



**MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE**

Reflection for Segment Three, Theme One: Presence of God and to God

Elizabeth Davis rsm (Newfoundland)

As we begin the third segment in our four-segment journey through Mercy Global Presence, let us pause for a moment. Let us go gently through our first two segments centered on “global” and “mercy.” We have been enlightened by our exploration of “global” through the lenses of *Cosmos*, *Earth and Integral Ecology*, *People and Deep Social Change*, and *God Incarnate in Cosmos and Jesus*. We have been energized by our reflection on “mercy” which was centred on *Mercy and Faith Traditions*, *Mercy and Degradation of Earth*, *Mercy and Displacement of Persons*, and *New Foundations in Mercy*.

Now we turn our hearts and our spirits to our third segment, “presence.” Over these coming four months, we will contemplate presence of and to God, presence to Earth, presence in ministry and community, and presence to self and others. It is one of life’s ironies that we are beginning this contemplation six months into a global pandemic. In this time, presence is marked by face masks and social distancing which are poignant signs of our respect and compassion for each other!

Once again, diverse, and distinct voices will comfort us, amaze us, and dare us as we deepen our awareness of “presence,” beginning this month with presence of, to and with God. To help us prepare to enter this reflection, let us explore the presence of God grounded in three rich traditions: the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the words of Catherine McAuley.

Presence of God in the Old Testament

The wonder of God’s presence in the Old Testament flows through the two distinct images of God threaded throughout the biblical books, God as transcendent and God as intimate. The book of Genesis begins with two creation stories. In the first story (Gen 1:1–2:4), God is transcendent, creating the Cosmos with a word, “mercifying the universe into being” as the Muslim spiritual master, Ibn Arabi, tells us. In the second creation story (Gen 2:4–3:24), God is intimately present, perplexed about how to find someone to till the soil. In that story, we find a moving picture of presence, “They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8).

Two Hebrew “mercy” words intensify these two images of presence. In Genesis 9, the transcendent God shows steadfast love (*hesed*) as the first covenant, the covenant between God and all Earth, is established by God’s word, “I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and Earth” (Gen 9:13). But in the same account, we see the intimate God who, like us, forgets and, therefore, needs to be reminded, “God said, ‘When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on Earth’” (Gen 9:16). When Moses persists in knowing God’s real name, God answers, “‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’” (Ex 34:6-7). Here we see both the transcendent God keeping steadfast love (*hesed*) in the covenant relationship and the merciful God showing “womb love” (*rahamim*) for the people for all time.

The calls of the prophets reflect the diverse images of God's presence. Isaiah remembers the image of the transcendent God who calls him in this way, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple" (Is 6:1) while Jeremiah's memory of the intimate God who calls him is very different, "The LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth'" (Jer 1:9).

Whether the image of presence is one of transcendence or intimacy, the sense that God is on Earth and with the people permeates the Old Testament. One of the most touching and intimate names for God in the Jewish tradition is not used in the Scriptures but is given by the early Rabbis. God is Shekinah, "the indwelling of God."

Presence of God in the New Testament

While images of God as transcendent and intimate and living among us will also appear throughout the New Testament, it is the intimate God who is most visible and most present. Jesus addresses God as Father. The first time God speaks in the New Testament is to announce, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Jesus expands that intimate relationship in Jn 14:23, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." During his agony in the garden, Jesus makes a poignant plea to Abba or Daddy, the intimate Aramaic name for Father, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mk 14:36). Paul extends that same sense of intimate relationship with God to the followers of Jesus. "Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of the Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Gal 4:6).

One of the most startling names for God who is intimately present to us is found in 1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for *God is love.*"

The Old Testament promise of the indwelling God is reflected in the way in which we first come to know Jesus' presence on Earth. When the angel announces the birth of Jesus, we are told. "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him 'Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us'" (Matt 1:23). Matthew's Gospel ends with the same sense of the God-with-us as Jesus promises, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

In the Gospel of John, Jesus describes his own presence by using the Old Testament translation of God's name "I am": I am the Bread of Life (6:35, 41, 48, 51), the Light of the World (8:12, 9:5), the Door (10:7, 9), the Good Shepherd (10:11, 14), the Resurrection and the Life (11:25); the Way, the Truth and the Life (14:6); and the Vine (15:1, 5). Perhaps the most startling manner in which Jesus describes himself and calls us to respond is in the parable of Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (25:35-36). Pope Francis adds a seventh statement: "I was Earth broken and abused, and you showed me mercy."

The presence of God's Spirit, in the Old Testament in the book of Joel and in the New Testament in the book of Acts, is marked by inclusion for all, "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young ones shall see visions, and your old ones shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18). The fruits of the Spirit are described by Paul in Galatians 3:22-23: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

The sense of God present as Trinity, which becomes explicit in the later tradition, is implicit at the end of Matthew's Gospel, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). This is echoed in the blessing in 2 Cor 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you." Both references show the sense of community and relationship at the heart of God's presence.

Presence of God in Catherine's Words

Catherine McAuley knew the presence of God in her life. She reminded us about centering ourselves in the presence of God, "The practice of the presence of God is one-half of holiness" (*Familiar Instructions*, 36). She gave us hope in her words, "We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back" (Letter to de Sales White, 20 December 1840). And she gave us confidence that God is always present with us, "How quietly the great God does all those mighty works! Darkness is spread over us, and light breaks in again, and there is no noise of drawing curtains or closing shutters" (*Limerick Manuscript*).

Catherine frequently blesses in God's name, "May God in mercy bless and protect you all" (Letter to Teresa White November 1, 1838). In one of her blessings, she uses a Trinitarian image in speaking to God's presence within us so that we may respond in love and ministry, "May God bless and animate you with God's own divine spirit, that you may prove it is Jesus Christ you love and serve with your whole heart" (Letter to Frances Warde October 23, 1837).

Catherine's theology of suffering speaks to the presence of God and of Jesus, "Some joyful circumstance will soon prove that God is watching over your concerns, which are all God's own, but without the Cross the real Crown cannot come. Some great things which God designs to accomplish would have been too much without a little bitter in the cup" (Letter to Elizabeth Moore March 21, 1840). As we in this twenty-first century come to understand the continued suffering of the cosmic Christ in communion with all creation, let us find new meaning in Catherine's words, "Let us fly often to the foot of the cross and repose in the wounds of Jesus. He has written us in His hands. Shall we not write His wounds in our minds and hearts?" (*Familiar Instructions*, 72-73)

And always the presence of God leads to the shaping of the person who follows, "God does not look at the action but at the spirit motivating it, and God will judge and reward us accordingly" (*Retreat Instructions*, 82), and "It is not sufficient that Jesus Christ be formed in us – he must be recognized in our conduct" (*Retreat Instructions*, 72).

For Catherine, God is love is a constant theme: "Let charity be our badge of honor...so that it may truly be said, there is in us but one heart and one soul in God" (*Familiar Instructions*, 107), and "Our charity must be in our hearts and from our hearts, and a charity such as Jesus Christ practiced while on earth" (*Retreat Instructions*, 148).

So, too, Catherine frames the works and the way of Mercy in the presence of God and Christ, "Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our divine Master" (*Original Rule*, in Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, 297), and "The corporal and spiritual works of mercy which draw religious from a life of contemplation, so far from separating them from the love of God,

unite them much more closely to God and render them more valuable in God's holy service" (*The Spirit of the Institute*).

That trust in the presence of God in the works and the way of Mercy goes even further in Catherine's trusting that God's presence permeates the whole life and spirit of the congregation: "The Order is God's work – not mine. It will do just as well without me" (*Familiar Instructions*, 136).

Catherine's beautiful reflection on the intimacy of God with us is marked by joy. She says, "How acceptable it must be to God when we make God this return, showing to all, by a cheerful, happy countenance, the gratitude with which our hearts overflow towards God for God's many favors in this life, and God's great promises for the life to come" (*Familiar Instructions*, 149).

Our Journey Continues

Enriched by these three great traditions, let each one of us ponder these questions:

- ✓ When do I experience God as transcendent, far above me?
- ✓ When do I experience God as intimate, quite close to me?
- ✓ Where have I seen God dwelling among us?
- ✓ How have I seen God's Spirit poured out on me, on us, on Earth?
- ✓ How do I image God with the eyes of my heart?

The participants presenting the nourishment for this month's contemplation, the reflective prayer and the articles in *Good Reading* will bring us more deeply into a sense of the presence of God in our hearts, in our communities and on Earth. Each one who shares this journey will deepen that contemplation as together we rejoice in the God who creates and cares, in the God who dwells among us, in the God who calls us into relationship, in the God who is with us, in the God who suffers with us, in the God who is love, in the God who walks with us now and forever.



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Theological Imaginings: Presence of/with/to God

Mary-Paula Cancienne rsm (Americas)

Why are we focusing on *presence*?

When we use the word “presence” in a spiritual or religious context, we generally mean an experience of ultimate reality, or “God,” maybe through some experience of someone or something that serves to instill in us a greater sense of meaning. Maybe it recalibrates our attention in such a way that we discover increased meaning, hope or purpose, or we at least stop, pause, take notice of or savor an experience because it seems important. It may awaken in us a sense of awe and gratitude, simply or profoundly. -- We may have an experience of “presence of mind” whereby we or someone else attends to reality more respectfully and creatively.

Our experience of “presence” is for this world. Maybe it does hint at a hidden dimension or toward *something more*, yet when we experience “presence” it does feel hyper-real in the moment. It can invite us into a deeper now, as well as into future, maybe simultaneously, or maybe it takes us back to something we left behind too quickly. The experience of “presence” has a timelessness about it and a spaciousness that is both intimate and wide. It has elements of new and old.

I want to suggest that opening to the grace of presence involves three stages: vulnerability, revelation, and resiliency.

Reverent awareness of the depth of creation lives in the energetic play of vulnerability, revelation, and resiliency. The experience of presence speaks to an attentiveness to what is happening on many levels. It rides on the wings of life, alert to what is, open to emerging existence over the course of its long arching story.

Let us consider a conversation with a friend. – We meet and greet. We start with chit chat, then settle into a rhythm of back and forth dialogue, listening and sharing, reflecting together on current events and how each of us is moving through life during what can feel like an upside-down world.

Our defenses and walls come down gradually. Reverently we attend to each other’s story, curiously. We engage, raise questions, reflect, wonder, maybe laugh, maybe cry, maybe both. In this exploration and exchange we come to know each other and ourselves a bit more. Something bare, close to the bone, unarmed gives us pause. It seems like new territory. It was unexpected. What happens between us in these moments?

In the first stage, we surrender some part of our protective layer such that we expose something raw and unfinished about ourselves:

an event when I did not know what to do;

a disappointment when I felt rejected;

a moment when I got it wrong;

an experience with someone I wish I could do over;

a moment of appreciation and affirmation;

a day of delight when I tried something new and it worked;

a process of trial and error until things came together and this is what I learned.

Through this exchange we give over to the second stage, the grace of discovery and revelation. Surprise, something catches us off guard, we see anew, we are a part of ongoing creation, remarkably, works in progress that we are, yet ever still surrounded in mystery.

Yes, I am a mystery even to myself and I need the eyes of the other to help me explore the world and the landscape of my own soul, to see and feel and listen, to reflect on the soul of Spirit, of deep beauty, truth and goodness, and her presence and hiddenness in the world. Some degree of vulnerability is needed to open the door to awareness, to seeing, to listening, to the experience of presence or soul. In this kind of vulnerability, we experience some taste of the core of life, of what we call God or truth, or even love. It is resolute.

Vulnerability is not about emotionalism, false humility, attention grabbing behaviors, or a wet, mousy ego. What is implied is a humble willingness to be with one's own insufficiencies or incompleteness ("shadow"), and to sufferings and joys, disappointments and hopes, our own and those of others, and to be willing to reflect upon, examine, pray with and learn from these.

Ongoing revelation of Mystery continues but without these meaningful exchanges with others as well as with other kinds, like oceans and eagles, as well as solitary time, our lives would be lifeless. Presence is, foremost, about being willing to communicate, give and receive, from a place of authenticity, with and without words. A depth of truth is in this communication, revealing more than the communication itself can contain. -- The experience of presence is lightweight if we contemplate it as a noun. It demands ongoing listening and mature empathy.

Following vulnerability and revelation comes a third stage, resiliency. How do we enfold the experience of presence into our being? How does the experience shape us and the story that is unfolding and developing?

To return to my friend, how does that visit become part of us, how does it help habituate us toward the good, beautiful, and true, toward fairness and kindness, strength and compassion? Or, how does a walk in the forest and my experience of the presence of the holy in those trees do this? What surrounds us and binds us? How am I vulnerable to the trees? How do I experience their vulnerability? What is this exchange or encounter? What is revealed, continually? What evaporates, unable to hold forth, yet still perdures? What is resilient like a golden thread woven into the very fabric from beginning and through out? -- Prayer and meditation are practices, teaching us about presence.

Why are we focusing on “presence”?

I believe we choose to focus on PRESENCE because we are hungry for a greater experience of the Divine Mystery/Spirit/Meaning, both personally and collectively, among us and between us, in our everyday and in the world at large. This experience does not have to be loud and shocking but can be a knowing that is intimate and ongoing. It does not have to be rooted in ancient metaphysics but can comport with 21st century understandings of the world but with room for humility and mystery. Meaningful presence must be able to enter into the pain and hopes of many.

Some of our old rituals and patterns may not engage us like they used to. – Yet we have a desire for more of the mystery of holy presence, and a desire to be more of a vehicle for an awareness of the depth of this presence. — Zoom world, virtual reality, simulacra, will not suffice.

I cannot help but think that the experience of “presence” involves some degree of real vulnerability, our vulnerability, maybe God’s vulnerability, discovery or revelation, and a resiliency that enfolds this and carries on.

Link -- <https://youtu.be/-wL3sxCy9w>



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Artistic Response: Presence of/with/to God

Marilyn Brown rsm (The Congregation)

I have used a spiral to represent God in this painting, to echo the spirals used by some of the first peoples of the world - the Maoris, the Indigenous peoples of Australia and some Native American tribes - to represent the Divine in their art. Purple for the Holy Spirit and gold for the Creator, our Father/Mother God are seventh chakra colours which govern the energy of communicating with the Divine and green for Christ, the energy of compassionate love and healing, as well as deep incarnation within creation.

All of creation - contained in the Earth- as well as humanity – represented by the woman – are present to the Trinity. The air and waters of the earth are being cleansed of pollution, which has moved up into the Arctic Circle. This cleansing has been facilitated by Humanity being in lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The woman is distant/disconnected from the earth, both due to the lockdown and to us not seeing ourselves as part of creation, but rejoicing and giving praise for the cleansing of the earth. She is connected to the Trinity through Christ, the Way back into the cleansed earth.

The spiral purposely does not fit onto the page as God cannot be confined within space.

Questions for reflection.

How can we maintain this impetus of decreased pollution set in motion by our enforced lockdown?

How can we communicate with Creation in a renewed spirit of reverence and interconnectedness and no longer see ourselves as apart from/dominant over Creation?



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Grassroots Ministry: Presence of/with/to God

Maura Walsh rsm (The Congregation): 'Presence of God'

In the beginning

Growing-up in Ireland in an environment of Celtic Spirituality, in which God was not removed from the world and the lives of human beings, was hallowed. God was all around – in the landscape of sea and mountain, bog and forest, in the rising and setting sun, in the comings and goings of the seasons. Everything was sacred. Celtic Spirituality, alive with a felt sense of God in all of life, was part of the very air I breathed as a child, when I was born into this milieu on a rural farm in Co Mayo.



One of the first memories I have, is of my father ploughing the end field of our farm. He was preparing the soil for sowing the seed, while I was preparing to take my first steps. He did such work, very much aware of the presence of God in all of nature. This was true of all of my family. As children, we spent summer holidays working on the farm weeding the drills of potatoes,

turning the mown grass that we would later fork into stacks of hay; going to the bog where we would help with saving the turf needed for the fire, to cook and heat the house for the year ahead. We also helped with harvesting the barley and oats crops before we returned to school in September. My mother prepared the meals and often took them out to the fields to feed the hungry workers. She was the faithful companion in forming the family unit and grounding us in our faith.

One memorable summer's day I had the honour of minding my then three-year-old, fair-haired nephew Darragh who lived in Dublin City. As we meandered along a country lane, I slowly became aware of the wonder and awe that were present within him, in this country place. He had a fascination for ladybirds and lost himself in admiration of them. Children call us to be aware of all we miss in nature when we do not pay attention. Sadly, ladybirds are exceedingly rare now—and I ask myself what has happened to that endearing species? A ten-year research project in England shows that the population of ladybirds has declined from 99.8% in 2006 to 30.7% in 2016 (Wiley on-line Library). The decline has been blamed on changes to habitats, global warming, insecticide use, and the invasion of one species of insect by another. The worrying truth is that the population of all insects is declining globally. There will be a total ecosystem collapse if we lose our insects. What kind of world is emerging for Darragh's children?

Commitment

As I grew older, I was very much aware of the presence of God in all of life. This led me to become a Mercy sister. The motto I chose is, "Walk in God's presence" (Exodus 33:14).

As I have grown in knowledge and understanding, and have been exposed to learning in theology and scripture, my motto has evolved somewhat to, 'My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest.'

Science was my chosen discipline in University. Following my studies, I moved into the teaching ministry. One of the subjects I taught was Biology, and this helped me to continue to grow in awareness of God in all of life, especially in nature. I endeavoured to instil this awareness in my students. Something must have worked since several of them have studied a variety of Science subjects at third level, and some of them are involved in research. I am proud to acknowledge that they are making a positive contribution to our environment.

The Universe Story: A Revelation

My consciousness took a big leap in the early 1980s, when I heard Miriam Therese McGillis OP (of Genesis Farm in New Jersey, USA) give some talks in Ireland, on the Universe Story and the new Cosmology. Her input began with a ritual of the Cosmic Walk. This was a revelation for me. My experience with science had centred on viewing the world through a microscope, but Miriam opened up new vistas that came through viewing outer space through the Hubble telescope. I came to understand a fuller story of Creation as told through both our telescopes and microscopes. I began to realise that we are now in a position to understand the origin and process, out of which the universe has emerged; and with it the solar system, Planet Earth, all of life and the human as well.

Awareness began to dawn for me that there are critical environmental issues facing us, like climate change, deforestation, global-warming and waste management. Miriam warned us that if we do not address these issues, we are walking towards a "cliff". I experienced that image as being very serious for myself and the whole universe. How right she was. I am among many who are coming to know and embody this new understanding of what it means to be human, to be in relationship with Earth, and the whole community of life.

This was a transforming time in my life. Since then, I have been trying to grasp and understand the whole area of Creation spirituality and its implications for my life, the life of our Congregation and communities, within the whole community of life.

Spiritual Nourishment

There has been a wonderful revival of Celtic Spirituality in Ireland over the past number of years. Celtic spirituality is alive with this sense of the Presence of God. It fosters a contemplative approach to all creation, bringing with it healing and awareness. We see this in the lives of the Irish saints. One example is St Kevin who went to live in the remote place of Glendalough, to be close to God in nature. One story about Kevin tells us that once while he was praying in his cell on the side of the mountain, with arms outstretched, a blackbird by chance arrived on it and built a nest there. In time, she laid her eggs, the eggs hatched, and eventually the chicks flew away. He made a commitment to keep his arm outstretched because the presence of God in the bird and her chicks was so palpable for him. What an extraordinary story of stillness and contemplation.

Patrick Kavanagh, an Irish poet, was very much aware of this Presence. A few lines in his poem “The One” reveal his contemplative vision:

A humble scene in a backward place
Where no one important ever looked...
Prepared to inform the farmers
That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God
Was breathing his love in a cutaway bog

The “cutaway bog” is viewed as being totally useless. Here, Kavanagh finds God’s love even in such a place that would be disregarded by his local, neighbouring farmers.

Celtic Spirituality and Creation Spirituality share the vision of the presence of God visible and invisible in all of creation. It is a spirituality which invites us to stillness and silence, to awareness and to love. The challenge now is to reconnect more deeply with the natural world and find our rightful place within this sacred web. Thomas Berry asks us to “go to the earth as the Source from which we came and ask for its guidance, for the earth carries the psychic structures as well as the physical form of every living being upon the planet” (The Dream of the Earth, Thomas Berry).

Pope Francis gives the same message when he says “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (Laudato Si # 233).

Bringing it Home

I live presently on the outskirts of Galway city in a new-build apartment block. When it opened, *Teaghlach Mhuire* was the first non-domestic A-rated building in the country, receiving an award for Sustainable Energy. There are thirty-eight sisters living here, most of us being seniors. Our lives have been turned upside down with the arrival of the Corona virus. Lockdown began for us in March. As the pace of life slowed, I began to embrace a more contemplative stance and spent more time in our beautiful, courtyard garden.



Over time, I became more aware that, despite our award, we didn’t have very many bees and butterflies. Others observed the same, so we did some research. This resulted in our purchasing bee bombs, which are handmade seed balls, made from native wildflower seeds, local clay and sifted compost. They contain eighteen species of wildflowers, all native to Ireland. They grow easily once they have plenty of water and sun. We had some success with their growth and they attracted some more bees. As I mentioned

earlier, I am very much aware of how the number of bees and butterflies is decreasing. The challenge to us is to make pollinator- friendly choices. “Even growing flowers at home to feed bees contributes to this effort,” noted Graziano de Silva – the director of FAO, at World bee day in Rome, May 20th, 2020. Next year we will grow more wildflowers and hopefully attract even more bees and butterflies.



One familiar summer sound in my childhood was the distinctive call of the corncrake, a shy, elusive bird. Once a familiar sound on every farm in Ireland, they had suffered a drastic population decline, threatened with global extinction because of intensive farming. However, jubilation, the corncrake's call rings out again! Great news on local newspapers and RTÉ news on July 17th, 2020. Due to conservation methods by farmers, the numbers

are on the increase in areas in the West of Ireland – the town of Louisburgh, the island of Inishbofin, County Donegal, and the Shannon Callows in the Midlands. May this good work continue as people grow in awareness of the need to protect our environment.

As I write, lines from Mary Oliver's poem 'When I am among the trees' are with me:

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
And call out "stay a while"
The light flows from their branches
And they call again, "It's simple" they say
"And you too have come
Into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
With light and to shine"

Just before lockdown in March the buds were beginning to open. By the time when we could venture out, the chestnut tree sported its flowers as all the trees were in full bloom. Spring energy was flowing abundantly in all of nature and I enjoyed "staying a while" among and with the trees.

Amen

As I come to the end of this piece, I realise the spirituality of Catherine McAuley stirs the leaves of my awareness to continue to grow in the awareness of the Presence of God. One of her sayings "we have one solid comfort amidst all the tripping about; our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back" (letter to deSales White Dec 20th 1840) is very encouraging. It supports me in my growth in Spirituality, helping me realise that I am always in the presence of God; that this is my "solid comfort."

I conclude with a blessing from the late John O'Donohue. It encompasses all that I wish to express, and I offer it as a blessing for each of us and for all of creation.

"May you recognise in your life the presence, power and light of your soul. May you recognise that you are never alone, that your soul in its brightness and belonging connects you intimately with the rhythm of the Universe."

-John O Donohue, *Anam Cara*

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Mercy Global Action: Presence of/with/to God

Amanda Carrier rsm (Americas)

The pandemic forced us to stop. It forced us to be still, to take stock, and to reflect. Without the routine busyness of our normal lives, we could see the poor and the sick, and the marginalized and the oppressed with new eyes. Covid-19 highlighted systemic injustices, inequality, and marginalization but is also drew us, individually and collectively, into the presence of God. Though the pandemic overwhelmed us, we can hear the presence of God- in loss, hope, and the new normal- calling us to build back better.

We each lost something as Covid-19 touched our lives. Some losses were physical: jobs, homes, health, or life itself. Intangible losses gave rise to the emotional strain we all experienced as a result of the pandemic. Without the freedom to move, to be near our loved ones, or to feel safe and secure, we struggled to cope. Additionally, we experienced these losses in our isolation, which is a loss in itself. Yet, the experience of loss connected us all. Everyone everywhere shared this experience together, and this gave us an unprecedented common context on a global scale.

The global reality of the pandemic calls us to be present to all of humanity and Earth as this crisis highlighted existing injustices, systemic inequalities, and oppression. Housing, violence, migration, food and water, and our political institutions all showed blatant inequalities as Covid-19 swept across the globe. In the pandemic's light, we see how far we still must go in the ongoing struggle from a just and equitable society. The reality can overwhelm us as we bear witness to profits being valued over people and Earth.

Our presence to the cry of the oppressed under the pressure of our common experience of the pandemic generated momentum for change. The momentum, cultivated through the individual and communal integration of our Covid-19 experience, comes with a sense of urgency. We must not lose our momentum and the political will to act in this time of loss. We must not go through all this suffering only to return to the old normal.

We can already glimpse the new normal in the simple and heroic actions of essential workers and average people responding to Covid-19. The "pandemic of kindness" erupted with courage, artistic expression, creativity, and generosity. The "pandemic of kindness" is a testament to human resilience and hope. It is an outpouring of compassion and solidarity, which we can evolve into if we stay present to the movement.

While there is much to do across the spectrum of advocacy, from grassroots to the global stage, honoring the "pandemic of kindness" helps enliven and encourage us. The importance of holding this positive movement cannot be understated because just as we are present to God in the face of suffering and loss, we are also present in acts of compassion and solidarity. To keep the momentum of change moving towards a new normal, we must reflect on the presence of God in the kind actions of others.

The contrast of the Covid-19 pandemic and the "pandemic of kindness" recalls Mercy's long tradition of serving the sick, most notably our first sisters' response to the cholera epidemic in

1832. Catherine's constant commitment to the sick combined contemplation and action, holding the presence of God and the presence to those in need of mercy together. Catherine's experience of God's presence in all whom she served constantly refreshed her sense of call to be mercy in a suffering world.

Our continued call to follow in Catherine's footsteps and be mercy in the world today, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, presents us with an opportunity. Working to answer God's call to serve, we become co-creators with God. That spirit of co-creation with God now finds voice in the work before us: to form a just society. The call to seek justice and to be mercy can guide of transition to a new normal.

It is imperative now to ensure that no one is left behind as the world turns its focus to recovering physically, economically, and socially from Covid-19. We must elevate the voices of the marginalized, oppressed, and Earth to ensure a more equitable and sustainable future. It is important to incorporate our presence to God into the work of recovery because this will center our focus on upholding the inherent dignity of all people and the planet. Keeping dignity at the core of our work as a Mercy Family will help us do more than recover; it will ensure that we build back better.



**MERCY
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Distinct Voice: Presence of/with/to God

Agnes Hunter rsm (The Congregation)

PRESENCE OF

Life has taken a different turn we must all admit but nevertheless, everything happens for a reason. The COVID-19 Pandemic has silenced us down and taught us a new culture, a culture that we knew nothing about yet we must learn to adapt and dance along with lemon, and juice the lemonade out of it. After the Pandemic has come and gone with the help of God we shall have acquired a new “US” that will fashion us anew for life in the normalcy.

Social distancing has alienated us from the mutual closeness we enjoyed with people previously, hence in our new normal after the Pandemic, we will have to learn how to embrace people yet still observe the new safety-social distancing norm. We will probably need to be warmer in our conversations and relate deeply with people we care about rather than just routine handshakes and cheek pecks.



COVID 19 Pandemic took us all by surprise but, nevertheless, we thank God that our eyes have been opened anew for the new normal. We have learnt to appreciate life more, built lasting relationships with people, and our trust in God has grown to a deeper heights. Lockdown new normalcy helped us to build family ties and togetherness with our loved ones with whom we were locked down.

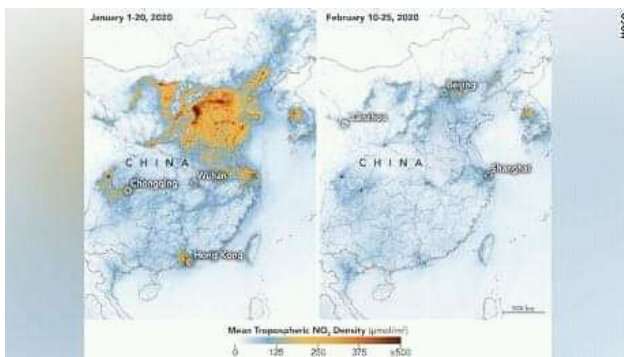
From left is Carolyne, Sr. Agnes and Mr. Mutua had visited but we were seated at a social- distance



After the pandemic, when finally the locks are lifted up, we shall walk a new into our loved ones homes and lives and possibly embrace life with new insights. A new “us” that we never knew before; “us” who can think differently.

From left Carolyne, Sr. Agnes and Sr. Regina

When we reflect on the presence of/with/ and to God during the pandemic, we noticed that even what we called tragic experiences, were in the plan of God. Therefore presence of God is the awareness of the omnipresence of God in our midst. There are many things we took for granted which COVID-19, brightly displayed as very important. For instance, I came across this information, about a satellite image that had been released by the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) that showed a reduction in emissions in China. As shown below.



The first picture was taken before the onset of CORONAVIRUS. The second picture was taken sometime during the pandemic. The first one has something like a scar in it but the second one has no scar – it is just beautiful to see. This shows that though the world has shut down, Mother

Earth is exhaling. The visible cloud of toxic gas hanging over industrial powerhouses like China (the world’s worst polluter) had almost disappeared. God is present to all his creatures and sometimes he uses events to manifest his presence.



These pictures show the Elephants in Maasai Mara Park. This was in an article shared in the Newspaper where someone had written, “Every year, the Maasai Mara, known for its

large population of lions, leopards, cheetahs, elephants and millions of herbivores, host over 300,000 domestic and international tourists. No single tourist has visited the Mara in more than 60 days. Therefore the animals are at peace. They are roaming freely and grazing without distractions, waste has also been controlled. The ground that was always littered with used water and soda bottles and snack wrappings is clean and breathing well as Coronavirus keeps visitors away”.

As an administrator of a Vocational Training Centre, where we train young women in computer packages, dressmaking, tailoring, hairdressing and beauty therapy, my mind was always planning what to be done in the institution, but during the period of stay at home, I recognized the beauty of creation just around us. The rocks below are just in front of our convent I have more clearly seen them during the lockdown.



No wonder Pope Francis said, in *Laudato Si'*, “God speaks to us through nature and it is through the beauty that, we know the nature of God”. The new normal invites us to look at the beauty of creation with gratefulness and joy. I believe as we move to the new normal we need to reflect on the past with gratefulness, the present with appreciation and the future with hope. And say, “COVID 19 was a blessing in disguise”.

Many of us have discovered a new “us” that we never knew before; “us” who have kept our journal books busy and made very powerful reflections and entries over the season, read books, prayed, rested, exercised, played games and learned new ways of being, still more “us” who have ventured into musical instruments and learned how to fiddle around with those amazing gadgets. The list is endless, lots and lots of people have what it takes to bounce back to after these frightful moments. We shall all put on a new dress of Transformation and welcome the newness in us all to flourish and blossom. Surely our lives after the Pandemic should not be a replica of what went before.

With our churches and places of worship locked up, we learned to turn our homes into worship places and reached out to God; a new norm. When we could not reach out to God

in our churches, mosques and synagogues, we reached out to him in our homes. We invited our families to be with us as we sought Him. In our new normalcy, our families will become centres of worship and God will be close to us unlike ever before.

PRESENCE TO

As I reflected on the presence to God, I remembered the story by William P. Young". A story about Mack, a man whose young daughter Missy was kidnapped and brutally murdered while on a family vacation. He receives a note from someone who signs the note as "Papa" Papa encourages Mack to come to the shack. Mack had long been seething with rage at Missy's death and in the depths of profound grief accepts the invitation and returns to the shack. Mack on arrival is met by Papa who turns to be God called Elouisa or Papa. He spends a weekend in the shack with Elouisa (Papa) and the other two members of the Holy Trinity, and Mack after the weekend leaves the shack a changed man. Mack only listened to Papa and the two members who stay with Him. I invite all of us to view the period of COVID 19 as weekend in the SHACK with Papa. A time when God wanted us to pray, listen and contemplate on our interconnectedness, a time to become creative and to think differently.

PRESENCE WITH GOD

We should approach the new normal as a new era, a period where we will learn that we are not sufficient and we need to journey with God and invite him in our daily activities. Like the disciples were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm, we realize we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented. So we too have realized that we cannot go on thinking of ourselves, but only together can we do this.

I conclude with a quote from what one of our sister of Mercy wrote in the Enews, about the pandemic that had affected people before and said, "When the danger passed, the people joined together again, they grieved their losses, and made new choices, and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully, as they had been healed". I concur with her and to say when this pandemic passes, may we be re-created a new, so that we may embrace joy the renewed face of the earth.



**MERCY
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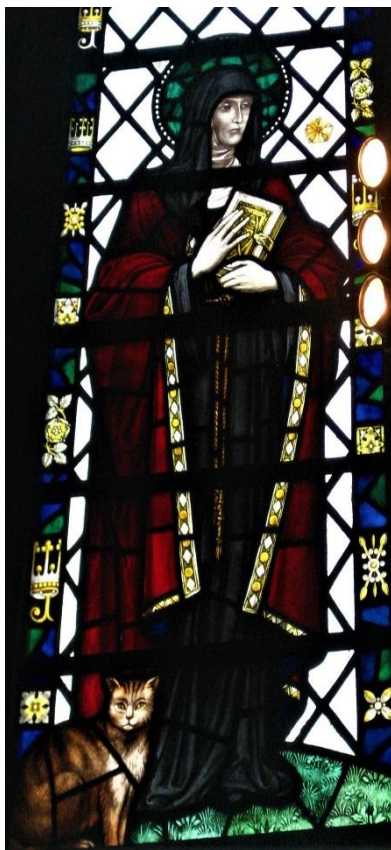
Reflective Prayer: Presence of/with/to God

Josephine Davies rsm and Cathy Edge rsm (Great Britain Institute)

Introduction

This has been an unusual year.

A year when for many of us there have been months of Eucharistic fast. Yet an opportunity to recognise God's presence.



One British woman whose life revolved around God's presence and who experienced serious illness was Saint Julian of Norwich (1342-1420).

Julian sees her entire life as a response to God's love and when she thinks she is dying she wants to live, so as to love God more.

Julian lived at the time of the Plague and in 1373 was taken seriously ill. She received the Sacrament of the Sick. During this time she had what are known as her 'Showings'. She became an anchoress and spent the next 15-20 years reflecting and praying about the meaning of these 'Showings', leading to 'Revelations of Divine Love.' This is the first book known to be written by a woman in English.

She wrote carefully in a context so as not to upset the powers that be; taken out of context her words could have easily caused some surprise and disagreement.

Prayer

Opening prayer

Awareness of the presence of God fills Julian of Norwich with joy, desire, hope and love. Lord, we pray that, seeking wisdom from her we may make your presence in our daily lives more conscious and vibrant so that we may be responsive to the graces, blessings and opportunities you offer at each moment of the day.

Hymn – Be Still My Soul: <https://youtu.be/5UJFw3p76d8>

Scripture – John 20:11-16

Meanwhile Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ ‘They have taken my Lord away’ she replied ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’ As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.’ Jesus said, ‘Mary!’ She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbuni!’ – which means Teacher.

Time for Reflection

We live in a time of instant gratification which we can sometimes expect in prayer. Julian teaches us the wonder of the unfolding of the answer to our prayer.

We know God’s timing is not always ours. But we also know God’s timing is always right, and that God wants good for us.

Jeremiah 29:11 - ¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Take time now with the quotes from Julian of Norwich and Pope Francis, either in text or using the video

Reflection Video – Presence of/with/to God: <https://youtu.be/CqG43h89YI>

All shall be well
and all shall be well
and all manner of things shall be well.

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 27

God of your goodness give me yourself,
for you are sufficient for me. ...
In you alone do I have all.

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 5

Easter summons us and invites us to remember His presence,
which is discreet and respectful, generous and reconciling,
capable of neither breaking the cracked reed
nor extinguishing the wick that burns weakly (cf. Is 42:2-3);
so that the new life that He wants to give us all, might pulsate.

Pope Francis - Page 46

In this little thing I saw three truths.
The first is that God made it;
the second is that God loves it;
and the third is that God sustains it.

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 5

You would know our Lord's meaning in this thing?
Know it well.
Love was his meaning.
Who showed it to you? Love.
What did he show you? Only love.
Why did he show it? For love.
Hold on to this and you will know and understand love more and more.

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 86

I came to realize that there were three ways of looking at God's motherhood:
the first is based on the fact that our nature is made;
the second is found in the assumption of that nature –
 there begins the motherhood of grace;
the third is the motherhood of work which flows out over all by the same grace –
 the length and breadth and height and depth of it is everlasting.
And so is his love.

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 59

May we find within us the necessary antibodies of justice, charity and solidarity.
We must not be afraid to live the alternative – the civilization of love.

Pope Francis - Page 49

“He did not say,
'You will never have a rough passage,
you will never be over-strained,
you will never feel uncomfortable',
But he did say,
'You will never be overcome.'"

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 68

The present pandemic, however,
reminds us that there are no differences or borders between those who suffer.
We are all frail, all equal, all precious.
May we be profoundly shaken by what is happening all around us:
the time has come to eliminate in-equalities,
to heal the injustice that is under-mining the health of the entire human family!

Pope Francis - Page 52

For in us is he (Jesus) completely at home, and has his eternal dwelling.

Julian of Norwich - Chapter 67

Questions for Reflection

How are you aware of God's presence in your life at this time?

Which quote from Julian or Pope Francis stays with you?

How does it reflect God's presence in your life at this time?

Closing Blessing

We ask a blessing on our troubled world;

we pray for those suffering in different ways from the COVID-19 pandemic,

for those enduring the effects of war and conflict,

for the powerless and the little people of our world.

Be present, Lord, to all who need you so badly.

Help us all in the good and the bad moments of our lives to remember that because of the Resurrection, ultimately, all will be well.

We make this prayer in trust and in confidence.

Mother of Mercy, pray for us.

Sources:

Quotes have been taken from

Revelations of Divine Love, Julian of Norwich, Penguin Classics series, Baltimore: Penguin books (1966)

Life After the Pandemic, Pope Francis, Libreria Editrice Vaticana (June 10, 2020)