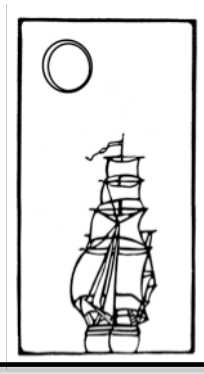

The MAST Journal

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2019

Mercy In Our Times

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

Any of you who have engaged in a memoir-writing workshop know there are many approaches to telling the story of your life. Where to begin? One approach is chronological. I start with my birth and go forward through all the decades—where I lived, and what ministry I was assigned in a particular year and decade. Other approaches are less governed by chronology, and more by theme. What historical events were going on at the time I was growing up, and how do I understand myself in the context of these social movements? Another approach is ancestral—my "roots." Who were the relatives who had the biggest impact on my life, and what values did they impart to me? I can also consider religious inspiration—the unfolding of my faith life, my relationship with God, my state in life, the effect of my belonging to a particular faith community with its scripture, tradition, sacraments, holy figures, its fall from grace, and its struggle toward conversion.

I can reflect on my work-life, the career, the jobs, or the ministries that I have done, and the effect on others—if that can be measured. If unmeasured, then how my life was shaped by the particular work I did, the urgencies and challenges I responded to, and the story of the changes in my life that resulted. I can also consider my intellectual history—what I studied, what I have thought about over the years, what became less or more important to me, how my thinking has changed, and why. There is also a "friendship" story—the persons who were precious to me—and I to them—and how those loves are mirrored in my life now.

The articles in this issue are a collection of writings which members of the editorial board have gathered and offer here under the theme of "Mercy in Our Times." The articles might be described as chapters in our "collective memoir." They are various answers to the question, "Where do we start when we try to tell our congregational life-story?"

What is the effect of belonging to our ecclesial faith community? **Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M.**, in "Rich in Mercy," reviews papal teaching on the theme of mercy. Yes, Pope Francis is known for *Misericordiae Vultus*, the proclamation of a Jubilee Year of Mercy in 2016, as well as his collection of homilies in *The Church of Mercy: A Vision of the Church*," and Tonielli's interview of the Pope in *The Name of God is Mercy*. But both John Paul II in *Dives in Misericordia* and Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* emphasized the theme of a merciful God and merciful Church.

Judith Patricia Healy, R.S.M., in "No Commandment Greater than These" couches her reflection on the two greatest commandments—love of God and love of neighbor as oneself—in the context of her retreat at the Abbey of St. Walburga in Colorado. Her retreat took place at the same time she was writing a paper for a course in Hebrew Scripture using Joan Chittister's *The Ten Commandments: Laws of the Heart*.

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. in "Living Eucharist" addressed a large group of laity at a religious education conference. Her historical review of the sacrament is a helpful outline for religious education leaders—how the sacrament moved from emphasis on the communal to emphasis on the personal and, after Vatican II, back to the communal. The 5 movements of the liturgy are accessible to a broad readership: Gathering, Hearing of the Word, Eucharistic Prayer, Communion and Thanksgiving-Dismissal.

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M. in "Reflection on Violence in Contemporary America" takes up the memoir theme of what revolutionary historical events were going on as the writer was growing up. She highlights the civil rights movement and Vatican II, both occurring in the 1960's. How can we understand our present commitment to non-violence against these two social movements with their common advocacy for social inclusion and political equality of all persons?

Janice Edwards, R.S.M., in "Catherine's Story: Our Lifeblood," considers our ancestral figures, those who have had a particular impact on our congregational life. She recalls Sister Patricia Joseph Corkery, R.S.M. (died in 1916) who had a gift for representing and translating the presence of Catherine McAuley at congregational events in

Ireland, England, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Antigua, Guam and Hawaii. Janice then presents her archival research on recollections by Catherine's contemporaries of her character and inspirational personality.

Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M., offers the text of her address at St. Xavier University in Chicago, "The Joyful Call to Mercy: Orientation to a New Academic Year." It integrates several Mercy themes. The establishment of St. Xavier arises out of the story of the Founder and her companions who opened the House of Mercy in 1827. The vision-statement of the University already reflects the values of Pope Francis in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and traditional works of mercy, such as "admonishment of the sinner," can address urgent social needs, such as environmental degradation, plight of economically oppressed and the dignity of women.

Patricia Flynn, R.S.M., serving on the present Institute Leadership Team, excerpts "Toward a Spirituality of Oneness" as reflection on this particular moment in congregational history of consolidating the regional communities into one entity. She reaches back to Catherine McAuley's emphasis on union and charity as the foundation for the later founding of the Institute in 1991, and subsequent re-configurations. She reviews the 2017 Chapter's re-commitment as continuity with ministerial concerns to which we have previously dedicated ourselves.

Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M., in "Leading in These Evolving Times, shares a presentation she has given in many congregational venues to Sisters in leadership. She empathizes with the pressures present leadership faces in dealing with aging members and closing of institutions. What is a fruitful understanding of "contemplative vision" for leadership? She offers practical suggestions for encouraging more person-oriented gatherings of members rather than a task-oriented agenda.

Julie Upton, R.S.M., in "These Hallowed Halls: Remembering and Giving Thanks," honors 100 years of Angel Guardian Children and Family Services, a child-care institution sponsored by the Brooklyn Mercies. Her paper illustrates the memoir theme of "How did my ministry evolve and change over the years?" She composed a readers-theater script to tell the story of Angel Guardian's changes over the years, as recited by four Sisters who had actually been on staff and in administration.

There are many more "memoir pieces" that have been written by Sisters all over the Institute. A multi-faceted memoir is an on-going work. A memoir's chapters evolve as Sisters discover their reflections are fresh and meaningful. Conversation among peers awakens attention to aspects of common life that may once have been side-lined, but now assume new spiritual and historical importance. *MAST Journal* is a place where chapters in a memoir of the Sisters of Mercy can find permanence.

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt

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Editor, *The MAST Journal*

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Rich in Mercy

Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M.

Most readers will recall the unprecedented encouragement Pope Francis gave to the Sisters of Mercy when he proclaimed 2016 a Jubilee Year of Mercy. Beginning with his stirring words, "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father of mercy," Francis gave us a wonderful exposition of the power of mercy in the context of today's world and challenged all readers to incorporate it into their lives.[1]

What is less often recalled are words of Francis' predecessors who also spoke eloquently of the meaning of mercy. In fact, one of the first encyclicals of Pope John Paul II was titled *Dives in Misericordia*.[2] Pope Benedict XVI, in turn, did not explicitly address mercy, but his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, reveals an implicit understanding of mercy as an expression of charity. What follows here are brief reflections on mercy in the writings of each of these teachers.

In short, every person deserves mercy, whatever his or her behaviors, because each one is created by God in God's own likeness.

Pope John Paul II

Rereading Pope John Paul II's encyclical from 1980, *Dives in Misericordia*, leaves one grateful again for its deep insights, so beautifully expressed. Mercy is presented as key to interpreting the Old Testament and to enacting the vision of the Second Vatican Council, as well as to living the mission of the Church today. [3] My favorite passage is the beautiful interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son. After re-telling the familiar story from the Gospel of Luke (15: 14-32), the Pope focuses on the dispositions of the father as he welcomes his wayward son.

> What took place in the relationship between the father and the son in Christ's parable is not to be evaluated "from the outside." Our prejudices about mercy are mostly the result of appraising them only from the outside. At times it happens that by following this method of evaluation *we see in mercy* above all *a relationship of inequality* between the one offering it and the one receiving it. And, in consequence, we are quick to deduce that mercy belittles the receiver, that it offends the dignity of man. The parable of the prodigal son shows that the reality *is different*.[4]

What the father sees is the inherent dignity of the prodigal, as well as his contrition: "This is my beloved son." Rather than requiring some onerous punishment, he embraces his son and throws a feast. In short, every person deserves mercy, whatever his or her behaviors, because each one is created by God in God's own likeness. As Pope John Paul II writes, "Love is transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice —[which is] often too narrow" and to embrace the divine likeness in the other."[5]

Succeeding pages of the encyclical trace the manifestations of mercy in the life of Jesus, culminating in the Passion and Resurrection, and the challenge to the Church to teach and practice mercy today.

A theme that is especially meaningful for the Mercy family and that runs through the entire document is the role of Mary, the Mother of Mercy, "the one who has the deepest knowledge of the mystery of God's mercy." She signaled a new era in human history when she proclaimed, "His mercy is from generation to generation" (Lk 1:50). In Mary and through her intercession, God's love continues to be revealed in the history of the Church and of humanity.

> This revelation is especially fruitful because in the Mother of God it is based upon the unique tact of her maternal heart, on her particular sensitivity, on her particular fitness to reach all those *who most easily accept the merciful love of a mother*. This is one of the great life-giving mysteries of Christianity, a mystery intimately connected with the mystery of the Incarnation.[6]

Another theme that undergirds the life of our Mercy Institute is that of justice. The encyclical notes the multiple forms of human evil, both individual and social. While affirming the reality of these, the Pope notes the temptation to hatred and vindictiveness that they engender. Hence the mission of the Church is to profess and proclaim the mercy of God in all its truth.

These brief excerpts from *Dives in Misericordia* can only hint at the richness of the document. It could well serve as a "catechism of mercy" for those who wish to develop the virtue in themselves and encourage it in others.

Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI is the most prolific writer among the three contemporary popes, having served as a university professor and scholar for many years and then as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith before his elevation to the papacy. This isn't the place to search through the sixty-six books he has published for reflections on mercy, so we'll focus on the first of his three encyclicals, *Deus Caritas Est*.[7] As its title indicates, this is about the love God lavishes upon us and which we in turn can share with others. A few key concepts follow.

Hence the mission of the Church is to profess and proclaim the mercy of God in all its truth.

In the New Testament narrative Jesus Christ gives a human face to the gratuitous love which God had shown to his people in the Old Testament. In his parables Jesus universalizes the concept of "neighbor." "Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help is my neighbor." Yet the concept remains concrete. "Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract, and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now."[8] It is easy to see how this resonates with Pope John Paul's exposition of the parable of the prodigal son: Loving my neighbor is to see the truth about her, that she is a child of God and God's love resides in her. The exposition of God's love ends with the words:

> No longer is [love of neighbor] a question, then, of a "commandment" imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is "divine" because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28).[9]

Succeeding sections deal with the practice of love by the Church as a "community of love." Topics include the multiple structures of charitable service in the social context of the present day, the relationship of charity to justice, and the distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activities. It is easy to see the vision and activities of the Mercy family and our institutions in this exposition.

Pope Francis

Mercy is a central theme in many of Pope Francis' speeches and writings. Italian journalist Andrea Tornielli's book length interview of the pope is titled, *The Name of God Is Mercy*.[10] A book length collection of the pope's homilies and addresses to various audiences is titled, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church*.[11] Clearly the declaration of a Jubilee Year of Mercy came out of a deep-seated appreciation for the

virtue. Since the resources are so numerous, I will just cite five insights which seem to characterize Pope Francis' appreciation for mercy. I will rely primarily on references from the proclamation of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*,[12] although the ideas expressed here resonate with many of Pope Francis' other writings.

Mercy is at the center of the Christian message. "Our salvation depends on it. . . . Mercy [is] the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness." (§2) Clearly, this virtue is foundational to everything Christians believe: the Old Testament history and law, the life and mission of Jesus, the ongoing work of the Spirit in our world. The very act of creating a Jubilee Year of Mercy indicates the place that this virtue occupies in our salvation history.

"We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of Mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace"

Mercy is a vital reality, not an abstract concept. In his mercy, "God reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a "visceral" love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy" (§6). We know that the corporal works of mercy are not abstractions; it requires a "hands on" effort to feed and clothe and heal. In turn, the spiritual works of mercy require an engagement of the heart to accomplish.

Further, mercy is not opposed to justice. "If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. . .. God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. He does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event [the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ] in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice" (§21).

Mercy is the very foundation of the life of the Church. "The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love" (§10).The Pope acknowledges that we can be tempted to focus exclusively on justice, but asserts that this is only a necessary and indispensable first step. The Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal, namely "to take up the joyful call to mercy." It is because of this imperative that Pope Francis convokes the Jubilee Year of Mercy. He writes, "The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy" (§24).

This same call to be a merciful Church is echoed in a section of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, where he discusses the importance of pastoral mercy from the Church's representatives in broken and irregular marriage situations.[13] "The church's pastors, in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church's teaching, must also help them to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgments."[14] Addressing the Church's moral theologians, Pope Francis writes that our appreciation of God's mercy "offers us a framework and a setting which help us avoid a cold bureaucratic morality in dealing with more sensitive issues. Instead, it sets us in the context of a pastoral discernment filled with merciful love, which is ever ready to understand, forgive, company, hope, and above all integrate."[15]

Mercy is a wellspring of joy. In an early paragraph in *Misericordiae Vultus* Pope Francis asserts, "We need constantly to contemplate the

mystery of Mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace" (§2). Further on, citing the words of Paul in Romans 12:8, he writes, "May the words of the Apostle accompany us: he who does acts of mercy, let him do them with cheerfulness" (§17). This may seem like a small point, but it is a characteristic of the current papacy. His first publication, an apostolic exhortation on evangelization in today's world, was titled, *Evangelii Gaudium*, or *The Joy of the Gospel*. His apostolic exhortation on marriage and the family *Amoris Laetita*, translates to *The Joy of Love*. His encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, after detailing some ninety pages of challenges, ends with the stirring words, "Let us sing as we go!" Clearly, in Pope Francis' view, exercising mercy in today's world is, in itself, a source of joy.

Our best exemplar of mercy is Mary, the Mother of Mercy. Pope Francis cites the same scripture passages as did Pope John Paul II in recognizing Mary as the unique exemplar of mercy. He prays that "the sweetness of her countenance watch over all of us in this Holy Year, so that all may rediscover the joy of God's tenderness." He urges Christians to pray the *Salve Regina*, "So that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes upon us and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus" (§24).

Reviewing the Encyclicals on Mercy

Reading over the works of our last three Church leaders shows us that we are living in an Age of Mercy. The call is powerful and the urgency is real. What does this mean, what is the opportunity, for Sisters of Mercy, our associates, colleagues, and ministries? How is commitment to each of our Critical Concerns an opportunity to demonstrate mercy in specific ways? This could be the subject of an entire retreat, as we probe the resonance between mercy and care for women or mercy and anti-racism. Further, how can we clothe our work for social justice in the cloak of mercy?

Personally, how does each of us explicitly integrate our appreciation for mercy into our prayer life, community living, and ministry? As we "respond in faith to God's mercy," may our mercy gush forth with joy in our words and deeds! ◆

Endnotes

[1] Pope Francis, *Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: Misericordiae Vultus* (April 11, 2015).
[2] Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia (* Boston, MA: St. Paul Books & Media, 1980).
[3] See especially footnote 52 which is an extensive treatment of the interpretations and uses of mercy and its equivalents in the Old Testament.
[4] Par. 22. Italicized words here and in subsequent quotations are in the original.
[5] Par. 20.
[6] Par. 31.
[7] Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Boston, MA:Pauline Books & Media, 2005).
[8] Par. 20.
[9] Par. 24.
[10] Andrea Tornielli, *The Name of God Is Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2016).
[11] Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014).
[12] Vatican City: Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. April 11, 2015. References will be indicated by paragraph number.
[13] Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2016).
[14] Par. 237.
[15] Par. 240.

No Commandment Greater than These

Patricia Healy, R.S.M.

Every year I make a retreat of prayer and reflection that usually lasts five or more complete days. Some years I meet each day with a person who offers guidance on suggested Scripture readings and shares with me some insights about ways God might be guiding my life. Other years involve being with God in silence and "doing nothing" so that God has a chance to bring forth new insights. In 1975, I made a retreat at a center for prayer located in the Texas desert. This retreat lasted 31 days. I was provided five suggested Scripture readings for each day and asked to spend an hour with each, being open to God's granting me insights. Each day I met with a person who could help me understand these insights. I don't know how the other retreatants experienced their time, but I felt that God and I spent hours of time "doing nothing." I didn't seem to be aware of any insights and referred to that experience as "the summer I went to Texas to find God and God went to Canada to prepare for the 1976 summer Olympics." In 1991, I went to Guelph in Ontario, Canada for a 41-day retreat. I had the impression that God remained with me in Canada for this retreat. It involved a particular pattern of prayer and reflection based on Scripture and included meeting each day with a person who listened to my insights and offered some perspective on my experience. This pattern of prayer is called the "Spiritual Exercises." It was developed almost five- hundred years ago by Ignatius of Loyola, who with six other men of his university, began a society of Catholic men, commonly referred to as Jesuits. Their best-known institutions in Omaha are Creighton University and Creighton Preparatory.

Each year as the time for retreat comes closer, I experience a feeling of anticipation filled with longing to be more intimate and open to God. Each year as I begin preparing for retreat, I bring these questions to God? What do You want me to know about my life's journey that I haven't yet noticed? What do You want me to learn? What do You want me to change? How do You want me to be more open to a deeper relationship with You and others?

What do You want me to know about my life's journey that I haven't yet noticed?

Retreat at the Abbey of St. Walburga, Colorado

I spent this past week in silent prayer and reflection at the Abbey of St. Walburga, located in Colorado's high ranch country. The nearest large cities are Ft. Collins, Colorado, and Laramie, Wyoming, each approximately 35 miles away in opposite directions. The Abbey community is currently composed of 26 Roman Catholic women between the ages of 25 and 95. They follow the Benedictine monastic tradition of prayer and work devised by St. Benedict and his sister St. Scholastica in the sixth century. Because the women at St. Walburga's form a contemplative community, this distance from cities helps them live a more secluded life as they seek God. Much of their day is devoted to the Word of God through reading and liturgical prayer. They gather for Mass and other formal chanted prayer six times a day between the hours of 4:30 AM and 8:00 PM. Some chants are supported by organ or harp; most are sung a capella. All guests are invited to join them for prayer.

This year I only joined them for morning Mass. Except for brief periods, most of their time is spent in silence unless conversing about the work that supports them financially. The Abbey houses a guest wing which provides a quiet place

for individuals or groups to gather for prayer and reflection for weekends, or longer periods of time. Their gift shop features books, CDs, statues, plaques, rosaries, candles they've made and decorated, and cards they've created using their photography and art work. The work that probably brings their greatest financial support is raising and selling natural beef cattle and hay. Yes, these are women who dress in traditional habit when in formal prayer. However, they wear jeans and work shirts when they need to lasso the two llamas they keep to ward off mountain lions and coyotes, if they're on the tractor mowing and stacking hay, or if they're branding cattle! Some of their former occupations include health care, teaching, computer programing, career naval officer, and professional ballet dancer. One of the most distinguishing features of this community is their real spirit of joy; they smile easily and often. They radiate a tangible sense of peace and happiness to one another and to their guests. This is the fifth retreat that I've made at the Abbey since 2006.

One of the most distinguishing features of this community is their real spirit of joy; they smile easily and often.

My Assignment on the Commandments

This year my retreat happened to fall during the timeline of a theology class I was taking on Hebrew Scriptures. One required text was *The Ten Commandments: Laws of the Heart* by Joan Chittister. Sometimes we discover amazing common relationships. Joan Chittister, author of *The Ten Commandments: Laws of the Heart*, is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania. The women who started Joan's community in Pennsylvania and the women who make their home at the Colorado Abbey of St. Walburga have a common heritage. They all came to the United States from the Abbey of St. Walburg in Eichstätt, Bavaria in Germany. Their common Mother Abbey was built in 1035 to honor Walburga, an English Benedictine who moved to Germany in the eighth century to help spread Christianity. She was known and greatly loved for her deep prayer life, courage, and charity. These traits seem present in her twenty-first century daughters.

The students in Hebrew Scriptures were required to write and present a major paper on any two of the commandments in Chittister's book. We were to convey our reflection on these commandments and their relationship with our insights, life-experiences, and challenges. My course professor suggested that I might use retreat time at the Abbey to prepare my class discussion and paper. I spent a day discerning if this was what I should do. It didn't seem to fit with how I felt I should use my time during this retreat. By the end of the day, I knew this was not where I was being led. The rest of my retreat and some of my 550-mile drive home was concentrated on two commandments, but not from Chittister's ten.

Which is the Greatest Commandment?

I was drawn to Mark 12:28-30. This scene is most likely set in the temple area. One of the scribes came forward and heard them (Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees mentioned in preceding verses) disputing and when he saw how well Jesus had answered them, inquired of Jesus, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength! The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself! There is no other commandment greater than these."

Both Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-30 provide the story in which Jesus is questioned about which commandment is preeminent. Jesus responds there are two and they are alike. The first

of the two great commandments tells us how to relate to God. The second articulates that we are to relate to others with the same degree of concern that we hold for our self.

In the first commandment, we are told to love God with all our humanness. We are human and not God. Yet, we are created as human with a most amazing connectedness to God. We are made in God's image, after God's likeness, filled with God's breath (ruah in Hebrew). God looked at these human creatures and found them "very good." All we are is gift from God and this God indwells in us. This is who we are. This can't be understood by rational reflection alone. It is only believed in faith, whose essential component is trust in God Who loves us. "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength!" Here is the mystery contained in faith. We are human and therefore limited in our ability to love like this. Yet, because we exist in God's love for us and in us, we love God reciprocally with God's own love magnified in our humanness.

Our greatest love for God is expressed from the depth of our being by trusting that God's love for each of us has no limits.

In Luke's Gospel 1:46-49, a song is placed on the lips of pregnant Mary of Nazareth as she comes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. This canticle shows Mary's acceptance that this reciprocal love between humans and God is possible. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." Her words are our words, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. ...The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name." To believe this is to trust God.

We will fail in this love, because we are human. Still God loves us limitlessly even in our failings. Our greatest love for God is expressed from the depth of our being by trusting that God's love for each of us has no limits. This trust in God's immense unlimited love is not something we can achieve by our own efforts. Rather, it is an incomprehensible, but unfolding gift of God's Self to us. What we tend to fall prey to is our lack of trust that God loves us so immeasurably. We set ourselves in control of God and say that God cannot love us because we sin, because we are not worthy. We turn from God. It's not possible for God to love us this much, this passionately, with unlimited love for us in spite of our human turning to sin. We have decided how much God can and will love us. We put ourselves in control of God. We fail to trust God's commitment to us; thereby, refusing to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength!"

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus states, "This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself!" Lack of faith, lack of trust in God's unlimited love for us is where the second commandment falls apart for us. In many cases we do love our neighbor as our self; however, our love for our self can be so small that our love for our neighbor is equally small. We deceive ourselves into thinking we don't need to be kind to others; we don't need to respect others; we can cut others down by the way we speak to them or about them. We can kill their emotions, their self-worth even if we don't kill their body. There is really precious little difference between killing the emotions and self-worth of another and killing their body, since emotions and self-worth, as well

as our physical body define who we are in our human existence.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself!" Our love for our neighbor is to equal our love for our self. This love flows from the gift of the first commandment, God's unlimited love for us. When we dismiss God's gracious love for us, we have set our self in control of God. When we decide that we aren't good enough or others have convinced us that we aren't good enough for God's love, then we set ourselves in place of God. We refuse to accept God as God and our self in relation to God.

Faith, trust in God's love, is a mystery for God's love has no limit.

We have set ourselves up as someone unlovable by God; therefore, we can't love our self. We have a false sense that we are not lovable. Because of this, we see others as unlovable and treat them as unlovable. When we trust that God truly loves us without limit and desires the best for us, then we can reciprocate love back to God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength because of God's indwelling Presence. Then we understand ourselves as lovable and glimpse that our neighbor is to be loved as we are. We trust God rather than ourselves. We accept who God is capable of loving and who we are capable of loving.

Faith, trust in God's love, is a mystery for God's love has no limit. Faith, trust in God's love, is a gift given to us so that we are capable of reciprocal love for God, for our self, and for our neighbor. Trust in God's love is what gets us through life's circumstances, both our joys and our devastations and desolations. Trust forms us in an ever maturing relationship of love that is willing to both give and receive with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. ◆

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Living Eucharist Twenty-Four Hours a Day

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

An address given at the Sacramento Diocesan Eucharistic Congress, March 25, 2000.

There are few people today that have not been touched by the constant struggle to balance the various dimensions of their lives. Demands of work, family, civic involvement and day to day living leave little open space in crowded schedules. Never has the psalmist's cry: "God...my soul is thirsting for you, my flesh is longing for you, a land parched, weary and waterless... (Ps. 63:1) been more accurate. As faithful disciples of Jesus we long to have a unity in our life and prayer, long to overcome the fragmentation that frequently invades our spiritual journeys. Deep within us there burns a desire to share the experience of the Emmaus disciples. We want to recognize and experience God at the Eucharistic table and to carry that experience into the whole of our lives.

Rich and varied practices of devotion kindled the faith life of the community but failed to foster an awareness that the Eucharistic celebration was at the core of the Christian life.

For the early Christian community, prayer was integral to their rhythm of life. Their lives, firmly rooted in the Paschal mystery, celebrated the reality of Christ present among them.[1] They celebrated in the breaking of the bread and remembered the Lord Jesus, a remembering which gave life and meaning to every other experience. St. Basil refers to this life Eucharist saying:

> This is how you pray continually--not by offering prayer in words but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer.[2]

For the first four centuries of Christianity, there was a oneness between the movement to communal celebration of the Eucharist and the believer's prayer that flowed to and from that moment. As the faithful discovered the presence of Christ in daily experience, they were moved to praise and thanksgiving. As they recognized their own failures to love as Jesus loved, they sought God's mercy. As they faced the crises of their day including martyrdom and imprisonment, they were moved to intercession. All of this was gathered in the daily prayer of the Church...at morning and evening prayer, in the sharing of the Word and most of all at the Sunday Eucharist.

The unity and wholeness of this prayer of the early Church was not left untouched by the historical and cultural onslaught of the centuries. After Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire, the liturgical celebrations took on more and more the trappings of the imperial court. In the centuries that followed the majority of laity became increasingly removed from active participation in Eucharistic worship as language changed and liturgical roles became formalized and professionalized. As the liturgy grew more removed from communal participation, the union and flow between the Church's communal prayer and the personal prayer of the believer was disrupted.

During the fifteenth century, a desire for renewal and reform swept through the Church Seeking an entry point for challenging Christians to conversion of life, the reformers focused upon a revitalization of personal piety.[3] Lacking the realization that the Eucharist was their prayer, the Christian community sought other sources of piety. Rich and varied practices of devotion kindled the faith life of the community but failed to foster an awareness that the Eucharistic celebration was at

the core of the Christian life. In a way, attending Mass was seen simply as one more devotional practice. The custom of refraining from frequent reception of Communion reinforced the notion of the Eucharist as a static event and moved the Christian community away from seeing the dynamism and life-giving nature of Eucharist.[4]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, liturgical and private prayer were seen as two separate and possibly opposed realities to be reconciled instead of being integrated.[5] The realization of Christian life as one of relationship, as one of on-going response to the presence of God-with-us, and as entry into the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was to stay in the shadows of Christian memory until the combined streams of liturgical renewal, Scriptural studies and Patristic studies would once more bring this core understanding to the surface of Christian consciousness.

The challenge to the contemporary Christian is to reclaim the oneness of life and liturgy that was such a vital force in the life of the primitive Church.

Drawing from the combined riches of these three sources as well as the mystical and living tradition of the Church, Pope Pius XII clearly articulated the inter-relatedness of liturgical and personal prayer in his encyclical *Mediator Dei*. Among the norms and principles promulgated in the document were:

1.1 Proper dispositions of soul and private spiritual activity are necessary in order that the Eucharistic and sacramental action may bear full fruit.

1.2. Both the public worship of the Church and the private prayer of the faithful are animated by the same spirit and tend to the same end.

1.3. The Eucharist is the center and principal source of the life of piety.[6]

The Constitution on the Church reinforces this understanding calling the Eucharist "the source and summit of the Christian life." [7]

What this means in practice is that our participation in the celebration of Eucharist is fed and nourished by the life of prayer and fidelity which we bring to it. Prayer, reflection upon the revelation of God heard in Scripture and daily experience and a life that is faithful to the demands of the Gospel prime the pump of thanksgiving, praise, surrender and conversion. All of these flow into the Eucharist, are transformed in and through the power of Jesus and are united to his own prayer. Romano Guardini speaks of this reality when he points out: "Liturgical and personal prayer mutually sustain each other. Each sphere springs from its own separate roots; yet they belong together and form the wholeness of Christian life."[8] The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy tells us that "devotions must harmonize with the liturgy."[9]

The challenge to the contemporary Christian is to reclaim the oneness of life and liturgy that was such a vital force in the life of the primitive Church.

He who wants to live can find here a place to live in and the means to live on. Let him approach, let him believe, let him be incorporated so that he may receive life let him live for God on God.[10]

Such singleness of focus does not happen spontaneously. It is supported and nurtured by spiritual disciplines and practices that help us appropriate the meaning of living what we celebrate, of being taken, blessed, broken and given in the pattern of Christ Jesus. The character of these disciplines is revealed in the five movements of the Mass. This ritual pattern of the Eucharistic liturgy points to prayer practices and inner dispositions that help us to pray unceasingly.

Period of Gathering

The pattern begins with the period of gathering, acknowledgment of the need for God's abounding

mercy, and praise and prayer that constitute the introductory rite. These prayer elements remind us that we do not come to Eucharist as individuals but as a people. What happens to one of us happens to all. Conscious of this we ask for mercy and forgiveness.

Eucharist was the ordinary sacrament of reconciliation in the early Church; the introductory rite reminds us of that truth. We cannot come authentically if we hold anger or hostility in our hearts toward our brothers and sisters, for forgiveness is integral to living eucharist. We seek forgiveness for both our personal failings and our social sin. By asking mercy for our failures in justice, for our lack of love, we acknowledge that for the Eucharist to be extended beyond this worshiping moment, it must be accompanied by a commitment to act justly and love compassionately. Confident in being gifted with God's forgiveness and mercy, we express in the Gloria our thanks and praise for the wonders of God. This section then concludes with a prayer of supplication.

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Prayer practices which extend this pattern of prayer in daily life include the Liturgy of the Hours through which the whole Body of the Faithful is united in praying with and in Christ.

To the early Church morning and evening praise were considered the two hinges of the day marking a sacredness of time and life. The Liturgy of the Hours is not a personal devotion but falls into the category of liturgical prayer, the prayer of the Church. Personal prayer forms or devotions which are rooted in this pattern include daily examination of conscience, family reconciliation services, the Jesus Prayer of the Russian tradition, charismatic prayer and song.

Liturgy of the Word

The second movement, the Liturgy of the Word, proclaims the Good News of God's love and reveals for us a way of life responsive to that love. It recalls what God has done and is doing for us at every moment of our lives and stirs up in the community attitudes of thankfulness, praise and longing. Here we are fed with the Bread of the Word and receive guidance on how to live that Word in our lives.

The homily breaks open that Word in relationship to the current demands of the time and culture. It is this movement that gives us the pattern for our practices of Lectio Divina, meditation, shared prayer on the Word and scripture journaling. All of these provide avenues for "pondering the Word" in our hearts. They are practices that lead one to appropriate the message as a living force in our life. They not only prepare one for fruitful participation in the Eucharist but help to direct us in the manner of being eucharist for our brothers and sisters.

An abundance of materials on the daily readings of the liturgy and commentaries on those readings help makes this richness accessible to all. Even fifteen minutes spent praying on the texts of the liturgy can make a profound difference in our receptivity to the Word proclaimed. Conscious of the importance of reflecting on the mysteries of Christ, devotions developed that aided those who could not read. The rosary, introduced by St. Dominic, helped believers to reflect upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It was a "non-readers" Gospel. Other prayer forms such as the Way of the Cross or Praying with Icons served the same purpose and are connected to the Word.

The Eucharistic Prayer

Through Christ, with Christ and in Christ the community enter into the third ritual movement, that of the Eucharistic prayer itself. Here, joined as one in the Body of Christ, we enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus. In union with Christ Jesus we offer to our God the perfect prayer of obedience in the breaking of the bread. The Eucharistic prayer invites us to do what we do "in remembrance of Jesus" in fidelity to the gift received in our baptisms. It calls to mind the saving actions of God, reminds us of our solidarity with both the living and dead. It reminds us that this transformation is through the power of the Spirit echoing the same theme we heard in our confirmations. It is a prayer charged with mystery, a prayer of faith. Here we affirm that "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. What happened once is happening now. Then the words of consecration proclaim, "This is my Body; This is my Blood," it is not only the sacramental elements that are transformed but we who celebrate are increasingly transformed into the Body of Christ.

"Eucharisticum mysterium" (Instruction on Eucharistic Worship) published by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1967, reflects on the eucharistic devotions that are found in our tradition such as processions and exposition. Processions such as the Corpus Christi procession, call disciples to give public witness to their faith. In symbol and ritual, the people, together with Jesus, the Bread of Life, move out into society as bread for the world.

A second eucharistic devotion, Eucharistic exposition, "stimulates the faithful to an awareness of the marvelous presence of Christ and is an invitation to spiritual communion with him."[11] The Church cautions, however, that "one must avoid anything which could obscure the desire of Christ in instituting the Eucharist; for he instituted it above all with the purpose of nourishing, healing and sustaining us.[12]

In symbol and ritual, the people, together with Jesus, the Bread of Life, move out into society as bread for the world.

Communion

Living out the Eucharistic prayer is not limited to a prayer practice. It is a call to relationship and life stance. The gift of contemplative prayer helps us to become more conscious of our union with God, to long for that experience of awareness of God's presence in the people we serve, in the tasks we undertake. The enjoyment of that sense of God's presence is hollow, however, if it does not give us eyes to see Christ in our brothers and sisters. It is at this juncture that the pattern of the Eucharistic prayer and Communion Rite converge. In the eating of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus, the disciple becomes what is eaten, becomes eucharistic bread for the world. To share the meal is to commit oneself to solidarity with those who sit at the table. For Jesus that meant those who were marginalized, suffering and outcast. We cannot eat the Bread of Justice and forget those who are the victims of injustice. When I receive the Eucharist, I also am given to others.

Period of Thanksgiving

The period of thanksgiving after the reception of communion is both a time of thanksgiving for the "greatest of God's gifts," for the wonder of God's action in us but also a time to recommit oneself to our brothers and sisters. It is that blend of thanks and dedication that characterize the life stance flowing from the Eucharist.

Dismissal

The concluding movement of the liturgy is the Dismissal Rite. It is this section that gives its name to the Mass. Basically it is a call to action. It challenges us to live what we have celebrated until we gather all that up and bring it back once more to be blessed, broken and given. It acknowledges the

transformation that has occurred in us as individuals and as community and from that transformation flows a commitment to transform the world. When we are sent forth it is a sending forth to continue the mission of God, to proclaim the Good News through our actions, to take the barley loaves and fish of our lives and share it that all may be fed. Living the Eucharist twenty-four hours a day invites us to bring together our prayer and life. It is an invitation to "remain centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back." Only in this way can we live what and who we are...God's bread given that others may have life.◆

Endnotes

[1]Thomas Merton, *Bread in the Wilderness* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1953): 6.

[2] Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980): 191.

[3] Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, pp. 75-78.

[4] Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, p.248.

[5] Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality* (New York: Desclee Company, 1961), p. 57.

[6] Gabriel M. Braso, O.S.B., *Liturgy and Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1960): 20-21.

[7] *Constitution on the Church*, §11.

[8] Romano Guardini, *Prayer in Practice* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957): 225.

[9] *Constitutions on the Sacred Liturgy*, §13.

[10] Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei, The Pope Speaks*, 10 (1965): 325.

[11] *Instruction on Eucharistic Worship*, §60.

[12] Ibid.

We want to recognize and experience God at the Eucharistic table and to carry that experience into the whole of our lives.

A Reflection on the Violence in Contemporary America

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M.

In 1938, Crane Brinton wrote *The Anatomy of a Revolution* which became the paradigm for studying revolutions. The text outlined the uniformity of the French, American, English and Russian Revolutions.[1] Each revolution witnessed a cultural shift that polarized the economic, social and political aspects of life.

Brinton's assumptions could be applied to other less known revolutions like the Mexican Revolution (1910). Similar to the French, American, English and Russian Revolutions, the Mexican revolutionaries wanted to end the abuses of their leaders.[2] Prior to the revolution, the country was ruled by a merciless dictator who governed for 34 years. After the revolution, a new generation of leaders arose who advocated a more democratic rule. However, their reign was short-lived.

Revolutions that impact all aspects of one's life are rare, but smaller ones emerge from time to time. Using Crane Brinton's pattern of a revolution, I will review America's social revolution of the 1960's and offer a possible solution for society's current unrest.

Revolutions that impact all aspects of one's life are rare, but smaller ones emerge from time to time.

America's Social Revolution

America's social revolution focused on the Vatican II Council (1962-65) and the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968). Viewing first the pre-revolutionary Church and Afro-American community, we can see the impact of the revolution on society. Both movements advocated inclusion, social and political equality for all persons.

A New Way of Envisioning Church

The first Vatican Council (1868) dealt with the problem of liberalism and advocated the infallibility of the Pope. In sharp contrast to the first Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII called the second Vatican Council to renew the Church (1962-65). The Council encouraged the use of the vernacular in religious services, dialogue with non-Catholic religious leaders and the rise of lay leadership. Pope John envisioned a Church where the clergy and laity worked together to bring about unity in the world.[3]

Equality in Society

A second call for equality came from the Afro-American community between 1955 and 1964. While the Civil War abolished slavery, Afro-Americans were still segregated in schools and public facilities 100 years later. Protests and riots erupted in the mid-twentieth century. The Montgomery bus protest (1955-6) and a sit-in at a North Carolina restaurant (1960) were a few examples of the activist community's unrest. Segregation legally ended with the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

A New Phase in the Social Revolution

By 1965, equality was being fostered in society and the Church. However, Brinton's research reveals a new phase appears 50 years after the completion of a revolution. Recently, Vatican II and the Civil Rights Act celebrated their 50th anniversary.

After 50 years, Brinton says two different voices begin to emerge. One voice advocates a return to the pre-revolutionary position, while the other voice seeks to renew the spirit of the revolution. These are the voices Americans are hearing today.

Hate Groups

The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified 954 hate groups within the United States. One of the fastest growing hate groups is the anti-semitic group; incidents of anti-semitism increased 57% between 2016 and 2017. Recently, eleven Jews were killed while praying in their synagogue.

Another hate group sent bombs to political leaders who disagreed with President Trump's philosophy of governance. These hate crimes continue to target all aspects of our lives and threatens America's sense of unity. While hate groups promote violence, other groups try to bring peace to our world.

Renewing the Spirit of Vatican II

Cardinal Cupich of Chicago and Pope Francis are both promoting a peaceful approach to end violence. Chicago's Cardinal has established a program to end violence in the streets, while Pope Francis continues to seek ways to revitalize the Spirit of Vatican II. He has appointed new bishops to non-European countries, continues to dialogue with non-Catholic Church leaders, called the bishops to accountability over the sex abuse scandal and established a Youth Synod to find ways to create a Church for the future. All of these ideas flow directly from the Spirit of Vatican II.

Both the voices of those advocating the spirit of Vatican II as well as those promoting violence will continue to be heard until the hate groups become open to seeing and acknowledging the sufferings of others. Archbishop Oscar Romero's experience could serve as a model in minimizing the sufferings of others. On the other hand, the actions of a hate group resulted in Archbishop Oscar Romero's death.

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Archbishop Oscar Romero: Hope for the Future

Oscar Romero grew up in a poor family, but his seminary education and his early pastoral assignments sheltered him from witnessing suffering people. His perspective on life changed when he was assigned to Santiago de Maria. It was here he saw the sufferings of the farmworkers at the hands of the landowners.[4]

The farmworkers were frequently forced to sleep on the ground on cold nights and often became ill. When he saw this injustice, Archbishop Romero opened the churches at night to provide the workers a place to sleep and eat. Romero's actions angered the landowners. His constant defiance ultimately led to his death.[5]

Like Oscar Romero, we are all called to seek justice and abolish oppression (Is. 1:17). Crane Brinton's research provides scholars with a framework to analyze contemporary violence, while Oscar Romero's life offers us an alternative to violence and inequality among people.

Summary

Like all revolutions, the leaders of the American social revolution wanted to abolish the inequalities of society. The Afro-American and ecclesial leaders desired equality for all. Their goal seemed to be achieved for 50 years. It is at the 50-year mark that two conflicting voices emerged. One voice desired a return to the pre-revolutionary status of white supremacy, while the other voice sought equality. These conflicting voices will continue to be heard until the hate groups are willing to acknowledge the equality of all persons.

Oscar Romero serves as an inspirational figure to confront hate groups. He recognized the injustices in the treatment of the farmworkers and found ways to ameliorate their suffering. Like Romero, we must all seek ways to end hatred in our world. It is our Christian and American heritage. The challenge is ours, both as believers and as citizens.◆

Endnotes

[1] Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., Revised and expanded edition, 1965).

[2] Ibid., p. 250.

[3] Walter W. Abbott, S.J. ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966).

[4] See the interview by Joshua J. McElwee with Sister Ana Maria Pineda on "Romero: A Man in Search of God and in Search of Truth" and Special Report in the *National Catholic Reporter* (Kansas City, MO) 19 October-1 November, 2018.

[5] Ibid.

Like Romero, we must all seek ways to end hatred in our world.

Catherine's Story—Our Lifeblood

Janice Edwards, R.S.M.

Because the dynamism of myths is powerful enough to span centuries, they can be told and retold without losing their meaning and energy. Religious life is an ancient and ever new story. Though its numerical membership rises and falls cyclically throughout history, a sacred vibrancy simmers in its depth. I experienced aspects of this vibrancy in 1989 when Patricia Joseph Corkery, a Sister of Mercy from Philadelphia, portrayed Catherine McAuley during a three-day charism retreat for the Sisters of Mercy in New Jersey.[1]

We had never experienced a retreat like this. No one had met this sister from Philadelphia, and only the few of us on the retreat committee knew what was about to happen. As Patty entered our worship space clothed in the traditional habit of the Sisters of Mercy, we could have, so to speak heard a pin drop. We had not seen anyone dressed in this full habit for two decades. As she stood at the podium, and silently bowed her head, our attention was riveted. Then with her floor length habit swaying, she glided up and down the aisle and began the retreat with a vibrant, "You've gathered—you've gathered."

As the retreat progressed, some sisters astonished me by walking up to Patty, addressing her as Catherine or Mother Catherine and revealing something of their lives to her. Patty Jo had become Catherine McAuley! This transformation was so powerful that no one recorded Patty's words; our intimacy with Catherine transcended words. Neither the traditional habit that Patty wore nor the accent with which she spoke caused these incredible shifts of consciousness. I believe it was the story Patty told—the story of one great woman—that changed perceptions. As Patty Jo interacted with us, the early 1800's, the late 1900's collapsed into the present moment. Just as God's and Catherine's great love inspired her early community, so too it animates us today. Her story was their story and is our story too.

Though turnarounds like these will fascinate me for the rest of my life, I know I will catch only a glimpse of their meaning and experience a bit of their energy. Because sacred stories arise from our depth, they are shrouded in mystery. Still, during that retreat we did experience a deeper dimension of our original Mercy myth—of Catherine's story. Diarmuid O'Murchu, a contemporary spiritual writer, tells us this happens because a community's original myth "is the lifeblood of the vowed life."[2]

Mythic Creativity—Our Lifeblood

Myths develop when someone donates her or his entire life in a radical way to what is "most profoundly important." For two millennia our stories of Jesus' self-donating love have been mythic. They have inspired Christians to focus their lives on Jesus' radical approach to love, mercy, and justice. Catherine McAuley also staked her entire life on "the holy"—on that which is "most profoundly important." When she wholeheartedly centered herself in God, her sisters, and the forgotten of society, her story became our compelling Mercy narrative—our very lifeblood.

When she wholeheartedly centered herself in God, her sisters, and the forgotten of society, her story became our compelling Mercy narrative—our very lifeblood.

How did the story of the people Catherine and Patty Jo served infuse the lifeblood of the Sisters of Mercy—in our own time? In his book on Religious Life in the 21st Century, Diarmuid

O'Murchu tells us that mythic creativity is what sustains a "group during the ups and downs of the founding years. It is also the spark of the Spirit. . . When the Spirit is at the helm, life will thrive even amid the letting go of death itself."[3]

This "spark of the spirit" endures. Thirty years after our New Jersey retreat, I have seen sisters faces light up when Patty Jo's name is mentioned. After that retreat, Sisters of Mercy in other parts of the world invited Patty Jo to portray Catherine for them. Because of our myth's long-lasting power, I sometimes describe these events with the strongest expression. For me, Patty Jo was an incarnation of Catherine's spirit.

"This is one of the most powerful experiences of my life," he said to Mary. "I am on fire, just like her. If you want us to take her spirit into the future, this is how to do it."

This essay revolves around God's and Catherine's radical love, and the breathing, pulsing, and ever-changing story that their love created. [4] First, we read about Catherine's vibrant presence among us today. Many Mercy communities have experienced our founder's charisma through her incarnation in Patty Jo. Then we focus on the magnetism of Catherine's love, its impact on those with whom she lived in the 1830's, and their drive to tell others about the passion of this remarkable woman. Finally, we consider how blessed we are to have such a powerful narrative tradition that revolves around one extraordinary woman. So, let us "pull up a chair to the precipice of the sacred,"[5] and let Catherine and Patty Jo draw us into the power of our myth—into our lifeblood.

Mythic Creativity and Patty Jo's Enactment

Patricia Joseph Corkery gave those of us in New Jersey an opportunity to experience Catherine's story as our story. But I wanted to hear how our New Jersey retreat had affected her. So, many years after that retreat, I visited Patty Jo several times. Though none of us recorded Patty Jo's words during that retreat, her own account of the retreat reveals another side of the story. During our first visit, I was amazed to learn that approximately fifty Mercy communities around the world had invited Catherine and Patty to visit them over a nine-year period. In many locations, after Patty Jo's dramatization was over, the sisters introduced her to their ministries and cities. She said that these women "treated me like a queen, like Catherine herself." That Patty Jo could become Catherine, let Catherine tell her own story, and afterwards be treated royally accentuates the profound creativity and versatility of our Mercy myth.

What began in New Jersey in 1989 continued until 1998. During those years Patty Jo circled the globe, visiting communities in Australia, England, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United States, as well as Antigua, Guam, and Hawaii. Mary Trainer, a Sister of Mercy who often accompanied Patty, told me about one hospital system in Rockhampton, Australia that required its board of directors to attend a retreat with Catherine. One board member sat in the back row with his arms folded tightly, annoyed about this mandatory retreat. But by the final evening he had changed. "This is one of the most powerful experiences of my life," he said to Mary. "I am on fire, just like her. If you want us to take her spirit into the future, this is how to do it." Encountering Catherine through a re-enactment had transformed him.

Perhaps Catherine's most striking incarnation occurred on July 23, 1994, at the dedication of Mercy International Center on Baggot Street in Dublin. This was the first House of Mercy that Catherine opened in 1827. It was being converted into Mercy International Center, Mercy's worldwide home. I could not personally attend this celebration, but I watched a videotape of it. Many

aspects of this event struck me, but the opening ritual attracted me the most.

Mary Trainer, one of the sisters who coordinated the center's renovation, began the celebration in the Baggot Street chapel. After a brief introduction she said, "I sense now that someone is present with us who is truly the lady of the house." Out came Catherine! Immediately I heard "Oh's" and Ah's," and before she even spoke, the people who were present burst into applause. Catherine raised her arms in welcome and said, "You're here! You're here! Mercy gathered from around the world–Mercy has come home!" Catherine's presence roused the group. In Mercy's birthplace, Patricia Joseph Corkery had translated Catherine McAuley once more.

Whenever Patty Jo incarnated Catherine, our founder's love became a reality for everyone present. Stephen Crites, a former Methodist minister and professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, says, "People do not sit down on a cool afternoon and think themselves up a sacred story. They awaken to a sacred story [that always lives], so to speak, in [their] arms and legs and bellies."[6]

The first sisters who lived with Catherine tell us that her warmth and closeness created cheer at community recreations, guided them in their struggles, strengthened them for new foundations, and enabled them to embrace Ireland's most impoverished people.

This comment confirmed something else Patty Jo told me. "When the sisters saw me, their love for Catherine just poured out of them. I saw deep-down affection on their faces. Somehow, they were relating with Catherine, not with me. I didn't have much to do with it, because it was so much bigger than me. They pulled Catherine out of me."

At certain times, in particular places, under special circumstances, the power of that narrative manifests itself. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, one of the most important theologians and mystics of the twentieth century, gives us some insight into these mysterious occurrences. He tells us that Love, the center of the universe, continually attracts and draws everyone into a "great union."[7]

Whether or not we realized it, during those visitations, Patty Jo drew us beyond our analysis and skepticism and into that kind of "great union." The timelessness of our right brain prevailed and our left-brain distinctions between life and death vanished.[8] We were drawn beyond our everyday consciousness and our individuality and into an awareness of Love's communion—of God's ever-present intimacy with us. [9]

Something mysterious occurred: Patty Jo Corkery receded, and Catherine McAuley emerged. Distinctions between Catherine and Patty Jo, Ireland and the United States, the 1830s and the 1990s seemed to dissolve. The creativity of our myth "awakened" us to our sacred story and Love's "great union."

Catherine as Seen by Her Contemporaries

In Patty Jo's visitations, we encountered Catherine's presence with us. But let us return to the 1830s and listen to her sisters' descriptions of her. We meet Catherine in the contemporary description of her sisters. When we read these descriptions, we recognize that divine love was fostering a powerful communion among those founding women. The intimacy that we sense in that early community is the same closeness that we experienced when Patty Jo represented the presence of our Founder.

The first sisters who lived with Catherine tell us that her warmth and closeness created cheer at community recreations, guided them in

their struggles, strengthened them for new foundations, and enabled them to embrace Ireland's most impoverished people. Our Founder directed Teresa White's novitiate in 1833, so Teresa knew Catherine well. She said Catherine was someone "to whom you could open your whole heart. . . . She made the interests of every convent her own and gave each sister a place in her heart."[10]

While a novice, Vincent Whitty was one of the sisters who nursed the dying Catherine. Many years later she told her superior, "If you had known her, dearest Reverend Mother, how you would have loved and venerated her, and still be as familiar with her as with an intimate friend."[11]

Clare Moore, one of the first four sisters who were professed at Baggot Street in 1833, said that while burdened with many concerns, Catherine was a "remarkably cheerful" woman, and at community recreation she was "as lively and merry as the youngest Sisters, who used to delight in being near her, listening to her amusing remarks and anecdotes."[12] She "loved music very much" and "constantly" asked her sisters to sing cheerful songs at recreation, beginning or joining in them herself.[13] Our founder "tried to have a piano in the Community Room in all the Convents she founded."[14]

Charity defined Catherine. Clare Moore highlights her wholehearted passion for God and others, especially those who were poor.

> Prayer was her delight and her refuge–in all trials. She addressed herself to her good God with the utmost simplicity and confidence even in the simplest difficulties. . . . But charity was her characteristic virtue. She loved all, and sought to do good to all, but the poor and little children were her especial favorites; these she labored to instruct, relieve and console in every possible way.[15]

Each of these descriptions underscores the quality of Catherine's love. They tell us that loving others was not something she did, it was who she was. Whether our founder was telling stories, creating fun, transacting business, writing letters, visiting foundations, or nursing Dublin's poor, her sisters and many others experienced an affection and an intimacy that rose from deep within her. This intimacy held them close to her and each other.

In these accounts, we see God's love manifest in Catherine and evoking our awareness of our "great union." Because our founder's story is our story, these portraits of Catherine tell us that loving and affectionate relationships are central to our Mercy narrative.

Catherine's Suffering

Though Catherine's fun-loving, comforting, and intimate relationships are central to her narrative, she was also more than these. Like Christ, she suffered with those who suffered. Her childhood adversity intensified her love and shaped our myth. Catherine's beloved father died when she was five-years-old, and after he died "her early life was one of much trial and sorrow."[16] She and her family moved frequently from one relative to another. While living with her uncle, Owen Conway, she "suffered great poverty. Often after an entire day spent without food, they had nothing but a little bread at night, with many other privations."[17]

Several years later, Catherine lived at the Macauley residence while nursing her dying sister, Mary Macauley. One night, she told William that Mary, his wife, had returned to Catholicism before she died. Being a bigoted Protestant, William became furious. His intensifying anger caused Catherine to run out, alone, into the darkness. While running away, she thought she might die of "terror and fatigue," but she finally "reached the house of a friend" who sheltered her for the night. This friend was a godsend, because we are told that William went in search of Catherine "with a dagger in his hand."[18]

Despite these years of suffering, our founder's "cheerfulness never failed."[19] Then, when

Catherine was about twenty-five-years-old, her life changed. William and Catherine Callaghan invited her to "become their daughter by adoption" and live with them in their home, Coolock House. For approximately twenty years "they were to her all that the fondest parents could be, and her grateful and devoted attachment led them to forget that she was only their adopted child."[20]

When Catherine was in her mid-forties, she began to nurse the sick Mrs. Callaghan through the last three years of her life. During the last weeks, as Catherine Callaghan was dying, the only sleep Catherine had was on a couch in the sick room where Mrs. Callaghan slept. During this time she experienced visions of charity and mercy to the poor.

> At one moment it was a group of orphan children to whom she was administering the kind offices of humanity; at another it was a crowd of young women engaged in various occupations of household industry. Then the scene would suddenly change and picture to her a number of destitute females, deprived of their natural protectors and deserted by their friends, some flying with horror from the suggestion of the tempter. Alarmed and amazed at the wild reveling of the imagination she often started from her slumbers and burst into tears. "Catherine," the sick lady would sometimes say to her, "I almost wish you never went to sleep, you frighten me so much, and seem to suffer such agony."[21]

This is one of our more dramatic Mercy stories. Between Catherine's "agony" and Mrs. Callaghan's "fright," we hear for the first time significant emotional distress in Catherine's prayer. Clare Moore alerts us to the deeper source of Catherine's pain. "Feeling as she did so sensibly for the sufferings of her fellow creatures, her compassion for those endured by Our Lord was extreme, so much so that it was real pain for her."[22]

In this woman's profound emotion, we experience the origins of the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine's childhood sorrows, trials, and poverty had intensified her adult empathy for impoverished people and endangered women. Then, while living at Coolock House, she ministered to poor, sick, and endangered people during the day and dreamt about orphans, destitute women, and those who were poor at night.

Because Catherine staked her entire life on something "most profoundly important," we have a long-lasting Mercy myth. Her empathy caused her to experience God's pain and the pain of orphans, destitute females, and impoverished people around Coolock as one and the same pain. Our story begins with this profoundly important "story about the Holy." Her narrative expanded steadily. She used her sizable inheritance from William and Catherine Callaghan to build a House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin. There her focus on Christ, her sisters, her family, and impoverished people had "such energy and significance" that within a year-and-a- half women joined her "so fast that it became a matter of general wonder."[23]

Because Catherine staked her entire life on something "most profoundly important," we have a long-lasting Mercy myth.

But Catherine did not keep her troubled prayer at Coolock House to herself. We know our founder eventually communicated her "agonized emotion" about Coolock's pained people and Christ's suffering to Elizabeth Moore and Clare Moore, and probably to others. Then Elizabeth and Clare told it to their sisters, and they both made sure it was written down.[24]

Catherine's deep conversation with these early women acted like a galvanizing force that

bound them to God and each other. When Catherine communicated her love for Christ and his suffering people to these young women, it inspired their love for God, each other, and those who were poor. After our founder died, the stories they told about her and her response to suffering must have soothed their "heavy affliction"[25] over her loss and eased any fears that this young community might dissolve.[26] Such is the power of Catherine's love and that of women bound to her and each other by faith. Whenever we relate our stories of love to others, it creates a powerful togetherness.

Portraying Catherine

Patty Jo died on August 12, 2016 at the age of 94. What she had done for us in the 1990s was so remarkable that I decided to visit her once more during her final months. I wanted to convey my appreciation for what she had done. I was cautioned that she experienced some dementia, and this might make our conversation a little difficult. While we talked she tired easily, but her memory of the former events was livelier than I could have imagined.

Just as mythic creativity sustained the early communities during our founding, this "spark of the Spirit" will inspire and animate us in our present and our future.

Patty told me that her novice director, Mother Mary Bernadette Joseph,[27] loved Catherine McAuley and often spoke with the novices about her. "I treasured her stories, and for years I studied more about our founder. Then, a while ago, a Sister of Mercy whom I did not know, called me and said, 'Someone told us you might be willing to dress in the old habit and play Catherine.' That sounded like fun, so I said Yes."[28]

Regarding all the incarnations that followed this yes, Patty said, "But I was always anxious before I portrayed Catherine, so I asked her to help me be who she wanted me to be in her name. I had to do this because I never knew what was going to happen."

As Sisters of Mercy we are blessed with a riveting narrative tradition. Catherine told stories at recreation and in letters. After she died the early Sisters told and wrote accounts about her. Then many, many years later Mother Mary Bernadette Joseph shared these same tales with her novices. Finally, Patty Jo circled the globe passing on these stories, and the sisters she met pulled Catherine out of her. What a remarkable narrative cycle!

We have contemplated Catherine's exceptional gifts for gathering and leading women from the 1830s into the present day. The early sisters told us that Catherine gave each sister a place in her heart, and that she was as lively and merry as the youngest sister at recreation. We heard how our founder suffered with and ministered to those who society rejected and agonized with Christ who suffered with all of them. Much later when Patty appeared as Catherine at the opening of Mercy International Center in Dublin in 1994, the audience burst into applause before Catherine said a word. This mythic creativity emanates from Catherine's intimacy with a loving and lovable God—with Love itself.

Now Catherine calls us to create new narratives. The grand institutions that we built in the past revealed our love of God and Catherine and highlighted their passion for those who were poor and marginalized. As we place many of these institutions in the hands of others and reimagine our mission to those whom society rejects, we will need to rely on our narrative tradition and its sacred power as never before. Just as mythic creativity sustained the early communities during our founding, this "spark of the Spirit" will inspire and animate us in our present and our future.

As we listen to the women in these stories, their radical mission guides and unifies us.

Stories attract and hold, and great stories attract and hold closely. Because Catherine's narrative is compelling, it will last. Whether we tell our story by ministering, befriending, ritualizing, dancing, protesting, or praying, whenever we celebrate our narratives—our lifeblood—we experience our community becoming a communion of powerful women, regardless of its size. Through the creativity of God's and Catherine's intimacy, the story of one great woman becomes the story of many great women now. ◆

Endnotes

[1] This charism retreat integrated the facts of Catherine's story with a dramatized version of them. Celeste Rouleau, a Sister of Mercy and Catherine scholar from Burlingame, CA, who died in 2008, provided the facts and Patricia Joseph Corkery offered the drama.
[2] Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Religious Life in the 21st Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016): 137.
[3] O'Murchu, 137.
[4] John Truby, *The Anatomy of Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008): 419.
[5] John Shea, *Stories* (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2008): 12.
[6] Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (Sept., 1971), pp. 295-296.
[7] Teilhard de Chardin, *Building the Earth* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965): 38.
[8] Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008): 139-143.
[9] Intimacy, as I use it within this article, begins with a God who is intimately one with all of creation. The more we share our doubt, fear, pain, faith, strength, and joy with others and with God and pay attention to their response, the more we will experience a closeness with everything, everyone, and the God who holds them all. This approach to intimacy with anyone or anything is an infinite, never-ending process.
[10] Austin Carroll, *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, Vol. 1 (New York: The Catholic Publication Society C., 1881): 49-50.
[11] Mother Vincent Whitty, *The Correspondence of Mother Vincent Whitty 1839 to 1892* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2011): 117.
[12] Mary Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995): 116. Hereafter cited as CMcATM.
[13] Mary Clare Moore, comp., *A Little Book of Practical Sayings, Advices and Prayers of our Revered Foundress, Mother Catharine [sic] McAuley* (London: Burns, Oates, 1868): 28. Reprint edition: Mary C. Sullivan, ed. (Rochester, N.Y.: Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2010), 28.
[14] Ibid., 28.
[15] CMcATM, 100-101.
[16] Ibid., 100.
[17] Ibid., 100.
[18] Ibid., 155.
[19] Ibid., 100.
[20] Ibid., 142.
[21] Ibid., 145.
[22] Ibid., 117.
[23] Mary C. Sullivan, ed., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004): 179. Hereafter cited as CCMcA.
[24] CMcATM, 131 and 77. Though Elizabeth Moore and Clare Moore have the same last name, they are not related. Both were Sisters of Mercy and close confidants of Catherine. Catherine shared her profound experiences of suffering with Christ and the Coolock people with these two women and probably others. Then Clare placed Catherine's words in the memoir she wrote about Catherine. Elizabeth Moore told this Coolock story to Mary Vincent Harnett who included it in her own memoir of Catherine. The source and first page of each memoir is included in this footnote.
[25] Ibid., 455.
[26] Austin Carroll, *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy, Volume II* (New York: The Catholic Publication Society Co., 1885): 37. Austin Carroll alludes to this fear. "All the early superiors were on the severe, which, no doubt, Providence permitted lest there should be any danger of the young Order falling from its first fervor before it was well matured."
[27] This novice director's full name was Mother Mary Bernadette Joseph O'Loughlin.
[28] Rosemary Jeffries, R.S.M., thought Patricia Joseph Corkery might portray Catherine well during the retreat. So, she called her, and the rest is part of our Mercy history.

The Joyful Call to Mercy: Orientation to a New Academic Year[1]

Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M.

"The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more." (Pope Francis) [2]

The day has finally arrived – you, new students, graduates, undergraduates, freshmen, women, have made it! Applications have been accepted. Financial documents have been signed. Commuter routes, dorm rooms, and class schedules are in hand. Parents, guardians and significant others stand ready to encourage, challenge and assist you as they are able. Take now a deep breath and think what this might mean for your life. What are you doing here? What will you become here?

Of course, the simple answer to those questions is "I'm here to get an education" or "I will become a social worker, an accountant, a nurse, a teacher…an educated person." Soon, however, perhaps already, you will understand those simple answers contain a life-time of complexity. Education is no simple matter of knowledge and skills and experience. Education is about all these – and more. Education is a process; as one dictionary states, "an enlightening experience." Educational institutions assist in this process of enlightenment by providing knowledge, skills, and experiences, but educational institutions--public and private—also assert a particular world view, a specific value-orientation. Of this you need to be aware. These institutions stand within a particular story with its own vison and purpose. You would be well-advised to learn soon something of the story and purpose embodied by this educational institution as its spirit will impact your life as you become an educated person – one who has deepened your own knowledge, skills, world view and personal values!

Our story contains history and tradition, context and meaning, values and spirit.

Story is the right term for all of us as individuals, families, and communities. We participate in a narrative with a beginning, an end, and a great adventure in-between. For the next few minutes, I invite you to relax and learn a bit of the history and tradition, context and meaning, values and spirit of Saint Xavier University.

History, Tradition and the Mercy Story

The story of Saint Xavier University is rooted in the rich tradition of Roman Catholicism and the particular story of the Sisters of Mercy. While we welcome the contribution of other religious traditions, of seekers, believers and non-believers alike, we stand firm within our own Catholic story, a story which is now beginning its second millennium. This two- thousand-year-old Catholic story is a complicated mixture of Gospel life, human institutions, and sacramental promise. This Catholic story and the Mercy story provide our institutions, as one Sister of Mercy observed, "a tradition, a culture, a coherent set of insights that help us know who we are and what we are doing and why."[3]

A primary concern of Saint Xavier University as a Catholic institution is that our endeavor be an authentic expression of the mission of the Church ("that all may have life and have it more abundantly") and the particular nuance brought to that expression by the heritage of the local church here in Chicago. This concern embraces the rich and full story of Roman Catholicism: a tradition of doctrine and moral tradition, and a tradition of ritual, witness, and service.

The specific Mercy story of which Saint Xavier University is a part can be traced to Baggot Street (Dublin, Ireland) – to a House of Mercy opened in 1827. Two women, Catherine Elizabeth

McAuley and Mary Ann Doyle, established this House to engage in the "daily education of hundreds of poor female children and instruction of young women." [4] According to Jeremy Daigler's book on Mercy higher education this instruction of young women gradually moved from preparation for domestic service in the homes of wealthy Dubliners to teacher training and nursing education to broader liberal arts education.[5]

This higher education enterprise in the United States had its beginning here – in the specific story of Saint Xavier University. Mercy's oldest chartered institution, St. Xavier College, evolved from St. Xavier Academy, an early ministry of the Sisters of Mercy in Chicago. This institution was chartered in 1847, only four years after the first Sisters of Mercy arrived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Between 1847 and 1997, twenty-nine institutions of higher learning were founded by various groups of Sisters of Mercy throughout the United States. Today this enterprise of higher education consists of sixteen colleges and universities which represent the largest number of Catholic colleges and universities sponsored by any group of women in the United States. St. Xavier University belongs to the second largest constellation of Catholic higher educational institutions sponsored by any group, men or women.

The particular context of the world as we enter the twenty-first century is both promising and threatening.

Contemporary Context and Meaning of Education

Of course, the Catholic and Mercy story, as with all stories, begins and continues in specific circumstances of time and place. Each new context creates fresh vision and meaning, even as the story remains connected to the vision and meaning of earlier experiences. Living our Catholic and Mercy story well always necessitates a careful reading of the times in which we live. Wars abound. Violence increases. Economic poverty rises in developed and underdeveloped countries. Women and children continue to be marginalized and victimized. National leaders seek their own well-being and neglect the well-being of their people.

Yet, this new millennium has also seen the largest worldwide call for peace in human history; a human genome project which bodes well for nearly unimaginable progress toward control of disease and physical defects; measured progress toward the alleviation of poverty in many countries of the world. Mass migrations of millions of immigrants occasion a "marbling of civilizations and peoples" that is gift as well as struggle. Quantum theory has startled human persons into a realization of the interconnectedness of all manner of creation as well as the implication, from a writer as brilliant as Stephen Hawkins, the implication of mystery at the heart of the universe.

In such a time, Catholic and Mercy leaders know that education is a most powerful means—perhaps the most powerful means—to better life for all and to move toward more humane social systems. We take seriously the task to present a particular world view and a specific values-orientation. Margaret Farley, a contemporary Sister of Mercy and a well-known ethicist, states the case for institutions of higher education quite succinctly:

> The Catholic college/university serves the Church [and the world] …by here and now providing a context in which students and faculty alike can think about, grapple with, the problems [of the Church and the world]….The service which the Catholic college must give now to the Church is precisely the provision of a place where persons can think together about the many questions which beset the concrete lives of people in the Church [and in the world].[6]

And how do we think about/grapple with the current problems of the Church and world? How do we creatively think about the questions impacting the concrete lives of people today? You have an excellent place to begin with study and reflection on the core values of Saint Xavier University. I am certain you will understand better as you move through your academic career how respect, excellence, compassion, service, hospitality, integrity, diversity, and learning for life complement your own hopes for your growth as a person and your hopes for the well-being of your family, friends, and, eventually, all with whom you share this planet. Saint Xavier University's *Vision 2017* will also educate you in an environment that, as the vision states, "responds to people with dignity and promotes thought leadership…and creates [for you] increased opportunities [to experience] a diverse community of ethical, motivated and socially engaged learners who are prepared for 21st century careers and, I would add, lives."

Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.
-Pope Francis

As a Sister of Mercy, I would like to close with the offer of two additional resources in the category of "values/spirit" to consider as you begin your academic career here at Saint Xavier in an environment which will challenge you to grapple with global issues and direct your learning to the improvement of the concrete lives of persons : the current celebration in the Catholic Church of a Jubilee Year of Mercy and the six Critical Concerns to which the Sisters of Mercy currently commit their lives and resources. Both suggest it is a wonderful time to join the story of Catholic and Mercy!

Values and Spirit

About the time you were finalizing your choice of a college or university--in December 2015--the world-wide leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Francis, inaugurated a Jubilee Year of Mercy for the entire Catholic community. Francis did so with a vision of cooperation among religious traditions and denominations and a hope: "That this Jubilee year…will foster an encounter with [Judaism and Islam] and with other noble religious traditions…so that we might know and understand one another better…eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination" (§23, second paragraph). The document announcing this Jubilee Year of Mercy reminds all people of good will that our present-day mentality tends to exclude from life and from the human heart the very idea of mercy. "The time has come," he says, "for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope" (§10).

You can expect to hear more of this "joyful call to mercy" as you make your way through your courses of study here at Saint Xavier University. Pope Francis's call for each of us to bring God's goodness and tenderness to our neighbor enhances our engagement with Saint Xavier's core values of respect, compassion, service, and hospitality. His challenge to "open our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates…and to heal these wounds with compassion and to cure them with solidarity and vigilant care" suggests much content for "thought leadership" and many opportunities for creativity within a diverse community of ethical, motivated and socially engaged learners who are prepared for 21st century questions and concerns.

Midway through the brief document announcing the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope

Francis highlighted a Gospel message precious within the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy: a call to revisit the corporal and spiritual works which are the business of our lives as Sisters of Mercy:

> Let us rediscover these *corporal works of mercy*: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the *spiritual works of mercy:* to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead. [7]

These works of mercy can be found in many faith traditions and many communities of believers. For the most part, we think of these works in one-on-one efforts to alleviate human suffering. Literally, we feed a hungry person; we shelter a homeless person, etc. However, Jon Sobrino, a Latin American theologian, articulates a most dramatic feature of today's world that poses a source of new meaning for our Catholic and Mercy story:

> We live in a suffering world…one's primary and ultimate response is…compassion.... [However], given this kind of massive and structural suffering... the response of mercy must be a response of justice that will bring liberation.[8]

Mercy moves the heart to compassion. Justice leads us to right relationships and right relationships lead us to systems and systems lead us to systemic concerns. While direct service will always be a necessary aspect of our merciful presence in this world, today we must link the works of mercy with the works of justice. We must seek solutions to hunger and homelessness and ignorance in a response to systems as well as to individuals. So, the Sisters of Mercy have determined to commit their lives and resources to six critical concerns facing our lives today: concerns of Earth, of women, of racism, of immigration, and of violence with a commitment to non-violence). Each of these concerns joins works of mercy with works of justice.

The Works of Mercy and Justice

Take, for example, the corporal work of mercy—instructing the ignorant. What would that corporal work of mercy—instructing the ignorant—look like in light of Sobrino's assertion that a response of mercy is incomplete without a response of justice? Ignorance (not-knowing) afflicts the developed world as well as the developing world. Such ignorance moves in wider and wider circles of peoples as we enter this twenty-first century. Ignorance rests in the most educated of persons in deliberate limitations of their horizon of knowing regarding the devastation of Earth's species and resources; the trafficking of human persons, especially women and children; the forced migration of millions of human persons – all within systems of government and economics and communication which condone violence and disrespect. Many of us prefer not-to-know because knowledge brings demands for response and reaction – challenges us to works of mercy and justice.

Many of us prefer not-to-know because knowledge brings demands for response, and reaction challenges us to works of mercy and justice.

Admonishing the sinner – a work of mercy - may well be a matter of pointing out the relationship between, for example, the abuse of Earth and the abuse of women. Bearing wrongs patiently and forgiving offenses does not preclude naming evil--those forces which prevent the fullness of life promised by Jesus the Christ.

Admonishing the sinner includes demonstrating against oppressive structures, and innovating systems to lessen their evil impact. Admonishing the sinner includes urging individuals to repentance and organizations to conversion of policies.

When we speak of sheltering the homeless in the twenty-first century, how can we not connect with refugees throughout this universe? Many species of plants and animals as well as communities of peoples have been dislocated from their native habitats to wander in environments many times hostile to their well-being.

I think you get the drift – the six critical concerns of the Sisters of Mercy today--earth, immigration, racism, women, and non-violence, with which you will be invited to grapple, rest on a realization that mercy and justice must meet.

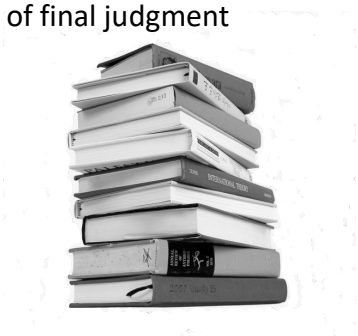
Robert Greenleaf, at one time a top executive in management, research, development and education at AT&T, claims a direct connection between story and the vitality of institutions. In a message for college and university faculty, Greenleaf asserts that "an indispensable condition for the persuasive power [of leaders] to be effective is that the institution is living out a great dream…It is the idea [story] that unites people in the common effort."[9] Those of you who gather today are quite fortunate – you have entered a grand story that will unite you and many others in a common effort. Welcome to our story! ◆

Endnotes

[1] This presentation was made at St. Xavier University in August, 2016, for the orientation to the academic year.
[2] Pope Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, April 11, 2015), #10.
[3] Quote is from an unpublished paper on sponsorship written by Helen Amos, RSM, in 1990.
[4] Angela Bolster, RSM, *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley*, 1989, Catherine's letter to Rev. Francis L'Estrange, OCD, September 10, 1828, p. 2.
[5] Jeremy Daigler, *Through the Windows: A History of the Work of Higher Education among the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas,* 2004), p. 8-9.
[6] Margaret Farley, R.S.M., ''Responsibility to the Truth: Challenge to Higher Education," a paper presented on June 5th at the 1978 Mercy Higher Education Colloquium held at St. Joseph College (West Hartford, CT).
[7] *Misericordia Vultus,* § 15.
[8] Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*, 1994, p. 45.
[9] Robert Greenleaf quotation found most recently at https://servantasleader.wordpress.com/2014/11/04/an-indispensable-condition. Site accessed on May 30, 2019.

DECLUTTERING

Damn! There's a lot of STUFF
Emotionally sacred memorabilia
Clothes of another vintage that may just come back into style
Lots of accumulated paper, and printed matter
Unused items begging to find a new home
Tattered remnants of old favorites seeking a final resting place
Taking space that desires deconstruction and repurposing
Every item requires inspection —a kind of final judgment
Reuse! Re-purpose! Re-cycle
I am but a packrat yearning to be free
No apologies to be made
Goodbye STUFF; hello minimalism



Maria Allo
May 2019

Towards a Spirituality of Oneness

Patricia Flynn, R.S.M.

In 2014, the Institute Leadership Conference invited all the members of the Institute to enter into the Journey of Oneness. The ILC posed two questions to frame the motivation for that Journey: "Who do we as Sisters of Mercy desire to be for one another and for our world?" and "How might we embody the mercy of God for a suffering world in more meaningful and impactful ways into the future?" To be sure, our journey together into our future has important governance and administrative aspects, and it is often these aspects that claim much of our energy and attention. However, from the beginning of our journey, there has also been the call to transformation as we seek to become more fully who we claimed to be at the founding of the Institute in 1991.

Having discussed the governance and administrative aspects in the earlier sections of this talk, I want to turn now to the challenge of transformation.[1] I have a heard a question voiced several times during the past year: "Where is the Spirituality of Oneness that should accompany, animate, and inform our journey?"

"Where is the Spirituality of Oneness that should accompany, animate, and inform our journey?"

I confess that when I have heard this question I remembered the experience of the Chapter delegates whose mantra was, "No more words!" I wanted to respond: "No more spiritualties!" Or at least no new ones, since I can barely keep track of the one or ones that I have!

But on reflection I have had to acknowledge both the wisdom of the question and the wisdom of the Chapter delegates. Perhaps what was needed was not a new Spirituality of Oneness but a Recommitment to a Spirituality of Oneness that has grounded us as Sisters of Mercy since our beginning and in a particular way as members of the Institute since our coming together in 1991.

I am neither a Scripture scholar nor a theologian, so, all I am going to do is offer some thoughts about pieces of this Spirituality of Oneness on which I have been reflecting with the hope that someone else might pursue them further. This is why this section is entitled "Towards a Spirituality of Oneness" since all I can offer are some threads that someone else might be able to weave together into a more cohesive whole.

Union and Charity

In approaching this question, it was hard to know where to begin – either with the Gospels or with Catherine. Beginning with Catherine solved the problem since Catherine always turned to the words of Jesus. This is also true with the foundational Chapter for the early Sisters of Mercy, the Chapter on Union and Charity.

We all know the story. When the Bishop came to appoint Catherine head of the new community the day after she had professed her own vows, she asked him what the fledgling community would use for a Rule until they had official Constitutions. His response was to point to the Chapter on Union and Charity from the Presentation Rule. He said that one chapter would be all the new congregation would need. [2] This is not the time for an in-depth study of that chapter, but I want to share two thoughts that connect with our Journey of Oneness, besides the relevance of the chapter title.

The first reflection I have has to do with the content of this chapter and its advice on relationships. I think that the chapter could be fruitfully read in tandem with the section on relationships in our Chapter Recommitment, especially the advice on availability, forgiveness and even voice! Despite Catherine's 19th century

vocabulary, both documents point to the centrality of community and the reality of the daily-ness of our efforts to truly be one in heart and mind. Catherine's spirituality was practical. A spirit of Union and Charity had concrete, every day and observable implications. Our Spirituality of Oneness should as well.

My second reflection points more to a future focus for a Spirituality of Oneness that I think might have some grounding in our early history. I have always been slightly perturbed that Catherine did not write the chapter on Union and Charity herself, though she did edit it significantly. There was always something troubling about it being "second hand," not original to us, especially given its early prominence.

I have heard references in the past several months to the "charism of religious life" and what direction the future of religious life is taking. Comments by Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., and others have de-emphasized individual charisms as our demographics shift and as newer members come together across congregations to witness to the particular life form that is religious life.[3] Perhaps the sharing of our foundational chapter with another religious community points to a Oneness that has been buried deep in our past and can lead us towards an even broader future of collaboration? Wherever our Spirituality of Oneness takes us, it is no longer just about ourselves.

I think that an untapped resource for a Spirituality of Oneness is our Constitutions.

The Founding of the Institute

From Catherine's call for Union and Charity, I will move quickly to 1991 and the Founding Document, read so enthusiastically by Amy Hoey, Peggy Costa and Judy Carle. I still get chills when I hear its words today! What I want to highlight from the Founding Document that is pertinent to our discussion today is the phase: "We women of Mercy **have discovered** a new relationship among us."[4]

These words remind us that our Oneness is not forged from our own wills and efforts – it is discovered as an already existing relationship, as a gift given. We were together before we came together and this awareness of the given-ness of our Oneness should keep us humble, patient, gentle and open to the continuous unfolding of the activity of God among us as a community. Oneness is truly God's work and not our own.

Constitutions and Chapter Statements

This invitation to the discovery of Oneness can also be a fruitful lens to turn a "long loving look" at our other foundational documents: our Constitutions and our Chapter Statements. I think that an untapped resource for a Spirituality of Oneness is our Constitutions. I know that I do not spend enough time in prayer and reflection with our Constitutions. Too often I turn to it only to check a reference or find a suitable quote for a prayer service. To take seriously the pronoun "we" that frames how we describe the spirit that informs our mission, vows, prayer and community life is to get more than a glimpse of what we aspire to as our Oneness. I am old enough to remember the pre-Vatican II practice of identifying everything as "ours"– to the great delight and hilarity of the postulants and novices. But there is a deep reality in the "ours" that claims the Mercy life we share together.

This same "we" characterized our Direction Statement, from its first version to its revision in 2005, and the other Chapter Statements from 2005 through 2011. There, we committed ourselves to solidarity with one another within a multicultural, international community and with the most vulnerable in our world. These statements continue to challenge us. In what ways is our Spirituality of Oneness characterized by our inter-culturality and internationality – beyond the obvious attention to translation and the incorporation of symbols, customs and music?

How does our solidarity with women and the economically poor experientially shape our Spirituality of Oneness and ground our trust in Providence and our passion for justice?

Our movement towards Oneness became more explicit beginning in 2011 with the Fifth Institute Chapter Statement when we proclaimed: "We, Sisters of Mercy, are growing in consciousness of the interdependence among us and with all creation." The question we posed to one another and to God at that Chapter revealed our understanding that this Oneness was not just a good idea on our part, but is integrally connected to God's desire for us: "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 new identity?"

The Journey of Oneness and Chapter 2017

The Chapter 2011 question marked the beginning of a series of questions that the membership was asked to prayerfully consider about our future. As noted earlier, the Journey of Oneness itself was seen as a response to questions about our desire for ourselves and for our world. Our journey towards greater union is meant to be transformative of ourselves as individuals and as a community – not merely a change of administrative structures. Our Oneness is meant to embody the Mercy of God for a suffering world. Now that is a phase that certainly calls for further reflection and prayer!

"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 new identity?"

This invitation to transformation was intensified in the year and a half long process of preparation for the 2017 Institute Chapter as members engaged in four sessions of contemplative dialogue from which emerged not a specific agenda for the Chapter but rather a deeper question for the Chapter to address:

God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery, who do you desire us to be now for one another and for our suffering world in order to continue our transformation toward greater integrity of word and deed?

There is so much here that could be developed as expression of a Spirituality of Oneness, but I only want to highlight a few points for consideration.

First, I think we need to take seriously the contemplative process in which significant numbers of sisters, associates and companions were engaged over an extended period. The conscious and consistent effort by that Chapter Planning Committee to situate the process not only within prayer but as a contemplative experience itself was an invitation to transformation. The iterative nature of the process, while at times frustrating, was also an experience in a deepening presence to the question that we rarely allow ourselves to have. It reminded me of the Ignatian practice of "repetition" – that prayerful returning to the place of consolation, or perhaps of resistance, since God always has more to say than we can grasp in any one moment of our mutual presence. We need to reverence the results of these consultations and perhaps take a second look at the reports that were generated by these prayerful encounters with God and one another as contributions to our Spirituality of Oneness.

I am also caught by the changes made to the original question that began the Journey of Oneness. We are no longer just asking one another who we want to be; we are asking God for

God's desire for us and this marks an important shift in our understanding of where our journey is grounded. I would also note the addition of the phase "towards greater integrity of word and deed" as a significant development in our sense of our Journey of Oneness. What is at stake is not merely an external re-structuring but that internal transformation of us as a community that speaks to the congruence of our lives with the words of the Constitutions, our Direction Statement and our Critical Concerns. This is Oneness at the deepest level.

The fruit of this sustained contemplative dialogue prior to and during the chapter was the *Chapter 2017 Recommitment: Called to New Consciousness.* This document deserves its own "long, loving look" of contemplation and I stand in awe of the work of the Spirit in the creation of this document. Again, I am not going to provide an in-depth analysis of this statement. I will leave it to a future issue of MAST to unpack its riches and its challenges. I will only provide you with the opportunity to listen again to the opening paragraph in light of all that has gone before it, stretching back to 1831, and especially within the Institute since 1991:

The Sixth Institute Chapter has come to believe that the God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery is calling us as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, as an international and intercultural community, to deepen our relationship with God and one another, and to intensify our work in communion with others who seek a more just and inclusive world. We recognize a yearning for oneness in all of creation, in all peoples and within our Institute. Our suffering world calls us to speak and act with integrity and clear intention.

From that foundational chapter on Union and Charity in the Presentation Rule, we have moved beyond the boundaries of community and even of Institute to embrace our cosmic communion with creation and our solidarity with all who work for justice in our global society.

I am not saying that I have clearly elaborated for you here a Spirituality of Oneness, but I just want to suggest that we have always been on the way to one. Perhaps this is the moment when it does need to be more fully developed but I believe that many of the pieces have already been part of our Mercy consciousness and that we do need to take seriously and deeply what we say to one another and to our world in the last line of our Recommitment:

In Catherine McAuley's spirit of union and charity, we voice the call of Jesus, that all may be one.◆

Endnotes

[1] This article is an excerpt from a longer presentation given at the MAST Meeting in June,2018, in Belmont, North Carolina, which provided an update on the Journey of Oneness.

[2] Mary C. Sullivan, *The Path of Mercy: the Life of Catherine McAuley* (The Catholic University Press of America: Washington, DC, 2012):108.

[3] Sandra Schneiders I.H.M., "Rethinking Religious Formation for the 21st Century," (Religious Formation Conference, March 2018). www.relforcon.org/rethinking-religious-formation-21st-century

[4] Denise Colgan, R.S.M. and Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. *Union and Charity* (Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Silver Spring MD, 2017):15.

Leading in These Evolving Times

Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M.

"No problem can be solved by the same mentality that created it." (Einstein)

"Whoever you are: some evening take a step out of your house which you know so well. Enormous space is near…"(Rilke)

Go to the bottom of the last page first.

Leadership in religious communities of women is in danger. There is a rapidly aging membership and a corresponding dearth of younger members. This situation has been developing for many years despite all the investment in vocation work, vocation directors and vocation conferences. It seems to happen suddenly. Our buildings have become too big and too many. Some properties have become burdens rather than centers of service and community. Our engagement of actuarial consultants, lawyers and building advisors dominate the attention of aging leaders. It has not been sudden, but we simply did not see it, or acknowledge the impact of this reality, it seemed so unimagined.

We are in danger of being overwhelmed and lost in the sea of necessities that leaders encounter – for they are necessities now. More significantly, we can feel we are losing the core of religious calling and commitment. We have committed ourselves to contemplative movement towards God, living that out in a community sharing the same inner calling, colored outwardly what we have come to call "charisms" – the variety of ways in which religious communities of women serve the world based on that original calling of our foundresses.

The outer forms of those faithfully followed charisms seem to be disintegrating before our eyes. It is easy to be dismayed, discouraged and even shocked into resistance and denial. But that is not the end of the story. We are the ones living into this reality, and it challenges us not to give up, but to ask more openly "What is meaningful for us now and how can we attend to the deepening of our original calling, which includes the letting go?"

About fourteen years ago I was in conversation with a sister around my own age. She said to me, "You aren't an administrator. You can never be in leadership." Even at the time I was shocked by the absoluteness of this judgment. It has stayed with me ever since, perhaps helping me to ask whether leadership in religious communities is administration alone, or something much deeper, broader and more spiritually meaningful? Since that time, I have worked almost exclusively with religious communities and their leadership teams. I have come to see that leadership is definitely much more than administration alone and those corporate demands that dictate what should be the role of leaders in religious communities. Like a thread hidden in a large tapestry, I have followed that "more" until I am ready now to put into words what was once simply a question hidden among many "givens."

"What is meaningful for us now and how can we attend to the deepening of our original calling, which includes the letting go?"

Perhaps my friend was right. Perhaps she was even visionary, because it <u>is</u> true that I could not have given my whole life to administration. My gifts are otherwise, and thankfully so. Perhaps this is what allows me to see, during the past several years, what is becoming clearer and more

urgent. This is the number of administrative tasks necessary in leading a religious Congregation of women in these times of completion, even while these same leaders age, suffer health crises, and slow down themselves.

But by far the worst effect of a narrow definition of leadership is overlooking the effects on the leaders themselves, and the consequences on community members. I have frequently noticed, in discerning who would be a good leader in election processes, that the members often hope for pastoral presence, forms of simple relating and ordinary conversation with their leaders. But then the busyness sets in; the same request is made at the next Chapter, and so on. The diminishing reality of real community is escalating as leaders become increasingly busy and are unable to sustain the quality of presence hoped for by the members as they themselves age.

And isn't most administration able to be done by those whose skill and experience it is, without having to be in leadership to do it? Other kinds of less administrative concerns must at least be of equal value. What members long for most of all, could be described as presence from the heart.

Realization, Reflection, Contemplation

We are all transforming. Not just religious life in general, not just leadership necessities, not just the places where we live. We live in a world that has always been evolving, but now we know it. The reality of instant connection has been transformed by technology which makes everything happening in the world instantly available. The effect is that news can lift us out from our own lives and transport us into any number of other realities, all in the space of one day, or less! So, it has become all the more necessary, to reflect upon how we choose to live in this world, with its sweeping capacities and opportunities for good. How can we enter this larger reality without being overcome by the magnitude of choices and possibilities, pulled here and there, unless we give intense consideration to what is happening?

With this reality as our backdrop, it is not surprising that the word "contemplation" has been coming back into our reading and writing. We need to intentionally explore what this word means for us in our present context. Otherwise, we are in danger of reducing it to that old dichotomy of "action and contemplation," as two different realities, distinct activities that we engage separately, but not together. There is no point in speaking of contemplation as a current necessity if this is the case. Like the word "evolving" that is fast becoming part of our common religious language, the meaning of "contemplation" is also becoming understood in a new and different reality.

It is only when we are spiritually empty of ideas and the constant chatter of the mind that we can be receptive to the deeper reality of the Divine Presence.

One way to open to this new understanding of an old word is to imagine contemplation as first of all an inner intention to move from thinking to emptiness. Yes – inner emptiness. This alone is daunting for many people. Centering Prayer has been teaching this goal for decades. It is one of the most effective starting points. It is only when we are spiritually empty of ideas and the constant chatter of the mind that we can be receptive to the deeper reality of the Divine Presence.

In my encounters with hundreds of religious over a long career, I have observed an increasing investment in "doing" as "who we are." In some publications, I have even sensed that if we are not "doing ministry" then we are betraying who we say we are. I don't believe this reduction. A focus on "doing" contributes to losing our way and losing our consecration to the divine purpose. If we put the emphasis on "doing," we can forget the

value of each individual, and lose that sense amplified sacredness when we come together as communities, where we value "being" in all the ways "being" gets expressed.

Leading as Consciously Transforming

- What would it look like if, as communities, we were to spend more time considering and learning new ways to become conscious of where we are in the unfolding of who we are now and how that relates to our doing in this diminishing time of active ministry?
- How would those who lead us explore such unfolding and invite members into such a way of life?

Here are a few initial seeds for pursuing an exploration of small shifts into a different layer of consideration for the life that remains to us as individuals and communities at this challenging and unique moment in history:

- ❖ Give time together to deepening an understanding of transformation, an intentional dwelling with its reality, exploring its stages and identifying where a community is in that reality. Slowly, with intention of the heart, not only of the mind.
- ❖ Consciously value emotional/spiritual health as much as physical health.
- ❖ Consciously value personal as well as corporate relationship.
- ❖ Explore and offer new understandings and ways to live from empty receptivity as much as continual doing.
- ❖ Offer more ongoing conversation and reading about the evolving world and how religious life is one small thread in that world.
- ❖ Invite and encourage more personal interaction with (not only reading about) nature: plants, animals, trees, flowers, growing food, even if it is just a tiny lettuce garden! Welcome an animal encounter.
- ❖ Explore by practice the difference between thinking and the inner presence of the heart, and how Heart Presence in contemplative practice is as valuable and effective as what we have long called "ministry."
- ❖ Include art, poetry and music in gatherings as much as theoretical presentations.
- ❖ Explore what caring for one another in community realistically looks like; acts like. Value wordlessness at least as much as the unconscious speaking that is endemic to our culture: social "conversation," reaction, response. Notice discomfort with not speaking.
- ❖ Develop interior silence.

So perhaps it is time to call for a "Spiritual Inquiry" into what religious life is and could be into the future. Anyone interested?

I observe the way in which leadership in religious communities has become necessarily more administrative than charismatic, reflective, and contemplative—what I think is needed today. What can change this? How can the need be brought into awareness? Is this a dragon that lies in wait for a no-win battle? And what leaders would even be able to relinquish or delegate administrative tasks so that space is opened up for a more contemplative practice of leadership? I see that leaders are so weighed down by administrative obligations, travel and meetings, that it's very difficult to envision a different way.

In closing, I return to the Einstein quote which opened this reflection: "No problem can be

solved by the same mentality that created it." How could this apply to religious life? Could it be that this is why there has been a frantically busy, meeting-filled, rushed and hurried way of life for so many years, as we continue the thinking – and the institutionalized way of life-- that has brought us to this point?

So perhaps it is time to call for a "Spiritual Inquiry" into what religious life is and could be into the future. Anyone interested? ◆

Introduction

Disconcerting, isn't it? Out of the order of things, perhaps even out of the order of how things should be! This introduction should be at the beginning, shouldn't it? And yet, it only takes something as small as this insignificant change to disturb some inner predictability that is a source of comfort and that allows us to take something for granted. Thus, the mind looks for the usual way of things automatically. This is prevalent in all organizations and institutions except those who recognize this trap and work consciously to step beyond it. Now back to the beginning of this article!

These Hallowed Halls: Remembering and Giving Thanks

Julia Upton, R.S.M.

Unlike most of the other Mercy communities, the Sisters of Mercy of Brooklyn had no hospital or college or university, but they had three highly regarded childcare institutions: Mercy Home for Children (1862), St. Mary of the Angels Home (1894), and Angel Guardian Home (1899)[1]. All three buildings and ministries continue to exist although in ways quite different from the orphanages they were a century ago. In 2003 St. Mary's and Angel Guardian merged, uniting two of New York's leading child-welfare organizations. Renamed MercyFirst in 2004, this not-for-profit human service agency serves more than 3,200 children, teenagers and families each year in Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau and Suffolk counties which comprise Long Island, New York. When the sisters were preparing to celebrate the centennial of Angel Guardian, the community wanted a history to be written. With the help of Sister Virginia Farnan, RSM as research assistant and aided by Sister Mary Paul Lafferty (1902-1973) whose 1943 thesis, A Study of the *Angel Guardian Home: A Child-Caring Institution in Brooklyn, NY (1899-1942)* provided access to and analysis of the sisters' work in its earliest days, I wrote the history *For the Love of a Child: One Hundred Years at Angel Guardian Children and Family Services.*

> To walk through its gate, up the stairs and into its elegant entry hall, however, is to pass into another era. Here the 19th and 20th centuries meet and give living witness to 115 years of caring and service … for the love of a child.

Within two decades, however, it became clear that despite many renovations and reconfiguration over the years, the Angel Guardian building was no longer appropriate for the ministry and the cost of maintaining the complex was no longer a sustainable option. In 2014 the Mid-Atlantic Community leadership team formed the Angel Guardian Think Tank, comprised of twelve sisters from the former Brooklyn Community who met monthly, researched, and made recommendations to the leadership team about the future of the property. We studied it from every angle and interviewed people from other Mercy communities who had faced similar dilemmas. In the end the Think Tank recommended that the property be sold. Before we did that, however, we decided to engage the entire community in our process. We designed the presentation to be both prayerful and informative and through table conversation solicited questions and suggestions.

Using text from the Angel Guardian history, interlaced with the refrain from Monica Brown's song "Love Shall Be Our Lantern Flame," we prepared a reader's theater script and invited four of the sisters who worked for many years at Angel Guardian to perform. Sisters Mary Terence Mullin, who died last year, and Mary Mercedes Somma were leaders during their years at Angel Guardian; Sister Francene Horan was the Director for many years, and Sister Mary Corita is a nurse who cared for the agency's youngest charges.

Introduction: Julie

When you stand on the corner of 12th Avenue and 64th Street in Brooklyn today, you see an enormous, somewhat austere, red brick building, surrounded almost entirely by an equally imposing six-foot wall.

"What is that building?" local residents and passers-by must wonder.

To walk through its gate, up the stairs and into its elegant entry hall, however, is to pass into another era. Here the 19th and 20th centuries meet and give living witness to 115 years of caring and service … for the love of a child.

This is Angel Guardian Home, where for 115 years we and our lay colleagues have cared for children in ever evolving ways. Listen and you can hear the echo of thousands of tiny feet that have tripped through its hallways and danced through its garden on their way to a fuller life.

This is but a fragment of what has been our story.

I. Caring for Children and Infants

Mercedes: In the latter part of the 19th century, the interest of the whole nation was directed toward sponsoring efforts to prevent the high rate of infant mortality. In 1897, Bishop Charles McDonnell asked us to establish an institution to provide for the care of pre-school age children as a branch of our school for older girls.

Francene: So, at a meeting of the Board at the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy in Brooklyn on October 27, 1897, it was unanimously resolved to mortgage the community's real estate to the Brooklyn Savings Bank for the purpose of erecting a building on our property in New Utrecht.

Terence: Originally designed to meet the need for services for the care and protection of dependent girls between the ages of two and five, the situation changed in 1901 when the public Flatbush Nursery closed.

Corita: The Commissioner of Public Charities of Brooklyn and Queens asked us to receive babies—boys and girls under the age of two. The first two infants were received on April 25, 1901, and soon there were seven. But they kept coming and coming ….

Terence: By the end of that year children under 2 were 27% of our population!

Francene: During that year unwed mothers and babies were also added by the commissioner, occupying the top floor of the main building. Thus, began a relationship with New York governmental agencies that continues until today.

Corita: But why a six-foot brick wall?

Terence: To keep out the goats and sheep!

Mercedes: Yes, that's just how rural that part of Brooklyn was into the 1930s.

Francene: And caring for children was a neighborhood enterprise. We probably each know someone who was a foster parent or adopted a child or helped in caring for the children in some other way.

Corita: Times were different and many of the volunteers took the children into their own homes for weekends or holidays.

II. Foster Care

Francene: Increasingly children came to be placed in foster boarding homes when such homes were available. As a result, the number of infants living at Angel Guardian decreased over time.

Corita: By 1941 we were providing foster care for over 2,000 children, nearly all of whom were in boarding homes.

Terence: An exception to that rule (and many others) came during the Second World War when economic hardships meant there were fewer foster homes available.

Francene: Heads of households headed off to the battlefield. By October of 1943, 245 homes caring for two, three and four children closed. School age children were transferred to the Convent of Mercy while Angel Guardian continued to care for the others.

Mercedes: After the war, though, we were again able to meet with success in placing children in foster and adoptive homes. The culture began to change as well, and Angel Guardian reflected that change.

Francene: All around things were less provincial. With ecumenism in the air, we broadened the embrace of Mercy to provide care for children of other faiths.

III. Adoption

Corita: The Adoption Department was organized in September of 1947.

Francene: During its first five years, 467 children were placed with a view to adoption and 352 were legally adopted.

Terence: In April 1951, the Adoption Department agreed to participate in the Italian War Orphan Program.

Francene: By 1966 in addition to our local adoption program we had placed children from Italy, Germany, Malta, British West Indies, Poland, Austria, Korea and Hong Kong through the Catholic Committee for Refugees.

Mercedes: But it never seemed right that countries should be divesting themselves of their greatest natural resource—their children.

Francene: This gnawed at the hearts of Sister Mary Paul and Sister Mary Mercedes so they traveled to Italy, Germany and Ireland to provide assistance to social service personnel of those nations. Simple legal changes, they saw, could provide services more directly and prevent children from being taken from their homelands.

Terence: In a personal audience Pope Paul VI thanked Sisters Mary Paul and Mary Mercedes for what they were doing for the world's children.

Mercedes: By 1971, 24 years after its beginning, the Adoption Department had assisted in 5,855 legal adoptions.

IV. Other Creative and Courageous Responses

Mercedes: As times change, needs change, and we have always tried to respond in creative and courageous ways.

Francene: We began to branch out into the suburbs along with the population that remained in need of social services. Initially the purpose of establishing branch offices was to provide assistance to Angel Guardian's foster parents so that they could be served closer to their homes.

Corita: Between 1956 and 1971 branch offices were opened in Mineola and Jamaica.

Mercedes: After commissioning a consultant to evaluate our services in Fort Greene, we recognized the needs of the families in that area, so we renovated a dentist's office at 157 Adelphi Street in Brooklyn.

Corita: Two Sisters, Barbara Cruse and Catherine McIntyre along with Mrs. Maria Coke brought the services of Angel Guardian "more directly and more imaginatively into the community among those who needed them."[2]

Francene: They went to counsel unmarried mothers living at home with their families, enabling them to obtain the services provided by New York City and also at Angel Guardian's residence for unmarried mothers.

Mercedes: Another creative example was soon to follow.

Terence: In 1974 the Fort Greene Family and Community Services program was established to test the idea of preventing foster care placements by providing families in need with intensive social services. Serving families in Fort Greene, Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick, the goal of the program was to intervene and assist at-risk families, enabling the family to stabilize while averting out-of-home placement.

Francene: It provides counseling and parent aide services to reduce clients' sense of isolation and desperation. Families are also offered ancillary services such as day care, education, financial entitlement, medical and family planning in the form of referral and information services.

Corita: In December of 1986 we responded to what the media came to call the "Boarder Baby Crisis," when New York City was overwhelmed by the large number of infants born to mothers infected with AIDS and the babies languished in hospitals for weeks. We opened a twenty-one bed residence for babies and young toddlers.

Mercedes: Named in memory of Sister Margaret Mary Chaloner, who devoted so much of her religious life to the care of children at Angel Guardian, Chaloner Residence was one of only three such programs in New York City to respond to the need to place these children in a safe, protected environment.

Terence: Chaloner Residence was closed in August 1989 by the New York State Department of Social Service after a determination that there was no more need for this program because of the availability of good foster homes.

Corita: During its three years of existence, 242 children had been cared for at Chaloner Residence.

Francene: When you speak today with those who served as social workers and child care workers at the Chaloner Residence, you see a glint in their eyes and sense a glowing aura around them. It probably radiates from hearts that were touched by the love of a child, and for a time came to know Angel Guardian as it was once upon a time, when the sounds of tiny children echoed through its halls.

Mercedes: Realizing the availability of space in the Nursery Building and the need for safe homes for women who were abused by their husbands, Sisters Regina Shelley and Linda Esposito initiated a safe home program on the second floor of the Nursery Building and named it the House of Mercy.

Terence: Sisters Ellen Smith and Theresa Falco joined them, and together they opened the doors of this safe space in January 1983. Over the years

many other sisters and lay volunteers joined them extending the embrace of Mercy.

Francene: During its 12 years of operation 229 families, which included 344 children, found shelter there.

Corita: In 2003 Angel Guardian and St. Mary's merged into a single agency which became known as Mercy First the following year.

Mercedes: Even today Angel Guardian is extending its arm of service to its neighbors. Sister Linda has brought Angel Guardian's Parenting Program to nearby parishes and is initiating the program among the Agency's new neighbors of Chinese ancestry in cooperation with the Chinese Association. As times change, needs change and we have always tried to respond in creative and courageous ways.

Corita: At a Board Meeting in March 1978, the Diocese of Brooklyn's Bishop Francis Mugavero said:

> My first association with Angel Guardian was over 28 years ago. Even at that time Angel Guardian was ahead of the times, venturing into new areas by utilizing public relations to recruit foster homes and starting the adoption program within the agency. The Sisters and Staff have never given up, never been afraid, have always been daring, had courage, made sacrifices and endured suffering which is expressive of their concern for the poor, the homeless and the dependent.

Once the decision had been made by the Leadership Team to sell the property, the Think Tank set in motion a series of farewell ceremonies in which many different groups of people would have their individual time to share their memories, pack them away in our virtual trunk and entrust them to the future praying

> For all that is yet to be
> for the ongoing work of the staff,
> for a peaceful move to the new location of the Mercy First offices and the new life it will bring and for whatever lies in the future for this dear building that your powerful MERCY will continue to pulsate within us, God of mercy. ◆

Endnotes

[1] In 1997 the Agency officially changed its name to Angel Guardian Children and Family Services, Inc.

[2] Richard Ryan, "New Neighbors on Adelphi Street," The Tablet (September 16, 1971) 9.

For the Love of a Child

Music by Sr. Regina Werntz RSM

Soprano

Cling to Me

In honor of the Golden Anniversary
of the Institute on Sacred Scripture
Misericordia University, Dallas, PA
1968-2018

Regina Werntz RSM

Lyrics inspired by Jer. 13

♩ = 120

REFRAIN

Cling to me, cling to me says our God. Be my peo-ple, be my

8

own. Cling to me, cling to me all your days, and be my beau-ty, my glo - ry, my

16

VERSES

praise.

1.Rid your heart of i - dols, rich - es, hon - or,
2.Af - ter I up - root you, leav - ing you to
3.May you know com - pas - sion: Mer - cy is my
4.Lis - ten, then, my peo - ple: Bend your ear and
5.I am with you al - ways, of - fer - ing my

23

pride. 1.Cast your cares up - on me, I am by your side.
roam, 2.I will seek and find you, and bring you safe - ly home.
name. 3.Set - ting free the cap - tives, heal - ing blind and lame.
heed. 4.I am God, your Sav - ior: Hope in time of need.
peace. 5.Fath - er, Son, and Spir - it, lov - ing with - out cease.

Discussion Questions

(Burns) As you read Latin American Jon Sobrino's quote in the last part of Helen Marie's article, which spiritual or corporate work of mercy represents for you the most urgent "response of justice that will bring liberation"?

(Doyle) How do you reconcile, in your own participation in the Eucharist, competing historical and liturgical emphases on personal devotion as opposed to communal celebration?

(Edwards) "*Catherine's childhood sorrow, trials and poverty had intensified her adult empathy for impoverished people and endangered women."* What sort of suffering and groups of people do you feel particular empathy for? Is this related to any experiences in your earlier life?

(Flynn) The 2017 Chapter Statement calls members to a new consciousness, "to intensify our work in communion with others who seek a more just and inclusive world." Which "others" who may not be women religious or even Catholic have you already been working with?

(Gottemoeller) *"Reading over the works of our last three Church leaders shows us that we are living in an Age of Mercy."* What particular challenges do women religious have in being convinced that we live in an "Age of Mercy"? On the other hand, how does papal teaching intersect with the urgencies that Sisters of Mercy describe in our Critical Concerns?

(Healy) *"Then we understand ourselves as lovable and glimpse our neighbor is to be loved as we are."* If you have worked with children, adolescents, or young adults, what are the obstacles they may feel that prevent them from being convinced they are lovable? Are the obstacles the same or different for adults or elders?

(Kerrigan) The two "revolutions" described in this article refer to the Civil Rights movement in the U.S. and Vatican II. In addition, one could add the feminist movement. What personal experiences of these revolutions touched you or didn't affect you during the 1960's and 1970's? When and how did you become engaged with these social changes?

(Peddigrew) If you are in leadership, how is the challenge of what "contemplative" means "being understood in a new and different reality"? If you are a member, has "contemplative" come to mean more than the opposite of "necessary action"?

(Upton) What anecdotes about key persons do you recall that memorialize the struggles and accomplishments in a congregationally-sponsored ministry —an institution that may or may not still be operating under the Sisters of Mercy?

Contributors

Helen Marie Burns, R.S.M. (West-Midwest) is a native of Independence, Iowa. She holds a Ph.D. from the School of Religion at the University of Iowa (2001) with a dissertation titled "Active Religious Women in the Iowa Frontier: A Study in Continuity and Discontinuity." Her background is secondary education. She spent twenty-some years in administrative roles within the Sisters of Mercy, including Vice President of the Institute. In 1988, she was elected to a three-year term in the Presidency of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Currently she is Vice-President of Mission Integration at Mount Aloysius College, Cresson, PA. She has lectured extensively on the topics of religious life, leadership, sponsorship, and the charism and tradition of the Sisters of Mercy. She has also contributed articles on the Sisters of Mercy for several publications. Currently she serves on the Board of Directors of the University of Detroit Mercy (Michigan), Mount Saint Agnes Theological Center for Women (Maryland), Center of Concern (Maryland), and Call to Action (Illinois).

Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. (West-Midwest). Katherine is ending her term as Novitiate Minister for the US Institute Novitiate and returning to her ministry of retreat work, spiritual direction and writing, fields in which she has been active for over 30 years. She received her M.Ed. from the University of San Francisco and a Masters in Liturgical Studies from St. John's University, Collegeville, MN. Among her publications is *Like a Tree by Running Water* an interpretive biography of Mother Mary Baptist Russell, California foundress of the Sisters of Mercy. She was a member of the editorial committee for *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy.* A Mercy historian she frequently facilitates retreats and programs on the charism of Mercy and religious life today.

Janice Edwards, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) holds a D.Min. from Weston Jesuit School of Theology and the Center for Religious Development in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her M.Div. is from Princeton Theological Seminary. She was a member of the leadership team of the Sisters of Mercy of New Jersey just prior to the establishment of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Janice has taught courses in spirituality and spiritual direction in colleges, universities, and spirituality centers, and has coordinated training programs in spiritual direction. She was part of the team that initiated and taught graduate programs in Holistic Spirituality and Spiritual Direction at Chestnut Hill College in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania. A spiritual director for over forty years, she has authored several articles, and recently published a book on spirituality, *Wild Dancing: Embraced by Untamed Love*.

Patricia C. Flynn, R.S.M. (Institute Leadership Team) holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Georgetown University with a specialization in Ethics; a M.A. in Philosophy from the Catholic University of America and a B.A. in English from St. Joseph's College in Maine. In addition to teaching philosophy to undergraduates at St. Joseph's College in Maine, she has served in diocesan administration and in new membership work for the Portland Regional Community. Before election to the Institute Leadership team in 2017, she served on leadership teams for both the Portland Regional Community and the Northeast Community.

Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. (South Central) was elected as the first president of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Subsequently, she acted as the senior vice president for Mission Integration at Catholic Healthcare Partners, a multi-state health system. She earned a Ph.D. in theology from Fordham University, with a focus on ecclesiology in the work of Yves Congar. She is widely published on themes of religious life and renewal. She is co-editor, with Denise Colgan, R.S.M, of a book celebrating the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, re-organizing and uniting the former 25 regional communities of Sisters of Mercy in the U.S. and their mission congregations—*Union and Charity: The Story of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas*. She is a member of the editorial board of *The MAST Journal* and on the planning committee for annual meetings of MAST in Belmont, North Carolina.

Judith Patricia Healy, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds a M.L.S. from Emporia State University in Kansas. She has been Reference/Interlibrary Loan Librarian at College of Saint Mary in Nebraska for 27 years. She is RSM-WMW liaison with College of Saint Mary's Lunch & Learn series: "Exploring Spirituality, Peace, and Justice." Past ministries include elementary education in North Dakota and Colorado, and a variety of posts in Colorado-- College for Financial Planning, Boulder Public Library, Central Catholic High School, and Mercy Hospital. Judith also taught skiing on the weekends for 12 years at National Sports Center for the Disabled at Winter Park, Colorado. She's held leadership roles in the National Assembly of Women Religious, Denver Archdiocese Sisters' Council, and ICON Library Consortium in Nebraska. She has contributed both poetry and prose to College of Saint Mary's annual literary publication: *Saint Mary's Review*, to *Allenspark Wind* in Colorado, and the Archdiocese of Omaha's *The Catholic Voice*.

Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds a Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Foundation, a D.Min. from Chicago Theological Seminary, and an M.A. from Loyola University. She has been a professor of social science and religious studies as well as an administrator in college and university settings. She has been an adjunct professor at St. Xavier University and System Director of Mission and Spirituality for Provena Health and Provena Senior Services. She is currently Assistant Administrator at Mercy Convent in Chicago, involved in the construction of the retirement center for Sisters of Mercy. She serves as a personal contact person for West-Midwest community members and is also on the Editorial Board of the MAST Journal.

Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M. (NL--Newfoundland and Labrador) received her B.A. and B.Ed. from Memorial University of Newfoundland, her M.Th. from Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO, and Ph.D. from California Institute of Integral Studies. Past ministries include high school teaching, vocation director for her congregation, and director of adult religious education for the Archdiocese of St. John's, NL. For the past 25 years she has been a facilitator for religious congregations of men and women in Canada, the U.S., Ireland, Nicaragua, Zambia and Zimbabwe. She also trained facilitators in Ireland for 12 years. Brenda has published five books of poetry, her doctoral dissertation, *Original Fire: the Hidden Heart of Religious Women*, and an essay collection, *Finding the Line: Ordinary Encounters in Nature's Mirror*, all available on Amazon.ca. She still facilitates chapters for religious congregations, while writing and painting in her forest setting where she has lived for nearly twenty years.

Julia Upton, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) is Provost Emerita and Distinguished Professor of Theology at St. John's University in New York where she has taught since 1979. She holds a Ph.D. in Theology from Fordham University, and an MPH from St. John's University. Her book, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: The Life and Legacy of H. A. Reinhold* was published by Liturgical Press in 2009. She is now working on a biography of liturgical artist and social activist Adé Bethune, artist who did woodcuts for The *Catholic Worker*.

MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines. This work is meant to serve women, the Church, and the Institute.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Aline Paris, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST'S Executive Director. MAST will hold its next **Annual Meeting at Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, NC, June 27-30, 2019.** Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Aline Paris, R.S.M. by e-mail at aparis@csm.edu or by mail at College of St. Mary, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE, 68016.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Marilyn King, R.S.M., 220 Laura Lane, Lebanon, KY, 40033-8155. E-mail mheleneking@windstream.net.

Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have, over the years, taken on responsibility to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Sisters of Mercy Hermanas de la Misericordia

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