

Reflection for Mass
February 10, 2018
160th Jubilee of Sisters of Mercy, Buffalo
Sister Margaret Mary Quinlan

“I was hungry...I was a stranger...I was ill and you came to me.” The healing we offer to others is the healing we ourselves have experienced through the mercy of God. We know what it is to be in need and through God’s grace we know the joy of offering mercy to others.

We understand from experience that mercy often is not of our own choosing. It comes to us from beyond ourselves as a grace. “The spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me and sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted...” Mercy also impels us to address the *causes of poverty*. It draws our attention to the *sources of illness* like pollution of air and water and the profusion of nuclear waste. We are anointed and sent to speak the hard truth in defense of the poor and the sick.

Jesus promises a reward to the merciful: “Come you blessed... receive the kingdom that was prepared for you from all eternity...” However, the reward is not only in heaven. Jesus reminds us often that the kingdom of God is within you: like yeast in bread dough, like the mustard seed—tiny—growing without our knowing it. The joy of the reign of God is already ours. “My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. God who is mighty has done great things for me...”

The Sisters of Mercy came to St. Brigid’s in Buffalo not in July—they came in February. The people who came to greet them were figures right out of the Gospel: poor, hungry, ill, and freezing cold. Of course, as the first response to their suffering, the sisters made soup, gallons of it, soup for that first day and for every day of that awful winter. They opened a school to which 200 children showed up. Before the era of Mercy Hospital, sick people were visited in their homes. The sisters brought food from their own table for the families of the poor. That’s how it all began here in Buffalo, February 1858.

Today we celebrate those holy women and the generations who have followed them over these 160 years. They are not only sisters, but associates, and coworkers, teachers, principals, doctors, nurses, lawyers, business people, boards of trustees. We remember all of those mothers and grandmothers who ran card parties, bazaars, and bake sales to support our schools and hospitals. Every one of us is called to reach back through our mercy history to listen to the first one who answered the call of the Spirit in our tradition. Catherine McAuley calls us to live deeply the charity that has held us together from the very beginning. “We must,” she says, “We must clothe ourselves...with mercy, compassion, kindness, humility... and patience, so that it may truly be said, there is in us but one heart and one soul in God...”