

## PRAYER FOCUS FOR APRIL 2016

### *Finding Our Default Setting*

#### REFLECTION ONE

Recently the ABC radio announcer James Valentine suggested a segment for his daily show called “Outrage of the Month” He declared: **“It seems as though outrage is the default position for our society.”**

It may give us pause to examine our own ‘default setting.’



In March 2011 “Mercy Global Concern” published a small booklet entitled *Are Women Human? Violence against Women and Girls*.

***“Violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>i</sup>***

In pondering on the focus for this reflection, International Women’s Day passed and the worshipping community was invited to listen and reflect upon the Gospel story of the woman “caught in adultery.” [John 8:1-11]. It is clear that the scene occurs in public and there is considerable ‘bystander’ interest and enthusiasm for her public stoning.



In his 2002 song [Scribbling in the Sand](#) Michael Card ([click HERE to listen and view on YouTube](#)) describes the scene:

*“It was silence, it was music  
it was art, it was absurd.  
He stooped and shouted volumes  
without saying a single word...”<sup>ii</sup>*

Whatever her circumstances, in this account the woman received justice –in the presence of God. Cardinal Walter Kasper describes *justice* as **“God’s Mercy”<sup>iii</sup>**

In 2015 Rosie Batty, as Australian of the Year turned our faces to look at the incomprehensibility of domestic violence against women. We have all known victims of this insidious crime, and we recognise how poverty, homelessness, a lack of human rights and racism are contributors to violence in colonised and dispossessed populations.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon recently declared:

***“I remain outraged by the denial of rights to women and girls –  
but I take heart from the people everywhere who act  
on the secure knowledge that women’s empowerment  
leads to society’s advancement.  
Let us devote solid funding, courageous advocacy  
and unbending political will to achieving gender equality  
around the world.  
There is no greater investment in our common future,”<sup>iv</sup>***

### **REFLECT:**

- **I feel... after learning ...**
- **The following questions come up for me now that I know ...**
- **Mercy calls me to...**

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invites us to set our ‘default’ at MERCY, which Shakespeare describes in his famous “quality of mercy” speech as an “attribute to God Himself...”<sup>v</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins dauntingly, reminds us “the just *one* justices... acts in God’s eyes what in God’s eye *she* is – Christ...”<sup>vi</sup> (Apologies to G.M.H.)

## REFLECTION TWO

### *Finding Our Default Setting*



Our worshipping community is currently reflecting on the post resurrection narratives – where it appears that Jesus entrusted the initial spreading of the ‘good news’ to the women he knew. The good news is that **‘the name of God is Mercy’** incarnated in Jesus and all whose hearts are “centred on God.” Jesus’ life and teaching provide the strongest hint for finding our own ‘default setting!’

**The prevalence of human trafficking in our world, particularly the sex trafficking of women and girls is surely a cause for righteous anger.**

Angela Reed rsm in speaking of her research into this area notes

*“...sex trafficking needs to be considered through multiple paradigms including, the localised paradigm which recognises the historic, socio-economic and political contexts in which trafficking occurs in that region or country... The other paradigms are globalisation, economic, migration, criminal, gender, human rights and the life course paradigm that recognises the continuum of violent abuse from childhood to adulthood.”<sup>vii</sup>*

The following logo<sup>viii</sup>, of ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans) gives a graphic image to the dehumanisation of victims of trafficking who are regarded as saleable commodities – metaphorically “barcoded” in a world where too frequently, ‘society’ is organised as an ‘economy.’



This logo invites us to **reflect on how people can be imprisoned and dehumanised with total disregard for human dignity.** In fine-tuning our own ‘default setting’ it may be helpful to reflect on our capacity to cultivate an attitude of ‘mercifulness.’

The person practising ‘**mercifulness**’ is welcoming, hospitable, warm, generous, willing to share, open and available to others and willing to be vulnerable.. In the Gospels, these attributes describe the Jesus we meet. As effective followers of Jesus we work towards the cultivation of mercifulness – or “Mercy-ing” - as Pope Francis described his own desired ‘default setting’ in 2013.

**When he announced the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis threw open a door which had been previously bricked up. His symbolic action reminded many in the Church of the plea of Pope St John XXIII for the Second Vatican Council to “open the windows” and let God’s Spirit blow in – and out!**



In a recent editorial, Ann Gilroy rsj notes:

*“Opening the door to mercy is a personal as well as a community challenge. Just as a door is an entry and an exit, so the work of mercy is within and around us...”  
and we have a year to practise!  
It’s a year for the Church to relieve suffering more intentionally, allowing healing and hope to well up within the community in neighbourhoods and around the world.”<sup>ix</sup>*

It is as if the risen Jesus is inviting us to **“step up!”** The disciples of Jesus having walked alongside Jesus have been constant witnesses to Mercy. Today we are asked to channel our ‘**small acts of kindness**’ towards **“women, children and men most vulnerable to extreme poverty and injustice, who are rich in the eyes of Jesus.”<sup>x</sup>**

*In the end we shall be asked only one thing,  
‘Were you merciful?’  
...it will be a question of the heart.”<sup>xi</sup>*



May we, as individuals and as a community be strong enough to answer in the affirmative!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*These prayer reflections were prepared by Sisters Anne McGuire rsm, Celestine Pooley rsm and Patricia McDermott rsm*

---

<sup>i</sup> Mullan, Deirdre and Rittner, Carol: Are Women Human? Violence Against Women and Girls. Mercy Global Concern. UN Plaza, New York. 2011.

<sup>ii</sup> Card, Michael. Scribbling in the Sand Covenant Ministries USA 2002

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic79r2\\_Mxl0&index=1&list=RDic79r2\\_Mxl0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic79r2_Mxl0&index=1&list=RDic79r2_Mxl0)

<sup>iii</sup> Kasper, Walter. *Mercy, The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. Paulist Press N.Y. 2014. (p.12)

<sup>iv</sup> UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Address for on International Women's Day 4 March 2016.

<sup>v</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice* (Act iv Scene 1)

<sup>vi</sup> *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poems and Prose. Penguin Classics, 1985

<sup>vii</sup> [http://acrath.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Angela\\_Reed05022015.pdf](http://acrath.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Angela_Reed05022015.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> [www.acrath.org.au](http://www.acrath.org.au) used with permission.

<sup>ix</sup> Gilroy, Ann. (Ed.) Tui Motu InterIslands Magazine, Auckland N.Z. February 2016

<sup>x</sup> Caritas Australia, Strategic Directions 2013-2018 (p6)

<sup>xi</sup> Farley, Margaret A. *One thing Only Is Necessary*. Address presented to the Baltimore (USA) Regional Community Chapter, January 24, 1992