

# The *MAST* Journal

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Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology*

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## Homilies, Sermons, and Reflections

<b>Preaching Difficult Texts: A Necessity and a Challenge, Second Sunday of Lent, 2022 and Third Sunday of Easter, 2022</b> <i>Barbara Moore, R.S.M.</i>	3, 28, 30
<b>Someday Is Not Soon Enough</b> <i>Avis Clendenen</i>	7
<b>A Sermon for the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd on Easter Sunday, April 16, 1995</b> <i>Rev. Linda M. Maloney</i>	11
<b>Foundation Day Homily, 2018</b> <i>Maureen Mulcrone, R.S.M.</i>	14
<b>Sisters Memorials June 16, 2021, and Advent Reflection, 2020</b> <i>Fran Repka, R.S.M.</i>	16, 26
<b>Homily for Deceased Sisters, 2021</b> <i>Mary Ruth Broz, R.S.M.</i>	18
<b>Scripture Reflections at Jubilee, 2014</b> <i>Jean Evans, R.S.M.</i>	20
<b>Golden Jubilee of Sr. Rita Kaufman, R.S.M., 2007</b> <i>Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.</i>	22
<b>Poetry</b> <i>Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.</i>	23
<b>Light from Their Lives: Learning from Our Mercy History</b> <i>Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.</i>	32
<b>Book Review</b> <i>Susan Sanders, R.S.M.</i>	38

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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,



What to call this issue? Un-ordained women in the Roman Catholic Church are not officially designated as the givers of the sermon or homily during the celebration of the Eucharist. An ordained minister, meaning a male priest or a male deacon, delivers the sermon from the podium after the reading of the gospel. He interprets the scriptures, provides a pastoral application to the spiritual life, and prepares the congregation for the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the decades after Vatican II, the Church's official General Instruction on the Roman Missal (GIRM) encouraged the un-ordained---laity--to speak in a variety of ways during the Eucharistic liturgy for the edification of the community of faith as introducers, commentators, lectors, psalmists and cantors. Laity are in fact permitted to reflect on the scriptures—at the introduction to the Eucharist, at the readings, at the Offertory petitions and after Communion. But what bishop or pastor opens the door of GIRM to the un-ordained?

A new development in the church's present pastoral life is "Catholic Women Preach," a web-site that presents lay-women and religious from all over the U.S. as sermon-givers. These include women graduate students, professors, seasoned ministers, employees of the church or diocese, some working for a non-profit agency, a healthcare or educational setting, some born outside the U.S.—a great diversity of voices. Their remarks are recorded in advance for each Sunday. The web-site provides the Sunday readings, a video of the woman preaching, and a transcript of her remarks.

A homily delivered by an ordained priest or deacon after the Gospel on Sunday is increasingly recognized as only one particular moment in the arc of the Church's spiritual and liturgical life. The practice of assigning this role to priests does not prevent the un-ordained in the Roman Catholic church, notably women, from "preaching" in the broader sense of that vocation. Barbara Moore, R.S.M, in "Preaching Difficult Texts," describes the challenges every sermon-giver faces when dealing with uncomfortable passages in Scripture. For Avis Clendenen in "Someday is Not Soon Enough," the limitations and opposition women have faced for decades have not deterred her—and many other women from accepting their role as preachers of the Word of God. Meantime, our sister churches in the Protestant tradition have empowered women for decades as ordained ministers and preachers. The "Easter Sermon, 1995" of Rev. Linda Maloney, is such an example.

Important occasions in the life of the Mercy community have been common moments for members to deliver the homily, sermon, reflection, or prayerful historical review. Maureen Mulcrone, R.S.M. delivered the reflection for Foundation Day in 2018. It was probably not anticipated in Canon Law that the assurance to women religious of "suffrages after death" would include the loving words of another sister memorializing her at her funeral Mass. Fran Repka, R.S.M. delivered the words honoring several sisters of her community who had died during the COVID-19 shut-down in "Sisters' Memorials" of June 16, 2021. Likewise the appreciative homily of Mary Ruth Broz, R.S.M, celebrating the variety of personalities of the deceased and their lasting effect on the life of the Mercy community, the "friends of God and prophets."

Jubilees are celebrations which honor sisters for their 25, 50, 60, 70 years of dedication—and now, what is not unusual, years beyond that! Jean Evans, R.S.M. gave a notable reflection for such a congregational festival in “Jubilee, 2014.” Sometimes our members prefer a quieter, more intimate, non-church style of celebrating their membership milestones. Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., honored one such sister for her Golden Jubilee in “For Rita Kaufman” in 2007. She records not really a homily about scripture, but a poetic reflection on her relationship with Rita.


The literary genre of poetry should be counted as a sacred form of scriptural reflection along with prose homilies, reflections and commentaries. Much of the Hebrew Scripture is revelation transmitted as poetry—notably the Psalms and many passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Song of Songs, Job, Proverbs and Sirach. Audrey Synnott, R.S.M. has been composing poetry for decades, and this issue presents a small sample of her poetic composition, including the moving “Abram in Starlight.”

Liturgical seasons provide a regular occasion for sisters delivering homilies, and one of many examples of this genre is the “Advent Reflection—Milford, Ohio, 2020” of Fran Repka, R.S.M. Sundays during the liturgical year provide the regular contribution of Barbara Moore, R.S.M., such as her “Second Sunday of Lent, 2022,” and “3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, 2022.” She publishes her Sunday homilies on her blog, and also preaches in Protestant churches.

We are honored in this issue to alert Mercy readership to another accomplishment of Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. She offers “Light from Their Lives,” an introduction to her newly published *Braided Lives: The Sisters of Mercy of Sacramento, 1857-2008*. Sue Sanders, R.S.M., the former president of the West Midwest community, an able administrator, competent scholar, with inspiring good humor, has provided a book review of *Braided Lives*.

This issue provides only a small sample of Mercy women preaching, reflecting, teaching and interpreting the Scriptures over many decades. On the practical side, as Katherine Doyle records, they also took on the risk of mountains of debt to construct convents, schools, and health care institutions. Some preaching of the Scriptures is done through writing and speaking, but some memorable sermons about the Word of God have been created with brick, wood, concrete, and steel.

Yours,



Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.  
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

# Preaching Difficult Texts: A Necessity and a Challenge

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Barbara Moore, R.S.M.

Preaching is a gift, a call and a powerful ministry within the Christian tradition. My preaching call began in 1972 in a city parish in Rochester, N.Y. Lay preaching has had an “on again, off again” acceptance by two of our Rochester Bishops and as of 2014, it has been banned in our diocese. But, since the 1980’s, I have also been called to preach and have been accepted as a preacher in our sister Christian denominations. That history began as I tried to enhance the community’s education about criminal justice and raise needed funds to keep a small agency afloat, Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry.

Many preachers, when they reflect on the designated Lectionary readings for the coming weekend, wish with all their heart that they did not have to preach, or that they could switch places with someone. A problem often arises when “difficult texts,” as we call them, are not dealt with creatively, or they are ignored altogether leaving men and women in the pews with questions, perhaps fears and disappointment. Maybe the preacher falls back on traditional explanations, old sermons or decides not to address the passage. But the bottom line is, difficult texts should not be ignored but examined. And that takes a good deal of effort. Father Timothy Radcliffe, O.P. in his book, *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* reminds us, “When a priest has read the Gospel, he kisses the text. Our reverence should extend to our everyday words.”<sup>1</sup> I am suggesting that same reverence must also be given to the interpretation and understanding of the Word itself.

The year I retired from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, New York, my last class was an elective for M.A. and M.Div.

students entitled, “Preaching Difficult Texts.” About fifteen students appeared who represented a rich variety of backgrounds. They represented a diversity of race, age, sexual orientation, and faith traditions. Some were on second-career paths. Some needed the credits to graduate, and one persisted in giving as little as possible, making only the efforts needed to pass. Their physical abilities also differed. One dear Episcopal deacon on his way to priesthood, was dealing with cerebral palsy. All of these realities made the class very rich and engaging.<sup>2</sup>

It was also clear that for some, their personal histories became the lens that dominated their handling of the texts. Disability and sexual abuse soon emerged as experiences of some students. At

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**But the bottom line is, difficult texts should not be ignored but examined. And that takes a good deal of effort.**

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one point, we were reminded that a preacher’s personal experience had to be balanced with that of the congregation. The preacher’s context is critical but it rests within the wider life of their listeners. Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor in her book, *The Preaching Life*, reminds us that the preaching ministry rests on a three-legged stool: God’s Word, the experience of the congregation and

the experience of the preacher. She writes, “...every sermon begins and ends with them (the congregation) but I also believe every sermon begins and ends with God.” She adds, “Every sermon is God’s creation as well as the creation of the preacher and the congregation.”<sup>3</sup>

Some of the difficult texts the students identified as the class began came from selected psalms or from tragic stories like the treatment of Hagar (Gen. 16:1-6) the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19), Jephthah’s daughter (Judges 11:29-40) the rape of Dinah (Gen. 34:1-31) and the rape of Tamar (2 Sam. 13:1-22), as well from passages in

some letters of the New Testament. We also could not ignore the stunning violence present in many Old Testament texts. The students were assigned difficult Scripture texts and readings, and they each wrote a short weekly sermon. They delivered their sermons in class; these were critiqued by their classmates and professor.

But the groundwork needed to be built for the study of the texts and possible approaches a responsible preacher could employ. One of the important texts we used was entitled, *Encountering God in Tyrannical Texts* by Frances Taylor Gench.<sup>4</sup> She is a Presbyterian scholar at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Her work is invaluable not only for students but for all preachers as we encounter disturbing and difficult lectionary passages. The students were also made aware of Phyllis Trible's, *Texts of Terror*,<sup>5</sup> Borg and Crossan's, *The First Paul*<sup>6</sup> and the accessible guide, Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So; Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*.<sup>7</sup>

Gench then provides us with five recommendations we need to use as we approach these difficult texts. I have found them to be very helpful no matter the text we are discussing or the length of time we have been in the pulpit.

- "Remember that the difficult text is worthy of charity from its interpreters."
- "Argue with the text, confident that wrestling with Scripture is an act of faithfulness."
- "We should not throw the baby out with the bath water."
- "We learn from the dangers as well as the insights the bible text presents."
- "Don't let anyone tell you that you are not taking the authority of the Bible seriously."<sup>8</sup>

She makes this fifth recommendation because some of the hearers might see such interpretation as a denial of the Spirit's inspiration in the writing of God's Word.

By keeping Gench and other scholars in mind, I would like to address two difficult texts. One from the New Testament and the other from the Old Testament. The first one has both a personal and communal aspect to it. The other has a personal and familial dimension. Let's begin with excerpts from a very familiar yet difficult text. We all have seen the reactions we can observe in the congregation when it is read.

### Letter to the Ephesians 5:21-33

*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the church.... Husbands love your wives just as Christ loves the church... Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies....*

Gench's recommendations encouraged questions and challenged the class to move in different directions. Gench advises preachers to dialogue and engage the text in conversation. She poses questions: What were my feelings as I read the text? What have I heard preached about it? What do some words mean in their original language and what is the context of the author as well as the reader? Have I experienced this Scripture being implemented in my personal life?

Borg and Crossan tell us that Ephesians is not an original letter of Paul. They propose that the later pastoral author of Ephesians was trying to offer some softening or balance to the more radical Paul who acknowledged women's ecclesial prominence in such passages as his naming of several women ministers in the closing greeting to Romans 16. Looking at the role of women in the author's historical context might also shed some light on the document. Was this passage in the letter to the Ephesians trying to modify the growing presence, ministry and strength of women in the early Church?

Imagine how these understandings might change a preacher's message. These reflections

involve not only a conversation with the text but research into the first context of both the author, their oppressors and listeners. The conversation with and about this text is not just done out of respect for the 1<sup>st</sup> century community but it is also a deep realization of the harm that this text has done through the years. And perhaps the harm it did to the women of Ephesus. Gench writes, "...Ephesians 5 perhaps more than any other text in the Bible has proved to be hazardous to women's health. Those who minister among battered persons bear witness that is 'a very difficult passage for women struggling to find self-respect and some control in their lives.'" <sup>9</sup>

We must also add that the text contains some verses that might be seen as positive for a first century church. "*Be subject to one another....; might reflect a mutuality. Then we have 'husbands love you wives just as Christ loves the church...'*". On one level this might elevate women because we call the Church the Body of Christ. And the author also adds "*Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies.*" Here too we can see some positive concepts. But those possible positive aspects of the text are rarely alluded to or addressed. How well do some husbands care for their bodies and does that care transfer to their spouses?

Peter Enns offers us some important advice as we deal with difficult texts. "...ancient writers had an adequate understanding of God *for them in their time*, but not *for all time*." <sup>10</sup> In other words, our task to find meaning for our own time and context.

In addition, some texts like Ephesians, carry a difficult **communal** message, yet others carry a carry difficult **personal and familial** message. A message about events that still exist. The issue of rape is an old as the human family. The rape of Tamar by her half-brother and the comments of

her brother and father contain a very familiar message yet a painful one as does her response to her abuse.

## Second Samuel 13:1-22

*(David instructs his daughter Tamar) ... "Go to your brother Ammon's house and prepare food for him"... (Ammon) said, "Come lie with me, my sister." She answered him, "No...my brother, do not force me...for where would I carry my shame?" (After the rape) ... Ammon was seized with loathing for her.... Her brother Absalom said to her, "Be quiet for now... for he is your brother; do not take this to heart".... When King David heard all of these things, he became very angry, but would not punish his son...because he was his first born...."*

What do we do with this text? I believe it can become a teaching tool for our congregations

**These reflections involve not only a conversation with the text but research into the first context of both the author, their oppressors and listeners.**

regarding one of the still very present sins against women of all ages. Yet sensitivity is needed when preaching this text. I remember discussing preaching and sexual abuse of women on a panel with a Presbyterian clergywoman. Her comments never left me. She warned that by using this text in an accusatory way, a spouse who was an abuser might be in the congregation and could say to his wife, "You told her, didn't you?" And more difficulties might occur.

The reaction of Tamar's father and brothers leave us breathless, but they are not unfamiliar to many who hear this text. As a woman, when I converse with the events in this text, I am filled with anger, sorrow and an understanding that Tamar's rape destroyed her life. I am also aware of the same effects of rape and abuse that can happen today. The role and power of males in the days of David may be different from today, but we must admit we have heard and seen similar

examples that remind us of that time in history. When we hear that Tamar's half-brother had a "loathing" for her after the rape and that her future hopes of marriage were destroyed, we are reminded of the painful effects of any kind of sexual abuse. How important that congregations hear these texts and have them presented by a preacher who is sensitive to the life-altering consequences such actions guarantee. Imagine the different approaches a male or a female preacher might bring to this text and how the congregation might react.

### Concluding Recommendations

We have looked at some tools that can help us address difficult texts and have briefly addressed two texts, the rape of Tamar from 2 Samuel in the Old Testament, and the message to wives and husbands in Ephesians in the New Testament.

Peter Enns leaves us a wise perspective as we, in our preaching ministries, struggle with difficult texts.

The biblical storytellers recall the past, often the very distant past, not 'objectively' but purposefully. These were their stories. They were narratives to the past to give meaning to their present- to persuade, motivate and inspire. What makes the Bible God's Word isn't its uncanny historical accuracy, as some insist, but the sacred experiences these stories point to, beyond the words themselves. Watching these ancient pilgrims work through their faith, even

wrestling with how they did that, models for us our own journeys of seeking to know God better and commune with (God) more deeply.<sup>11</sup>

That is our task as preachers. To wrestle with God's Word, especially the more difficult texts, and to offer faith and meaning to the present context in which we find ourselves and the congregation. ♦

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Rev. Lori Vail, a newly ordained priest who was a member of the above-mentioned class and was recently ordained a priest. She offered insights from the student's perspective.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So... Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life*. (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1993): 77.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Taylor Gench, *Encountering God in Tyrannical Texts*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Reading of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So... Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It*. (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Gench, pp. 9-17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>10</sup> Enns, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-77.





# Someday Is Not Soon Enough

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*Avis Clendenen*

Ezekiel 37: 1-14:

The prophet walks about in places of desolation, scattered with dry bones and speaks into that desert, “Can these bones live?” and knows in the marrow that there is more life.

John 3: 1-8:

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the night bearing the weight and wonder of a question.

We know well the power of dangerous memories. The “great remembering” of each Eucharistic liturgy holds the power and the promise of past, present and future coming together in one magnificent gesture pointing toward the future. Such a dangerous memory surfaced for me in considering the happening more than forty years ago of my first public homily. In October 1978, five hundred people gathered in Chicago for a response to the challenges put forth in the 1976

United States Catholic Conference of Bishop’s Call to Action Conference. In 1978 I was twenty-eight years old and invited to preach the homily at the close of the day spent considering key questions facing the church: concern for the divorced, the future of Catholic education, empowerment of women, married priesthood, and mutual decision-making in the life and practice of the Roman Catholic church. Those were the issues of

that time. Two years before I had received a Master of Divinity degree from Chicago’s Jesuit School of Theology. I was vested in an alb and present in the sanctuary for the liturgy. This is the homily I wish to share in this essay along with the responses generated by my public preaching in 1978 and considerations arising today from the place where I now stand at 72 years of age. The homily was designed in 1978 in response to the

scriptures proclaimed that long ago day: Ezekiel 37: 1-14 and John 3:1-8.

Recently I read James Carroll’s latest novel, *Mortal Friends*, the story of an Irish Catholic family spanning almost three generations. The moment in the book that most captured my imagination centered around the birth of Coleman Brady’s first child. Outspoken, political Brady was a dutiful yet somewhat unloving husband. Witnessing his wife giving birth had an altering

effect upon him. He found himself crying at the new-found awareness that she might even die. He became vulnerable through her labor.

After the child’s birth, when his wife seemed peaceful, he laid his head next to hers, asking, “Are you all right?” “Sure,” she replied. He continued, “I thought you were dying.” “I am,” she said, “So are you. But another time, not now.”

It seems to me that this dialogue captures something of our moment in the church today. I feel

it in my bones. The birthing of a new order. The coming of a new age. And I am dying in expectation, in labor. So are you. But another time, not now. The bones will live, stirred by God’s Spirit being born through us. So, if you ask me if I’m all right, I am. If you ask me if I’m dying. I’m that, too. So are you. But, not now, another time.

The Nicodemus in us in coming out from the

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**Are not so many of  
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dark. Are not so many of the questions we are exploring born in the darkness of ourselves—from the very hidden parts of our being—from the shadow of the church? Have we not felt deep stirrings, struggled through nights with the question: How can this be, Lord? Nicodemus took his dark side and went to see Jesus and Jesus sat with him. Nicodemus gave birth to the recognition of the stirrings of his own heart as he shared with Jesus. “You are from God,” he uttered. Jesus replied, “Nicodemus, you must be born from above. The Spirit will blow where the Spirit will blow.”

The rebirth Jesus was talking about was far beyond the capabilities of the established order. Are the secrets of our hearts residing in the shadow of ourselves imagining a new order? “How can this be?” Nicodemus stuttered. How can this be? That our church would have women who would be priests. That the separated would share Communion. That all gifts for ministry could be called forth and respected, expanding the parameters of the church.

It is night now even as we speak, and we must face the consequences of our own proclamations. Is God breaking silence through us? It is night even as we talk, and I am dying. So are you. Not now, another time. The Spirit is blowing where she is blowing. No doubt about it.

We must, as Nicodemus, bear the terrible weight of our questions and of our convictions. Yes, we have been led to new places. Deep secrets are struggling to emerge from the shadows. And the only response is the prophet’s: “There is in my heart a burning fire and I am weary from holding it in and I cannot (Jer. 20:9).” I am dying among you and with you in the giving forth of a new priestly ministry; a new order of the way things can be. So are you. But another time, not now.

Even in our valley moments when it seems impossible that the unjust structures of our world

and our church can ever be redeemed, discouragement is not the final word. Even when we seem as solitary dry bones, and come to intimately know the un-spirited. To ask the questions: How can this be? Can these bones live? Is to hear the faint nighttime still-small-voice whisper: “I will cause breath to enter you and you will live, says the Lord.” The Spirit is blowing where the Spirit is blowing. In unexpected places; within unexpected persons; even among seemingly dry bones. We will receive a new spirit to raise us up from our lost hope. This is a promise of biblical proportion. This is also our burden.

Nothing can hinder our solitary standing, single bones, and shadowy questions from becoming a communion. We together carry the consequences of our deep intuitions and proclamations. What we believe, can be. The bones will live. And some will say, as they said of

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heart a burning  
fire and I am  
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(Jer. 20:9).

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Ezekiel, that we have been transported to places that simply do not exist in our church. Many are not in labor, not even expecting a new birth. Some do not hear the bones rattling. Can we hold the prophet’s truth, that it is God’s Spirit that takes us to places precisely to hear God’s new message? Unexpected transportations; night meetings with Jesus; to the valley of

dry bones; awaiting the life-giving fresh breath of God.

And we may very well spend our lives  
walking there  
gathering the bones together.  
Mending and weaving a new body of  
God’s people,  
feeling for the pulse and heartbeat,  
awaiting a new birth.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after this liturgical celebration and my homily, a national Catholic periodical ran an article entitled, “‘Call to Action’ Road Show Hits Chicago.” The following excerpt appeared under the heading “Premeditated Disobedience”:

The closing liturgy was celebrated by the newly inaugurated president of the Association of Chicago Priests. The homilist was Sr. Avis Clendenen, RSM. Tall and slim and clad in an ankle length white gown, she was a striking figure—in forbidden territory—as she delivered the homily. That it was done with quiet, reverent dignity does not change the fact that it was done in calculated, premediated disobedience of the rule forbidding women to do this, a disobedience joined in by the celebrant himself, as “president of the assembly.”

As Mass proceeded, Clendenen hovered a few steps behind and to the right of the celebrant as did another assistant. At the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer, she raised the tray of Sacred Hosts while the other assistant raised the colorful jug containing the Precious Blood. Anything seems to go so along as the “Spirit” moves. One must wonder how it can be imagined that the real Holy Spirit, as opposed to some sort of imaginary one, can be present in the presence of disobedience and flaunting of the authentic teaching of His Church...At the conclusion of the performance, the priest gave the closing blessings adding: “I hope someday to preach at her (nodding in the direction of Avis) celebration. This Mass is ended, but our work has just begun.”<sup>2</sup>

In this article nothing was written about what I actually preached in the homily. The author’s reporting focused attention on what I was wearing and where my body was in relation to the action at the altar. I was not vested but clad. Through his eyes, I was not wearing a common alb but an ankle length white gown. I was a woman in a sanctuary. He saw a striking figure in forbidden territory. I was both calculating and involved in premeditated disobedience while, at the same

time, quiet, reverent and dignified. I was there as a homilist. Yet, he reported nothing about the content of the homily. I assisted at the altar in a manner quite ordinary for someone skilled (and credentialed) in liturgical ministry. The author could only see me as “hovering.” Every effort to demean was meant as arrows to wound; to make it

clear that a woman is *persona non grata* in the sanctuary.<sup>3</sup>

I wish I could report that my decades of preaching history have been vastly different from that time in 1978. Women in Roman Catholic sanctuaries preaching remain formally anathema in regular parish life and practice. While reporters rarely follow anyone around to catch us in acts of canonical disobedience; the recent Papal acknowledgment of the ministry of catechists and the formal

inclusion of women as acolytes and lectors seem overblown and disingenuous to the reality of practice over the past near half century.

Another movement called “Discerning Deacons” has arisen to explore, in *ad nauseam* fashion, the inclusion of women in the diaconate. How long is long enough? Maintaining tradition for the sake of tradition can be a form of idolatry. Jesuit theological Karl Rahner once cautioned us not to narrow our horizon of openness; not to make it impossible for God to in-break into human consciousness and say what God wishes to say; to tell us under what guise God wishes to encounter us.<sup>4</sup>

Women preaching and ministering in all ministries of the church is not a question of rights, or even of fairness in the social and ecclesial order. It is a question of an adequate, believable, and liberating Christian theology. Humans—male and female alike—are fitting, albeit partial, symbols of God’s own image. As the universal

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church stands on the threshold of an enormous synodal invitation issued with colorful and hopeful graphics and words, are we up for the task as we were at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965? So, if you ask me today at 72 if I'm all right, I guess I am, though ecclesially weary, for sure. If you ask me if I'm dying, I'm that, too. So are you. Someday is simply not soon enough. Yet, *yet* the words of liberation theologian

Dorothee Sölle still ring in my ears: "I am responsible for the house I did not build but in which I live."<sup>5</sup> Even if the house feels like the valley of dry bones, I will, as we will together, muster the courage to stay on the path; trusting that the Spirit that brought us this far will not abandon and in her blowing remodel the house until there is no forbidden territory. ♦

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> First published in *Union Scope*, Vol. 5, No. 10, Sisters of Mercy of the Union (1978): 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> James Gill, *Wanderer*, October 26 (1978): 13-15.

<sup>3</sup> Some insights appeared in *U.S. Catholic* under the title, "It's time to cross into forbidden territory," Vol. 59, No. 12 (December 1994): 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald McCool, *A Rahner Reader*, New York: Seabury Press (1975): 45.

<sup>5</sup> Dorothee Sölle, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Theology*, (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International 1990): 55.

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# A Sermon for the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd

## Easter Sunday, April 16, 1995

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*Rev. Linda M. Maloney*

Dear Friends, we have completed our Lenten observance. We have finished the course; or, rather, we have stood fast and allowed the wisdom of the Spirit to soak into our troubled minds and hearts. We stood, on Good Friday, beneath the cross. This morning we run, with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, and all the other women to the tomb to hear amazing news: “He is not here but has risen.”

Our celebration of Easter this year coincides with Passover. We celebrate the joy of redemption with our Jewish sisters and brothers, remembering that our God is the one “who dried up the sea, . . . who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over.” In the Passover night, at the Seder, Jews sing a song of redemption: they recite each of God’s mighty deeds, followed by the refrain, “Dayyenu”: “It would have been enough for us.” “If you had brought us out of Egypt but had not provided manna in the desert: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.” And so on.

If we Christians were to sing “Dayyenu” for our redemption, the litany might be something like this:

If you had chosen to take pity on us and save us but had not come among us: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

If you had chosen to come among us in the terror of your glory to strike our hearts and compel us to repentance: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

If you had elected to appear among us in the shape of a human being, to win our hearts to you with gentleness: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

If you had chosen to become one of us for a short time, to teach us and heal us, and then returned to your glory: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

If you had lived a full life among us, and died surrounded by your friends: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

If you had died young, but swiftly and cleanly, for our sake: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

If you had accepted the meanest and most shameful death we could administer, for our sake, and so returned to your glory: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us.

It would have been enough for us. It would have been more than enough for us. **But it was not enough for God.**

It was not enough for God because God’s desire for us is so burning, so powerful, so irresistible that nothing can separate us from it. “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). What does that mean? It certainly does not mean that we are so strong that we can overcome all those enemies, and so attain to God. It is not, as Bill Countryman said, that we will get it right, that we will prove our worthiness. It means that Jesus, having died for us and been made Lord and Christ forever, cannot simply “retire” to heavenly glory to await our arrival in due course. His rising from the dead does not mean his removal from us — an idea unfortunately imprinted in our imaginations by

Luke's depiction of him as ascending into heaven and being taken from our sight, even though that was probably not Luke's true intention in painting that picture. His resurrection is the guarantee of his being forever and at every moment *with us*.

In his resurrection Jesus has entered into the most intimate possible embrace with all creation and with every individual thing and person within it. The author of Colossians writes that "your life is hidden with Christ in God," which is the reverse of the mirror. It is because the life of the risen Christ is hidden in ours that we are one with him in the divine embrace. We know how unbearable it is to us to be parted by death from those we love. I make bold to say that it is no less unbearable for God. When God died in Jesus the Christ, it was only in order to be with us forever.

No wonder the women were terrified! In Luke's scene, they fall on their faces in awe and fear. I don't think this is merely because they saw some people in white robes (certainly to be interpreted as divine messengers). The first woman in this story met one of those, too, and she was perfectly calm about it, in spite of the startling character of his message. There is something deeply terrifying about this event, and it is not anything as banal as fear of ghosts. Mark's version of the women's reaction is even more vivid: "they ran away from the tomb, because great fear and excitement got the better of them. And they didn't breathe a word of it to anyone: talk about terrified . . .!" It is terrifying, and awe-full, in the original sense of that word. Can it be true that God loves and desires us so much as to hunger for our love? Can God need something from us? Surely that cannot be true. Centuries of theologians have worked diligently to deny it. But Easter says that it is true: God cannot bear to be parted from us. God has desired us enough to be willing to live and die and live again with us.

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Can it be true  
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That God should choose to be "in our hands" in this way is a thought so frightening that only Easter makes it bearable. Good Friday reminds us every year that, when God reaches out to us in love, we can say "No." We can turn away. We can reject God's love so brutally and so thoroughly that — as far as the face of God turned toward us is concerned — we can kill God. I am not talking in metaphysical categories. After all, what we can know about God is what God is and desires to be for us, and nothing else really matters as far as we are concerned. God-for-us is fully present in Jesus, the anointed, and we have concrete proof that human beings can kill the one who is God-for-us, Emmanuel, God in our midst.

This news could only provoke despair and serve to turn us toward ourselves, if it were not for Easter. We can indeed banish God from our lives and from our world. But God doesn't take "no" for an answer. God, in the risen Jesus, is always with us, calling us by name, as in John's version of the story: Jesus says "Mary" to the weeping Magdalene; she turns and knows him. We have only to turn at that call, to begin to live life in company with the God who will never leave us, never abandon us, never be parted from us, even by death.

In case you think these are the ravings of a wild and "far-out" preacher, let me cite a poet of some twelve centuries back, whose work has been sung in our churches at the high festival, the great Easter Vigil, from then until now: This author really went over the top in describing the meaning of the Easter Triduum: "Oh truly necessary sin of Adam, that Christ's death has blotted out! Oh, happy fault, that merited a redeemer so holy and so great!"

Now that's going pretty far — and I do note that in some modern "shorter" versions these verses have been expunged. The Exsultet, from which these verses are taken, expresses true

amazement that God would do so much for our sake. What it does not do, and what I want to emphasize today, is to reflect on the “why” of it all. Because it is not as if God played “Lady Bountiful,” as we sometimes do when we serve Thanksgiving dinner at a shelter or join a Habitat for Humanity crew. Those are good things, and if God had done as much for us, Dayyenu: it would have been enough for us. What is so amazing is that *it was not enough for God*: that God, impelled by so much love for us, became one of us and refused to be expelled from our midst, even by death, even by being murdered. God loves us too much to give up on us. God will not abandon us, even if we try to abandon God.

Jesus kept trying to tell us about this. For one thing, he told us to pray to God as “Abba.” Not just “Father,” but “Abba.” People of his time didn’t have much problem with calling God “Father,” because fathers in the ancient world were pretty imposing characters, with the power of life and death over all the members of their households. That was perfectly compatible with people’s image of God, and probably is even today. This is a comfort to some people and a curse to others. But in telling us to call God “Abba,” Jesus was saying that God is the kind of parent who loves his or her children without regard for his or her own dignity, or life itself. Those of us who grew up in the South can pretty easily get our minds around the idea of grownup children calling their parents “Daddy” and “Mama,” because that is what we do — although I know it is difficult for some of the frozen chosen from northern climes. But it is not too often that we think of Jesus’ “Abba” in that way.

Jesus even tried to illustrate this for us in a story. You know the one about the father who had two sons. When the ne’er-do-well low-life son goes away and spends the family inheritance, and then comes crawling back, what does the father

do? He casts off all the dignity proper to an Eastern *paterfamilias* and goes running down the road to hug the wastrel! Get the picture? God is not standing on God’s dignity where we are concerned. God loves us too much. And just as much as one of us would die rather than let harm come to our children, rather than lose even one of them — so God will do anything, *anything* rather than lose us.

If God had proved as loving and forgiving a father as the one in the story: Dayyenu. It would have been enough for us. But it was not enough for God. God had to do even more, in Jesus -- become one of us, live with us, die for us, and rise to live with us forever. That was something even

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“We are  
Easter people,  
and alleluia is  
our song.”

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Jesus could not prepare us for, because until it happened, we could not conceive of it. Even now, even after it has happened, and been celebrated and remembered every Easter, and every Sunday of the year, from then until now, it is more than we can get our minds around. It is and remains a mystery, the ultimate mystery of life: that everything we can imagine as goodness and love toward us, everything that we could have hoped for from God, everything that would have been enough and more than enough for us, *was not enough for God*.

Think of all the endearments you have ever said to your beloved; think how you have said “I couldn’t live without you.” The risen Lord who greets us this Easter morning is saying just that to each of us: “I could not live without you.”

“We are Easter people, and alleluia is our song.” We are Easter people because the risen Lord is with us always, as one of us. Not his death and not ours can separate us. “See how the beloved comes: leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills.” He comes to meet us, here in this place, on this Easter day. Rejoice, holy people, and be glad: your God is with you. Alleluia! ♦

# Foundation Day Homily, 2018

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*Maureen Mulcrone, R.S.M.*

We celebrate today two great events which occurred on December 12 and one near miss—by that I mean another a great event that happened near but not quite on this date.

Last week, I was reflecting on possible thematic connections between the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Foundation Day of the Sisters of Mercy. That day I heard on the radio that December 12 was also the anniversary of the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: The amendment abolishing slavery. This turns out not to be quite true—it was actually ratified December 6, 1865, so it's a near miss for this date but a tremendously important event. Just hearing about the Thirteenth Amendment focused my sense of what these three events have in common with one another and with the season of Advent: They are all proclamations of liberation and justice.

Now, some of us may be more or less familiar with each of these events so, let me just review what they are about:

Foundation Day was the day in 1831 when Catherine McAuley, Elizabeth Harley and Mary Ann Doyle finished their novitiate and took their vows to become the first Sisters of Mercy. While Catherine McAuley had opened the House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin on September 24, 1827, which we celebrate as Mercy Day, she did not actually found the religious community of the Sisters of Mercy until this date in 1831.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe commemorates the appearance of Mary the Mother of God to Juan Diego, the baptismal name of a poor indigenous man living near Mexico City.

I'm wearing this purple garment in honor of the simple garment called a tilma, that Juan Diego wore—although his garment was closed in front. It would probably be more appropriate if I were wearing a chasuble instead.

While walking to a Mass in honor of Our Lady on December 9, 1531, Juan Diego heard beautiful music, saw a radiant cloud appear and within it was a vision of a woman with the features, skin color and clothing of an Aztec woman. The lady spoke to him in his own language and sent him to tell the bishop of Mexico to build a chapel on the site.

Now if you or I—or a migrant farm worker—showed up at the local archbishop's house today with a message to build a church on a remote hillside, you can imagine we wouldn't get much of

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a reception. Juan Diego seems to have had a similar experience. Eventually the bishop told Juan Diego to ask the Lady to give him a sign.

In at least one version of the story poor Juan eventually tries to avoid the lady, especially because his uncle was sick. But she finds him, tells him that his uncle will recover and directs him to gather the nearby roses (which were neither in season nor native to Mexico) and take them to the bishop.

On December 12, Juan Diego went to the bishop's house and opened his tilma. The roses fell to the ground—and the bishop fell to his knees, for on Juan's tilma was the image of Mary as she had appeared on the hillside, with the features, skin color and traditional clothing of a pregnant Aztec woman.



Not always do individual feasts fit so neatly into the spirit of the liturgical season as these three events fit into the spirit of Advent.

Irish Catholics, both before and during Catherine McAuley's time, experienced subjugation and discrimination imposed by their English occupiers. Similar and worse was the subjugation in the 1500s of the native populations in what we call Mexico, and the sufferings of enslaved Africans in this country.

We often say that the season of Advent is about waiting—waiting for the rebirth of God's presence among us which is a presence of love and justice.

In last Sunday's readings we heard: "Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning and misery; put on the splendor of glory from God forever: wrapped in the cloak of justice from God. . ."

This is the message of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe: A woman imaged, not as a European, but as a native woman, clad in Aztec clothes. She is a sign of justice for herself and her children whether in the 1500s in Mexico, or with her children at the U.S. border today.

We heard: "Prepare the way of the Lord...Every valley shall be filled, and the mountains made low." This is not just about geography or topography, but about sociology and theology. The image refers to equalizing the differences that separate those in high places from those in low places, those who have and those who are in want.

This is the message Catherine McAuley lived in comforting the sick poor in their homes, in relieving ignorance through education, in bringing counsel and consolation to those imprisoned whether justly or unjustly.

On Tuesday we heard: "Comfort, give comfort to my people; Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings."

This is the message of the abolition of slavery—but the effects of slavery have not been abolished; it remains for us to proclaim the glad tidings that Emmanuel, God with us, is the God of all people and we are, each of us, infinitely dear to God

regardless of race or color.

These feasts and events: Foundation Day, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the abolition of slavery offer us the chance to renew our commitment to bringing Mercy and Justice to our world.

And so let us, this Advent and this feast, remember not just the infant in the crib, but the Christ who calls us to go up onto a high mountain and proclaim the glad tidings of:

- Liberation from civil oppression
- Liberation from racial and class oppression
- Liberation from any mental constructs that keep us from seeing all people as our sisters and brothers
- Liberation to live and rejoice in the love and justice of Emmanuel, God with us.



# Sisters of Mercy Memorial Liturgy, June 16, 2021

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*Fran Repka, R.S.M.*

*"We shall all meet in heaven. Oh, what a joy to think of it!" Catherine McAuley*

Readings: Is. 61: 10-11; Ps. 43.

1 Thess. 5: 16-18, 23-24; Matthew 5: 3-12

This afternoon we celebrate our beloved Sisters who died this past year: Sisters Lucy Beischel, Agnes Boes, Ruth Boudot, Joanne Braeunig, Ann Dalton, and Mary Clyde Stiers. The Scripture readings chosen for this Liturgy are most meaningful. For if we should ask, "**Where are they?**" we hear the answer through each Sister's voice in the first reading from Isaiah: "I exult for joy in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God, for I have been clothed in the garments of salvation, and wrapped in the cloak of integrity..."

And if we should ask: "**How are they?**" Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians puts it well: They are at peace. They are at peace among the community of saints. In this same passage these Sisters have words for us from Paul: "Be at peace among yourselves. You must all think of what is best for each other and for the community. Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do." May each of us live up to these words.

And if we should ask: "**What might they be calling us to through these chosen readings?**"

We have the answer in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus teaches the Beatitudes to his disciples from the mountain top. The Beatitudes are based on Isaiah (61: 1-11) from where comes our first reading this afternoon. The Beatitudes are not demands, but they do declare the marks of a true Christian, the marks of a true Church.

Having known these Sisters, some more closely than others, and loved them all, I believe that each lived the **Beatitudes** in her own way. As Catherine McAuley once said: "God does not bestow all His choicest blessings on one person. Jesus did not give to Peter what He gave to Paul, nor to either what He gave to John."

These Sisters were blessed in that each of them began her journey "poor in spirit" and "humble of heart." As prayer was Catherine's first priority, so it was for Joanne, Mary Clyde, Ruth, Ann, Lucy, Agnes. They were aware of their creature-hood; they had faults and sufferings. Yet more importantly, each awakened to the gratuitous LOVE of God within. Such that they could exclaim, "Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my

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of their creature-  
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exceeding joy" (Ps. 43:4).

These Sisters were blessed when they not only "mourned" their many losses as they grew older; but also, as is characteristic of true people of God, they mourned, the present condition of our Church and hurting world, lamented that God's kingdom has not yet come and there is much yet to be done. Thus, they call us to continue this work and they are now in a position to help us to bring forth that day "when every tear shall be wiped away...and there be no more crying or pain" (Rev. 21:4).

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice: Among them they prayed daily for their sisters and brothers on the margins; some fasted

for justice, some wrote letters to government officials against non-violence and other injustices, attended vigils, served the poor in Jamaica, visited those in prison, and other concrete actions. Jesus and Catherine McAuley were consumed with alleviating the conditions of the poor. These Sisters remind us that non-violent love takes place in the streets as well as in the cell of one's own heart.

Blessed are the merciful: Mercy was in their blood. In these Sisters one could witness a compassionate, kind heart, a heart of unconditional love. In Catherine's words: "There are things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost nothing: the kind word, the gentle compassionate look, and the patient hearing of sorrows." Our Sisters encourage us to do the same.

Blessed are the pure of heart. Our Sisters now know fully their dignity in Christ and recognize the same God in their sisters and brothers. Faith in the one God requires that one be devoted to God with all one's heart. They call us not to have divided hearts.

Lastly, they were truly "peacemakers". Some simply knowing that "Just to be is blessing; just to live is holy" (Rabbi Heschel); some by listening deeply. Others quite involved in our Mercy Critical Concerns and actions for peace. Each was a peacemaker in her being and in her ministerial service. Collectively, they served as teachers, principals, nurses, pioneers in health, formation, leadership, librarian, and mission effectiveness.

They volunteered in the HOME program, Mercy Neighborhood ministries, St. Boniface School, Mercy hospitals, not to mention other creative gifts given through photography, poetry, the arts.

In summary, their lives as we knew them may be over, but their work is not yet finished. They are busy about praying with us, challenging us to form bonds of union and charity as we move toward Oneness and Mission, and as we continue to build the reign of God through living the Beatitudes.

And so... Agnes, Ann, Joanne, Lucy, Mary Clyde, and Ruth, God has done great things in you. As your Sisters in Mercy, we give gratitude and praise for what you

have allowed God to accomplish in you! We thank you for blessing our lives, as well as the many lives you encountered when you walked with us. Now we ask that you light the way for us through the darkness in our present world; help us first to give gratitude always for every little thing; to not be afraid to engage more deeply in our Mercy Critical Concerns, especially immigration, the degradation of earth, poverty, racism, non-violence and women. Help us to open our hearts to the spiritually hungry, to teach, as Pope Francis does, to respect all life from the unborn through old age, and indeed all of creation, including the current cicadas. Pray for us that we continue to act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with our God.

We love you dear Sisters. "We shall all meet in heaven. Oh, what a joy to think of it!" ♦

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**In these Sisters  
one could  
witness a  
compassionate,  
kind heart, a  
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unconditional  
love.**

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# Homily for Deceased Sisters, 2021

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*Mary Ruth Broz, R.S.M.*

How important it is to come together as a community and celebrate a day like today! Many of us remember what it felt like a year ago, wanting so much to honor these amazing women, but because of the pandemic, having to resign ourselves to the fact that it would not be possible! Perhaps that's why including the Sharing of Memories before this liturgy was so important--just hearing pieces of their stories remind us they are not very far away! They live on in us.

As I sat down to prepare these reflections, for some strange reason, I found myself taken back to that familiar question that we usually associate with the season of Passover: "Why is tonight different from all other nights?" As we know, following that question, the familiar story of the Israelite people recounting their salvation history begins to get told to the youngest generation, how the angel passed over the houses, how the Red Sea separated, and how protected and loved the Israelite people felt as they remembered this God who had been there for them, and the story goes on!

Perhaps it was no accident that that was my starting point! While there will always be a need for days when we must focus on the business at hand--looking at our past, planning for our future-- perhaps we have an even greater need for a day like today. This is a day that is different from all the others, a day that calls us to stop, to remember again who we have come from and the amazing women we have been privileged to share life with for so many years. As I began to look over the list of Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Associates who we are remembering today, I realized that some were life-long friends to many of us while others we were just getting to know as their

final years were ending.

Others stunned us with how much we learned about them by reading their obituary. The mystery of it all! As you look over the list, you will notice

- nurses and administrators of hospitals and even Mercy Hall school principals and teachers on every level
- religious educators and business sharks
- people who made us laugh and some who made us think
- people who calmed us down and those who fired us up
- people who crossed the ocean to arrive here and those who came a few miles down the road
- some who quietly slipped into a pew and others who called us to attention just by the way they entered a room
- people known for their kindness and those who could be tough, and many who had a little bit of both.

There were those who spent most of their lives teaching first graders how to read and others who transformed the landscape of institutions for generations. Many of them leave their footprints on people's hearts in ways we never will know. Some we still can see as we walk into the chapel on a day like today.

And then, there are the Associates, people who joined us along the way, people who inspired us as they raised families, cared for aging parents, worked on staff, and generously volunteered in our institutions---some for many years. They extended the Mission of Mercy in ways and to places we never could.

These sisters and associates, all very different, but all women of faith, daughters of Catherine McAuley! Surely if God can take up residence in all of them (and all of us). We are so different so why should it surprise us to hear in today's gospel that "in my Father's house, there are many dwellings." We have come to know that on earth. Surely, we can imagine that in heaven!

Our Celtic roots remind us that it is really only a thin veil that separates these worlds. Those who have gone before us are more connected than we realize.

I still remember reading a great book by Elizabeth Johnson in 1999 entitled *Friends of God and Prophets*. In it she offered some new ways of viewing our connectedness with those who have gone before us. She talked about "making the communion of saints sing again," challenging us to not just admire those who have died from afar, but to imagine them still walking among us, companions with us on the journey, partners with us on our struggles, whatever they may be. They are there to share their spirit with us with their lessons of encouragement as we carry on our unfinished agendas. "How can the way be rough," she went on to say, "when it has been smoothed by the feet of so many walking along it?"

So today IS different from all other days. Today we are remembering those people who walked among us and continue to do so. They are people who inspired us and challenged us in ways we have talked about and ways we haven't. They addressed our critical concerns

before they were even named "critical concerns," non-violence, anti-racism, immigration, care for the earth, and the empowerment of women. They may not have done it perfectly, nor do we. We are not remembering them for the awards they received, or even the work they accomplished, but for the amazing people they were. We're here to let them know that in their own way, they taught us a little bit more about how to run the race and keep the faith.

We know we stand on their shoulders and on the shoulders of those who went before them ... and those who went before them. We haven't

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**Look around. Inside each of you lives a gallery of strong and powerful women of Mercy, women who have taught us how to live and some who even taught us how to die.**

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forgotten how they have shaped this community of mercy with compassion and justice and wisdom and kindness and the human-ness of who they were. That is part of their legacy and now is part of ours!

It's almost as if God is saying to us this morning, "This is how you run the race and keep the faith." You know the way! Look around. Inside each of you lives a gallery of strong and powerful women of Mercy, women who have taught us how to live and

some who even taught us how to die. No wonder we are told, "Do not let your hearts be troubled," as Jesus said to his disciples. You know the way. The answers are here. The Word became flesh and dwells among you. We need only to make the connection! We can remember some lines from Maya Angelou's poem, When Great Trees Fall. "When great trees fall, rocks on distant hills shudder... They existed. They existed. We can be. Be and be better. For they existed."◆



# Scripture Reflections at Jubilee, 2014

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*Jean Evans, R.S.M.*

The readings of today's Mass tell us in no uncertain terms that God is our protector and lifeline, particularly at times when we are most vulnerable. Elijah, the prophet of God who was run out of town by the cruel queen Jezebel, takes shelter in a cave and there in the midst of chaos and distress, of earthquakes and tempests, is consoled by the still small voice of God.

Catherine McAuley, from the early days of the Mercy congregation, knew with unquestioning certainty that a "Providential hand" was guiding and supporting the little community when forces from all sides conspired to destroy it. And, in today's gospel from Matthew, the disciples, fighting the winds and squalls of the Sea of Galilee, are miraculously saved by the presence of Jesus. This Jesus is the Son of God, who calms the stormy sea, and says just enough to reassure the disciples, "Take courage. It is I; don't be afraid."

The celebration of a Jubilee is a moment to thank God publicly for a lifetime of love and service within the Church; for protection from God who has held us by the right hand, from God whom we chose to be our portion forever, many years ago: 25, 50, 60, 70, and even 75 years ago in this Mercy Congregation.<sup>1</sup>

Our jubilarians have served the Lord in education and health care, pastoral care and administration, social work, parish work and counseling. They responded to the needy in a myriad of ways through their presence, their prayer and their suffering in union with Christ. Today is a day to give thanks and praise to God who has done great things for us!

Our vocation to the Sisters of Mercy has been a gift and continues to be an on-going call: To live joyfully in the spirit of our foundress. We are the daughters of Catherine McAuley, as we sang so many years ago. She was a brave and determined woman who knew deprivation and hardship, who lost her parents and struggled to keep her

family together in the hostile environment of anti-Catholic Dublin of the 1800's. A person internally displaced within her own country and culture, Catherine McAuley saw beyond herself to the plight of destitute women and children in the Dublin streets. She tried to save women and children from prostitution and workhouses. In our day, these children would be trafficked, and these women would be bused from our borders to detention camps.

When the Providence of God changed her financial circumstances, Catherine McAuley spent all she had to better the lives of the poor women and children by opening the first House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin on September 24, 1827. All the while, she was impelled by the conviction that God, to whom she dedicated herself for time and eternity, sent her and her companions to bring relief and comfort to God's own poor, vulnerable children. She was convinced that, by serving suffering people, she was serving and loving Jesus Christ her Lord.

What a marvelous gift each of us jubilarians has received: To share with Catherine in Jesus' mission of mercy.

What a marvelous gift each of us jubilarians has received: To live a life infused by the grace

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**What a marvelous gift  
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has received: To live a  
life infused by the  
grace of God that  
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and resistances into  
moments of  
surrender, of peace  
and of contentment.**

---

of God that transforms our lost opportunities, our sins and resistances into moments of surrender, of peace and of contentment.

What a marvelous gift we have received to be called to a common life: To support and be supported by our companions on the journey—some of whom, like Sisters Joseph Mary Galli, Barbara Henry and Ellene Egan have preceded us into eternity. And one, Pauline Mary White, is a Carmelite in a small village in Wales.

When we were young, jubilarians ahead of us seemed so old! Now, that we're all living longer, maybe we have to think a little differently about the meaning of jubilee.

A jubilee can't just be a getting together for a luncheon, like a retirement banquet. Jubilee can't be the end of the story because the book is still being written!

By our vows we are committed to a dynamic life-long relationship with God whose love and unspeakable tenderness continue to lead us into the heart of the Trinity.

By our vows, we are committed to work for, advocate and pray for the welfare of all God's people in this world—you who are with us today, those near and far, families, the young and the aging, the lost, the vulnerable, ordinary people in distress or spiritual need.

We are committed to the protection of all God's creation--this earth, which is experiencing its own agony, passion and transformation.

Long ago the prophet Jeremiah spoke for God to the Jews of the exile reminding them of the covenant: "With an age-old love, I have loved you" (Jer. 31:3). There is a special significance to this term "age-old love" according to scripture scholar Carroll Stuhlmueller. The adjective "age-old" (*ôlam*) in Hebrew, refers much more to the distant future without excluding the ancient past. So, what does this mean for us jubilarians?

There is nothing to fear. There is nothing to fear because our future is provided for by the very One who initiated the covenant of love. It is a future more hope-filled, more blessed by God's mercy than we could ever imagine. It is a future of a Congregation that has relied on Providence from its inception—God's Provident Hand holding all our lives gently and lovingly.

On this day of gratitude, I ask God for three blessings for the jubilarians:

- May our Jubilee be a moment of joyful re-dedication to Christ in consecration and mission celebrated together with our community, families, and friends.
- May our Jubilee be that moment when, looking across the sometimes troubled waters of our lives, we discover ourselves held secure by the gaze of Jesus, by Jesus who says, "Take courage; it is I; don't be afraid."
- May our Jubilee take each of us to a deeper love and more authentic living, to a time when we can pray the words of Teilhard de Chardin, "Lord, lock me up in the deepest depths of your heart; and then, holding me there, burn me, purify me, set me on fire, sublimiate me, till I become utterly what you would have me be..."<sup>2</sup> ♦

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## Endnotes

1. These reflections were given at the Jubilee Mass celebrated in Burlingame, California on August 10, 2014.
  2. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*. <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1621&C=1535> August 2, 2014.
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# **For Rita Kaufman, R.S.M., on Her Golden Jubilee of Profession as a Sister of Mercy, September 8, 2007**

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*Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.*

Even without your name appearing on the invitation, I knew it was you, Rita.  
You invited the reader, a friend you knew, a friend who had been touched by you.  
You wanted me to come. So I knew it was you.  
As Jesus said, "I know mine, and mine know me."  
You imagined your own life bigger now, and different  
from the way you started fifty years and more ago.  
Not a churchy ritual, but a gathering of friends in the house of a friend.  
A commitment to be yourself has a very long history  
and women often want you to be just like them, no different.  
Years ago, before God, before us, before the Church, in a churchy ritual  
you made vows, those mysterious personal and public promises to take this road.  
Over the years you committed and recommitted yourself  
to wholeness, simplicity, telling, clarity, and care,  
first in public, but then for most of your life, quietly, personally, without fanfare,  
in the midst of social changes, political changes, wars on the outside and inside,  
economic reversals, ministry changes, scandals in the church,  
and your own transplantation from east to west,  
from old friends to new friends. And many new books.  
But you have stayed faithful, alive, evolving, moving beautifully.  
You have learned new languages for the spirit's journey.  
You have listened to many hearts, and your own heart has grown larger,  
a great mansion of many rooms, where each one finds comfort, peace,  
enveloped by your attentive listening,  
and your patient, respectful and freeing presence.  
What did you say, a wise question? Or just an empathetic phrase?  
How did you invite, but not invade?  
I know this mysterious gift, because I told you things  
I'd said to no one else in over forty years.  
With you I felt it was always the whole truth, there at the table with you.  
And now it came out as a simple statement, the right time for it,  
to say what was never really a secret, but just the truth.  
It wasn't a matter for me of being believed,  
just being heard for the first time, something always true,  
quiet and sure as morning coming.  
Morning and evening. The next day.  
Now it could be said again.  
So when I got the invitation without your name,  
I knew it was you.  
Be blessed and a blessing in our midst.



# Poetry

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*Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.*

## SILENCES

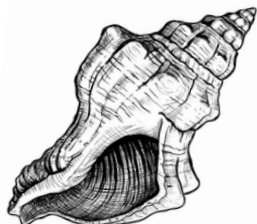
Some inner silences I know:  
When I mute a cry of pain  
Or long desperately to know  
Some solid thing of God  
that soars beyond theology.  
Then comes a pause  
Like the distance between stars  
Or the heavy depths of ocean.

I've set these silences aside  
as empty conch shells  
Whispering of seas no longer there.  
But now and then I wonder  
Are silences God's Voice!  
Is it that I simply miss  
God's subtlety of language?

--Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.

## Silences

In this poem it is the troubling silences that touch me. The conch shell that gives the sound of a sea that isn't there; the fantastic distances between stars; the deepest depths of the sea and most profound, the silence in response to our prayers. I haven't been in a space capsule circling the earth, but astronauts speak of a profound silence as well as of the astounding probability of other beings living on stars and planets. Beings whose speech and way of life we have yet to learn. So, is it strange that we should have to learn God's language? Silences can encourage us to discover and to learn.



### Trees

Some people say  
the majesty of trees  
is rootedness and  
supple loftiness of branches.

I say  
The suffering of seasons  
is what makes them matter:  
staying where their roots reach  
but letting go of leaves  
quite recklessly.

Their lasting  
Sparks some jealousy.  
What secret do they know?  
How dare they  
ask no guarantee of spring?

--Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.

### Trees

This poem is a very early one of mine, 1965 or so. I have always loved trees, and as a New Englander have delighted in their seasons. The fresh gold-green of spring, the full, heady green of summer, the delightful colors of fall and the sculptural reachings of winter, often softened by snowfall. Repeatedly they speak their beauty. In storms and hurricanes notwithstanding, they trust. No need to ask any guarantee of spring.

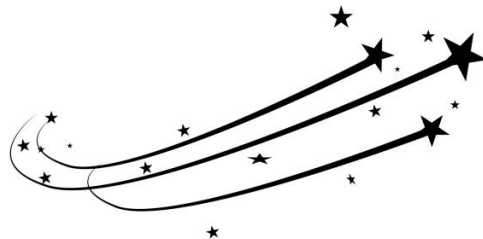


### Abram in Starlight

He rode a crest of yearning out of sleep  
that seemed unlike his thirst for sons  
--and yet the same. Made senseless  
by the sweetness, still he knew  
it was his God who touched him then.  
He hoped that Sarah felt this, too.  
In every other way than womb  
life was gendered in the woman.  
He drew gently from the blanket  
lest she wake to find him gone  
and count herself the reason.

He stood outside the tent in April air. Spring  
was in the stars' slow winking and the thirst  
for greenness sucked the earth. His bones felt dry.  
He reached them up, as if to steep them in the sky  
--then all the stars bent down! He touched their light  
and felt no other pain than peace. All thought  
went white before a love whose strength  
could bring the desert stones alive.  
Sarah! How he needed now to wake her,  
though he could not seem to shape  
the stirring of his soul in sound.  
He ducked beneath the flap; cold starlight spilled  
on Sarah's face, not sleeping now, but teared.  
He bent to comfort her, caressing with her name,  
and she, assured, began to kiss the wonder from his face.

--Audrey Synnott, R.S.M.



# Advent Reflection- Jesuit Retreat Center, Milford, Ohio, 2020

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*Fran Repka, R.S.M.*

READINGS: Isaiah 25: 6-10; Psalm 23; Gospel: Matthew 15: 29-37

The Scripture passages just proclaimed are just as meaningful today as they were in Isaiah and Jesus' time. Both Isaiah and Jesus lived amidst political intrigue and polarization. People were experiencing darkness, crippling sickness, shattered lives, hopes buried, wrestling with injustices, lost livelihoods and lost lives, just as we are experiencing today in this coronavirus pandemic. Separated from each other at life's pivotal moments. During it all Isaiah and Jesus give us a language of HOPE, a language that assures us that ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD.

Isaiah proclaims: "The Lord of Hosts will provide for all people an abundant feast of rich juicy food and choice wines...and wipe away the tears from all faces."

Then follows Matthew's Gospel, often referred to as "the second feeding story." Matthew's first feeding story appears in Chapter 14 where Jesus fed a Jewish crowd of 5,000. Today's feeding story appears in Matthew 15 where we have Jesus feeding a Gentile crowd of 4,000, seemingly a continuation of Jesus' ministry to non-Jews. This reminds us that the body of Christ includes all people regardless of race, color, creed; and includes all creation. All will be fed. **EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE WITH GOD.**

In this second feeding story, there are deep meanings for us in this first week of Advent. We are reminded to be watchful! Be alert! And this when we are already on constant alert fearing the impact of an unseen virus, leaving us with so much uncertainty. Jesus' call is not one of anxiety and fear, but a call to be attentive to the HEART, and to DISCIPLESHIP. We have faith in the nearness of God and God's action in the world.

First, the Heart. Jesus obviously had a warm presence. People followed him everywhere.

Jesus' compassion clearly starts with a heart intimate with God. It is our call too.

Matthew wants us to note that Jesus' compassion for the people starts with a heart intimate with God. It is important to name where your heart is. Finding where your heart is, is revealed in the choices you make. Your honest naming of where your heart is and accepting where it is, is Holy in itself. The Spirit will continue to lead you to compassion. God's unconditional Love is already within you, transforming you. Awaken to God's presence with you, for God is closer to you than you are to yourself. God pursues you. We all have a choice to accept God's intimate love or not.

Secondly, Discipleship. When our hearts are in union with God, it's impossible not to respond to Jesus' call to try our best to be in right relationship with self, others, and indeed all of creation. In Matthew's feeding story, Jesus shows us by his very actions how we need to BE with each other in this COVID time. Jesus after three exhausting days of preaching, forgiving, healing the blind, crippled, and mute, remains deeply touched by those whom he was healing. He could not send them home without feeding them. Jesus' compassionate heart is so at ONE with God that he cannot not do something for God's people. He took the loaves and a few fish, broke the bread, and gave thanks. Notice that he does not start by directly distributing the food. Rather, Jesus calls the disciples to distribute the bread and fish. In other words, the disciples who are already taken care of...are to CONNECT with the hungry, the sick,

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**ALL THINGS  
ARE  
POSSIBLE  
WITH GOD.**

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the blind and the deaf whom Jesus healed. It is this witness I believe that also moved the people to give and share among themselves until all 4,000 were satisfied. They too believed that there is enough. ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD!

You too are called to distribute bread, your bread, your self-gift. Whatever makes you YOU. What are your God-given gifts to be shared? If you don't know, ask God to reveal them to you in this retreat. Sometimes it is difficult to name our God-given gifts, but they are enough. If we hold back from naming and claiming our gifts, how will we ever connect these gifts with a hurting world in a meaningful way?

I like to imagine that after these 4,000 were fed, people experienced a new-found freedom, integrity, and a renewed energy for sharing. And still there were seven baskets of fragments left over. Doesn't Matthew's feeding story remind you of what we saw happening last week around Thanksgiving when all over the U.S., people were helping to feed each other, making sure families had plenty to eat. ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD!

And there are other God-given blessings that are witnessed: People caring about their

neighbors' welfare; families spending more time together; teachers and students adapting to a new style for learning; each one of us appreciating the sacrifice of first responders and essential workers taking risks to keep the rest of us safe and healthy; others serving our nutritional, physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. Aren't we all finding creative and simpler ways to be together? Our love for each other seems to be increasing and enhancing our perception of things we have not

been awakened to like the depth of systemic racism and prejudice in our country and society. We are discerning what is of value. Matthew reminds us that Eucharist and Mission are inseparable. The mission of the church is a continuity of the mission of Christ.

In summary, the coronavirus has taught us like nothing else in human experience that we are all connected, and that we are all vulnerable. During this retreat, what vulnerable moments need your compassionate heart in terms

of your relationship with God, with others, yourself, and indeed with all of creation? Be watchful! Be alert! Believe Jesus' and Isaiah's words that "something new is emerging" and ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD! Amen. ♦

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**You too are  
called to  
distribute  
bread, your  
bread, your  
self-gift.  
Whatever  
makes you  
YOU.**

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# The Second Sunday of Lent, March 13, 2022

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*Barbara Moore, R.S.M.*

Genesis 15: 5-12, 17-18

The author describes the making of the covenant between God and Abraham.

Psalms 27

The psalmist speaks of humankind's recognition of the covenant with God.

Philippians 3: 17-4:1

Paul refers to the fruit of God's covenant with us.

Luke 9: 28b-36

Luke shares the Transfiguration moment.

As I began writing this reflection the news of the sorrow and death in Ukraine loomed before me. Although war from afar has been part of my life since WWII, I have never experienced what these patriotic souls are experiencing at this moment. What message can our Lenten texts give us today? For the Ukraine is in the midst of a dramatic Lenten season.

This encounter, the "Transfiguration", appears in Mark, Matthew and Luke's Gospels.

That reality indicates that there was a rich oral community tradition around this experience. There are slight differences among the three Gospel accounts, but the similarities are important.

The Transfiguration as recorded by Luke today is preceded by a question Jesus asks. Who does the community think he is? We hear that Herod thinks he is a risen John the Baptist. But Jesus asks his close friends, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" Others think he is Elijah. But Peter gives a powerful answer. "The Messiah of God." Jesus then shares the reality of his coming death. What a contrast! Death for the long-awaited Messiah? The affirmation that Jesus is the Messiah and then the reality of his coming suffering coupled with

the Transfiguration must have been so confusing. But my guess is we all struggle with such extremes in life. A beautiful experience can be somewhat diminished by another's words or actions. The same thing happens in today's Gospel. And it is happening in Ukraine. The beauty, love, history and commitment of a people and nation are being tested. We might ask, "Where are their moments of transfiguration these days?"

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**The Ukrainians are seeing and hearing of the support, actions, supplies and prayers which must seem to them like "mini transfiguration" moments.**

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Jesus is seen by his three friends in dazzling white clothes speaking to the giants of his faith, Moses and Elijah. The Ukrainians are seeing and hearing of the support, actions, supplies and prayers which must seem to them like "mini transfiguration" moments. NATO, The European Union and other nations around the globe are in a posture of support and aid. But after the apostles' experience, Jesus again speaks about his coming death. And

I am sure the fact of death is very real for the Ukrainians, their families, soldiers, mothers and children and those resisting Putin.

Just as God assured Abram in the first reading that he would have land and descendants, the Ukrainians must fear a loss of both. Their

independence from Russia has gradually led them to a place of democracy and freedom which they cherish. It is interesting that this horror happens to them as Lent unfolds. The Ukrainians are already suffering their Good Friday.

As Jesus' ministry progressed, he began to predict his own death. He understood that both political and religious powers were suspicious of him and his message. It feels like the Ukraine is in the crosshairs of those who want to restore their power and control over them. Their suffering reminds me of the "Christ figure" who was aware of those who were threatened by him and wanted him out of the way.

In addition, two dimensions of the Orthodox Church are found in Ukraine. One community follows the Russian Orthodox Church, and another is called the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which was established in 1991 when Ukraine declared their independence from Russia. And we can see

that these national divisions can and do fuel divisions within their faith communities.

Perhaps the best Scripture for the struggles our brothers and sisters in Ukraine are facing can be found in the Psalm for this weekend. It is Psalm 27. We hope all parties will read, pray and live its sentiments.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom should I fear?

The Lord is my life's refuge; of whom should  
I be afraid?

I believe I shall see the bounty of the Lord in  
the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord with courage;

Be stouthearted and wait for the Lord."

May that be our Lenten prayer for the Ukrainian men, women, and children facing such violence and fear. May our hope be that they will experience their own national resurrection. ♦

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# Homily for Third Sunday of Easter, May 1, 2022

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*Barbara Moore, R.S.M.*

Acts of the Apostles 5: 27-32, 40b-41

The Apostles disobeyed an order not to preach.

Psalm 30

The Psalmist speaks of God's rescue.

The Book of Revelation 5: 11-14

Using metaphors, the author speaks of the worthiness of the Lamb.

John 21: 1-19

Jesus appears to the apostles while they were fishing.

The appearances of the Risen Lord continue and today, it is a very interesting one with a deep and profound message.

Today, apparently Peter and his friends are returning to their professions or maybe needed food, or just needed to get away after the previous heart-breaking events. Peter says, "I am going fishing." and he is joined by several others.

John indicates that Jesus reveals himself in this way...". He was at a distance, cooking on shore and at first, he was unrecognizable; perhaps not expected amidst the ordinary events of the apostles' lives. Ordinary things like we all face; our work, our struggles, our hungers and sorrows. These ordinary things were all present as the disciples labored to catch fish. Then a simple direct question changes everything.

"Children, have you caught anything to eat? No! Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." Surprisingly the skilled fishermen, even after failure took a chance, responded and the catch almost overwhelmed them. Another Jesus' appearance was now recognized and Peter, "jumped into the sea" to reach him on the shore. Scholars debate what Jesus' appearances were really like because he

appears and disappears, comes through closed doors and eats with folks. But no one denies that something happened, and, in some way, he was present, recognized and even in today's Gospel, engages Peter in a profound dialogue. I find this Gospel very important. I say that because many of us do not recognize the divine presence within and among us. A presence in the most ordinary ways;

our work, our family life, and our community life. And sometimes that presence invites us to make a change, to take a chance, to "cast our nets over the right side of the boat" of our lives. To respond to a need when we believed we could not. To forgive another when we think we should not. To take a different direction when we are filled with fear. To speak up for peace and justice when we do not know the

response we will receive. "Casting our nets" in a different direction can be risky. And many of us know that reality to be true. I can understand why the disciples, as they reached shore, found it difficult to ask who this person was, but did respond to Jesus' invitation, "Come, have breakfast." A meal that reminds us of the Last Supper, the meal on the way to Emmaus and the feeding of so many on the hillside.

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It is important to understand that John's Gospel was written some 60 years after the resurrection. It was written to a believing community. The role of Peter was taking shape within the community. The three questions and images Jesus raises as well as the call to Peter to care for Jesus' lambs and sheep remind us of Jesus' description of himself as the Good Shepherd. They also remind us of what happened at another charcoal fire when Peter denied him three times.

Reconciliation and affirmation are evident in this text. Peter is affirmed in his growing role of leadership and forgiven his denials. Reconciliation and affirmation of one's role and gifts are so central to the Christian message. And even after all the sorrow, mistakes and denials, Jesus shows these qualities. I wonder why he asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Was it a reminder of his denials? The first time he asks if

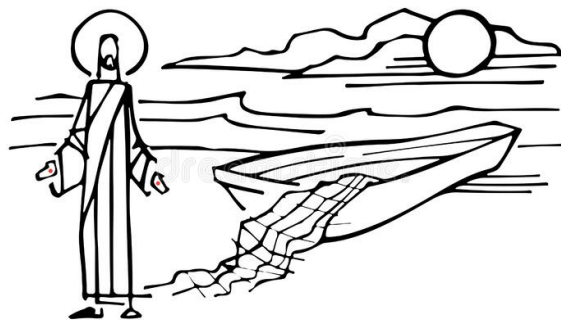
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**Reconciliation and affirmation of one's role and gifts are so central to the Christian message. And even after all the sorrow, mistakes and denials, Jesus shows these qualities.**

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Peter "loves him more than these?" Is he placing these burdens on him of taking care of the "lambs and sheep" as well as deep love to indicate that Peter will be called into leadership that will be difficult? "Someone will lead you where you do not want to go." By the time John is writing his Gospel, Peter has been led to his death.

I believe that this Easter season the risen Lord is making appearances in our world. He is present as people come to the help of the Ukraine in so many courageous ways. Jesus is present through the ways many people struggle to make the earth safer for his beloved "lambs and sheep." The risen Lord is present when his followers come to a realization that all of God's children, no matter their race, creed, sexual orientation or culture are "chosen in God's eyes." May these be the values that make us "throw the nets of our lives to the other side of the boat" in service and love. ♦



# Light from Their Lives: Learning from Our Mercy History

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Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.

When we set forth on the journey of preserving the untold stories of Mercy embedded in time, we get immersed in a history with multiple dimensions. We have to uncover the story, place it within its historical context and allow it to reveal its truth without forcing on it an interpretive lens from a different, later historical moment. Finally, the story must be shared so that others might discover its significance for contemporary society. The journey embraced in the telling of *Braided Lives: The Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento 1857-2008* is such an experience.<sup>1</sup>

The challenge of reclaiming the Mercy story during its pioneer period is multi-layered. This is particularly true in the case of the Sacramento sisters of northern California. Pressures of time, records lost through flood waters or fires, and a custom of attributing writings and accomplishments anonymously to “a Sister of Mercy,” made it difficult to reconstruct the story. However, the task of reclaiming the history resulted in insight into the enduring values of Mercy. It revealed the valor of Mercy women in the face of crisis, danger and challenges, and highlighted how the Sacramento sisters became so much part of the local civic community.

The historical silence around individual Mercy pioneers in Sacramento diminishes when I retrieved memoirs and newspapers of that period. Records about sisters like Genevieve McCue, who served courageously during Sacramento’s Great Flood, revealed her humor, dedication and willingness to serve.<sup>2</sup> Extended obituaries of sisters like Mother Mary Vincent Phelan and Mother Mary Ligouri Madden, leaders of the new independent Sacramento foundation, reflected patterns of collaborative partnerships, creative

responses to crisis and a foundation of strong personal relationships.<sup>3</sup> For the sake of the mission, the sisters as a whole accepted physical privation, personal suffering and risk knowing they were in it together. These patterns and values were passed down from generation to generation. They were as evident in the latter years of community history as they were during the first fifty years of the foundation.

The Sacramento foundation began in 1857 as a branch house of the San Francisco community. It was not initially meant to be a Mercy mission, but one founded by Presentation Sisters. The Mercy contingent was supposed to establish a needed school in San Francisco while the

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However, the task of reclaiming the history resulted in insight into the enduring values of Mercy.

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Presentation Sisters were to open a school in Sacramento. Arriving in New York, the Presentations left immediately for Sacramento with Father John Cassian. Once in California, the Presentation sisters discovered that Sacramento lacked what they considered required support for a cloistered community. Not only was the climate unhealthy, but the

geographical expanse of the parish boundaries and scarcity of priests prevented them having daily Mass in the convent. The Presentation Sisters deemed the city totally unsuitable for cloistered religious. If they had to go to Sacramento, they would return to Ireland instead.<sup>4</sup>

## **Mercy Sisters’ Changed Mission from Teaching to Healthcare**

It was at this point that the fortunes of the Mercy pioneers were significantly recast. Wishing to retain the services of the Presentation community, Bishop Alemany agreed to let the them stay in San Francisco and open a school. This decision meant that the Mercy community,

when it arrived on December 8, 1854, was no longer needed as teachers. Mother Mary Baptist Russell and her sisters had to revise plans by reading the signs of the time.<sup>5</sup> There was no lack of urgent needs in the city, for it had inadequate infrastructure to address vital services, especially healthcare. Mercy teachers instantly became Mercy nurses and caregivers.

The speed with which the sisters made significant changes in their plans is remarkable. Within days sisters found themselves visiting the sick in their homes as well as visiting the County hospital. It all revolved around mission. It wasn't easy. In addition to a city without organized infrastructure, the sisters were caught in the wave of anti-Irish, anti-Catholic sentiment that was sweeping California at the time. It was the period of the "Know-Nothing" or nativist movement, and it was this political group that dominated California politics. The sisters had to overcome the hurdles of being women, being Catholic and being Irish.

The early years of the California mission were harsh. The sisters had to deal with public hostility expressed through accusations of misconduct, mistreatment of patients and use of public funds for religious purposes. They were even accused of holding women against their will within the convent. On these occasions the sisters chose to remain silent and let their lives speak. The Grand Jury launched an investigation into the sisters' lives and ministry. The result: total exoneration of the sisters and the designation of the community as one of the treasures of San Francisco.<sup>6</sup>

### **Contrasting Welcome, Challenges and Educational Success in Sacramento**

The trials and tribulations of the sisters in San Francisco were not replicated in Sacramento. The contrast is striking. While the first three years of Mercy in San Francisco were marked by public attacks, public health crises and struggles to find adequate members to meet expanding ministry

demands, Sacramento city leaders mobilized to provide the community with needed support. The women of the city held benefit fairs and even Governor Peter Burnett contributed \$500 to the effort. For Sacramento, the arrival of the sisters was greeted by a belief that their presence would contribute to the growth of the city.<sup>7</sup> This belief led to a braided relationship between the Sacramento sisters and the city's citizens.

The foundation had its own hardships, however. Sacramento, a gateway to the mines, was a town built on commerce and trade. As an emergent city, it provided ample opportunity for commerce, but no levees guarded the city. Flooding and fires were frequent. Land prices were inflated as speculators bought up property. When the sisters arrived on October 2, 1857 the pastor of St. Rose Church, Fr. John Quinn, gave his house to them for their convent, a great act of charity on his part. Unfortunately, his house was damp and, even Mother Mary Baptist called it a "shanty."<sup>8</sup> Living in Sacramento's winter fog and dampness and summer heat was not helpful for the sisters. Some fell victims to malaria and consumption, and even Mother Mary Gabriel Brown, Sacramento's first superior, often had to be recalled to San Francisco to recover her health. Some sisters never did.

Unlike the San Francisco foundation which focused on healthcare in its early years, the Sacramento branch focused on education. That focus forged deep relationships of respect and caring between the sisters and families whose daughters were students at St. Joseph School. Many of the girls came from the families of civic leaders like C. K. McClatchy, publisher of the *Sacramento Bee*. School registers make clear that the school was inclusive of students from every faith, ethnicity and economic level. No one was turned away due to lack of ability to pay. The sisters provided an education marked by excellence, strong moral formation, and training for leadership as well as practical job

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skills. Female autonomy flowed from such formation.

At commencement time, the sisters invited everyone in the city to exercises that highlighted student accomplishments including not only oral presentations and dramatic productions but semi-professional musical recitals. Papers reported that people filled the inside space and overflowed to the convent balconies, leaning through windows to hear the exercises.<sup>9</sup>

St. Joseph's became known for more than great exercises, however. It was known as a cradle for future educators. In 1878 St. Joseph's became a "Normal" school training future teachers. Academy alumnae worked to equip science labs in public schools so they could meet requirements for accreditation by the University of California. The bond between the sisters and the public-school system became stronger as graduates went on to become teachers and administrators. One graduate, Minnie Rooney, was even elected to be Sacramento's superintendent of schools.<sup>10</sup>

An important aspect of forming young women for leadership was providing a model of what that entailed, a living example that actualized female authority. Historian Steven M. Avella suggests that the model of such was evident in the lives of the sisters themselves.

Their various services—healthcare, education, and childcare—were critical to the civic project. There is an added dimension to their work and presence in Sacramento that is worth noting. Not only did sisters provide critical social services, but they also represented a significant instance of female autonomy and agency that was remarkable in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Viewed from this perspective, their convents and various charitable and educational enterprises represented 'female-centered' space—enterprises

owned, operated and totally controlled by women.<sup>11</sup>

### **How Mercy-Owned Land Became the Capitol of the State of California**

Such autonomy came with financial demands. Right from the beginning, monies were scarce.

The County of San Francisco reneged on debt owed to the sisters. Mother Baptist had purchased the decommissioned State Marine Hospital to serve as St. Mary's Hospital and was balancing all the other expenses of her community, hospital and house of mercy. While financial assistance from the people of Sacramento was forthcoming, it still failed to cover all the costs. In 1858 Mother Baptist was able to purchase land for a new convent in Sacramento but did not have the money to build.

She said:

In time they expect to have a Half Orphanage, but it is pretty hard to raise the necessary funds even in this so-called Golden Country...In Sac. also they have a building lot secured but not the wherewithal to go further, however we console ourselves with the reflection that as a general thing great bodies move slowly.<sup>12</sup>

This situation got even worse when the State, seeking a site for the State Capitol, seized the sisters' land through *eminent domain*. Although land prices had significantly increased, the sisters were reimbursed for only the initial cost of the property.

### **New Building Projects While Aiding those in Distress**

The need for a new convent was urgent. A letter from Mother Frances Bridgeman says:

M.M. G's gave us more real information than we had for a long time and it is better, for one knows the worst then be in doubt---We had no idea that your present dwelling is so unhealthy & in such

bad repair---This of course makes the building more necessary---May God enable you to get on with it.<sup>13</sup>

They were able to “get on with it” in 1860 when sufficient monies were gathered to allow them to buy land for St. Joseph’s. The shanty was no more. A new, larger and drier convent and school was built.

The joy didn’t last. In December 1860 and January 1861 catastrophic floods hit Sacramento inundating the city. Although St. Joseph’s itself was flooded up to the second floor, pianos lost and little food salvaged, the sisters were intent upon helping the flood victims. Daily, citizens came by boat to take them from the second-floor balcony and row them to the Pavilion across town to help the survivors.<sup>14</sup>

It was this act of “being with” persons in times of crisis or need that first bound the sisters and city together. Citizens simply came to expect that where there was need, they would find the sisters. Writing about a steamboat explosion in the 1870’s, the *Sacramento Bee* noted: “The patients are receiving every attention at the hands of humane men and women. The Sisters of Mercy, as usual, on such occasions, are doing all in their power to alleviate the pains and agonies of the sufferers.”<sup>15</sup> Similar reflections were published about the sisters’ service during the 1918 flu epidemic.

While the sisters’ willingness to risk their own safety was a key factor in forging the link between them and the city, other characteristics were equally essential: inclusivity, courage to risk and collaboration. There was a striking inclusivity to all the undertakings of the Sacramento sisters. Not only were young women of every tradition welcomed to St. Joseph’s, but that same inclusivity was seen in health care. Even the first advertisements for Mater Misericordiae Hospital

noted that persons of all denominations and backgrounds were welcome.<sup>16</sup> As a result, support came from the city as a whole and not just the Catholic community.

### **Commitment to Serve Amidst Floods, Building Projects, and Enormous Debt**

Risk came into two guises, both demanding courage. First came risk to health and life itself. Disease, inadequate housing and scarcity were accepted for the sake of the mission. The second type of risk was financial. The pattern of the sisters taking on the burden of debt was constant over their 160 years of service. The first major struggle involved repairing and renovating St. Joseph’s which suffered major damage in the Great Flood. It had become unhealthy for sisters and students alike and suffered from overcrowding. Not everyone could even fit in the

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**Citizens simply came to expect that where there was need, they would find the sisters.**

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chapel. In 1868 a group of concerned citizens came forward to raise monies for the convent’s repair, but their efforts were vetoed by Bishop Alemany. To him, debt was a social scandal. He allowed no fundraising for the convent until the existing debt for St. Rose’s Church was paid. He wrote Mary Baptist to admonish the sisters to be patient, to not cause “anything that could place us in a bad light or hinder the work of paying the debt,”<sup>17</sup> Eventually the sisters were allowed to build but that did not happen until 1873.

The pattern of financial risk was continuous throughout the history of the sisters. The sisters always started ministries at the request of either the city or the church. Those collaborations were what made them such a vital part of the city. If the need was great, they were willing to take on the financial great risk. Nowhere was that more evident than in their healthcare ministry. By the second half of the 1890’s, the need for a private hospital in Sacramento was critical and physicians

begged the sisters to start a hospital, promising their support of the undertaking. Mother Mary Ligouri, then superior, took the leap and said "Yes." Monies were loaned solely on the basis of her personal bond.<sup>18</sup>

The physicians and citizens were true to their commitment to support the sisters in this work so much so that Mater Misericordiae Hospital had to expand capacity and upgrade technology four times within a twenty-year period. Each time the sisters had to fund the project by relying on benefactors or what resources they had. By the 1920's it was evident that a new hospital, one that was fireproof, was needed. Sister Mary Aloysius Nolan sent out "The Dollar Letter" inviting citizens to invest in the health of the city by funding the new hospital.<sup>19</sup> Once more the sisters accepted the financial risk borrowing almost \$400,000. Bishop Keane, a great support to the sisters, said at its dedication: "The Sisters of Mercy go into this magnificent building today under the shadow of a huge debt, but they do not fear, for they have faith."<sup>20</sup>

In the 1950's Sacramento came knocking again. This time a commission had determined that the city lacked 400 hospital beds. Mercy was approached to help by adding 100 beds to the hospital. Civic leaders from all sectors led a total city fund drive for the undertaking. Bishop Armstrong, supporting the decision to expand, declared a Mercy Hospital Pledge Sunday for the diocese and even Governor Earl Warren signed on as Honorary Chairperson. The fundraising drive was the most successful in the city's history.<sup>21</sup> Leaders of the effort realized that the amount of monies needed for modern hospitals to keep pace with need and new technologies were beyond the purse of the sisters and formed Mercy Foundation to systematically plan for future expansion.

### **Collaboration and Expansion**

Meanwhile, in Redding, California, the sisters had been asked to build a new hospital as well. In spite of their debt, the sisters agreed. The need

was great but the civic community fell short of the monies they pledged.<sup>22</sup> Once more, the sisters supplied the deficit even though expanding numbers of young sisters necessitated the expansion of the community motherhouse built in Auburn in 1940. Community funds were needed for the expansion and for the costs of educating the burgeoning numbers of new members. In the early 1960's, Mother Mary Teresita Durkin asked all the sisters to be sparing in expenses since the community carried a 6-million-dollar indebtedness.<sup>23</sup>

### **Collaboration and Continuity**

The key to the success of the Mercy mission in Sacramento was collaboration. This was most evident after 1886 when Sacramento became a new diocese and, following custom, the Sacramento foundation also became an independent community. From that time on it was all about partnerships. Always there was a request, a confirmation of need, and an affirmative response if a collaborative partnership with the community was possible. Collaborations worked because all were viewed as equal partners in the process.

While true for ministries initiated and sponsored by the sisters, such partnering was more complex in collaborations with the institutional church or the government. These arrangements were not always relationships of equal power. Partnering with government agencies resulted in loan defaults, unpredictable legislative actions limiting care of orphans and the necessity of having to seek legislative approval for aid to ministries knowing funding was dependent on legislative moods.

Church partnerships meant the sisters worked for the church but did not have autonomy in decisions about those ministries. A unilateral decision in 1957 to reduce community-sponsored schools to two-year entities in order to form a new two-year diocesan high school ultimately forced the closure of St. Joseph Academy. An earlier

diocesan decision in 1936 had transferred the sister's ministry to orphans at Stanford Home to the Social Service Sisters. Both meant the Sisters of Mercy had to surrender loved ministries. Such setbacks did not dim the desire to collaborate. In fact, in February 1984 the sisters voted to "expand the ministry through collaboration."<sup>24</sup>

The story of the Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento is a microcosm of so many other Mercy stories. It provides not only a picture of courage, compassion and devotion but also points to norms and practices which allowed the Mercy mission to flourish and expand over the course of over 160 years. The constancy of holding true to the mission and trusting in Providence was joined

by a commitment to the values of inclusivity, collaboration, and fostering human dignity. From these they never wavered.

The lessons emerging from their story are as true today as they were then. The Mercy mission flourished because, having accepted the call to Sacramento, the sisters built strong relationships with those served. They witnessed a solidarity with the people in good times and crisis times and saw themselves engaged in a common endeavor to better the lives of the people. No one was excluded. The legacy left to those who follow in their way is rich in values needed in contemporary society and makes their story a paradigm apt for today, one inviting reflection and study.◆

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The research for *Braided Lives, the Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento 1857-2008* was supported by a pastoral research grant from the Louisville Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Carroll, Mary Austin. *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, Vol. 4, pp. 32–33.

<sup>3</sup> *Sacramento Bee* (published as *The Bee*), "A Saintly Woman is Laid to Rest," May 2, 1902, p. 3.; Catholic Herald, "A Noble Woman and Ideal Religious," July 1, 1922, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Annals*, Presentation Archives, San Francisco (PASF) pp. 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> Katherine Doyle, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2004), p.81.

<sup>6</sup> Doyle, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, pp.92-93.

<sup>7</sup> Doyle, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>8</sup> Doyle, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, Letter to Mother Francis Warde, pg. 201.

<sup>9</sup> *Sacramento Bee* (published as THE DAILY BEE), "Commencement at St. Joseph's Academy," Sacramento, California July 1, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Doyle, *Braided Lives the Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento 1857-2008*, (London: Fonthill Media Publications, 2022), p.60.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Avella. *Sacramento and the Catholic Church*, (Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 2008, pp.

73-74.

<sup>12</sup> Doyle, *Like a Tree by Running Water*, Letter to Frances Warde, December 28, 1859, p. 200.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Gertrude King, *Early History of the Sisters of Mercy*, SOMA-AC, Box 7, 1.350.10, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Carroll, *Leaves from the Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, Vol. 4, pp. 32–33.

<sup>15</sup> *Sacramento Bee* (published as THE DAILY BEE), "Local News," Sacramento, California October 13, 1865, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Sacramento Bee*, August 31, 1899, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Annals of the Sisters of Mercy*, *Sisters of Mercy of Burlingame*, p. 523.

<sup>18</sup> Doyle, *Braided Lives*, p. 68.

<sup>19</sup> Sister Mary Aloysius Nolan, *Annals of Mater Misericordiae Hospital*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Nolan, M. A., *Annals of Mater Misericordiae Hospital*, SOMA-AC, Box 47, RG 1 3.400.2.14, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Superior California Catholic Herald*, "Campaign to Aid Mercy Hospital is City's Most Successful Drive," July 6, 1951, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Doyle, *Braided Lives*, pp. 128-130.

<sup>23</sup> Durkin, Mother Mary Teresita, *Minutes of Superiors Meeting*, September 18, 1964.

<sup>24</sup> *Catholic Herald*, "Mercy sisters opt for future expansion," February 20, 1984, p. 5.

## Book Review

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*Susan Sanders, R.S.M.*

**Mary Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. , *Braided Lives: The Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento, 1857-2008* (Arcadia Publishing, 2022).**

Braid: To plait, weave, knit, or even twist together. To bring together separate strands to create something new, and generally stronger, than what the strands could bring or bear separately.

Doyle's meticulously documented research braids together two seemingly separate legacies: That of the Sisters of Mercy in California, and that of the development of the Sacramento River Valley community. In so doing, she creates a new, more complete understanding of the development of the frontier gold-rush town that would later become the capital of the State of California.

Many local area histories or organization-sponsored "coffee table" books are composed mostly of pictures of notables and events that institutions publish to offer donors to mark anniversaries. Doyle, however, does not frame her history exclusively around the contributions of elite community leaders, most of whom are usually men. Rather, she weaves the stories and accomplishments of Sacramento civic, political, and philanthropic leaders together with another set of leaders whose accomplishments and contributions to the common good are often overlooked in both historical literature and organizational research: women who were – and are -- every bit the entrepreneurs and business people who helped Sacramento transition from a stepping off place to the goldfields to the capital of a state with the fifth largest economy in the world.

Doyle's research, however, focuses not just on the contributions of Sacramento women generally, nor on women who migrated to California as companions or independent seekers of adventure, notoriety, power, or profit. Instead,

Doyle's research focuses on a particular group of women who immigrated from Ireland, coming first to San Francisco and then to Sacramento, expressly to serve those in need, especially those who were homeless, orphaned, uneducated, or lacking healthcare. This group is the Sisters of Mercy, Catholic women who had vowed their lives to God to live simply, chastely, prayerfully, and to serve those in need, even if such service took them from Kinsale to a frontier town on the other side of the world.

Most people would call these women Catholic nuns. This appellation, however, is technically incorrect, as these women were not cloistered or confined within the walls of a convent campus. Rather, because these women walked and worked outside the cloister, they were then, and still are, more appropriately called Catholic "sisters," not Catholic nuns. Doyle makes this distinction clear as she describes in detail the sisters' conventual lifestyle and ministries, and how both changed to adapt to the needs of the times throughout their 160-year history in the area. The Sisters of Mercy who lived and served in the Sacramento River Valley were indeed what they had been called in Ireland: the "walking sisters."

It is their story – their vision, lifestyle, decisions, and institutional contributions – that Doyle uniquely weaves together with the decisions, actions, and accomplishments of Sacramento's lay men and women who were and are the movers and shakers of their day. Braided together, these separate stories contribute substantially to a narrative that illustrates how respectful and collaborative partnerships between the Catholic sisters and the civic community of Sacramento resulted in providing the social



service infrastructure and institutions that stabilized a town by making it an attractive community in which to live and work.

But why come to Sacramento in the first place?

Like many other religious communities of women whose congregations were founded in Europe, the Sisters of Mercy came to San Francisco from Ireland at the request of a local cleric who asked them to serve a burgeoning and desperately needy immigrant population. Having laid the groundwork for a new hospital in San Francisco, Mercy Sister Mother Baptist Russell and a companion, at the request of Bishop Joseph Alemany, traveled from San Francisco by steamboat to the Sacramento area to survey a site for a new foundation and to establish a school. Once settled in Sacramento, the Sisters of Mercy, holding firmly to a Gospel vision and mission offered in the style of their Dublin founder Catherine McAuley, the sisters served all, but especially the poor, sick, and uneducated. Moreover, they served without respect to means, religion, class, race, or country of origin. Immediately, the Sacramento civic community and Governor Burnett recognized the importance of the sisters' work and immediately began to raise funds to support it. This was the beginning of a 160-year successful relationship between the Sisters of Mercy and a generally supportive Sacramento political and civic community.

Organizationally, what factors made the efforts of the sisters and the civic community so successful and enduring? At least three factors present themselves.

First, the sisters and the civic community shared a compelling vision and mission. Albeit for different reasons, both communities wanted to create a better life for the people of the area. Both recognized that the common good of the area depended on assisting not only the entrepreneurs and the business community, but also those who

were impoverished, lacking education and opportunity, homeless and hungry, or suffering from the diseases and stresses of a frontier life.

What were the differences in their motivations? The correspondence of the sisters makes it clear they were motivated by love of God and the desire to emulate the life of Jesus who brought dignity, respect, and healing to needy and marginalized people. The civic community, by contrast, knew that Sacramento needed to be a stable, safe, and attractive place to live if commerce and government were to thrive there.

A second factor suggested by Doyle's research is that the relationship between the two groups seemed to be characterized more by collaboration than competition. The sisters themselves, or at the request of others, would found and operate a hospital, for example. Almost immediately, individuals from the community would step up to begin to raise funds for it. Success, therefore, came because relationships were collaborative rather than competitive.

A third factor contributing to the successful partnership Doyle describes is the flexibility and resilience of their leaders. As a Sister of Mercy herself, Doyle offers ample details about how area leaders, but especially sister leaders, maintained their mission even though the times demanded that the sisters be flexible about how they addressed it. Doyle's book is especially illustrative here as she gives an insider's perspective on the organizational dynamics and challenges different Sister of Mercy leaders encountered throughout the congregation's history in the area.

Such detail suggests three questions for students of organizational leadership and design. First, just as Jill Mattuck Tarule, Nancy Goldberger, Mary Field Belenky, and Blythe Clinchy have posited *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (Basic Books, 1988), might there also be women's ways of doing that distinguish their organizational

leadership and design from men? Second, how is it that an organization that is not founded on or driven by the profit motive has been able to sustain its mission and increase its ministerial response to people in need for over 160 years, even when those served cannot pay for what they receive? And finally, what kind of leadership does it take to weave together effectively the interests and objectives of two very culturally different groups of people, one of which is religious, the other secular, into a successful

collaboration that benefits the common good? Braided Lives offers a unique opportunity to study how two separate communities came together to create something new and stronger than what each community could have done separately. ♦

*Braided Lives: The Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento 1857-2008* is available through Amazon, Barnes and Nobles or through Mercy Center Auburn's gift shop.

### 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, then a Sister of Mercy, twenty Sisters of 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. MAST has been meeting annually since 1987.

The purpose of the organization is to promote and support scholarship and theological reflection on Scripture, theology, spirituality, ethics, and related sciences undertaken by Sisters of Mercy around the world, our colleagues and friends in order to serve the Church and the Institute, especially women. To this end the association encourages the publication of scholarly writing through the MAST Journal; the convening of an annual conference focused on issues of theological or spiritual concerns; and mutual support for its members engaged in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration.

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 theological education.

Julia Upton, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST's Executive Director. The Executive Committee includes Marie Michele Donnelly, R.S.M., Katherine Doyle, R.S.M. and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

For information about becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the Executive Director, Julia Upton, R.S.M., by e-mail at [uptonj@stjohns.edu](mailto:uptonj@stjohns.edu) or by mail at St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent Rd., Syosset, NY 11791-3863. Dues (\$25) can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to MAST Treasurer, Katherine Doyle, R.S.M., Holy Spirit Convent, 3920 West Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822-1123. Her e-mail is [mkdoyle@sistersofmercy.org](mailto:mkdoyle@sistersofmercy.org).

Since 1991, The MAST Journal has been published three times a year. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M. was the founding editor of the Journal. The present Editorial Board is: Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. Editor, Patricia Talone, R.S.M., Aline Paris, R.S.M., Sharon Kerrigan, R.S.M., Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M., and Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. Writers for the Journal include theologians living and working in the United States, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, as well as Central and South America.

Past issues of the Journal from 1990 to 2021 are available free through the MAST Archive at [www.mastrsm.org](http://www.mastrsm.org).

## Contributors

**Mary Ruth Broz, R.S.M.**, from the former Chicago Region, has spent much of her ministry in retreats and spiritual direction. She received an M.Div. degree from the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago and a D. Min. degree from St. Mary of the Lake University in Mundelein, Illinois. For almost 20 years, she was founder and co-director of Wellstreams Center of Feminine Spirituality. During that time, she co-authored the book *Midwives of an Unknown Future*. She continues to offer spiritual direction and does free-lancing out of Mercy Meeting Place in Chicago.

**Avis Clendenen**, Mercy Associate, holds a Ph.D. and D.Min. degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. She is professor emerita of religious studies at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, and a trustee of the University. Currently, she serves as coordinator for liturgy and spiritual enrichment services at Mercy Circle, a Sister of Mercy- sponsored continuing-care retirement community in Chicago. Avis is the author of *Experiencing Hildegard: Jungian Perspectives*, co-author with Sister Irene Dugan, r.c. of *Love Is All Around in Disguise: Meditations for Spiritual Seekers*, editor of *Spirituality in Depth: Essays in Honor of Sister Irene Dugan, r.c.*; and co-author with Troy W. Martin of *Forgiveness: Finding Freedom Through Reconciliation*. She continues to offer retreats and days of reflection on these topics. She has contributed several articles to *The MAST Journal*.

**Katherine Doyle, R.S.M.** is trained in history and spirituality. She received a M.A. in Educational Administration from University of San Francisco, and an M.A. in Liturgical Studies from St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. She has served as Director of Mercy Center Auburn, Director of Faith Formation in the Diocese of Sacramento, and Novitiate Minister for the Sisters of Mercy U.S. Novitiate. A Mercy historian, she has published *Like a Tree by Running Water, the Story of Mary Baptist Russell, California's First Sister of Mercy* and is a frequent contributor to *The MAST Journal*. Her newest work is *Braided Lives: the Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento 1857-2008*. She serves on the Executive Committee of MAST the organization.

**Jean Evans, R.S.M.**, holds a D.Th in Christian Spirituality from the University of South Africa. She received training in spiritual direction at the University of San Francisco and at Loyola House in Guelph, Ontario. After teaching high school in California for fifteen years, Jean volunteered with the Sisters of Mercy of Johannesburg, South Africa from 1984-2012. She was engaged primarily in the academic and vocational training of adults and marginalized youth. Jean also taught theology at St. John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria and at St. Augustine College in Johannesburg. With a long experience of offering retreats and spiritual direction since 1999, she is presently a spiritual director at Mercy Center, Burlingame and assists with Taizé Prayer around the Cross on First Fridays. She has published articles in *Catholic San Francisco*, and is a past contributor to *The MAST Journal*.

**Rev. Linda Mitchell Maloney**, an ordained Episcopal priest, received her Ph.D. in American studies from St. Louis University (1968) and her Th.D. in New Testament from the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen (1990), with Prof. Dr. Gerhard Lohfink as her Doktorvater. She is the

first woman in the history of the Roman Catholic faculty at Tübingen to earn the Th.D. in Scripture. Having taught American history at several universities in the 1970s (and co-founded the Women's Studies Program at the University of South Carolina), she joined the faculty of the Franciscan School of Theology at the Graduate Theological Union from 1989 to 1995. Thereafter, until 2007, she was academic editor at Liturgical Press in Collegeville, Minnesota. She was ordained to the Episcopal priesthood in 2003. Since 2005 she has served churches in the Diocese of Vermont and in the Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Montreal. She has been active since 1986 as a translator of books on Scripture, theology, and liturgy, mainly from German to English, including four volumes in the *Hermeneia* series from Fortress Press. She is one of the principal series editors of the feminist Wisdom Commentary Series published by Liturgical Press, and herself the author of the commentary on *Acts of the Apostles*.

**Barbara Moore, R.S.M.**, holds a B.A. in American History from Nazareth College in Rochester, New York, an M.A. in History, University of Rochester, and an M.Div. from Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in New York. Later, she earned a D.Min. in Preaching at McCormick-Presbyterian Seminary in Chicago, Illinois. She taught several years in public schools, then in Mercy high schools. She was pastoral associate and preacher at St. Monica's parish in Rochester. From 1980-1990, she was Director of Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry in Rochester. For the last 30 years, she has been a preacher in various Christian churches, as well as a monthly preacher at two Roman Catholic parishes in the Rochester diocese. Her public service includes an early 1990's internship with Congresswoman Louise Slaughter in Washington, D.C. and two years on the Congresswoman's local staff. She was Coordinator for Underserved at Highland Hospital in Rochester for 3 years, later Manager of Highland's Center for Women in Rochester from 1997 to 2002. From 2006 to 2017 she taught preaching as adjunct faculty member at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School. This included a short stint as Dean of Women and Gender. She has published three books on preaching. She maintains a blog on preaching and adult education.

**Maureen Mulcrone, R.S.M.** holds an M.A. in Theological Studies from the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and an M.S. in Broadcasting from Boston University. She has engaged in extensive continuing education in fund-raising through the Center on Philanthropy of Indiana University. Since 2015, she has served as senior philanthropic advisor to the Sisters of Mercy West Midwest and to the Institute. She has managed all aspects of fund-raising, grant applications and marketing for the Mercy Education Project, successfully increasing annual giving. From 1988 to 2006, she held a variety of executive and managerial positions within Trinity Health and Mercy Health Services, including System Vice President for Mission Effectiveness. With that experience, she developed teaching materials on health-related topics for courses in the College of Health Professions at the University of Detroit Mercy. She served in congregational leadership for the Sisters of Mercy Province of Detroit from 1980-1986 and has for several decades served on boards of trustees for Mercy institutions in health-care and education.

**Fran Repka, R.S.M.**, is a registered nurse and licensed psychologist. She is founder and Executive Director of both the Cincinnati Archdiocesan Consultation Services and Mercy Professional Services. The latter is a counseling center for the poor and underserved. She is a certified spiritual director who studied at the Jesuit Centre of Spirituality in Guelph and completed a Spiritual Direction Internship at Loyola University in Chicago, with sabbatical studies at the Weston School

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**Sue Sanders, R.S.M.** holds a Ph.D. in Public Policy from the University of Chicago, an M.A. in Public Policy from the University of California Berkeley, and a B.A. from Michigan State University. She is the former President of the Sisters of Mercy, West Midwest Community. Prior to serving in congregational leadership, she served in several vice-presidential and academic leadership positions at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, where she founded the Center for Religion and Public Discourse. She was also a professor of public policy, an academic position that began when she came to DePaul University in 1990. She was tenured as associate professor of public policy in the School of Public Services at DePaul University. She has served on several high school, university, and health care boards. She is widely published in the areas of the nonprofit tax-exemption, nonprofit management, and the governance and sponsorship of religious congregations. Her empirical research on teen dating violence, among the first of its kind, and published as *Teen Dating Violence: The Invisible Peril* (Peter Lang, 2001) has become the basis of high school curricula and workshops on teen dating violence in high schools across the country. Sue Sanders currently serves as an Institute Minister and is based in Omaha, Nebraska

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## *Discussion Questions*

**(Clendenen)** *As the universal church stands on the threshold of an enormous synodal invitation... are we up for the task as we were at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965?*

What are your hopes and dreams for the Church of the future?

**(Doyle)** As for your own congregational or regional foundation, what are the most meaningful memories from your Annals—the official record? Or do you feel most impressed by unofficial accounts and anecdotes from older members you have spoken to?

**(Moore)** As for “difficult texts,” which Scripture passages read at Mass, or the ones you’ve read on your own bother you? What is the reason for your irritation or puzzlement?

### **(Homilies, Sermons, Reflections)**

1. When you hear a homily that’s “good” what approach of the homilist, retreat leader, or reflector (male or female) do you appreciate? What content do you value?
2. Do you think women should preach regularly in a parish, or give a reflection during Mass? Is this likely in any parish or diocese you know?
3. As you view homilies given by women at the website, “Catholic Women Preach,” do you prefer some sermons to others? Do you think women and men have similar strengths and weaknesses as preachers?
4. Are there women you know who “have the gift” for preaching? If they don’t give the sermon at Mass, where else could that gift be used?
5. Do you prefer a homily or sermon that comments more on the scripture, or one that talks more about the application to Christian life? What balance do you think there should be in a good homily?
6. What do you think is the effect on spiritual life and self-understanding of hearing decades of homilies and sermons given solely by men?







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