

Providence – what in God’s name can we do?

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! Providence, says Catherine McAuley’s biographer Mary C. Sullivan, is the most frequent reference to God in all her writings. “Her notable confidence in God – expressed repeatedly in her letters and implicit in all the prayers that were especially significant to her – was grounded in her faith in God’s mysterious but benevolent providence.” *The Path of Mercy, The Life of Catherine McAuley*, p 160.

Yet Catherine’s unquestioned trust in God was never a reason for people to fail in giving of their best. “While we place our whole confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our own exertions,” she insists. Life for Catherine was an alliance between her best self and the God who dwelt within her; it was her close relationship with God that formed the basis of her hope and confidence. Her daily prayer was that God might “conduct me by thy wisdom, restrain me by thy justice, comfort me by thy mercy and defend me by thy power.”

What does this trust in providence mean to those of us in Mercy ministries who may not match Catherine’s interior life, or her own deep awareness of God’s presence? How are we to align ourselves to this remarkable woman of faith, whose achievements are the inspiration and the measure for so much of what is still done in her name?

Whanaungatanga gives us a clue: in Mercy we never stand alone, we are in relationship with those who have gone before us, and with those who still invite us to be part of their ever-widening circles of Mercy. In the words of Sister of Mercy Elizabeth Davis, “we are walking this journey

Imaging Mercy Today



THE logo designed for the Holy Year of Mercy features Jesus as the Good Shepherd, taking on his shoulders Adam, as the representative of all humanity.

The image shows one of Jesus’ eyes merged with the man’s, to show, says artist Jesuit Father Marko Rupnik, how ‘Christ sees with the eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ.’

with people we are really privileged to be with.”

It is Sisters of Mercy, whose response to God’s call identifies them as consecrated women, whose vows are at the heart of every Mercy enterprise. In one way or another, it is in their family of faith that we are invited to share. Their ministry is increasingly a hidden, even invisible one: it may be their silent prayer that sustains our efforts in a busy, sometimes frenetic world. It’s a support of which we should never be unaware.

Each of us is also invited to be a person of vision, able to reflect on what we do for Mercy and what we bring to our daily work. There is a reason for beginning every important meeting with a time of prayer or quiet reflection, to renew and strengthen our links with Mercy, and to sharpen our focus. Is this the best we can do? Are these the unmet needs which Mercy invites us to address? Does this reflect our commitment to ongoing improvement? As Catherine herself put it, our resolve is “to be good today, but better tomorrow. Thus we may hope to get on, taking short careful steps, not great strides.”

As Mercy people, we also need to give ready hearing to voices like that of Pope Francis, who has declared a special Holy Year, dedicated to Mercy. One of the traditions for that Year, to run from next December 8 to November 20 2016, will be the opening of a Holy Door in St Peter’s and other major churches in Rome and around the world, through which pilgrims will be invited to pass, as a symbol of their forgiveness and conversion to a new life.

A question for us to ask already is ‘What doors can we open in our ministries, to give easier access to those who come looking for mercy or a lightening of the burdens that weigh on them?’ What initiatives can we take, to present better the image of a merciful God who rejoices to see captives at liberty, the blind gifted with new sight, the down-trodden set free and good news brought to the poor?

- Dennis Horton

Atawhai mai, atawhai atu Mercy given, mercy received

*E Te Atua hoa hiko,
GOD, companion on our journey:
you are within us and beyond us,
calling us in our hearts to a future unseen.
Increase our trust in your providence,
making our best efforts fruitful by your grace.*

*May we learn from Catherine to pray
believing the outcome is in your hands,
but to act as though all depends on us:
for if we are truly and totally yours,
we live and act by your grace within us.
As in Mary, let what you have said be done in us.*

*May we resolve, as Catherine advised,
to be good today, but better tomorrow,
moving ever forward with short,
careful steps, not great strides.
Help us to set our minds and hearts
on the forthcoming Holy Year of Mercy,
with wisdom to open new doors
for those who wait to be set free.*

*Enlighten our inner eyes, to make
a difference in our world through
the mercy we extend, knowing that it is
from the mercy we have received
that the blessing we offer comes,
in Mercy’s name. Amen.*