



Celebrating Jubilee – Mary Reynolds rsm

Introduction

The celebration of Jubilee is a practice long established in our Judeo Christian culture. In ancient times, the Old Testament book of Leviticus directed the Hebrews on how to celebrate Jubilee and in the New Testament, Luke refers to the year of Jubilee as the acceptable year of the Lord or the year of the Lord's favour. The Church continues to celebrate Jubilee years, often called Holy Years.

The themes of Jubilee in our biblical and church traditions are of central importance to us as we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the opening of Mercy International Centre and as we mark that by a re-dedication of the Sacred Garden and the celebration of our heritage.

Returning to your own property and to your own home

The Book of Leviticus exclaimed '*It shall be a **jubilee** for you; each one of you is to **return** to your family **property** and each to your own clan*'. Mercy International Centre is the property of the Mercy family/ the Mercy clan. That is why we want to welcome you all home in this Jubilee year. This is the Mercy home to every member of the Mercy family, which throughout the past 25 years, has grown exponentially. The family now includes our 6000 vowed members, 5000 Associates and half a million partners in Mercy. Whether you have the privilege of being here in person or joining us on the web – our second Mercy home – you are heartily and warmly welcome- Go mbeannai Dia daoibh – the gaelic way of saying hello which means – may the blessing of God be on you.

Your Mercy home holds the story, the inspiration and the invitation to belong – to continue to live Mercy values and embrace the Mercy ethos, to experience Catherine's works and spirit and to keep Catherine's dream alive in the world.

This home preserves the heritage of the founding family of Mercy and provides a sense of place and continuity. It invites, grounds and frames the stories being told and remembered. The newly developed historical drama *'In God Alone'* recreates the life and times of Catherine in a compelling way and the Library holds biographies of Catherine McAuley and some of the early founding sisters, as well as a collection of books, written by or about Sisters of Mercy and Mercy ministries.

The Mercy world website compliments this physical home, ensuring the story, with its many faceted elements, can be accessed wherever in the world you are. A new feature of the reconstructed garden is the learning space, where the stories of Mercy will be shared with the expanding and diverse Mercy family and others who come to Baggot Street.

Coming home offers you the opportunity to experience the immediacy of the stories that link to Catherine and to the women of Mercy who followed her.

Memory is the sacrament of presence. We need to tell and retell the stories that made us, to know who we are. During these Jubilee days, there will be an opportunity to immerse ourselves in Catherine's story and in the stories of some of the women who surrounded her. In the Sacred Garden, we will remember the first women buried here and in Clarendon Street and all the people of Mercy whom we have known and loved. We need to bring forward the names of these valiant women, who came before us, 55 thousand recorded in our register, held here at Mercy International Centre –

- women who had the courage to break through the impossibilities of their time to bring help, healing and freedom into the lives of the poor, sick and oppressed and to work for systemic change;
- women who left home and homeland and braved the unknown to take Mercy around the world
- women who had the vision to see that nothing is of greater good to society than the careful education of women, so they could take their role in the development of that society and contribute to the transformation of society and empowerment of people;
- women who nursed with tenderness and care and who set standards in health care that are now recognised as the foundation of the current philosophy termed 'Careful Nursing' that promotes the nature and inherent dignity of the

human person, the existence of Infinite Transcendent Reality in life processes and health as human flourishing

- women who walked the lanes of towns and cities bringing temporal and spiritual comfort by their practical assistance and by the kind word, the compassionate look and the patient hearing of sorrows
- women who were ‘contemplatives in action’, fixed on what needed to be done and who never accepted a dichotomy between contemplation and the apostolate, insisting that active works must be done without losing awareness of the presence of God.
- women who were resilient in insisting on the role of women religious as defined by their constitutions, not controlled by the practise of enclosure or by inappropriate hierarchical interference in the internal affairs of the sisters.

We need to remember these women of mercy; to make them present in our society and church. The sacrament of memory will make them a real presence in our world. We must heed their example and energy if we are to be fuelled by a new vision of the future that involves opening up new horizons and indicating new possibilities. Mercy continues as it was for them, the business of our lives, as we work for the human betterment and the care of Earth through the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.

As we focus on ‘coming home’ for Jubilee, we are conscious of the crisis and experience of homelessness, both physically and spiritually in our world. Our Strategic Plan that directs our work, shapes our response to this reality by undertaking to:

- Make Mercy International Centre a home space of welcome and hospitality and a place of nourishment in Mercy heritage, spirituality, charism and ethos to all who wish to explore or experience the significance of Mercy in their lives.
- Extend the resources of Mercy International Centre beyond the home space by the use of technological and digital means.
- Respond to the cry of our ‘common home’, particularly the degradation of the environment by promoting sustainability and a realisation of our oneness in the sacred communion of all creation.
- Champion inclusion, belonging and the security of a home in a world of displacement and homelessness.

Sabbath

Sabbath was a core element of the biblical jubilee celebration. The people were to cease from their labours and leave the land to rest:

'In the Jubilee year, you shall not sow, neither reap that which grows of itself, nor gather from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you.'

The jubilee year was rooted in the observance of the Sabbath Day (Exodus 20:8-11). The Ten Commandments instructed the Hebrew people to honour the Sabbath through concrete action. On the Sabbath Day, people, animals and land were given a time to rest, protecting all from overzealous productivity. Unlike those of us in a work-addicted culture, the Bible's moral vision recognized that overzealous productivity, non-stop work, resulted in exhaustion—exhaustion eventually resulted in burn-out and extinction.

The Jubilee year was a time for reflection, a time to recognise the centrality of God in one's life, a time to renew one's dependence on the providence of God, a time to restore right relationships with God, with Earth and with all people.

Our Mercy wisdom stories echo a similar call. One of Catherine's well known maxims is that *'our lives should be as a compass that goes round its circle without stirring from its centre. Our centre is God from whom all our actions should spring'*. She counselled that *'intimate union with God is essential in order that our zeal may be fruitful'* and she drew comfort from the fact that *'in all our tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place centred in God'*.

Our world today is noisy, fast moving and frenetically busy. The fast food take-a-ways, the disposable commodities, the news and media overload, the congested traffic, are all symptoms and outcomes of overloaded lifestyles that crush out time for reflection and lead to stress with its attendant manifestations. A document published during the Year of Consecrated Life by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated life invited us to *'search the horizons of our life and our times, in watchful prayer; to peer into the night in order to recognise the fire that illumines and guides, to gaze into the heavens, looking for the heralds of blessings for our dryness, to keep awake and watch, and to make intercession, firm in our faith'*.

During this Jubilee year, we invite you to avail of some of the reflective spaces that Mercy International offers. Our programmes provide opportunities for reflection on how we are called to be receptors and channels of God's mercy in our lives and ministries; spaces such as Catherine's room, the Chapel, the Oratory and Catherine's grave are graced places of prayer and reflection. These can be visited, not just on site but on the Mercy web also and this makes possible a circle of prayer and reflection around the world, where we pray and are prayed for, thus creating connected fields of intercession and prayerful support.

A special addition to our Sacred Garden to mark the Jubilee year is the sculpture of Catherine, titled 'Come, Sit Awhile'.

Gael O'Leary, the sculptor of this beautiful image, shows Catherine as a woman of compassion, faith and hope. Sitting in the garden reading her psalter she is a symbol of today's Mercy people who seek to combine their need for prayerful reflection with the call to be engaged with those in need. Whilst finding her solace in prayer and her relationship with God, Catherine is ever ready to be there for others, with an open heart and listening ear.

In this setting there is an invitation for all who wish- Sisters, Associates, Partners-in-Mercy, Staff and Visitors- to come 'sit awhile' with Catherine; to be comfortable in her presence; to take inspiration from her spirituality and deep belief in the providence of God; to emulate her openness to others.

Compassionate Care of Others

In the Old Testament, there was a direct connection between Sabbath and care of others. Sabbath provided the opportunity to acknowledge God's sovereignty over his people and all their possessions which was intended to inspire in turn the magnanimous and compassionate treatment of the poor and the destitute.

This theme is taken up by Jesus as he marks the commencement of his public ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, he proclaims

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

The year of the Lord's favour, the Jubilee year, is a year when concern for the poor, the sick and oppressed are central.

There is an extraordinary resonance between this and the mission that Catherine set for her newly founded congregation. For almost 2 centuries followers of Catherine have dedicated themselves to this mission.

During the **Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy 2016**, Mercy International Association offered a worldwide reflection process for Sisters of Mercy and Partners-in-Mercy to discern together globally a shared response to the 'cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor' in our world today.

A wide variety of cries were heard that coalesced together as Displacement of Persons and Devastation of Earth. As we reflect on these now, we cannot but notice that these very same elements were core to Jubilee.

- freedom for those in slavery. Pope Francis has reminded us that new forms of slavery include the trafficking of people, an issue to which MIA gives major attention
- return of people to their own lands and possessions reminds us of the plight of the migrants and the homeless, two issues with which we grapple
- land redeemed to those who lost it through adverse circumstances such as poverty, highlights for us the responsibility to work for the elimination of poverty as we engage with the 2030 agenda and the promotion of the sustainable development goals.
- rest for the land could be phrased today as care for our common home.

Out of the discernment that followed the identification of the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor, there arose the concept of Mercy Global Presence, expressed as follows: *'In a global world, there will be a Mercy Global Presence. In a world of displacement, Mercy Global Presence will champion inclusion. In a world of degradation of the environment, Mercy Global Presence will realize its oneness in the sacred communion of all creation'.*

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In addition, there emerged a call for a new theology, new images of God, a new language and new conversations to underpin responses to these cries.

This Mercy Global Presence will find substance and shape through further communal and global contemplation. This will happen only with the ongoing reflective engagement, which will involve opening new conversations, finding new language, searching for new expressions of spirituality, and developing new theologies and new rituals.

Following the celebratory days of Jubilee, on Sept. 29th, the Mercy Global Presence process will be launched. This will be a 16 month engagement over two years that explores each of the elements -mercy, global, presence- and how they call us to dare Mercy today. The discernment will be supported by contributions from theologians, artists, ministers of mercy at the local and global levels and by other voices. It will also be supported by using the best and most creative online communications. There is a heartfelt invitation to Mercy people everywhere to engage in the process. The greater the engagement, the richer the outcome will be. We need each other to discern our path into the future. This is well expressed in the new Mercy International Association Vision launched as the Silver Jubilee year 2019 got underway. It expresses the desire to *'gather the inspiration and energies of the Sisters of Mercy, our associates, colleagues and partners worldwide towards the creation of a Mercy Global Presence'* and also the desire that *'through the work of the Association and the longings and efforts of the entire Mercy family, we will strive for the globalization of compassion and the recognition of God's mercy as present and active in our world'*.

All the programmes and activities of Mercy International Association, flow from and aim to actualize the Vision Statement. In this Jubilee year, a special Mercy Global Action one year programme was established to provide a transformational experience for women (lay and religious) who are passionate for advancing Mercy & Justice. It is a fellowship programme that aims to extend Mercy Women's sphere of influence. It provides an opportunity for fellows to establish strong links and networking across the Mercy world through international encounters, webinars and modules, mentorship and more. The programme has been designed to stimulate creative and critical thinking, promote collaborative leadership and personal reflection, leading to a compassionate and communal response to current concerns in our world. In August, 10 women commenced this programme with an immersion experience in Cambodia.

Care for Earth

The Jubilee year in biblical times was a year of rest for the land.

“Rest for the land” suggests pragmatically the need to protect Earth from maltreatment. From the opening pages of the Bible, the message is that human beings have responsibility to care for the non-human creation. Naming animals represents responsibility for them (Gen. 2:19-20). Being told to serve and guard the garden represents another form of responsibility (Gen. 2:15). The acceptable year of the Lord, the jubilee vision, includes earth care.

Pope Francis has given us the challenging encyclical *Laudato Si’ – Care for our Common Home* and has established care for our common home as one of the Corporal Works of Mercy. Catherine McAuley proclaimed that the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy were the business of our lives, so in effect we do not have choice in this matter.

We are all aware of what is happening to our planet today. It is undeniable that devastating events concerning the planet are accelerating faster than imagined, marring the beauty of God’s creation and hastening changes that threaten life sustaining eco-systems. Mercy International has long taken on responsibility for caring for our planet through advocating, educating and collaborating for environmental justice. We work at the grassroots, national, regional and international levels to raise awareness, and to implement programmes and practices that prioritise sustainable development for people and the planet. We advocate for clean water rights for all, standing in solidarity with and working alongside those most affected. Our call to our Mercy family in this Jubilee year is to recognise the interconnection of all life, to acknowledge that our actions, choices, and life-styles have the capacity to diminish creation or to conserve and sustain it.

Waters from around the Mercy world were placed in the rill in the Sacred Garden 25 years ago, thus creating a wellspring of Mercy. Today the wellspring source is marked by a bronze sphere that images our earth – our common home and our Mercy home. The waters that now flow from it remind us of the moral and spiritual challenge that the ecological crisis poses and our responsibility to take swift and unified global action to address it. The combined features of this area of the Sacred Garden -the water sustainer of all life, the beautiful floral designs created by Clare Augustine Moore, the

plaques that honour a host of mercy friends and loved ones, remind us of the importance of right relationships with God, with each other and with all of creation – a central call of jubilee.

In designing the Sacred Garden, special attention was also given to environmental and sustainability issues. Trees were introduced, plants that encourage bees and butterflies were planted, chemical free soil and mulch was used and facilities for rain harvesting were installed. The lighting installed in the garden is an extension of the e-lighting, recently installed in the centre that substantially reduces our carbon footprint.

As a gesture of solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters due to exploitation of our environment and devastations happening in our planet, Mercy International has contributed financially this year to three areas:

- Accommodation for volunteers working with people in Haiti suffering from the effects of earthquakes and landslides
- Rehabilitation for people in the Philippines affected by recent typhoons
- Water and Sanitation improvement in Nigeria, particularly focussed on schools

Conclusion

As we welcome you home during this Jubilee year, as we renew our attention to the ‘cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’, as we celebrate Jubilee in its true sense by recommitting to our relationship with God, with each other and with all of creation, may we each allow the words of Mary Wickham rsm to inspire us:

*‘God of the Universe, Maker and Sustainer,
You are the true global presence of Mercy,
Your Mercy infuses every part of everything.
Guide and free us to act with your righteous kindness and piercing justice
to bring all home,
to be at home,
to be makers of home. Amen.’*