

Though separated, our hearts will be united

(Mother Cecilia Maher, Quote of the Day, 9 April 2020) <https://www.mercyworld.org/catherine/quote-of-the-day/>

We have experienced the events of Holy Week, including the celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, in the seclusion of our own homes. This is not our usual custom. Indeed, Easter, like Christmas, is a time when even many who are not regular church-goers find their way to their local church, knowing that what this day marks is important.

But this year we've been separated from each other by a contagious and dangerous illness. In our lifetimes, we haven't experienced this requirement that we isolate ourselves. For many, there has been a loss of income that might previously have been secure. For almost all, there has been some level of inconvenience and a loss of freedom, as things we normally do are not available to us.

Yet we live in the age of the internet. We can see each other and speak with each other through the screen we face so regularly. Alone. Together. Different but the same. Confining yet comforting.

During the years after founding the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine and her Sisters invested immense energy in travelling – in establishing new foundations of Sisters in Ireland, the UK and in time, around the world. Ironically, the disease we are protecting ourselves from now initially gained a hold world-wide because today, we travel far further and more frequently than Catherine and her Sisters did. For them, travel was slow, so not undertaken unless there really was a purpose to be achieved. We, on the other hand, are often very keen to board an aircraft and take ourselves off to other lands.

Yet, as Mother Cecilia Maher noted, **though separated, our hearts will be united**.

This comment could have easily been made last week, rather than in the 19th century, it's so current...

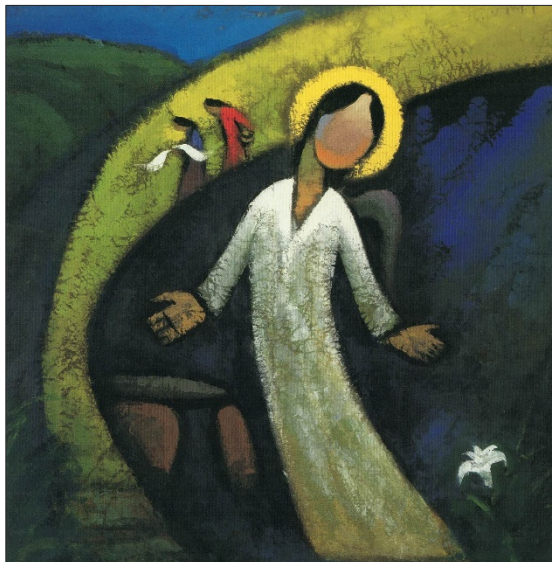
How are our hearts united?

Last week, Jan O'Connor, a Mercy Associate from Tuart Hill in Perth, wrote to her local group about the prospect of 'an Easter without going to Church'. She noted that in her lifetime, she couldn't remember not spending much of the Easter Triduum at her local church. This year it would be different. The Easter liturgies would be experienced via live-streaming, usually involving liturgy from the nearest Cathedral. So the Church of the family at home would be the community of faith at worship over Easter, not the usual parish community of faith at worship in the local church.

Mercy Associate, Annette Rowe from Gladstone, reflecting on our current domestic isolation where Mercy Associates groups can't meet, made the comment 'So we are the Church'. She's right, we are. We build churches so we can have a sacred place where we can go to pray and to gather as a faith community to worship. But we have faith that is not contained by a building. God is always and everywhere present, and our faith should be too.

In her letter, Jan went on to make the point that the Easter event, the Resurrection, remains the same, regardless of where we are when we celebrate this wonder of God's love for humankind. Like Christmas, Easter is a time of joy. While Christmas celebrates the incarnation of Jesus, to become a human being among us – a cause for joy; the Resurrection celebrates the triumph of Jesus over an ugly and unjust death, able to rise and overcome death because He is the Son of God – a cause for joy.

We are children of a loving God, all of us. **That love unites us, though we are separated**. It always has and always will, but this year we might be more conscious of how important it is to remember our participation in the fellowship of humankind. Our faith includes the belief that God is always near us, especially during times of hardship.



Leaving the Tomb, He Qi

As we give thanks to God for the myriad blessings we have (even at this time when they might seem less apparent than usual), among the things we give thanks for is each other. Whether we are separated or together, we are a community who share faith, something we do regardless of where we physically are located. In our prayer, we hold each other before God with thanks, celebrating the faith we share and the love God generously bestows on all of us. Alone. Together. Different but the same...

Though separated, our hearts will be united.

The four gospels, for good reason, all provide an account of the Resurrection. Each gospel states that the discovery of the empty tomb took place at dawn, very early in the day. This timing provides the sense of a new beginning – just as a new day begins at dawn, so the Resurrection provides an experience of a new beginning for us. **Blessing of the Kindling** is a Celtic prayer that describes how we might respond to the newness of a day, as people of faith.



He is Risen, He Qi

BLESSING OF THE KINDLING

I will kindle my fire this morning
In presence of the holy angels of heaven,
In presence of Ariel of the loveliest form,
In presence of Uriel of the myriad charms,
Without malice, without jealousy, without envy,
Without fear, without terror of any one under the sun,
But the Holy Son of God to shield me.
God, kindle Thou in my heart within



A flame of love to my neighbour,
To my foe, to my friend, to my kindred all,
To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall,
O Son of the loveliest Mary,
From the lowliest thing that liveth,
To the Name that is highest of all.
O Son of the loveliest Mary,
From the lowliest thing that liveth,
To the name that is highest of all.

(from the collection *Carmina Gadelica*)

<https://www.mercyworld.org/spirituality/kindness/>

To ponder (and perhaps to write about in your diary or discuss with a colleague):

- ◆ How did Holy Week and Easter this year seem different? What did you do to experience the specialness of this time? Were there some things that seemed better than usual in our domestic church – our family?
- ◆ In your day to day life, at work or home, what do you ensure you remain close to those dear to you but located elsewhere? How do you ensure your work community remains strong in its bonds of friendship and common purpose in serving the Institute?

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