

**Emma Llewellyn's First Profession as a Sister of Mercy**  
**St. Alipius' Church, Ballarat East**  
**January 18, 2020**

Few people these days choose the path that Emma has chosen. We thank God that some do. And we thank God for Emma's decision to continue along the path of Mercy in her quest for the living God. Vowed religious life is in no way superior to life as a single or married person. It is, nonetheless, a valid life choice for some, and today, more than ever, it has to be defended as such. Emma's deep faith in God and her faith in Mercy religious life witness to the validity of this choice. Her public profession of the vows of chastity, poverty, obedience and service is an ecclesial event. It matters for us and it matters for our church. It gives hope to us, to her Mercy sisters, to her family and friends and to our troubled world.

When I asked Emma about her choice of readings, she replied: "They just came to me". How could that be? Over the past two years of candidacy, Emma has immersed herself very intentionally in God's Word: God's Word in creation, God's Word in the biblical, gospel tradition, God's Word as expressed in the lives of the followers of Catherine McAuley. Those who know Emma have surely heard her exclaim when she discovers something new: "I didn't know that!" We have come to realise that Emma takes enormous delight in learning something that she did not know. She listens and ponders and allows the questions to arise. She questions and questions and questions. She will no doubt continue to question to the end of her days. That is why the readings we have heard just came to her. She allowed them to well up in her. They encapsulate her yearnings and her deepest desires as she gives public expression to her commitment to live in the mercy of God.

The reading from the Book of Wisdom confronts us with the oft-neglected truth that we belong within a tradition that has long imaged the Mystery that is God in diverse ways. The female figure of Wisdom Sophia came to express, for Israel, both the accessibility and the mystery of God. Our quest for God, a quest we share with Emma, is a quest for Wisdom Sophia and those who seek Wisdom find her at the heart of life, "at the gate" of the city where business was and is transacted, where disputes are settled, where justice and mercy are done done and right relationships restored.

In the reading from Colossians and in Luke's gospel story, we find two of the Christian Scriptures' most engaging reflections on what it means to live "in Christ" and, in particular, what it means to encounter the mercy and

compassion of God. The members of the little community in Colossae are addressed as God's holy and beloved. They, like us, have been baptised into Christ and must clothe themselves in compassion and kindness and above all in love. These words echo through the ages. We must clothe ourselves in the loving mercy of God, forgiving one another as God forgives us. My experience is that we cannot do any of this alone. We need one another and we need to remind ourselves that "the tender mercy of our God has given us one another" to sustain us in our response to the needs of our planetary home.

Luke's gospel story is so familiar to us that we can take it for granted and fail to appreciate all the words of Wisdom that come from the lips of Jesus in this context. In our understandable focus on the Samaritan folk healer, the one who is said to be "moved with compassion", we can all too readily forget the one who is robbed and stripped and three times abandoned. We can also forget the other agents and instruments of compassion and mercy in this story: the flax that provided the fabric for the bandages; those who planted the flax and converted flax to fabric; the healing oil and wine, fruit of the olive and of the grape; those who produced the oil and the wine; the Samaritan healer's own beloved animal; the trusting innkeeper. These are the ones, the earth elements and the human agents, who showed mercy, the ones who show us how to show mercy.

In a few moments, Emma will make her first profession as a Sister of Mercy. Emma learned mercy in a loving family. She has learned a particular refraction of God's mercy in her Mercy schooling and in her Mercy communities. Her profession calls us all to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor with the compassion and loving kindness that is mercy. The message I now send from the decades-long professed to the about-to-be-professed is, in the words of Australian poet Judith Wright, "whatever [you] repent, it is never what [you] give, it is never that [you] love" (*Age to Youth*). Be yourself, Emma, your best Mercy self and you will be truly Sister to the many who seek justice and mercy at the heart of life.