

Abundant life



“I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

So said Jesus to the Pharisees, concluding a parable in which he compared himself to the gate to a sheepfold – the way to abundant life for his sheep, to safety at night and nourishing pasture during the day.

Abundant life seems like an appropriate theme for this time, which has seen so many aspects of our normal lives – social, psychological, political, economic – severely restricted. Debate has raged over whether the sacrifice of these aspects of our lives in the effort to preserve bare, basic biological life, particularly among the most vulnerable in our communities, has been a reasonable trade-off – whether keeping some people from death has justified the sacrifice by so many of much of what makes our lives worthwhile.

There would be few who would not agree that this time has confirmed that it is our relationships – with our selves, with one another, with the world around us, with the Great Spirit which animates all – which play the largest part in transforming our lives from mere existence into things worth living. As the physical limits of our lives have drawn closer and closer in, many of us have found ourselves taking particular notice of our relationships. Many have found the narrow parameters of life under lockdown an opportunity to renew their relationships with the local – family, housemates, trees, birds and other living things who share space with us. Some have found delight in the comfort of a good partnership. Others have struggled with solitude, or challenging family dynamics, or have taken the time to re-evaluate their friendships. Homeschooling has pushed numerous parents to the brink! Those with the luxury of access to such technologies have rejoiced in the multitude of ways they have found to connect with others through phone and internet.

While humans have locked down, reflected and debated, other forms and aspects of life have flourished. You will likely have seen the stories of birds, fish, mammals and others returning to places where they have not been seen in many years. Or the stories of residents of Indian villages being able to see the nearby Himalayas for the first time in decades, and children in China seeing stars for the first time, as pollution levels have dropped.

As some states and countries begin cautiously lifting lockdown measures, conversation is starting to shift to what we might take from this time into our new normal, in response to COVID-19 but also to the other great crisis of our time, the ecological. The importance of considering our response to both these crises in tandem was highlighted by Dalia Nassar, who wrote that "... unless we develop a response [to these two great crises] that can consider life *in all its relations*, we are going to act in ways that fundamentally undermine lives." Nassar was referring here not just to the biological life of our own species, but about flourishing, abundant life for all living things. (You can find a link to her article at the end of this reflection.)

As people of Mercy we are particularly invited to give this deep thought, as "Mercy is a mode of relationship ... a habit of mind and heart"¹. It is a mode which was richly illustrated by Catherine McAuley, who gave us "a beautiful vision of life made agreeable by interrelationships"² which offered safety and the way to a decent livelihood to many and nurtured "abundant life" in all.

Reflection:

- What have you found yourself missing or challenged by while in lockdown?
- What new appreciations have you developed during lockdown?
- What will you take forward from this time about what "abundant life" means for you?
- As the "new normal" emerges, how might the way you relate to all for whom you are a living expression of Mercy be changed as a result of this time?

Additional resources:

- The quote referenced at the start of this reflection is taken from the Gospel of John. You can read it in context [here](#)
- [Reflection by Veronica Lawson rsm on John 10: 1-10](#)
- [Dalia Nassar, 'What can the environmental movement learn from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic?'](#)

Ellen Geraghty

¹ Patricia Smith, "Mercy values today: ever ancient, ever new", in *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy*, p 932.

² Elizabeth Carroll, "The spirit of Catherine McAuley: its relevance to contemporary challenges", in *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy*, pp 927.