking; governments treat water not as a human right, but as a commodity available to the highest bidder; and “developed” countries (the word is often a misnomer) fail to help vulnerable countries where global warming causes persistent drought conditions.



To turn all this around, we ourselves, our religious and social institutions, and our nations will need to surrender to the integral ecological conversion that Pope Francis urges (*Laudato Si'*, #216-221) – in very small and very large ways, from not showering every day to getting our own governments and the United Nations to enact binding clean water regulations and distribution and conservation measures. Contrary to the nationalist rhetoric we may hear, our “town” is now global, the size of “we” and “us” has expanded, and the geographic range and responsibilities of Matthew 25 have enlarged.

On Good Friday, we will hear Jesus say from the cross “I am thirsty” (John 19:28), an avowal that expresses both his bodily pain and his desire for God’s embrace. As we hear his words, let us also hear and heed the parched cries from Earth’s numerous Calvaries where today our sisters and brothers cry out for safe, clean drinking water, not the vinegar of the world’s indifference and neglect.

Mary C. Sullivan, RSM

Water for the World

A Reflection on World Water Day 2017





Re-entering the Paschal Mystery Anew

Julia Upton, RSM

Each time we cycle round to preparing for Holy Week, memory carries me back to my childhood and the surprising Holy Week reforms of 1955. In the parish elementary school where I sang in the choir beginning in the third grade, my first lessons in the real meaning of liturgy came with the final revision of the Holy Week liturgy that year.¹ Not only did the choir learn the new music, but our enlightened choir director also meticulously explained the reason for the changes. Similarly, my mother bought every pamphlet printed on the subject of the Holy Week reforms, so even as young children we were not merely observers of the changes,

¹*Acta Apostolica Sedis* [AAS] 47 (1955): 838-847. The unexpected experimental revisions to the Holy Week liturgy came as a one-year trial in 1951, and extended the following year for another three years. See AAS 43 (1951): 130-137; AAS 44 (1952): 48-63.

but we entered into them, learned them by heart and lived them deeply in the moment.

Mother also imposed another liturgical practice on her daughters. Saturday nights after we had our baths and our hair had been washed and curled in preparation for being our Sunday best, Mother would have us read the Sunday gospel. At the time it seemed like a huge imposition on our free time, which we would have rather spent reading Nancy Drew or some other novel. Now I see just how devout Mother was, and how she unknowingly shaped me into a student of liturgy.

Holy Week is unlike any other week in the Liturgical Year. We do not just recall or reenact the events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection; we actually step into these mysteries as a believing community. As Paul Turner has written, "Holy Week invites the entire church into the emotional experience of loss, fear, and redemption. We remember the One who died for us. We accompany his waning days, attentive to his final words and actions, discovering anew our love for one who is lost—and the joy of one who returns."² It is as if the entire parish community is invited into a time of spiritual retreat for that week. The liturgies are the same annually, but each year we are different as individuals, as local church communities, and as members of the global church. We bring all that with us into the mystery anew each year.

When the Sisters of Mercy Convent in Whitestone, NY was opened on February 2, 2011 as home to sisters in need of assistance in the tasks of everyday life, its foundresses, Sisters

² Paul Turner, *Glory in the Cross: Holy Week in the Third Edition of The Roman Missal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011) xv.

Lenore Guirrerri and Mariette Schmitt, decided that it would be important to celebrate the Holy Week liturgies that year as fully as possible. Few of the sisters would have been able to participate in local parish liturgies, but all would have been shaped over the years by entering into those sacred mysteries. Having lost so much during that year in divesting and moving, it would have been devastating to lose Holy Week celebrations as well.

When they invited me to sing the *Exsultet* during the Easter Vigil, tears welled up in my eyes immediately. It would not be the first time I had the privilege of singing that glorious ancient hymn. Before I entered the Sisters of Mercy I was an active member of my local parish and studying for a doctorate in Theology. Each year the pastor invited me to do something to help with the parish celebrations of Holy Week. Over the years I had written pastoral introductions and transitions for each of the services, but that year instead of telling me what he wanted me to do, the pastor asked me what I would like to do. “Sing the *Exsultet*!” was my instant response, surprising even me.

The pastor’s initial reaction was stunned silence, but he warmed to the idea rather quickly. Neither the parish priests nor the deacon sang very well and I had been a leader in the parish folk group for many years. They all knew I could sing and there is nothing in the Roman Missal that precludes a lay person from singing the *Exsultet*. The preference is for a priest or a deacon, but even the text allows for someone who is neither to sing the hymn. Instructions are minimal with quality being the defining characteristic, emphasizing that it should be sung as worthily as possible. Had the desire to sing this ancient prayer been harboring inside me for a long time, maybe decades? I had no idea! The words tumbled out before I had a chance to

think about them, which is quite unlike me. Instead I have been pondering that question for more than 35 years now.

The *Exsultet* is a lengthy, powerful, poetic summary of salvation history and a preview of the themes found in the readings which follow the rest of the Vigil. It has been sung as we know it today since the 9th century. Filled with exuberance the cantor sings, “Let this holy building shake with joy!” It recalls key moments of salvation history and remembers that this brilliant Light of Christ has dispelled the darkness of sin and death for all time. Fairly exhausted by remembering it all, the community then sits to hear some of the key texts, responding with psalmody.

The drama of entering into all the liturgies of Holy Week appealed to me even as a child when those celebrations were all in Latin. How much more meaningful they are now in English! Celebrating them with the sisters at our convent in Whitestone has deepened my appreciation of them over the years. Because we need to be attentive to the needs of the community gathered, in planning the liturgies we make some accommodations. Our celebrations, for example, take place earlier than recommended by diocesan guidelines. Ideally the Easter Vigil begins after sundown, but we probably end by sundown. While we have the Washing of Feet on Holy Thursday, we might only have four sisters willing to participate. I would probably prefer to use all seven of the Old Testament texts during the Easter Vigil, but we limit it to three.

The convent in Whitestone has never had a resident chaplain. We have been fortunate over the years to draw on the goodness of priest friends and local presbyters who celebrate

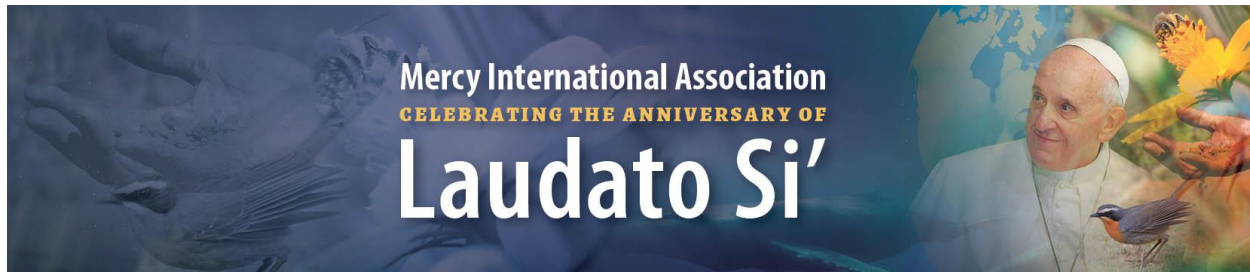
Eucharist Sunday through Friday. While finding celebrants for all Holy Week presents some challenges, so far we have always been fortunate. Sisters of Mercy from other convents share in the celebrations as do men and women from other religious communities and friends and family in the area. Yes, our holy building even shakes with joy.

I cannot imagine not celebrating all the liturgies of Holy Week. Perhaps that is because they have been so meaningful to me in my life, or maybe it is because I have come to know how meaningful they have been in the life of the Church throughout the centuries. That is the faith that grounds me and calls me forth to a fuller life each year.

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Mercy Responses to the call to “care for Our Common Home”

While participating in a Global Catholic Climate Movement meeting in Assisi earlier this year, I became totally smitten with a piece of artwork in a shop that had each of the stanzas of Saint Francis’ Canticle of the Creatures portrayed on a painted tile. Together, the tiles form a beautiful representation of the prayer that inspired the title of Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*.

Now we have a modern day version of this prayerful attentiveness to all of God’s creation, in the pope’s Prayer for Earth that concludes the encyclical. His prayer is both a hymn of praise and an invitation to transformation in a world so in need of justice and mercy. It seems a fitting framework for looking at just some of the ways that Mercy around the world has responded to the call to “care for Our Common Home” since the encyclical’s release two years ago.

***“All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.”***

Just as Francis of Assisi poetically praised Brother and Sister sun, moon and stars, wind, water and fire, Pope Francis opens his prayer with homage to God’s presence in all of creation. Many participants in the Mercy International Reflection Process during the Jubilee Year of Mercy shared similar insights after analyzing issues of concern in the encyclical that particularly touched them. Among those named were the need to “live out of deep interconnection and relationship with the natural world and each other” and to “be a community which feels the pain of Earth and the cry of the Poor with a new ecological consciousness reflected in attitudes, habits, structures and actions.”

***“Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.”***

Mercys in the Institute of the Americas have joined in solidarity with indigenous peoples whose worldview of interconnectedness compels them to courageously protect their water, land and sacred dignity. These Protectors of Mother Earth are lamenting the impact of fracking and protesting the route of a pipeline near the Standing Rock tribe’s reservation in the United States. They are fighting a hydro-electric dam in Panama that would destroy the Ngäbe people’s cultural heritage, remembering Berta Caceres who was killed for defending her people’s land in Honduras, and pointing the way to a future of smaller-scale extraction of natural resources in Africa that benefits local communities and minimizes impact on Earth. Mercy has [prayed with and for them](#) as well as accompanied them in their advocacy in the halls of power in Washington, D.C.

***“Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.”***

Mercys around the world are living into ways of being that profess greater harmony with all of creation. Of particular note are the Sisters of Mercy in the Western Province in Ireland who received the Eco-Congregation Ireland Award and produced a book, [Walking Gently on Earth](#), that highlights members' efforts in caring for Our Common Home. It traces the congregation's journey from an evolving ecological consciousness through commitments to changes in lifestyle, intensive gardening and educational programming for primary school students, work for climate justice, and participation in the Mercy International Reflection Process. The Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, meanwhile, in November 2016 launched a [sustainability policy](#) that addresses energy use, water use, waste, transport, procurement, investment and infrastructure throughout the institute and its ministries. The policy includes a commitment to measure and monitor the impact of its sustainable living activities, education and advocacy.

***“O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.”***

Hearing Pope Francis' call to respond to “both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor,” many participants in the Mercy International Reflection Process explored the plight of displaced persons in all forms. Sisters in England examined the needs of persons suffering from dementia; sisters in Australia and Ireland advocated against harsh policies toward asylum seekers; sisters in Newfoundland envisioned “cities and towns where homelessness is prevented, treated and resolved for all.” In New Zealand, about 500 people affiliated with Mercy, including many students from Mercy colleges, participated in a pilgrimage to parliament to call attention to homelessness.

***“Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.”***

Other reflection process participants lamented the degradation of Earth and made commitments to protect their communities against pollution and misuse of water and land. Sisters in Huarney and Puerto Eten, Peru, convened local groups that ended up confronting problems of garbage. Sisters in York, England, committed to supporting opposition to proposals for a new nuclear power station while Sisters in Australia joined opposition to fracking, or coal seam gas mining. Mercy Global Action at the United Nations, meanwhile, has been focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals and developed a [series of reflections](#) on the need to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources.

***“Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.”***

Pope Francis doesn't let businesses off the hook in his call to transformation. And [Mercy Investment Services](#) (MIS), the socially responsible asset management program for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, is nudging corporations along through shareholder engagement. This year, MIS filed 11 shareholder proposals asking oil and gas companies and electric utilities to report how they are aligning

their business plans and practices with the regulatory and market changes that will be required to keep global temperature increases below the 2-degree limit set by the Paris Climate Agreement. MIS' Environmental Solutions Fund, launched in early 2015, has committed \$24 million in investments to solar and wind projects in the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa and on other environmental solutions such as recycling, waste reduction and technology.

***“Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.”***

Pope Francis recognizes the challenge of transformation in fast-paced, consumer-oriented cultures and urges us to slow down enough to contemplate our place in creation. A daily mantra, “May I live gratefully and simply today,” is guiding sisters and associates in the Mid-Atlantic Community of the Institute of the Americas after months of conversations about how to collectively respond to *Laudato Si’*. In fall 2016 they [embarked on a year-long examen](#) that so far has led them to reflect on their personal needs and wants, complicity in the global economic market, and opportunities to care for creation as consumers.

***“We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.”***

While deepening our response over the past two years to the challenges Pope Francis lays out in his encyclical, we certainly recognize the struggles ahead in the name of justice, love and peace. Yet we move into this future together, holding out the vision of a Mercy Global Presence that emerged from the thousands of participants in the Mercy International Reflection Process. In endorsing this vision, Mercy International Association’s Members and Board said earlier in June: “over the next months we will learn more about how we can become involved locally and connected globally in exploring the three dimensions of Mercy, Global and Presence.”

And all we can say to that is “Laudato Si!” or “Praised Be to You!”

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'The world is too small now for an Us and a Them': Reflecting on World Refugee Day

"In our world today, 65 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes, and 34,000 additional people are displaced every single day. The need to welcome refugees has never been greater. Now is the time to take a stand." From www.standwithrefugees.us

Religious communities enjoy a certain amount of status due to access to education and historical credibility. From that place of relative privilege we take stands on many issues. We speak out. We are generous with time and other resources. We have a great deal to add to public discourse.

A colleague tells me he would like to have more conversation about living a privileged life in a suffering world. We've talked about how hard it is to change flawed systems. I propose that temptations to despair and feeling overwhelmed are intertwined with recognition of today's systemic inequality.

Technology has made it difficult to escape images of hunger, sickness, and the violence of war. Our hearts break as we learn about toddlers being washed off boats into the sea, and the desperation of refugees trying to find safety. We feel challenged as we realize that international borders, race, sexual orientation, gender and organized religion are too often used to divide human beings and increase polarization and fear. As more countries close their borders to desperate people and governments call for travel bans, one wonders what it means to be a human being in the 21st century. We join the greatest minds in history in the journey toward recognizing that we are one.

Having spent significant time with people who have lost everything, I feel some of their despair as mine. Ours. I believe the world is too small now for an Us and a Them. We have no separate future and we need to break through the many ways we are so divided. It is increasingly **uncomfortable to be comfortable** in the face of today's reality. The Mercy community has worked for almost 200 years on behalf of people who are marginated. Now, however, many of us sense there are deeper questions to explore.

Mercy values, structures and resources facilitate both individual and collective responses to our world. These might range from avoidance and confusion to new energy, action, and delight. Promoting spirituality that nurtures confidence in God and in the fundamental goodness of humanity is crucial. In the words of a young woman from Kenya, who was detained in a county jail for months,

*Know that deep within you there is extraordinary strength you never knew.
When doubt threatens to steal your joy, when confusion clouds your judgement,
don't ever let fear stop you... look deep inside of you and when you're still enough you will see
clearly who you are.*

As we plan for the future we cannot forget the Mercy ministries, both individual and collective, that have influenced so many lives. To continue having an impact in this rapidly changing world, how might we respond to needs of our time? Convents, retirement centers, land, and ministry sites are being studied, sometimes sold or given to others to further a mission. Mercy leaders continue to exhibit skilled financial planning and good stewardship. Yet we know we are complicit with and benefit from the flawed systems mentioned above which leave so many behind. How can we model efforts to help change those structures and level society's playing field?

We might, individually and communally, visibly change practices which align us with corporate models such as executive travel and meetings which emulate corporate gatherings. Those resources could be used for people in need, as could assets we no longer require. We speak of solidarity, and of simple living. It's a struggle to make the connection between those concepts. What are we willing to let go of? Where are we willing to go in order to stand with the most vulnerable? Who do we welcome?

It might be effective to focus on and augment efforts already being made. We could more intentionally encourage and find funding for members of the broader Mercy community (vowed members, office workers, board members, students and all connected with Mercy) who have the interest and desire to actively participate in social efforts for positive change. This would enhance what already occurs: exploration of the movement to offer sanctuary to immigrants, non-violence training, service trips and delegations with follow-up awareness raising efforts, and participation in lobbying efforts both locally and nationally. Mercy presence and effort on behalf of ministries in Africa, Haiti and CCASA might have more participants and support if leadership and the broader community were to invite, encourage and allocate funds for enhancement of their work. Community support and presence are crucial.

Dorothy Day is an example of someone who knew words are not enough. But she also felt there is a price to be paid for following one's conscience. "I know what human fear is and how often it keeps us from following our conscience", she said. There are many kinds of fear: "fear of losing our bodily goods, fear of poverty, fear of losing our job, our reputation, and least of all there is the strange business of bodily fear". (from [The World will be saved by Beauty](#), by Kate Hennessy, Scribner, 2017)

Can we pro-actively encourage exploration of interconnectedness (oneness) at the broadest, deepest, and most mystical levels possible? Oneness is the core issue and the remedy for hatred. How can we more persistently develop compassion for all? Not an easy endeavor!

Let's support one another in taking our stand especially as we note World Refugee Day! Let's continue to resist the temptation to turn away from suffering, complexity and our own complicity, but rather take it in and breathe out love and compassion and joy. May the strength of our community give us courage to confront the challenge of this time.

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home

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Where the heart is- home.
Where the mind strives- home.
Where the body thrives- home.
Home- the arena of belonging-
for safety, intimacy and nourishment,
a place to protect and preserve.

We want to be at home.
We want to make a home.
We want to enable others to be at home.

Home is the arena of belonging, of right alignments,
be it hut or house, shanty or caravan.
It is the local neighbourhood of familiarity,
it is the nation and region,
your culture and the character of your tribe, your clan.
It is Earth.

Home- the place, the space, the base, no place like it.

Sweet.

We all live here.

We are human.

We are creatures of sky and sea.

We are trees and landscapes,

grass seed and coral reef.

Cats and caterpillars, catfish and catmint.

We all live here.

Cats and caterpillars, catfish and catmint.

But there are those whose hearts are adrift,
whose belonging is fraught or shattered,
their minds denied,
their bodies deprived.

They are in our small situations, local and secret,
as well as on the vast public canvas
of the world's strife and discriminations,
those whose homes are not havens but horror,
whose habitations are inimical to life,
whose lives are exploited and commodified.





We pray for those not at home-

the displaced and exiled,
the destitute and disconnected,
victims of war and domestic violence,
casualties of greed and pollution,
the innocent, the stricken.

We pray for those not at home within themselves-

those with dementia, whose brains fail them,
the mentally ill, whose minds disturb them,
the depressed and struggling rural workers,
the long-term itinerants of our vast cities,
the workers enslaved by venal systems.

We pray for Earth, our home-

for our abuse of its riches,
for our squandering of its resources,
for the malaise we have inflicted on its creatures,
for our waste and our negligence.

We long to make things right,
to be authors of remediation,
stewards of goodness,
attendant to renewed awe, having respect for every atom.
We encourage each other in the many existing efforts,
we acknowledge the many ways Mercy is at home.
Now, this moment of all moments,
we are called to learn new ways, to risk new perspectives,
in order to recognise the cries and silences of the needy,
to name and respond to what has so far escaped us,
to know how best to foster and preserve,
to enable what needs homecoming,
whether human, creaturely,
or one of the myriad threads
of Earth's fragile, wondrous fabric.

God of the Universe,
Maker and Sustainer,
You are the true global presence of Mercy,
Your Mercy infuses every part of every/ thing.
Every part of every/ thing.
Guide and free us to act
with your righteous kindness
and piercing justice,
to bring all home,
to be at home,
to be makers of home.

Amen.

Mary Wickham rsm

World Day of the Poor

19 November 2017

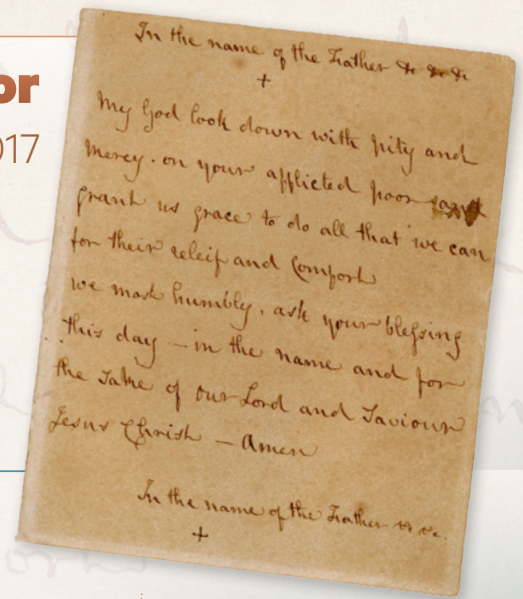
A Prayer for Persons who are Poor

My God, look with compassion and mercy on those who are poor, and grant us grace to do all that we can for their relief and comfort.

We ask your blessing this day – in the name and for the sake of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

Amen.

Contemporary version of Catherine's prayer for the poor from *Praying in the Spirit of Catherine McAuley, A Collection of Prayers* written or compiled by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.



Catherine McAuley's original handwritten prayer for the poor.

In his Message announcing the **First World Day of the Poor** (November 19, 2017), Pope Francis is not asking us simply to focus for twenty-four (24) hours on the poor. He is begging us to act—in the preceding week and throughout our lives—in concrete ways that carry on the Gospel mission of embracing, sharing with, and advocating for those who are emotionally, materially, economically, politically, or spiritually poor in any way. As his own life demonstrates, Francis is not into one-day, short-term stints of mercifulness.

For us in the Mercy family, November 19 can be a loud wake-up call—a summons to personal and communal self-examination and conversion. We say that we are committed to the merciful accompaniment and service of those who are poor. When was the last time I embraced a poor person, listened to his or her story, and then concretely shared what I am and have with that person? What are my tangible, daily encounters with the poor? Do I ever walk the streets of our poorest neighborhoods; go to prisons, shelters, or soup kitchens; visit the hospital wards of the poorest patients; or sit down and talk with homeless people sleeping under bridges, on warm air vents or park benches? Or are my encounters with them merely words, theoretical ideals articulated in our Mercy foundational documents?

In her "Prayer for the Poor People," Catherine McAuley begs God for the "grace to do all that we can for their relief and comfort" — "all that we can," not just a few occasional gestures in the general direction of the distant poor.

We might begin to honor the First World Day of the Poor by sitting down for awhile and meditating on our hands -- yes, our human hands. Are my hands withered? Are they innocently withered, by physical ailment or accident, like the hand of the man whom Jesus heals in Mark's gospel (3:1-6)? Or are my hands shriveled, dried up, devitalized by disuse in relation to those who are poor?

Francis sees the World Day of the Poor as a time for "deeds" and "works," not just "words."

The deeds he urges are encounter (embrace) and sharing. Over and over he asks for "outstretched hands" that touch and share with -- in true and tangible solidarity -- our sisters and brothers in need.

World Day of the Poor

19 November 2017



He pleads for our genuinely coming to know, embrace, and stand with real persons who are stricken by material poverty or social need; and then sharing with them whatever will help them—sharing not what is falsely called "mine," but what is already truly "ours."

So let us ask our human hands: Have you ever really embraced persons who are poor in some way? And while you are embracing them, have you really listened to their feelings, and conveyed to them your respect, understanding, and compassion? For Francis, this is human encounter, the human act of reaching out, drawing near, touching, and conversing with others as equals. When was the last time I held the hand of a poor person, or put my hand on the shoulder or arm of a person impoverished in some crippling way? Our human hands are God-given instruments for such spiritual and corporal solidarity. If our hands cannot reach across the globe to the devastated Rohingya, Puerto Ricans, and South Sudanese, can we not at least carry their "dejected faces" in our hearts as Catherine McAuley did, and be a voice crying out for the justice and mercy owed to them?

Catherine used to say that "our mutual respect and charity is to be cordial; now cordial signifies something that revives, invigorates, and warms" (Practical Sayings, 5). Wouldn't it be wonderful if during the weeks preceding and following the First World Day of the Poor we engaged in a strenuous renewal of our efforts to revive, invigorate, and warm the poor of our world, while humbly receiving from them their own gifts of reviving, invigorating, and warming truth and love.

On November 11 as we remember the human death of Catherine McAuley, let us look at her dear hands, hands worn out by years of Days of the Poor. Early that morning she had, with these hands, tied up her old boots and sent them to the kitchen fire, her walking to encounter and share with the poor now over. Then, "about five in the evening, she asked for the blessed candle to be placed in her hand" (Elizabeth Moore, November 21, 1841)—her hand made ready for the redeeming hand of Christ by all the suffering poor it had embraced with sensitivity and compassion.

That November Day so long ago was the quiet culmination of a Lifetime of Days of, with, and for the Poor. May we all be taught and inspired by it.

Mary C. Sullivan, RSM

Baby Jesus, born in a shed,

said to his mother,

Is this my home, O mother mine?

Is this my belonging and my landscape?

He quite liked the donkey and the little lambs.

It felt warm and safe.

And his mother replied, Joseph's hand on her shoulder,

My precious child,

this is the place of your birth,

but no, not your home.

It is safe for the moment,

but moments change as tyrants change,

and we may be on the move again.

And Baby Jesus said,

So, where is home?

Where do I belong?

Where shall I settle?

And his mother replied, her hand on her heart,

You belong with the no-belongs,

your home with those who lack a home,

your friends the failed and the misfortunate.

Your head will rest on the pillow of exile,

your heart beat in each wounded heart.

Your heart will be their home.

You must speak to them of the lilies and the sparrows,

telling over and over Isaiah's word

that close to the heart of God are held the smallest lambs.

You will give them hope where no hope hovers,

bleed for justice, gather the strays,

and one day you will ride this donkey into the great city.

Your landscape is the desert of suffering,

the mountain of need,

and the sorrow-tinged sky.

The vast sea that brings the fish

brings vastly too those who need harbours of peace.

You are not a settler, my son,

but a wanderer with the wanderers,

a kindler of love

for those who sit with pining eyes

around the campfires

of the world.

And the Baby Jesus listened.



Mary Wickham RSM



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Flaming the Fire of Mercy: Creation Waiting in Eager Longing



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