

Imaging Mercy Today

A 'comfortable Cuppa' to heal the world

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! For those impressed by the synchronicity of numbers, the second Friday in November – 11.11.11 - promises to be a date of rare significance. Nations in many parts of the world will remember it as Armistice Day - 'Poppy Day' in the United Kingdom - marking the official end of the First World War; a wreath-laying ceremony is scheduled at the National War Memorial in Wellington, to begin at 11am that morning. But in Mercy circles, the day is being kept as the anniversary of Catherine McAuley's death in Dublin 170 years ago.

This year, leaders of Mercy International Association have invited Mercy people around the world to join with them in marking the date, as Catherine invited her own sisters, with a legendary 'comfortable cup of tea', and to make the event a fund-raiser, with donations sent to Mercy International supporting its efforts to maintain Baggot Street as a place of heritage and hospitality, and to develop its website as a focus for promoting Mercy's efforts on behalf of the world's poor and vulnerable.

Well known now is the story of Catherine, as she lay dying, issuing her instruction: "Tell the sisters, when I am gone, to comfort one another with a good cup of tea. I think the community room would be a good place." US Sister of Mercy Sheila Carney, one of those formally entrusted with promoting the cause of Catherine's canonization, had an interesting thought about the founder's choice of the community room for this cup of tea, which she shared in a reflection at Baggot Street last year. The expected place for

the community to gather would have been the dining room, said Sr Sheila. But the dining room in those days was a place of silence. "And Catherine knew that the discipline of silence would not be what they needed.

"So she sent them to the community room, the place where she had taught them to be sisters to one another," Sheila Carney suggested. "This was the place where they made life-changing decisions together, where they laughed and played together and where, in her own words, 'not one cold, stiff soul appeared.' This was the place where they shared an intimacy more familiar than what they had ex-



A GOOD CUP OF TEA: Mercy International Association is inviting Mercy organizations around the world to mark the 170th anniversary of Catherine's death on November 11.

Small steps to high peaks

E Te Atua hoa hiko,
God, companion on our journey:
we find you not only in the heights above,
but also walking close at our side.

Strengthen us for the challenges that wait,
as we seek to make your reign of mercy
more firmly established in our world,
especially among the little and the lowly.

Keep alive in us the vision of what might be;
let us learn from Catherine to take the small steps
from which every great venture begins,
and to welcome the gifts that others bring.

As we celebrate the 170 years since
Catherine died, we give thanks that her spirit lives,
inviting us to be people of mercy
sharing with others the blessings we have received.

We thank you for the grace of this day;
bless us where we are still poor,
and bless all those who count on us,
in mercy's name. Amen

perienced at home."

So the message of the comfortable cup of tea is a profound one. It's a sign for all Mercy people of their life together. Catherine asks us to be sisters and brothers to one another, and to trust that if we turn to one another in times of joy and sorrow, we will find God in that interaction. And as like as not, we'll find Catherine's spirit as well. This is her final call, urging a loving community amongst us.

The lesson Catherine teaches here is not just for her sisters, but for all who are moved by her spirit to be people of Mercy. We can produce the harvest that bears her hallmark, only if the relationship among ourselves is one of loving regard for what each one has to contribute.

This goes for the chief executives and staff nurses of Mercy health care facilities, the principals and HODs in Mercy schools, and the managers and leaders of Mercy community development ventures. We can bring mercy to others, only if it shapes the way we relate to one another.

Working to create the wairua of mercy in our staffrooms or wherever we gather demands a willingness to waste time in creating a sense of openness and hospitality, being present to one another in ways that nurture friendship and build human capital, and that put people and their views ahead of tasks or outcomes. In a world so driven by commercial and strategic success factors, there's another rating scale here that we ignore at our peril. - Dennis Horton