

April 17, 2021

Mercying

We in the Mercy Family may now have reached one of the most demanding moments in our history. In trying to en flesh the persistent Gospel call to be a Mercy Global Presence, we now face the hard questions of the further personal and social conversion to which we and all humanity are summoned.

We use the noun, “mercy,” so much to describe our life and mission that we may have softened its meaning and treated this mercifulness as an already acquired and comfortable response to the world and its people. Perhaps we need to refresh our hearing of the full range of this Gospel call and reinvigorate our dedication to what Jesus constantly asks of us, by more often using the verb, “mercy.”

To mercy another, to engage in mercying, to mercify is to act and advocate, to heal and protest, to accompany and clear the way, to do the works of mercy in the field hospitals of the world and work to eliminate the need for some of these field hospitals. It is to succor the crucified peoples and call humanity away from its crucifying structures and practices. It is to become for and with others the active hands and voice of God’s own Mercying.

We in the Mercy Family are asked to become humble, minor actors in the transforming mission of Jesus the Christ. We are called to be those who watch what Jesus is doing, learn from and resemble him, and then join him under the yoke.

We are to be the mat carriers of the paralyzed, the coffin bearers in Nain, the arms on which the lame lean, those who listen to the mute and cry out for wider human listening, those who eat with and try to influence the tax collectors. We are to be the fathers and mothers of the epileptics, the hands assisting the blind, the voices that encourage lepers to come forward, the boy who brings and shares his two fish, the Simons of Cyrene, the centurions who offer sponges soaked in wine.

The action of mercying is more than doing the works of feeding, clothing, sheltering, and comforting. It is also persistently acting to remove what causes the need for such mercying: the unjust policies, the oppressive structures, the widespread ignoring of and casual indifference toward human suffering, the complacent attitudes of supremacy that allow such suffering. We are to be those who amplify Lazarus’s voice at the rich man’s gate, who stand with the Syrophenician woman pleading for her daughter, the Josephs of Arimathea daring to approach the Pilates of this world, and the Peters and Johns boldly teaching the temple leaders at the Beautiful Gate.

Through such mercying, we may slowly awaken ourselves and others from the harmful sleep of our inhumanity.

For the truth we need to face is that we humans are still unfinished, still in the long process of becoming true human beings. Both as individuals and as a global human family, we are not yet what our Creator dreams we will become. In the evolution of the cosmos and the slow maturing of all its created life and embedded energy, we humans are still a long way from what God hopes and helps us to become, both as individual humans and as one universal humanity.

We know full well that genuine universal love by and for all humanity does not yet abide on this Earth. Collectively we still lack the one full and defining human characteristic: universal love and solidarity. We are not yet a universally mercying species. We are on our way, Jesus' Way, in this slow conversion, but we have not yet arrived at universal, human readiness for the full and coming reign of God's own Love, Justice, Peace, and Mercy. The evidence for that unreadiness seems to be all around us, on our various hills of Calvary, near and far.

As a species, we are still crucifying peoples --in sundry modern, economic, political, social, and environmental ways too numerous to list. We also know – from examining our own lifestyles, behavior, and preoccupations – that we ourselves do not yet love all human persons on this Earth as widely and thoroughly as God asks. Our personal ignorance, indifference, preferences, and actions are too often self-absorbed and self-constraining. We too easily construct excuses for the limits we place on our mercying.

So, we must continue to humbly surrender to the transforming conversion that has been set in motion by God's mercying creation of us, the incarnation of God's own Son, and the generous gift of Christ's guiding Spirit among us.

We know that universal love of all humanity is not simply an intellectual attitude or a passive emotional sentiment. We know it is, more deeply, a daily and personal movement toward embracing and alleviating the sufferings of all our sisters and brothers in our Common Home – those we live with, those who live next door, those we see on television and in newspapers, those in the Amazon Forest, Haiti, Cameroon, Yemen, Myanmar, Guatemala, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and many other places. We know that we are called not only to relieve their misery, but to address its causes.

Yes, mercying is a huge, Gospel-size calling to which we weak human beings can respond only bit by bit. We know that our becoming, individually and all together, human persons who really love all humanity *as* Christ loves us is God's continuing creative work in which we are asked to collaborate as fully as we can. But as Catherine McAuley often told us: "If we are humble and sincere, God will finish in us the work God has begun. God never refuses God's grace to those who ask it" (*Practical Sayings*, 3).

Catherine had another word of sound advice that may give us courage and confidence in our daily mercying. She once told Mary de Sales White:

"The simplest and most practical lesson I know is to resolve to be good today-- but better tomorrow. Let us take one day only in hands at a time, merely making a resolve for tomorrow. Thus we may hope to get on – taking short careful steps, not great strides" (*CCMcA*, 365).

So let us resolve to take those daily steps toward becoming, and guiding the stumbling human family to become, the universally loving human beings God still dreams we will become. Let us press forward in our daily efforts to mercy. Let us find and bring our best alabaster jars of perfume to anoint Christ's body; let us clear the way for Christ and his donkey's feet; let us somehow stay at the foot of the Tree when we are tempted to flee; and let us bring our God-given spices to the bodies in a thousand tombs.

This mercying will be a long journey, a pilgrimage of short but constant steps, for which we may now carry too much distracting baggage and too little personal strength. But “God *will* finish in us the work God has begun.” One day, there will be a humble, loving humanity, a full, wide and true “Mercy global presence.” The Mercy family will not claim to be that whole wonderful presence, or its leaders, but only loving faces in the now truly human crowd. This awakened and universally loving, just, and merciful humanity will be devoted to the *common* good and will be lifted to such wholeness by the Ever-Rising life of Jesus the Christ.

Christ will have come through all the locked doors of our narrow conceptions and indifference; he will have guided our fingers to all his still-open wounds. And then, transformed, we will go to meet him in Galilee where, even now, he is preparing our Breakfast-Banquet. And, almost unbelievably, he tells us that the seaside fire of God’s merciful Reign that he is kindling needs and wants our small fish, our little mercyings, so let us hurry to bring them ashore.

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