

## **MERCY DAY CELEBRATION**

**Baggot Street, Dublin**

**September 23, 2011**

**Mary Sullivan RSM**

God has given to each of us today, in our readings, encouraging and enlivening words. In the Derry Large Manuscript, composed by Mary Ann Doyle, we heard the great promise of this House:

*“Nor can we think that it was without a special providence of God that a day [September 24] was chosen [for opening this House of Mercy in 1827] which, in a special manner, placed this house and our [whole and] holy order of Mercy under the protection of [the mother of Jesus] and caused them to be named from the most amiable of Mary’s attributes, by which she most resembles God whose mercies are above all his works” (Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy [CMcATM], 47-48).*

What does this mean for us today?  
What courage and zeal and confidence  
does this statement give us, now?  
You know well that Catherine McAuley  
believed strongly that we, Sisters of Mercy  
and associates, are not her work, but God’s work.  
And she used to say often:

*“If we are humble and sincere God  
will finish in us the work God has begun.”*  
(Practical Sayings, 3)

It is God’s work in Jesus Christ that we are about.  
And that work, our distinctive work, is the manifestation,  
the rendering, by our lives and communities, of the  
Mercy of God, God’s Merciful love for all creation  
and all human beings.

Catherine used to say often:

*“The Mercy of God comes to our assistance and  
renders practical God’s Charity in our regard”*  
(Limerick Manuscript, in CMcATM 181)

That is the great work of the church and so of Sisters of Mercy – the very “*business of our lives*”. We are to collaborate with God, to render practical, to make available, to reveal, to give witness to, to testify, through our mercifulness, the mercy and charity of God for the whole of creation.

We are only water, in all-too-human jugs! Only water in our very ordinary stone jugs.

Yet by the power and the goodness of Jesus Christ, we have been, and are even now being, transformed into wine.

Though the fullness of Jesus’ hour, the final wedding feast of God’s love, has not yet come – that hour when all creation will be embraced fully in Christ’s Resurrection- still, through the promise of God in Jesus, that hour of transformation is even now anticipated in us.

That is the great and encouraging message of today’s Gospel (John 2 : 1 – 11): that if we fill the stone jars of our ordinary lives and communities with the most generous Water of which we are humanly capable,

Jesus and his Spirit will draw out of our lives the good wine of God’s life and love, for all God’s people and all of us.

And the plain water in our jugs is not just, or even primarily our works, our human efforts at mercifulness, but it is our very lives and spirits, ready and willing to become alive with the Life of the Gospel, the Wine-Life of Christ, through the following of Jesus Christ.

Catherine McAuley’s word for the “following” of Jesus Christ was “resembling” him: that is a powerful, humble and demanding word – “resembling” Jesus Christ.

The full depths of what it signifies may be what Sisters of Mercy and their associates need most to contemplate and en flesh today.

Clare Moore, one of Catherine's earliest associates, says that Catherine's "*desire to resemble*" Jesus Christ was "*her daily resolution, and the lesson she constantly repeated*":

Catherine used to say:

*"Be always striving to make yourselves like [Jesus Christ] – you should try to resemble him in one thing at least, so that any person who sees you, or speaks with you, may be reminded of his blessed life on earth".*  
(Bermondsey Annals, in CMcATM, 117)

This does not mean wearing sandals, or a long tunic!  
It means presenting generously our jugs of water.

It means having the joy, the peaceableness,  
the humility, the confidence in God,  
the charity, the mercifulness,  
of life in the Gospel and of the realm of God;  
it means letting ourselves, by God's grace  
and goodness, become God's wine.

There is a real sense in which much of Paul's  
Letter to the Colossians, our second reading today (1 : 24 – 2 : 6)  
is a letter of Catherine McAuley  
addressed to us, on behalf of Jesus Christ.

*I now rejoice in my sufferings for your sake;  
in my flesh I was completing what is lacking in  
Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is,  
the church. I became its servant according to God's  
commission that was given to me for you, to make  
the word of God fully known, the mystery that has  
been hidden throughout the ages and generations  
but has now been revealed to his saints. It is Christ  
whom we proclaim, teaching everyone in all wisdom,  
so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.  
For this we toil and struggle with all the energy  
that he powerfully inspires within us.  
.... I want people's hearts and yours to be  
encouraged and united in love, so that they and you  
may have all the riches of assured understanding  
and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is,  
Christ himself... Though I am absent in body,  
yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see  
your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.  
... Continue to live your lives in him, rooted  
and built up in him and established in the faith,  
just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.*

So on this Mercy Day, of all days,  
Let each of us rejoice in our  
vocation as Sisters of Mercy, and as  
colleagues and partners in Mercy.

Let us offer to Christ the mere water of our lives  
to be transformed anew into the salvific wine of  
Christ's own life for the sake of all God's  
beloved people.

Let us, through the plain and humble water of our  
Mercifulness and with the help of God  
and Catherine render anew, to all those who long for it,  
the charity of God's presence and assistance, now  
enfleshed in our poor selves.