



Reflection on the Mercy Day Gospel Reading

In one of the recent Sunday scripture readings, the writer of Ecclesiastes says ‘the heart of the sensible person will reflect on the parables’.

Today then, let us bring our senses to a reflection on this beautiful and challenging parable of The Good Samaritan. In so doing we will be close to the heart of Catherine McAuley who, we know, would have been familiar with this parable having read the scriptures daily to Mrs Callaghan.

When instructing her Sisters regarding their Mercy way of life she said ‘Mercy the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ for those who are desirous of following him’.

If we look closely at Clare Augustine Moore’s illuminated script of these words we see, within the upper-case ‘M’ of the word ‘Mercy’, Clare’s intricate illustration of the image of the Good Samaritan. And so I wonder if Catherine may have had this parable in mind when she instructed others about the meaning and practice of mercy.

Today can we take a fresh look at the parable, then – a look that might highlight the similarities between Jesus’ teaching and Catherine’s ‘doing’.

There is the man in need – badly hurt lying on the side of the road. For various reasons (we might even say ‘legitimate’ from their own point of view) the priest and the Levite ‘see’, ‘judge’ and walk by.

The Samaritan too, sees, but judges differently – he doesn’t ask ‘what religion is this man; what colour; what ethnic background; how did he get himself into this state...? do I have the time to stop; what will it cost me?’ No, immediately the Samaritan sees only one thing – another person needing immediate help: and he responds to that with an open heart.

He uses his own resources: of wine and oil (possible depending on the sale of these goods at Jericho as part of his income); he uses his own donkey to carry the injured to safety; he spends his own money on securing shelter, food and care for the man and

he calls on the kindness of the inn-keeper and his household to continue the care after he is gone.

So how does Catherine's practice of mercy mirror these actions?

Firstly: a need is seen and responded to – no 'what-ifs', no leaving it to someone else, no consideration of the person's background, status or reasons for how they 'ended up' in such a need - but immediate response. 'The poor need our help today', Catherine instructed, 'not next week'.

Secondly: Catherine used her own resources to do the works of mercy. At times these were considerable (Mr Callaghan's legacy) at other time very meagre (depending totally on whatever donations came in) but always she could and did give those resources 'that don't cost anything -the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and patient hearing'.

Thirdly: Catherine drew others into her 'circle of mercy'. Just as the Samaritan called on the inn-keeper and his household to carry on the kindness he had begun and possibly the retailer in Jericho had to be told why his order wasn't totally filled and his understanding sought. One could reflect on the reciprocal trust engendered among these people - the Samaritan, the inn-keeper his household and the injured man- a trust born out of a common desire to 'do and receive mercy'. And so Mercy expands into ever-widening circles.

Similarly, Catherine was joined immediately by other women attracted by her mission and today that same spirit and 'Circle of Mercy' continues to grow throughout the whole world, wherever Mercy Sisters and partners in Mercy continue the work of Mercy whenever and wherever it is called for. Shakespeare's beautiful lines on mercy come to mind '...The quality of mercy is not (con)strained'. And each of us is challenged daily to do all we can to strengthen that Circle of Mercy through unconstrained service of others.

On this feast of Our Lady of Mercy I ask myself, in my particular mercy ministry what road am I walking along? And who is on the side of that road in need of my hand and heart of compassion and mercy? –

- The physically or mentally sick?
- The child in class who doesn't 'fit the norm'?

- The, trafficked and abused woman looking for shelter?
- The refugee feeling abandoned and without any hope of a future?
- The homeless looking for a meal?
- The lonely and housebound?
- Our precious earth crying out for my respect and care?

And how do I best 'fit myself' for an unconstrained response full of Mercy to that need?

I remember some years ago the Australian National Conference of St Vincent de Paul invited the author, Morris West, to give the keynote address. One sentence from that talk has stayed with me: 'We are', he told the gathering, 'but hollow reeds through whom God sometimes chooses to blow his Holy Spirit'.

How do I become that hollow reed, enabling God's Spirit of Mercy to flow more freely through me to whatever need is calling out for it?

Like the sensible person in Ecclesiastes 'I will turn my heart to reflect' on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

And then?

I will 'Go', as Jesus commands, 'and do the same'.

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