

**CELEBRATING TOGETHER DURING THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC –
“A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE FOR SOME, REAL PRAYER FOR ALL.”**

United in Spirit We Gather...

PART 1

Reader:

This is a splendid and resonant day, September 24th...a date that echoes through the centuries.

It holds two connected meanings for us:

The first, an ancient Feast, Our Lady of Ransom, the Mother of Mercy, derived from the vision and ministry of St Peter Nolasco to liberate slaves in the 13th century.

The second, remembrance of a newly built house in 19th century Dublin beginning its first day as a home, derived from the vision of Catherine McAuley, to free the needy from ignorance, subjugation and disease.

We may call this confluence of two realities a coincidence of history, or we may claim it as a providential sign of the way of the Spirit. We rejoice at the inspiration given to us by two women who were devoted to Jesus: Mary of Nazareth and Catherine of Dublin.

How blessed are we to have been endowed with the name Mercy, and to spend our lives discovering its meaning.

The Feast Our Lady of Ransom emphasised Mary's role as conscience, as liberator and protector and one who calls us to action. Gradually the feast focused on her more maternal aspect, Mary as the one who reveals Mercy- literally in the person of her child Jesus, but also in her living, her ongoing discipleship, and her witness to the major events of the life of Jesus.



We join in song now

as we reflect on the life of Mary, Mother of Mercy...

(Sing of A Lady by Liam Lawton)

PART 2

Reader:

We move our focus now to the second woman of mercy who invites our attention and our devotion, Catherine McAuley of Dublin.



Let Mary Sullivan take us there:

The doors of the House of Mercy on Baggot Street opened on Monday September 24th, 1827- a date that would one day be revered...

Although Baggot Street, Fitzwilliam Street, and Merrion Square contained the well-adorned homes of the wealthy, the back alleys and narrow side streets surrounding them concealed the slum hovels and cellars of hundreds of poor families.

On September 24th... when Anna Maria Doyle and Catherine Byrn moved in, there could have been few furnishings in the house, beyond the odd pieces of furniture, bedding, dishes and other utensils Catherine brought from Coolock House...

In September 1827, poor families suddenly found, in their own neighbourhood, free schoolrooms for their female children. Within the week, homeless women and girls, and unemployed or barely employed servant girls also came to the door seeking shelter in the House of Mercy.

Meanwhile "Miss McAuley", as they called her, was travelling back and forth in her Swiss carriage between Coolock, Military Road and Baggot Street- probably with a sense of joy and gratitude that her long-held dream was coming true but also with fear, doubt, and apprehension...

(excerpts from Sullivan, M.C, The Path of Mercy)



Reader: We gather our thoughts and feelings about
the great feast of Our Lady,
and the great adventure in faith of Venerable Catherine McAuley.

We give thanks...

God of infinite Mercy,

We thank you for these two women, our ancestors in faith.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

Women of their own time and unique cultures.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

Women of the past whose stories and lives hold meaning for us in the present.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

Women of trust who pondered the Word.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

Women of faith who acted in the way of Mercy.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

We are glad and privileged to claim them as kindred.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

We are grateful to be descendants of their vision.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.

Guide us in the way of the Mercy they lived.

All: We thank you God of Mercy.



PART 3

Reader:

Mary is endowed with many titles and has been depicted in a variety of stylised ways over the centuries. One depiction of Mary that was common for several centuries from the 1400s in Europe was the image of Mary wearing her Cloak of Mercy, with figures gathered in under the canopy formed by the cloak. The metaphor of the cloak, the importance of Mary's cloak appears in folklore and devotional prayer to the present day.

In the Middle Ages the cloak of mercy image was often found at shrines dedicated to safety and gratitude for survival from The Plague.

As we are in the midst of our own Pandemic, with its tragedies and all its anticipated and unforeseen aftermaths, it is appropriate for us to reflect on what meanings the metaphor of the cloak of mercy holds for us today.

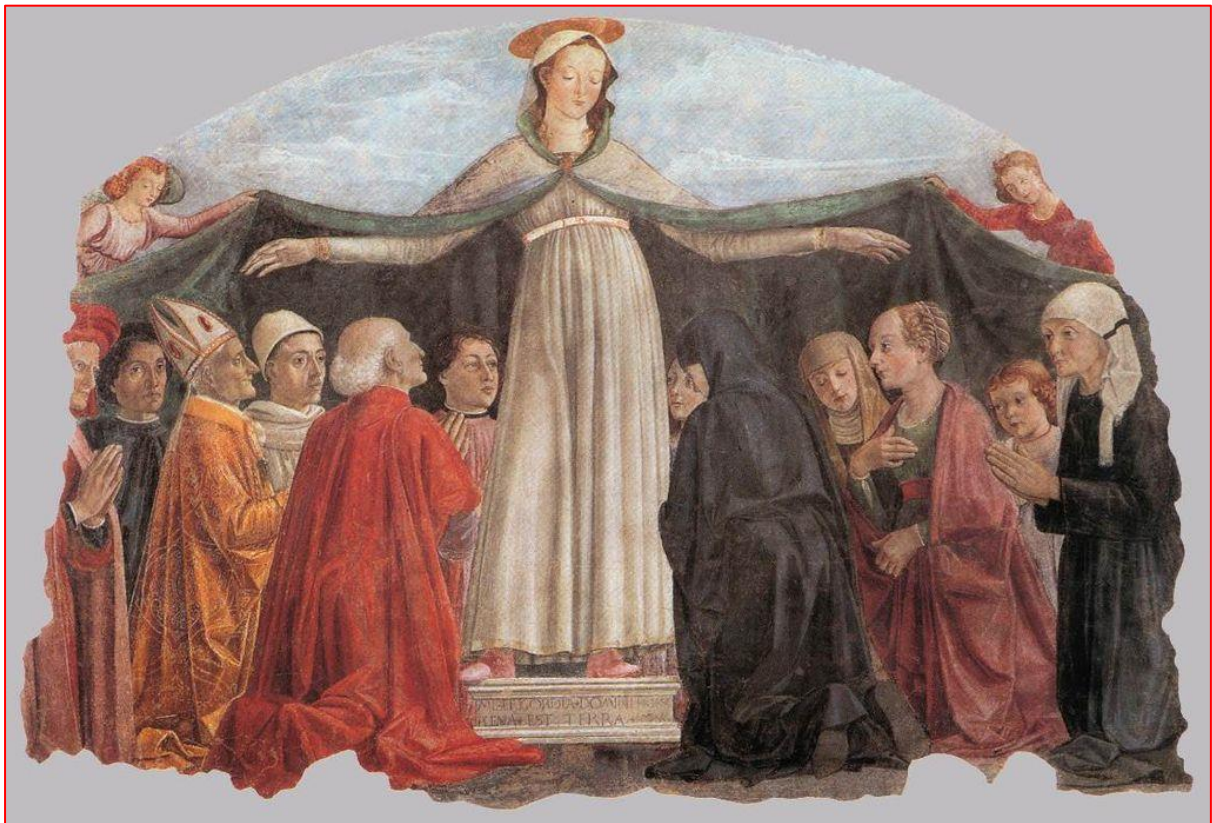


The words that belong to the Cloak of Mercy include:

shelter, safety, ingathering,
welcome, refuge, inclusion,
healing, protection, equity, community,
patronage, maternal love and strength...

How are these words calling us today?

Let's consider the fresco of the Mother of Mercy from the church of All Saints, Florence.



What do we see?

It is a fresco commissioned in 1472 by the wealthy Vespucci family of Florence, featuring members of the family as well as unknown figures. It was an early work of Domenico Ghirlandaio.

We see the old and the young, the powerful and privileged, the bereaved, the anonymous, the yet to be famous- the explorer Amerigo Vespucci is there as a teenager.

Mary is young; she has pink slippers! She appears to be pregnant. Mary has extra-long arms as if to extend the range of the cloak; the angels help her with holding up the cloak. The lining of the cloak is green, the colour of hope. To emphasise her singular holiness she is depicted as larger than those she is protecting. She displays a gentle strength in a painting that radiates a serene harmony. In its context though the reminder of suffering and all that this Mary will endure and experience is not far away since this painting is above the depiction of the Pieta figure cradling the dead Jesus taken down from the cross.

PART 4

Reader: We take pause now to consider how the metaphor of the cloak of mercy has meaning for us as the descendants of Catherine McAuley.

We are familiar with the sculpture, *The Circle of Mercy*, that stands outside the front door of 64A Baggot St, Dublin. Catherine's veil wraps around the woman and baby, with the suggestion of a cloak, to gather in and to welcome.



The original design, the miniature prototype made by Irish sculptor Michael Burke, was different in some ways from the final artwork. It made a more pronounced cloak effect out of Catherine's veil, as well as including a second little child nestling in the folds at Catherine's right. The veil is much more expansive and curves around to encompass the figures. Catherine, like Mary, wears the cloak of mercy, even if it is a religious veil. The hem of the veil wraps around like a shield on either side to protect and to unite the four figures.



Spend some time to ponder and share:

- ❖ How do we enact the metaphor of the cloak of mercy today and into the future?
- ❖ Who do we welcome under the cloak of mercy?
- ❖ Who welcomes us?
- ❖ Who is waiting for and needing our welcome?
- ❖ Who do we find it difficult to welcome or include?

(You may like to make some kind of symbolic gesture here- to write names or place symbols of those you are bringing under the cloak of mercy.)

Reader: As we move to the conclusion of our prayer time and mindful of the need and suffering in our world at present, from the nearest of our neighbours to distant lands and people,

Let's listen now to a poem,

called *Mercy Day*...

If we utter aloud the word *mercy*,
standing, each of us, by an open window
anywhere we are in the world,
then the word *mercy* will carry on the soundwaves
onwards and unceasing,
through the air of the wounded world.

And maybe, when it takes flight
into deed and kindness, justice and effort,
it will effect a healing, a hope and a blessing.
It may call the homeless home,
it may coax to hope the betrayed and broken,
it may ease the burdened earth.

Listen for it, the repeated word *mercy*,
on this Mercy day,
Listen for its neighbourly dialects and global idiom.
Imagine those who, like you, are saying it aloud,
and those who need to hear it, today- the word- mercy.

One word, one deed of justice, one kind effort at a time.

Creator God, Sustainer of life,
Jesus, our companion Word,
Spirit, who, like the air, inspires,
give us the simple daring this day
to say and to be Mercy.



Come on...let's do it...
let's say it right now, all of us,
let's utter it aloud,
the word

Mercy...



Reader:

In conclusion, we pray:
May our blessing be
to hear Mercy purely,
to know and speak it clearly,
to show and receive it lovingly,
and to become, each day,
more truly Mercy.

All: Amen.

Sing the Suscipe to conclude

Mary Wickham rsm