

# The Journey of Grace

## Psalm 139:7-10

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.



In this season of Lent, I am reminded of the ways in which sorrow and joy interpenetrate in our lives. How is it possible that despite our sorrow at the turbulence in the world - the catastrophe of the war in Ukraine, the dreadful floods here in Australia, and the ongoing upheaval and tragedy of the pandemic - we can still experience moments of joy? Closer to home, we may have loved ones who are in the midst of great suffering. We may be experiencing deep pain ourselves. How are we called to hold and be present to these contrasting movements, within ourselves and in our communities – including within our Mercy Associates communities, where some may be rejoicing while others weep?

In a letter of encouragement to Frances Warde, the superior of the Carlow convent, Catherine McAuley wrote that:

**“This is your life, joys and sorrows mingled, one succeeding the other.”**

Catherine McAuley to Frances Warde, May 28<sup>th</sup> 1841

*How do Catherine’s words resonate with your life experience?*

*How do they resonate with the experience of your Mercy Associates group?*

I expect I am not alone in finding in the Christian story a profound pattern for understanding and living with this experience of “joys and sorrows mingled”. Writing about the liturgical year, Suzanne Guthrie reflects that:

Year after year a journey of grace opens for us, and draws us through a re-enactment of a primal mystery. An ancient pattern unfolds: awakening, encountering, deepening, suffering, death and rebirth, transformation, and return. This rhythm is as old as the stars, as obvious as the plant cycle: seed, growth, flowering, dying, seed pod bursting and casting off its contents far and wide. Germination. Beginning the cycle of new life again. The pattern of awakening, trial, and transcendence lies so deeply in the human psyche and in lived experience that resonance is inevitable.

Suzanne Guthrie *Edge of Enclosure*

As Mercy Associates, we “journey with each other and with the Sisters of Mercy” (Mercy Associates Vision Statement). We also remember the journeys undertaken by Catherine and the early sisters, as together they founded the Mercy order and sowed the seeds for its worldwide presence and diverse ministries today.

In all the seasons of their journey, Catherine retained a deep faith in the guidance of God.

**“There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence – vigilance – or judgment has not impeded – and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God.”**

Catherine McAuley to Elizabeth Moore, January 13<sup>th</sup> 1839

The recent Mercy Associates Leadership Group meeting in Sydney was a wonderful opportunity to reflect on our history, the life which is emerging now, and how we are being called to be in the future. The Ignatian writer Christopher Chapman’s insights into spiritual growth offer a way to reflect on the graced journeys of Mercy Associates groups and our whole community across Australian and Papua New Guinea.<sup>1</sup> He discerns four recurring movements of spiritual growth in Scripture: rooting and grounding; emergence in response to invitation; the struggle towards abundance; and fruitfulness and fall. These are ongoing and interdependent movements, rather than successive, linear stages.



You might like to use the following page to reflect in your Mercy Associates group on how your practices together support each of these movements – and on whether one of these movements is particularly resonant with the experience of your community right now.

**During this Lenten season, let us pray ...**

God of hope,  
You lead us on life’s journey.  
As we come together in Your name,  
Open our ears to hear Your voice.  
Open our hands to Your work.  
And open our hearts to Your Spirit.  
Amen

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Chapman, “Striving for perfection or growing into fruitfulness?” *The Way*, 57/3 (July 2018), 7-17.

## Reflecting on our graced journeys

### *.... rooting and grounding*



Ephesians 3:16-18 *I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.*

The seed finds depth, and here its transformation begins.

### *... the emergence of new shoots: a response to an invitation*

Isaiah 11:1 *A shoot shall come from the stock of Jesse. And a branch shall grow out of his roots.*



For all that is created, to 'be' is to experience the desire to 'become'.

### *... the struggle towards abundance*



Mark 4:7-8 *Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.*

The sower and the seed, the mustard seed that despite its size grows into a home for the birds, the weeds among the wheat: all tell of the wonder of growth, but also of obstacles that lie in its way.

### *... and the generous bearing of fruit.*

John 15:8 *My Father is glorified in this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*

Rooting and grounding in God moves us into a fruitfulness that is generous and expressive of mutual interdependence.

