

PRAYER FOCUS FOR MONTH OF OCTOBER 2016

“The Time for Hiding Under the Doona is Over”

REFLECTION ONE



At a recent gathering, attended by a small group of sisters and some co-workers, some of those present were making heartfelt ‘noises’ about the capacity for “truth” to be recognized and acted upon within the public sphere. Then, as is so often the case, we saw the same issue emerge in print.

“Post-factualism in the Information Age, hyper-nationalism amid high Immigration, social change versus preservation: these tensions seem to be serving a kind of nihilism that is particular to our time. There are forces, sometimes embodied in real people, which are unravelling what remains of the things that hold us together, like our sense of interdependence and common humanity.”ⁱ

This a clarion call for hope! It is quite astounding to think that ‘facts’ are no longer acceptable within a debate. It is as though being rational is a waste of time! We recently witnessed a newly-elected member of the Senate in the Australian Parliament; announce on national television that human-induced climate change is a conspiracy perpetrated by the United States’ National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA.) This is despite years of research, data collection and the agreement of 97% of the world’s climate scientists that the activity of humans is contributing to the warming of the planet.ⁱⁱ

Further, the Prime Minister recently described budget repair as a "fundamental moral challenge."

He reminded MPs and Senators and presumably the Australian People that "the time for hiding under the doona is over".ⁱⁱⁱ This would appear to be in direct contrast to the joy experienced in daily encounters with our compassionate God, whom we see in the faces of all we meet!

For what then shall we pray? Pope Francis gives some clues as to how to live in these troubled times, indeed how to "re-member" ourselves as part of the "dangerous memory"^{iv} of the Church, the freedom offered to us by God in the Spirit of Jesus.

Francis' reflections on the major issues of our times – the movement of peoples, economic settings that enrich the wealthy at the expense of the poor, and the environment – also reflect his solidarity with people whose lives are blighted. His language is strong and concrete, particularly when criticizing policies that canonize greed and self-interest. He speaks from the bottom and not from the top.^v

This offers us a not so gentle nudge towards our present Chapter Statement:

Mercy impels us	Marimari I kirapim tingting bilong mipela
to extravagant hospitality,	long soim nambawantru: pasin welkam
compassion and justice	pasin bilong sori, na soim stretpela pasin
in the earth community,	long algeta komuniti bilong graun
being shattered	wei I stap naubautnabaut
by displacement.	bikos I nogat ples bilong al yet.

In his famous painting “The Numbering at Bethlehem” the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder shows in amazing detail a snowy northern hemisphere winter’s day.^{vi} The painting is full of the ‘business’ of daily life in the small village it depicts. In the midst of all the activity, so rich and varied, Bruegel inserts, in the foreground, the unmistakable figures of Joseph leading the very pregnant Mary on a donkey through the village, enroute, one presumes, to Bethlehem.

Perhaps our Chapter Statement reminds us, like Bruegel that the miracle of the Incarnation, the hope of our world, continues to unfold every day when we live as the prophet Micah reminds us - to:

Act justly

Love mercy

Walk humbly with God. [Micah 6:8]



REFLECTION TWO



Towards the end of the Second Vatican Council a group of about forty (40) Bishops met in the catacombs of Domitillio. There they committed themselves to ensuring that the post-Conciliar church would be a more open, simple, humble church. It would be closer to the people and recognise itself as the “People of God,” This document came to be known as the “Pact of the Catacombs”^{vii}

In a recent article about Dom Helder Camara, Ann Deslandes notes that Dom Helder was a party to the Pact:

“...[those] who professed their dedication to ensuring that Catholic Church 2.0 embraced simplicity, humility and openness in its dealings with all people, and sought structural justice for the economically oppressed without fear or favour...”

Deslandes further notes:

“The example of Dom Helder is reflected in many of Australia’s current moral troublemakers, such as Love Makes a Way^{viii}, Father Rod Bower (Gosford Anglican Church)^{ix}, Mums for Refugees^x, and the Knitting Nannas Against Gas^{xi}”

We need people like this if we are to achieve our hopes for justice at the national scale of catastrophes such as the impoverishment, incarceration and torture of Aboriginal people, the destruction of the environment, and the arbitrary detention and abuse of refugees and asylum seekers.”^{xii}

No ‘hiding under the doona’ here!

In founding the Institute, Catherine McAuley seemed very clear that the Order should be recognised as having a twofold thrust, of contemplation and action.

Those who have tried to live it know this to be a difficult rhythm, an intricate dance between stillness, focus, absorption in God and the active, practical mediation of God’s love to those around us.

Movement towards the integration of these two movements within us is the heartbeat of what it means to walk the path of Mercy.

[\(Adapted from Shelia Carney RSM, Catherine McAuley – Integrated Spirituality\)](#)

In a recent issue of Mercy E-news we find the Litany of Mercy, gifted to us by our good sister, Mary Wickham rsm.^{xiii} Whilst principally for use around the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, you are invited to dip into its richness. It begins:

“Creator God – Maker and Source of Mercy	–	<i>all praise to You.</i>
Jesus – exemplar and champion of Mercy	–	<i>all praise to You.</i>
Spirit – artist and animator of Mercy	–	<i>all praise to You.</i>

Out of the profound silence of Your Presence we murmur the words of Mercy:

+ Rahamim: the womb love	–	<i>inscribe it on our hearts.</i>
+ Hesed: the loving kindness	-	<i>inscribe it on our hearts.</i>
+ Eleos: the healing oil	-	<i>inscribe it on our hearts.</i>
+ the words of tenderness and empathy	-	<i>inscribe them on our hearts.</i>
+ the words of tolerance and forgiveness	-	<i>inscribe them on our hearts.</i>
+ the words of justice and faithfulness	-	<i>inscribe them on our hearts...”</i>

The Jubilee Year of Mercy is drawing to its official close and the spirit of Vatican II is still whispering to us down the years, in the prayer and actions of those who “hunger and thirst for justice” [Matt 5:6.]

With an extra couple of Works of Mercy urging us to care for our common home - so recently 'gifted' to the Church by Pope Francis, there is a rich vein for on-going prayer and contemplation.

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a "grateful contemplation of God's world" (Laudato Si, 214) which "allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us" (ibid., 85).

As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires "simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness" and "makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world" (ibid., 230-31).^{xiv}

May we, as women of Mercy continue to walk and pray in solidarity with all those who long for justice and peace, in the knowledge that as we do so, we celebrate with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

-
- ⁱ Fatima Measham, Hope not Nihilism is the Antidote to Bleak Times. *Eureka Street*, 16/09/2016
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/global-warming-climate-change-man-made-scientific-consensus-study-a6982401.html>
- ⁱⁱⁱ ABC News. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-29/malcolm-turnbull-pushes-labor-to-support-budget-savings/7796390>
- ^{iv} Johann Baptist Metz, Followers of Christ. The Religious Life and the Church, (1978) p12.
- ^v Andrew Hamilton. Pope Francis Among Other Disruptive Leaders. *Eureka Street*, 15/09/2016
- ^{vi} Pieter Breugel the Elder. *The Numbering at Bethlehem*. 1566. The Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels.
- ^{vii} <http://www.sedosmission.org/web/attachments/article/137/Catacomb%20Pact%20-%20English.pdf>
- ^{viii} <http://lovemakesaway.org.au/>
- ^{ix} <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-15/party-for-freedom-stunt-disrupts-anglican-church-service/7733710>
- ^x <http://www.mums4refugees.org.au/about-us/>
- ^{xi} <http://www.knitting-nannas.com/about.php>
- ^{xii} Ann Deslandes, Rogue Bishop's rebellious Example Lives On. *Eureka Street*, 15/09/2016
- ^{xiii} http://www.mercyworld.org/news_centre/view_article.cfm?id=1588 Mercy E-News September 14, Edition 688
- ^{xiv} "PopeFrancis, World Day of Prayer for Creation"
http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2016/09/01/pope_francis_message_on_world_day_of_prayer_for_creation/1255035