

## Foundation Day Prayer Service: December 12, 2011

### *Mercy: A Community of Relationships*



**Introduction** On December 12, 1831, Catherine McAuley, Mary Ann Doyle, and Elizabeth Harley professed vows as the first Religious Sisters of Mercy. The chapel was not their own, they did not yet have an approved Holy Rule, nor did they claim a fourth vow of service. But on that day 180 years ago, this new Community of Mercy *did* own something very precious: a shared mission to serve the poor, sick, and ignorant. As we join Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Companions and Associates around the world to celebrate the beginning of our Mercy Institute, let us “rejoice in the continued invitation to seek justice, to be compassionate, and to reflect mercy to the world.”

**Gathering Song** *My God, I Am Yours* or another *Suscipe* (One version is below)

**Psalm 81** (Recite antiphonally)

**Antiphon** We accept God as our first and all-encompassing love.

Sing in unison to the Most High, our strength;  
shout for joy and join the celebration!

Raise a song, sound the great bells, the flute and the harp.  
Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon,  
and on all the feast days.

Sing in gratitude to the Great Hunter,  
to the One who seeks out all hearts.

Give thanks in the congregations  
that the Good News be heard throughout the land.

I hear a Voice I have come to know;  
“I relieve your shoulder of the burden;  
your spirit is free to create.

In distress when you call, I come to you;  
I answer you in the secret place of your heart;

I am your very breath; I have been with you from the beginning.  
Open your heart wide and I shall fill it.”

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

**Antiphon** We accept God as our first and all-encompassing love.

**Scripture Reading** Luke 8: 19-21 The True Kindred of Jesus

Then his mother and brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.” But he said to them, “My mother and my brothers [and sisters] are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

**Reflection** December 12, 1831 - December 12, 2011

When Catherine McAuley responded to God’s dream for her, she created a path, a way to do mercy, which has been walked by thousands throughout the world. There are many who say that Catherine never originally intended to found a religious community. True. As a woman brought up in largely Protestant circumstances, it simply wasn’t part of her worldview. However, making a conscious choice, she took the risk of founding a religious congregation of “lesser status” within the Church. Catherine’s choice has been echoed and validated by every woman who has followed in her footsteps as a Sister of Mercy.

Our Founder’s ring bears two inscriptions. The internal motto, “Thy Will Be Done,” reminds us not only of the words of Jesus but also of that free act of faith spoken by Mary which led to the in-breaking of the Word Made Flesh on earth. On the outer surface of Catherine’s ring is the Jesuit motto, “A.M.D.G.” One could say that “All for the Greater Honor and Glory of God” indicates the strong influence of her Jesuit friends and their spirituality on her life. Catherine dedicated the works of mercy she would do, as a woman religious, to the promotion of God’s greater glory. In a sense, those two inscriptions, when placed together, give us that Word (“Fiat,” an inner, heart-held disposition) made Flesh (God’s glory magnified and made visible through loving service to one’s neighbor).

Over the years, as a community and as individuals, we have asked ourselves, “What is God’s will for me? For us? How can I/we contribute to the greater good?”

Would I be willing to leave friends and family and roots to serve in community leadership—for the greater good?

Could I/we be more visible. . . more loving. . . more committed to the works of mercy. . . more courageous. . . more forgiving. . . more just. . . more prayerful. . . more hopeful—for the greater good?

During times of prayer and solitude, it may dawn on us, as in Pat Schnapp's poem, that the words about God's will which we pray in the Our Father are filled with risk:

Bracing yourself,  
you pray  
the dangerous words  
"Your will be done,"  
using flares to direct it  
down the runway  
of your desires,  
sobered  
at the possibilities  
of your recklessness.

--Pat Schnapp, RSM (*Alleluias and Amens*)

As seen in the Gospel passage above, doing God's will brings us into relationship with the One who calls us Mother and Brother and Sister. Within our Circle of Mercy, opening ourselves to the call and will of the Community leads us into a more intense relationship with those we call "Sisters" of Mercy. The 2011 Institute Chapter documents challenge us to intensify our Gospel-based spirituality. If we were to embrace more fully the call of the Gospel, what place would the words, "Thy Will Be Done" take in our lives? Would they open us to new directions? New choices? A new relationship or renewed sense of solidarity with one another?

### Intercessions

In gratitude for Catherine, woman of faith and woman unafraid to risk. . .

**Gracious God, we thank you.**

For an increase of faith and courage. . .

**We pray for ourselves and for one another.**

In gratitude for all who walked the path of Mercy from 1831 to today. . .

**Gracious God, we thank you.**

For those discerning a call to the Sisters of Mercy and for a greater appreciation of our call as Sisters or Associate Members. . .

**We pray for ourselves and for one another.**

In gratitude for our relationship with one another and with all who have enriched our lives. . .

**Gracious God, we thank you.**

For openness to God's will for us and the grace to say, "Thy Will be Done". . .

**We pray for ourselves and for one another.**

**Prayer** Let us pray *The Our Father* together.

**Closing Song** *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Roc O'Connor, SJ) or song of your choice

