

First Reading

Reader: Cecilia Cadogan rsm (Ireland)

A Reading from the Second Letter of Paul to Timothy:

For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.

So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord,
nor of me, a prisoner for his sake;
but bear your share of hardship for the gospel
with the strength that comes from God.

He saved us and called us to a holy life,
not according to our works but according to his own design
and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began,

but now made manifest through the appearance of our savior Christ Jesus,
who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light
through the gospel,
for which I was appointed preacher and apostle and teacher.

On this account I am suffering these things;
but I am not ashamed, for I know him in whom I have believed
and am confident that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me
until that day.

Take as your norm the sound words that you heard from me,
in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Guard this rich trust with the help of the holy Spirit that dwells within us.

The Word of the Lord.

Second Reading

Reader: Anne McGuire rsm (Australia)

A Reading from *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*
by Mary Sullivan:

Catherine McAuley died about ten minutes to eight in the evening on Thursday, November 11, 1841. Early that morning she disposed of her homemade shoes in a quiet but definitive gesture which has rich symbolic import as a revelation of her character. She had established an unenclosed religious order of women—“walking nuns”, as they were popularly called—one of whose chief purposes was to visit the poor, the sick, and the dying in their own homes and in hospitals. She had urged her associates, and herself, to go forward through the streets to those in need, “as if they expected to meet their Divine Redeemer in each poor habitation” (Rule 3.6). But now, as Elizabeth Moore records:

On Wednesday night or rather Thursday morning about two o’clock she called for a piece of paper and twine, tied up her boots and desired them to be put in the fire. The Sister to whom she gave them did not know what they were but had directions to remain at the fire till all was consumed.

This simple gesture of quietly burning her boots in the middle of the night stands as a remarkable symbol of Catherine’s final abandonment of herself to the providence of God. In this act of self-surrender she accepted the end of her walking, she relinquished her historical work as a Sister of Mercy, and she turned barefoot toward the God who stood before her in death. Like Moses who removed his sandals before the burning bush (Exod. 3.5), and Joshua who put off his sandals before the messenger of God (Josh. 5.15),

Catherine McAuley deliberately and reverently entered the holy encounter of her death.

About five o'clock in the evening on November 11, 1841, Catherine "asked for the candle to be placed in her hand," and "we commenced the last prayers." This candle remains the final, fitting symbol of her attitude toward her own death, and life. She had once told her young community that their lives should be like the noiseless burning of a pure candle:

How silently and brilliantly the lamp in the sanctuary burns...when the oil is pure and good; it is only when it is otherwise that it twinkles and makes noise. (Limerick Manuscript)

Now, in the last hours of her life, she reached for the blessed candle, the ancient symbol of the presence of the risen Christ. How long she was able to hold it is not known, but her positive gesture of reaching for it marks her final, decisive turning toward the merciful God in whose providence she had always confided.

In grasping this candle, she left behind, to the care of God and of her "darling" companions, all that she had created and animated. With the total self-abandonment that is the final act of true Christian self-possession she surrendered herself and her life's work to the mysterious Easter consummation who is Christ, without claim or ceremony.

Gospel

Reader: Patrick Hume SJ

A Reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him,
he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him.
And he will separate them one from another,
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father.
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?
When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?
When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply,
'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine,
you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing,
ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

Then they will answer and say,
'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
and not minister to your needs?'

He will answer them,
'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones,
you did not do for me.'

And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Prayers of the Faithful

Reader: Louise O'Driscoll (Mercy International Association)

Celebrant:

On this 170th anniversary of Catherine McAuley's death we remember her and all our sisters who have given their lives in service to others, and so we pray:

Reader:

Our response is: *"We are yours, O God, for time and eternity."*

- We pray for each of us, that we may be a steady influence for good on this earth: [R]
- We pray for hearts free from anxiety and fear and full of self-surrender: [R]
- We pray for trust in God's providence during times of doubt and difficulty: [R]
- We pray for all who are nearing the time of their own death, that the hope of life eternal will comfort them: [R]
- We pray for Sisters of Mercy throughout the world and for their co-workers, that Catherine's life and death may continue to call us to embrace the spirit of hospitality and service: [R]

Celebrant:

God of mercy and compassion, fill us with the same spirit of obedience and love that filled Catherine. Through her intercession, may we be people of mercy and justice. Give us the confidence in you that will sustain us and give us life. May your desires come to fulfillment in and through us. Amen.