



MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE

Reflections at the Beginning of Segment Two- Month Four: New Foundations in Mercy

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“Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it” (Jer 6:16). With these words of God in the book of Jeremiah, we begin our fourth month’s reflection in segment two of Mercy Global Presence. Before we focus on this month’s theme, to give us energy and to serve as a catalyst to our moving forward, we remember key voices from last month’s reflection, *Mercy and the Displacement of Persons*.

Gratitude for Voices from *Mercy and the Displacement of Persons*

We noted that displaced persons are a diverse group both within and outside our countries. They include refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, homeless or precariously housed persons, those with cognitive impairments, those who are trafficked for sex or labour, persons subjected to domestic violence, and elders in long term care facilities. The stark sculpture by Timothy P. Schmalz of the homeless Christ huddled on a park bench made the reality more real to us. So, too, did the touching painting of a young Australian Aboriginal boy by Margaret Smith rsm entitled *Reclaiming Place: Continuing the Story*. His is a culture in which every living thing is family, all of the earth is sacred and everything is connected. Margaret Hinchey rsm led us in a poignant theological reflection on Jesus and the Canaanite woman in Matt 15:21-28. She says, “This story sets forth who Jesus is as the Christ, the anointed one who reveals in painful human interactions what God is like. And that awareness and transformation in the very human Jesus came as a result of the actions of one of the poorest of the poor, the outcast, the ‘other’. Through this profound encounter, both Jesus and she were liberated.”

Malia Fetuli rsm began her powerful slide presentation with the words of a very well-known *Maori* (indigenous people of New Zealand) Proverb: “*Maku e ki atu, he aha te mea nui o te ao? He Tangata, he Tangata, he Tangata.* You ask, what is the most important thing in the world? It is People, it is People, it is people.” Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm spoke about the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on already traumatized migrant peoples, “What a paradox life is. They (our migrant brothers and sisters) left fleeing hunger and misery, and now a virus, miniscule in size, has the capacity to paralyze the entire world; questioning all of the comforts of a minority of the world’s population that has believed it had the power to possess life.” Sheila Curran rsm continued that theme as she set the context for the reflective prayer, “In the midst of this dramatic situation of COVID-19, which has “displaced” so much in our lives and in our world, we may have difficulty seeing, feeling and hearing the effects of this resurrection. This context reminds us of something we already know and which we too often forget – that it is the crucified one who is the risen one. The word of God comes to aid our fragile memory.” Accompanying her words was a moving painting entitled *The Future is in Our Hands* by the Syrian artist, Joel Bergner.

Margie Taylor rsm read for us a heart-breaking poem of the pain, suffering and resilience of a woman who had been trafficked for sex since she was a young child. The last verse of the poem reads

chapter 6:
i have hopes of a new story being born
with prevention, protection, and prosecution at its core
and with jubilation i will shout
I'M NOT FOR SALE ANYMORE!
the body holds the story

Among the rich treasures of readings, poetry, music and art in *Good Reading* is a modern painting of the Pietà by Vyacheslav Okun sj entitled. *This is "Good Friday 2020"*. One of his contemporaries describes the painting, "In this Pietà, Mary's suffering over the destroyed body of Christ after he is taken off the cross is reimagined and substituted as the suffering and grief of healthcare workers in the midst of the current global coronavirus pandemic."

New Foundations in Mercy: Energy to Respond

While we are now in "Ordinary Time" in the Church's liturgical year, our spirits echo with the resurrection stories from Eastertime. In the story of Mary and Cleopas on the road to and from Emmaus, we read, "They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?'" (Lk 24:32). We treasure the meaning of the Sanskrit word for "mercy" – *daaya* – in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions, "suffering in the suffering of all beings." The Jesuit James Keenan, sj echoes this sense, "Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of others." With hearts burning within us, growing in an understanding of mercy as suffering in the suffering of all beings and dating to answer Mercy's call to enter into the chaos of others, we hear with new ears the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* (#141):

We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.

We desperately need the energy embedded in these inspiring words to give us the wisdom and the courage to respond with new foundations in this troubling and tumultuous time. Four negative forces are visibly intersecting in our world today: an intensifying climate emergency; a resulting global COVID-19 pandemic; a resulting visibility of inequalities relating to systemic racism, sexism, ageism and homelessness; and a resulting increase globally in poverty and hunger. In June of this year, in preparing a submission to the Government of Canada outlining an *Ethical Framework for a Post-COVID Recovery*, Sue Wilson csj and Joe Gunn illustrate so well the needed response to this intersection:

While the task is enormous, so, too, is the potential. We know the policies which are needed to support an integral ecology which simultaneously cares for people and planet, to acknowledge the dignity of work and dignity of the person, to facilitate a reconciliation with Indigenous persons rooted in restorative justice, and to witness to both our shared humanity and the common good. It is simply a question of political will to make the policies and of the public will to live them.

New Foundations in Mercy: Readiness to Respond

We are aware that there are five key elements in any endeavour to re-vision: (i) knowing the essentials so that in the re-visioning the essence is not lost; (ii) knowing the social and historical contexts of our age, “the signs of the times”; (iii) being sensitive to the new images emerging among us; (iv) having confidence that we can actually do the re-visioning; and (v) being aware that transformation does not happen suddenly or at one moment in time. In the past months in our reflections, we have lived the first three of these elements.

In September in *Faith Traditions and Mercy*, we deepened our sense of the life-giving meaning of mercy by looking through the eyes of many faith traditions. Each major faith tradition holds mercy as essential to its life, is a name for God, is one of the qualities of God lived by people every day and is integrally connected to creation and to Earth. In October in *Mercy and the Degradation of Earth*, we looked at the signs of the times as they relate to the degradation of Earth. We could see a three-layered emergency: global climate change, approaching tipping points of ecosystems (Amazon, Arctic, Australia, and Antarctic), and the unprecedented threat of biodiversity loss and habitat destruction. In November, through reflection on *Mercy and the Displacement of Persons*, we recognized many displaced persons within and outside our countries.

In these three sets of reflections, we could see diverse and startling images of the realities around our world. Thankfully, we could also see signs of hope in response to what might appear to be overwhelming and hopeless realities. There is no doubt where Mercy is calling us today. She is calling us together to help shape an integral and integrating vision, one which allows people in all their diversity to flourish and one which allows bioregions in all their diversity to flourish. We know where our new foundations must be!

New Foundations in Mercy: Confidence to Respond

Our confidence to respond in shaping this integral and integrating vision comes from knowing that we have already begun to do so. We are growing in awe of that first incarnation of God in the creation of the cosmos. All our ministry – traditional and new – is now inspired by integral ecology as we respond to the cry of Earth and the cry of the Poor, know that this is one cry. No matter what the question is, the response is always inclusion – inclusion of humans and other-than-humans in the communion of all creation, inclusion of humans and Earth, inclusion of diversity of person and thought – always inclusion for greater richness, depth and growth. The globalization of mercy and justice is the only way to balance the globalization of greed and self-centeredness. We act always from compassion-filled hearts and spirits. In our own fragility, so foreign to us from our previous sense of power and dominance, we find true solidarity. And we live in a constant way of contemplation – personally, communally, and globally. Such are our new foundations!

While we do not always live into these foundations consistently or perfectly, we can look around us and see our sisters and brothers walk these ways of mercy with confidence and hope. This is not happening in one moment of blinding insight or in one focused place of foundation. But it is happening, and it must happen, and it will happen. The poem by David Whyte entitled “Just beyond Yourself” is taken from *The Bell and the Blackbird*. It was used in the reflective prayer on the LCWR website for 15 June 2020. It speaks so well to our promise to shape these new foundations and to our confidence to do so.

Just beyond
yourself.
It's where
you need
to be.
Half a step
into
self-forgetting
and the rest
restored
by what
you'll meet.
There is a road
always beckoning.
When you see
the two sides
of it
closing together
at that far horizon
and deep in
the foundations
of your own
heart
at exactly
the same
time,
that's how
you know
it's the road
you
have
to follow.
That's how
you know
it's where
you
have
to go.
That's how
you know
you have
to go.
That's
how you know.
Just beyond
yourself,
it's
where you
need to be.

“That’s how you know. Just beyond yourself is where you need to be.” We take joy in knowing that we are not shaping these foundations alone. God has always promised to be with us. We hear that promise in both the Old Testament (Joel 2:28-29) and the New Testament (Acts 2:17-18):

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old ones shall dream dreams,
and your young ones shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

We give our beloved founder, Catherine McAuley, the last word in our reflections today, a word given us one hundred and seventy nine years ago, just months before she died, a word as life-giving and hope-filled then as it has been throughout these years and as it is today, “Hurra for foundations, makes the old young and the young merry.”