



## Lent 2011 – Week Four

Light a candle

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Open the prayer time by reciting or singing the Suscipe of Catherine McAuley

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Input on Catherine McAuley

### On the threshold of a new decade

It is significant that we, sisters and associates, gather together to reflect on Catherine and the Mercy way of life at the beginning of the season of Lent. It is also the beginning of a new decade. We are called to a change of heart, to deeper integration of our 'inner' and 'outer' lives. It is a time of remembering and renewing our covenant with God, each other, and ourselves – to look at the quality of our relationships, realizing that how we are with ourselves mirrors how we are with God and others. Lent is a time when we sort out what we need on the journey and leave behind what is no longer necessary for us to carry.

To do this sorting out we need to enter our hearts. We cannot move forward, cross the threshold unless we discover what our hearts hold. Only then can we decide what we need to relinquish so that we can step forward wholeheartedly to a new place. To move forward, to cross the threshold is a choice, but if we have closed hearts we cannot make this choice freely. A closed heart is weighed down with past hurts. It is paralysed by pain, disillusionment, fear and lack of meaning and passion for life. Above all it suffers from confusion. We used to know who we were. Unless we take the time to get in touch with the deeper meaning of our call to mercy and the power it has for us, our Church and our world, we will continue to suffer from diminished self-esteem. We need to welcome God's word, God's wisdom, and God's inspiration so that we can cross the threshold to the next part of our journey. God's word to us 'Return to me with all your heart' constantly re-echoes through the Lenten Readings. In answer to God's call, 'I have come to invite sinners to a change of heart' we respond with a plea 'Remember your love and your faithfulness, O Lord'.

When we look at the life of our Foundress we cannot but be impressed with how she made Jesus the exemplar of her life. She lived Mercy and in her dying breath she passed the charism of mercy onto her sisters. Catherine was impelled by God's invitation to be mercy, to enflesh mercy, and to extend mercy to a world desperately in need of mercy's courage, comfort and reassurance. God first and then Catherine has entrusted the covenant of mercy, the mission of mercy, to us her sisters, associates and friends

What does this mean for us? It means:

- (1) accepting God's love for us, so we can love ourselves and others unconditionally
- (2) recognising the abundance of mercy God pours into our hearts, so that 'the gift we have received, we will give as gift'. (Mt. 10:8)
- (3) welcoming the word of God into our awareness in such a way as to pay careful attention to where the dynamic energy of mercy is leading us.
- (4) allowing our hearing the love of God in our lives to move us to embody the word, the mercy of God. Our life in mercy becomes a sign of the continuation of the new covenant in Jesus.

- (5) becoming imago Dei – images of God in whom God dwells and longs to be proclaimed through our presence, our deeds, our words, our relationships.
- (6) recognising and receiving the life of God from others in all their diversity, difference and similarity .
- (7) recognising that being known by the other and loved by the other (as well as knowing and loving the other) is at the core of human fulfillment and participation in God
- (8) being challenged to develop a spirituality that helps us to remember God’s tender mercy for us and to embody covenant love.

Catherine was shaped by her experiences of love and friendship, by poverty and wealth and by her patient endurance of bigotry. She knew her own heart and encouraged her sisters to be in touch with theirs. She wrote in the Original Rule and Constitutions: ‘If our own hearts be not affected, in vain shall we hope to affect the hearts of [others]’. She knew from her lived experience that the mission of mercy depended on God’s faithfulness, as well as the heartfelt experience of the community as an impetus to effect change. Catherine always paid attention to her experience and honoured it as a place of revelation of God the Merciful One. The memory of her father’s care for the poor and her sensitive observance of suffering women and children touched her heart and deepened her desire to serve. Her letters show consistent references to her desire for intimate union with God and animated her service to the poor.

Her description of the necessary qualifications for a Sister of Mercy as ‘an ardent desire to be united to God and serve the poor...feel a particular interest for the sick and dying... [A Sister] should be healthy, have a feeling, distinct, impressive manner of speaking and reading – a mild countenance expressive of sympathy and patience’. Catherine was aware of God’s mercy in her life. She longed to share it with others and to express it practically. Hers was a spirituality that was based on the integration of prayer and service.

What she saw, heard and touched in the context of her life fashioned her into an authentic witness of God’s mercy. She met God in times of quiet prayer as well as in her meetings with others

For her relationships were a priority even when they entailed suffering. People were her foremost concern. She could identify with poverty and wealth. She emphasized cordiality to warm, renew, and invigorate others. She instructed her sisters to banish coldness from their hearts so that cordial affection would be evident in word, action and manners. Integrity of heart and the discernment of one’s words and deeds were central to Catherine’s authentic witness to Jesus Christ. She passionately believed that intimacy with Jesus would lead one to think, act, and speak in the manner of the Redeemer and his compassion for his suffering people. She was imbued with the profound realization of an intimacy that animates. God’s mercy provided the energy for all her activity. It was the source for the direction and endurance for her mission. The image of the Merciful One became flesh in her life and she walked among her suffering brothers and sisters to bring comfort and love to a world desperate and thirsting for God’s merciful touch.

We are called to do the same today. The mercy charism, the mission of mercy is entrusted to us. We, and all who speak and act in the name of the Merciful One, release God’s creative power and bring forth the promise of Mercy.

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5 minutes silent reflection on what has just been shared about Catherine McAuley

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Take 5 minutes to allow everyone to share aloud the names of those they know who are sick and in need of prayer. Each person will write the names of the people they wish to pray for, on a piece of paper, and place them in a basket.

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Spend 15 minutes in silent prayer for the sick

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Conclude with the prayer for sick through the intercession of Catherine McAuley

*Prayer for the Sick*

GOD OF LOVE AND MERCY  
YOU INSPIRED CATHERINE MCAULEY  
TO SERVE YOUR SON  
BY RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF HER TIME.  
MOVED BY HER CARE FOR THE SICK,  
WE ASK THAT THROUGH HER PRAYERS  
YOU REACH OUT WITH YOUR HEALING LOVE  
AND RESTORE

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TO FULL HEALTH.  
WE ASK THIS IN COMPLETE CONFIDENCE  
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST YOUR SON.  
AMEN

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