



From the cross today to Easter's light

By DENNIS HORTON

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The 'cross of Christ' is the most frequent reference in all of Catherine McAuley's hundreds of published letters. It was the image which she and her 'walking sisters' wore as their first steps led them through the streets of Dublin and the other Irish towns where they went in search of the poor and sick. The cross was a symbol of their willingness to care and serve. The white cross on its dark background which Catherine chose was unique in its day, in that it had no figure nailed to its outline. Her sisters were instructed to recognise Christ in the suffering they found in the streets and houses they visited.

We don't have to search far this Lent to find our own way of the cross, shaped by events at home and abroad. Ash Wednesday coincided with a fiery end to the occupation of our Parliament after almost a fortnight of protests, initially relating to mandates imposed by Government to curb the Covid 19 pandemic but broadening as time passed to include a range of extremist viewpoints.

Many lamented the destruction of a children's playground and the willful damage to a Parliamentary precinct seen as in some way sacred and open to all. The blockage of city roads and the forced closure of businesses and streets and the temporary closure of nearby St Mary's College after students were harassed and at risk all led to a level of violence deplored by most ordinary New Zealanders. Many felt held to ransom by a small minority insisting on individual freedoms in ways that imperilled the larger common good. The riot looked more like the storming of the US Capitol a year ago than a homegrown protest. The occupation is over, but the wounds will take time to heal.

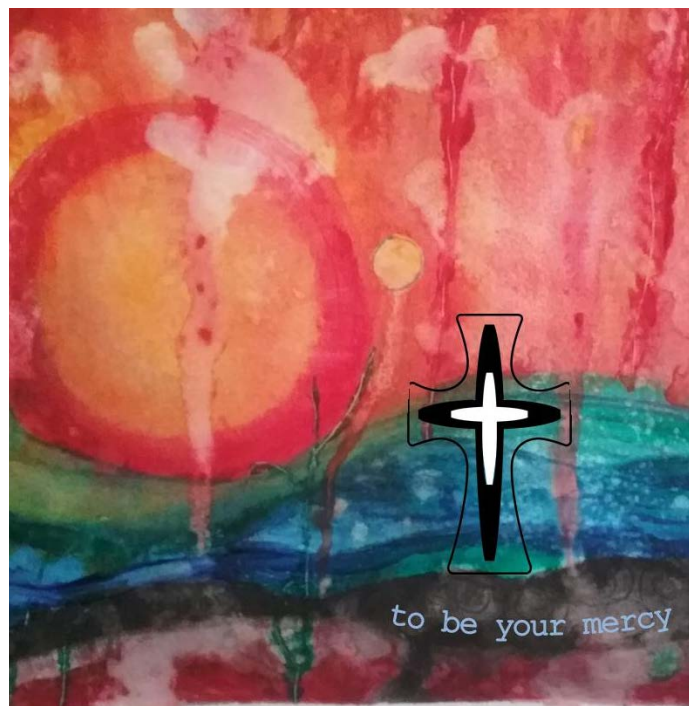
On the wider scene, our world has been changed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and a level of violence that can only be described as an unprovoked war by Putin's regime against its freely and legitimately constituted neighbour. The war has been condemned by Pope Francis for being not simply 'a special military operation' but a war that has unleashed rivers of blood and tears. 'This unacceptable armed aggression must stop,' the pope insisted. Though Ukraine's struggle is a long way from home, the economic sanctions imposed on Russian oligarchs and the promise of easier access to visas by family related to Ukrainians living here are reminders of how small our world has become, and of how quickly borders must

yield when our common humanity is at stake.

The last station on our way of the cross this Lent is a focus on the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care. Research undertaken by Te Rōpū Tautoko, the group set up by the Catholic Church to gather information about abuse in Catholic institutions, identifies a total of 1680 reports of abuse against Catholic clergy, brothers, sisters and lay people from 1950 to the present. On behalf of our whole church Cardinal John Dew describes the statistics as 'horrifying and something we are deeply ashamed of.' He hopes that facts like these will help us to face the sad reality and that 'we will build a safer church for everyone.'

Meanwhile, Caritas

Aotearoa has launched its Lenten Reflection Programme with the theme of 'Called to be Peacemakers' inspired by Pope Francis who invites us to be artisans of peace, by opening paths of dialogue rather than constructing new walls. As we journey towards another Easter, may we find new ways of listening to the cries of the poor in our day, and of sharing the light which our faith in the risen Christ brings. May Mercy be our way, and Alleluia our song!



Mercy's cross – our way to Easter
Artwork by Cheryl Connolly rsm