

ISMAPNG Staff Formation Bytes

Module 3: Resilience

Resource Sheet

Introduction to the Module

Our focus for Module 3 is 'Resilience'. It offers an opportunity to explore the importance of resilience in Catherine McAuley's life as she dealt with some of the stresses and anxieties facing her during 1837-38. We then look at two poems and a song which may touch a chord with you as you reflect on your capacity to be resilient during these times.

Resources used in this Module include two brief video clips, poetry, the findings of research on resilience conducted by Brené Brown, brief extracts from the letters of Catherine McAuley and some commentary on Catherine's resilience by Mercy historian, Mary Sullivan RSM.

Some may have participated in the seminar *Dealing with Stress and Anxiety in Times of COVID-19* facilitated by Mercy psychologists Maryanne Loughry RSM and Ros Carr RSM on 12 May 2020. A link to the seminar is also included, and an extra Byte is offered in this module to further explore this key personal attribute.

We encourage you to engage with as many of the Bytes as your time allows.

Byte 1: Resilience - 'bouncing back' from disappointments and disasters

Each of us can probably look back and make a judgement about the effectiveness or otherwise of our responses to the difficulties or obstacles we have encountered on life's journey so far. Developing resilience is a journey and each of us probably has a different road map for that journey because we respond to events in different ways. Life's experiences, even though they might be similar (e.g. the death of someone close to us) can lead us along different paths.

In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, psychologist Brené Brown (pp. 64-65) summarizes what researchers have found to be "common factors of resilient people:

1. *They are resourceful and have good problem-solving skills;*
2. *They are more likely to seek help;*
3. *They hold the belief that they can do something that will help them to manage their feelings and to cope;*
4. *They have social support available to them;*
5. *They are connected with others such as family and friends."*

Brown also notes one of her own research findings (p. 64) that spirituality, namely a person's "belief in connection, a power greater than self, and interconnections grounded in love and compassion" emerged as a key component in building and maintaining resilience and in remaining hopeful. She found this whether or not people referred to God in their interviews and whether or not people were churchgoers or regular worshippers within a faith tradition.

Clip 1: The Youtube clip *'Resilience: Bounce back'* (2 mins 37 secs) also identifies key aspects of developing resilience. Click on the link below to view it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HU3DsJ5aNZw>

- From your experience, in what ways, if any, do the insights into resilience offered by psychologists and others, help us to tap into our own gifts and inner wisdom, including our 'spiritual wisdom'?
- How might reflection on such insights help us to cultivate hope when we might otherwise have felt powerless in the face of adversity?

Byte 2: the resilience shown by Catherine McAuley

Mary Sullivan RSM writes about Catherine's resilience in the face of adversity. During 1837-38 Catherine was dealing with a number of stressful situations, both personal and organizational as the new Mercy Order continued to expand. (See extracts at the end of this resource sheet).

As you reflect on these four of the many situations facing Catherine during 1837-38, note her reliance on these sources of energy to nourish her resilience:

- spending time in prayer;
- being proactive in finding a resolution or way forward in each situation; and
- seeking help and support from her friends.

How significant are these sources of energy for you as you develop your resilience?

Byte 3: A poem or two for me and for you



The natural world and the world of humanity can teach us a great deal about resilience if we are open to seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling the realities surrounding us! Poets have a particular gift and a capacity for tapping into their own wisdom and for inviting us, their readers, into an intuitive, sometimes spiritual space.

Take some time to sit with the poetic insights of Joyce Rupp and Michael Leunig. The two poems are reproduced at the end of this Resource sheet.

- Do you recognize yourself in any of their words or phrases? If so, attend to them gently and see where the recognition leads you.
- Focus on a time when you became aware of a 'Sentinel of Strength' (Rupp) or a 'small, shy truth' (Leunig) emerging in your life. As you look back on this time, imagine what you might say to Joyce Rupp or Michael Leunig if you had the opportunity to speak with them about your connection(s) with their poem.
- Listen to what they say back to you.

Byte 4: The strength we can give and receive in times of difficulty

The words and music of the song 'You raise me up' speak to us of the ways in which other people can help us realize our inner strength in tough times. We can look back at these times and know we were/are standing on the shoulders of those who have shown us a way forward in the darkest moments. There are sources of energy and self-belief which enable us to figuratively 'stand on mountains' after the long climb or 'walk on stormy seas', as the Youtube clip by *Secret Garden* shows us (5 mins 14 secs):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHpwbh9lxxY&list=RD5V93pY7jFjA&index=3>

- What literal or figurative high mountains or stormy seas have you navigated successfully at various stages in your life?
- What is the most precious thing you have learned about yourself as a result?
- Is there someone whom you have advised or mentored when they were feeling disappointed or anxious? What advice did you give to help them 'bounce back' and build their resilience?

Byte 5: Zoom conversation

We invite you to join our Zoom conversation to explore the content of this Module further, and to share your thoughts and/or insights with other participants.

Additional Byte:

Clip 1: (49 mins 52 secs) Staff who were unable to participate in the seminar facilitated by Maryanne and Ros may wish to view it on <https://vimeo.com/417823821/3546499551> and have a further conversation.

Annette Schneider RSM and Carole Gan
26 May 2020

Byte 2 Resource

Extracts from

Sullivan, M. C. (2012) *The Path of Mercy: the Life of Catherine McAuley* Dublin: Four Courts Press

Sullivan, M. C. (2004) Ed. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841* Dublin: Four Courts Press

Amongst the personal concerns were the following:

Five young sisters had become victims of typhus which was rampant in Dublin. Catherine's niece, also named Catherine, became ill and died on August 7, 1837, at Baggot Street where she had joined the Mercy community. In a letter to her great friend Frances Warde, written later in August, Catherine said *"I have suffered more than usual with my old pain of sorrow and anxiety. My stomach has been very ill."* (Sullivan, 2004, pp. 203-204).

Catherine had fallen down some stairs and broken her arm. The resultant splint on her arm made some things very difficult, as she wrote in a letter to Sr Angela Dunne in Charleville on December 23, 1837: *"I have not been able to write or do much since I returned. On the second day I went to Kingstown – to condole with them on the loss of their lively dear companion. When the Angelus bell rang, I was hastening to the choir from the Community Room, missed the first step of the stairs, fell forward and in endeavouring to save my head from the window, broke my left arm across the wrist – and injured the sinews in the back of the hand so much that I am not likely to have the use of it for months – if ever."* (Sullivan, 2012, p. 114)

Amongst the organizational concerns were the following:

Catherine was embroiled in a lawsuit with the Parish Priest of Kingstown, where a branch house from Baggot Street had been made in 1835. A severe financial crisis ensued as Catherine lost the lawsuit over who was responsible for paying for renovations on the site so a school could be established. Catherine understood that a grant from the Board of Education could be obtained for the works, that the Parish Priest would undertake the grant application and that handing over £50 from a fundraising Bazaar would be the limit of her contribution. In fact, she had to pay the remaining cost of the renovations, £375, and she had no means of obtaining this amount of cash.

Writing to the solicitor for the Mercy community, Charles Cavanagh, Catherine stated that *"The letter which I enclose to you Sir, says the account was furnished to me. It never was, nor could Mr Nugent (the builder) have ever – in sincerity – regarded me as answerable to him. The charge seems to be a most extraordinary one for the coarse plain work that is done."* (Sullivan, 2004, p. 201)

In the latter part of 1837, Catherine found the controversy over the appointment of a Chaplain to the House of Mercy to be a great trial. Mary Sullivan (2004, p. 94) writes that *"in September a deep conflict arose between her and Dr Walter Meyer, parish priest of St Andrew's church, over his unwillingness to assign a regular chaplain to serve the sacramental needs of the homeless women and girls sheltered in the House of Mercy on Baggot Street ... but the bitterness she [Catherine] felt was a new kind of suffering for her; it was assuaged only with prayer, effort on her part and the support and counsel of friends."*

In January 1839, when writing to Frances Warde, Catherine expressed some sense of peace amidst all the distress: *"I am not unhappy, thanks be to God – nor do I see any disedification likely to arise from the matter... It is humiliating no doubt, a smart attack on self-importance, and if this part of it is*

well managed, it must turn to good account. I humbly trust it will end very well.” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 218)

Also in January 1839, Catherine was able to articulate in a letter to Sr Elizabeth Moore some of the insights she had gained as she looked back on the first eight years of the new Institute. It gives us a window into Catherine’s resilience. She wrote: *“I could mark circumstances calculated to defeat it at once – but nothing however injurious in itself has done any injury. That is all I could say. The loss of property has been supplied. The Death of the most valuable Sisters passed away as of no consequence. The alarm that was spread by such repeated deaths – did not prevent others crowding in. In short, it evidently was to go on – and surmount all obstacles – many of which were great indeed – proceeding from causes within and without. One thing is remarkable – that no breach of charity ever occurred among us. The sun, I believe, never went down on our anger ...”* (Sullivan, 2004, pp. 179-180)

Byte 3 Resource

Sentinel of Strength

The tall, thin cottonwood tree,
With its tattered autumn leaves
Still attached to the battered branches,
Stands alone by the side of Lake Michigan,
A landmark for the path to the shoreline.
But for myself, much more than that.
The tree reminds me of resiliency,
The long white line down its trunk.
A visible, split-open revelation of strength.

Healed now from severe lightning strike,
This naked exposure speaks to my need:
“Stand in your sorrow. Stand strong.
You can heal. Life chooses to go on.
Wounds leave their distinct scars
But that is not the end of the story.
Your value continues to thrive
In your imperfect, wounded state.
You, too, serve a significant purpose,
A sentinel of enduring strength,
A new power stored in your memory,
Whispering hope when your heart
Wants to wither in its unhappiness.”

[Taken from *Prayer Seeds: A Gathering of Blessings, Reflections and Poems for Spiritual Growth*
©2017 by Joyce Rupp. Used by permission of Ave Maria Press, Inc®, All rights reserved, p. 61]

An untitled poem by Michael Leunig

Dear God

We struggle, we grow weary, we grow tired. We are exhausted, we are distressed, we despair. We give up, we fall down, we let go. We cry. We are empty, we grow calm, we are ready. We wait quietly.

A small, shy truth arrives. Arrives from without and within. Arrives and is born. Simple, steady, clear. Like a mirror, like a bell, like a flame. Like rain in summer. A precious truth arrives and is born within us. Within our emptiness.

We accept it, we observe it, we absorb it. We surrender our bare truth. We are nourished, we are changed. We are blessed. We rise up.

For this we give thanks.

Amen.

[Taken from Michael Leunig (2014) *When I talk to you* Sydney: Harper Collins, p. 66]

References

Brown, B. (2010) *The Gifts of Imperfection* Minnesota: Hazelden

Leunig, M. (2014) *When I talk to you* Sydney: Harper Collins

Rupp, J. (2017) *Prayer Seeds* Notre Dame IN: Ave Maria Press

Sullivan, M. C. (2012) *The Path of Mercy: the Life of Catherine McAuley* Dublin: Four Courts Press

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