



Our Call to Weep and Act Mercifully

Today as Sisters of Mercy, our partners in ministry, and our whole Mercy family witness the sufferings of our brothers and sisters all over the globe, and see the ravages of climate change and the increasing degradation of Earth herself, we may, given our practical bent as Mercy people, want to fast forward to what we, as people called to mercifulness, can and must *do*. But is this immediate desire to “*do something*” the most fitting first response to the world as we see it in 2015-2016? Is this the proper first reply to the conversion that Pope Francis envisions in proclaiming the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy? Is this the first reaction called for by his encyclical *Laudato Si*’? Or should we not first pause and grieve?

Let us for a moment go back to a side street in ancient Jerusalem, one now called the *via dolorosa*. A bloodied man is staggering along carrying a crossbeam, helped somewhat by a suddenly recruited stranger named Simon. Some women line the route. Perhaps some of them have come here out of mere curiosity. But there are others who are weeping, not in a conventional way, but because of the acute suffering they see. The man notices their tears and says to the women: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for ourselves and for your children . . . For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:28, 31).

Today’s world is also a scene for tears and sorrow—lament for what does not have to be, for the great human and Earthly suffering caused by individual freedom gone awry. Is not grief the proper first response to what we see in 2015-2016? Is not sorrow the first human stirring we are called to feel as we watch the long trails of refugees moving all across the Earth, carrying their frightened children around their necks as they seek, on foot or in

severely overcrowded boats, *some* place of shelter, food, water, and peace upon this Earth. Some foxes still have dens, and some birds of the air still have nests somewhere, but these hundreds of thousands of God's sons and daughters have nowhere to lay their heads (Matt 8:20).

And as we read *Laudato Si'* and encounter -- if not at our own doorstep at least in televised images -- mudslides, tsunamis, raging fires, floods, epic droughts, and melting glaciers, and realize the present and worsening destruction of Creation, with all its historical generosity and cosmic beauty, ought not heartfelt sorrow well up in us first, if we have human blood in our Mercy veins?

As members of the Mercy family we know that grief and lament alone cannot be our only or final prayer or deed. Good Friday afternoon and Easter morning are one and will never be separated. In God they are one incomprehensible act of sympathetic sorrow and merciful self-bestowal and embrace. But if we in the Mercy family in the early twenty-first century do not let ourselves see and feel the agonies of the present Calvaries as they drop blood upon the ground, cast darkness over the whole land, tear the curtains of our former temples, and split the rocks, we can never become the merciful spice-bearers of Easter morning. We will never be the women, or men, who come in sympathy to anoint, only to find ourselves anointed and told "Do not be afraid."

Our mercifulness as the community and family "of Mercy" will be most persistent, powerful, and effective if it too, like God's, arises from felt sorrow, sympathy, and self-expenditure. Somehow, led by God's unsurpassable example and help, we must simultaneously be Jeremiahs, Isaiahs, and Jesus' disciples—crying out against the debilitating ignorances and insensitivities that cause such suffering and destruction, proclaiming hope even against hope, and then doing the healing, self-expending deeds of mercy and eco-justice.

Is not this the thorough conversion to which *Laudato Si'* and the Jubilee Year of Mercy urgently call us? Is not this the enflaming engagement of head, heart and hands to which the Mercy International Reflection Process (MIRP) so ardently summons us?

Neither Pope Francis nor Mercy International Association invites us to a casual academic exercise. Both invite us to *metanoia*, to know and feel, to see and act in a new and deeper way -- to let ourselves be “born anew” by grieving and embracing the destructive ignorances, sicknesses, and poverties of our historical time, even if we are now eighty or ninety years old. (Anna the prophetess in the temple of her day was eighty-four!) We are all called, by the Mercy International Reflection Process and by the Year of Mercy, to look beyond the narrow, convenient streets of our previous understandings and endeavors; to embrace the magnitude of the created, evolving, and expanding universe, our common home; to enlarge our theological realization of the scope of God’s creative presence and love; and then to kneel down, roll up our sleeves, and do what we can and must for all the wounded life in our corners of the field hospital that is the Earth.

Catherine McAuley once said of two young homeless women who came to her door, “their dejected faces have been before me ever since” (*Correspondence*, 322). As together we begin this Jubilee Year of Mercy and our Mercy year of global reflection and action on behalf of distressed Earth and the distressed sisters and brothers at our doors, may we too carry “dejected faces” in our minds and hearts as we search for and construct the healings for which such dejection is pleading.

As Pope Francis makes clear in his announcement of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, this is a *kairos* moment for humanity, for all created life on this planet, and so for the global Mercy family. A *kairos* moment is a crisis or turning point in history, an hour of grace, an appointed time in the purposes of God that demands specific decisions while the opportunity is still present. Either we engage now in integral ecological conversion—with all

the scientific, theological, social, political, and economic conversion such integrity will entail -- or further human suffering and cosmic destruction will surely lie ahead. Either we will weep now and act, or we will weep even more later.

The Mercy International Reflection Process that now begins is a gift of God to us, a sympathetic divine visitation. To be invited as an international Mercy family to experience together the global sufferings and the outright devastations of this moment and then to act together in healing ways is a merciful gift of God. Yes, it is a demanding invitation, but one in which, we may trust, God's energy, compassion, and guidance will accompany us. To participate in the MIRP in the ways we can, with whatever sacrifices of time, energy, and presence are needed, is not a casual option any one of us may easily lay aside.

Yes, Creation indeed waits with eager longing – for God's help and ours. Somehow during this coming year of the Mercy International Reflection Process, let us together walk alongside Christ as he once again rides his borrowed donkey down the hillside overlooking our poor, blind Jerusalem, and weeps: "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace" (Luke 19:41-42). As we descend with him into the agonies of our Earth and its beloved peoples, let us together offer him not old palm branches and empty Hosannas, but new repentance, and our new promise to try again to recognize the things that will make for genuine human peace. Let us as one interconnected Mercy Family beg God that through our attentive hearing of Creation's yearning and humanity's cries and through our acts of mercy and justice on behalf of Earth and its impoverished people, God's Holy Spirit will -- still groaning on our behalf -- offer us a new day of Merciful visitation.

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