

Mercy Spirituality: An Empowering and Feminine Spirituality

“Nothing is more productive of good to society than the careful instruction of women.” -Catherine McAuley

Reader 1: At its core, Mercy began with the careful instruction and elevation of women, specifically young women in poverty. The tending and formation of feminine spirituality in our Church and world continues to be subversive and prophetic work. We remember the bravery and resolve of our founder, Catherine McAuley, and her commitment to educating women in a political climate that was not supportive of this.

Reader 2: Scripture is filled with empowering spirituality and feminine spirituality. The beginnings of Jesus are intertwined with feminine spirituality. As we listen to this passage, I invite you to reflect on the image of two women, both embarking on impossible and miraculous pregnancies. These two cousins show a deep love to one another in this moment. Elizabeth provides Mary with strength for the journey to return to Nazareth and embrace her calling to give birth and mother the Son of God, Jesus.

Reader 3:

A Reading from the Gospel according to Luke
Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”
Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

The Gospel of the Lord.

[Pause for quiet reflection]

Reader 4:

Reflection:

Mary, our Blessed Mother, knew deep in her bones the power of surrounding herself with women who would uplift and support her. It’s significant that the writer of the Gospel of Luke included these passages about Mary and Elizabeth’s meeting. Imagine this for a moment: Mary, a young, unwed, poor girl from a little town called Nazareth finds out from Gabriel, a messenger of God, that she is to have a baby. Not just any baby, the Son of God. Mary, like many of the women whom Catherine served at her doors at that first House of Mercy, needed female accompaniment – feminine spirituality. It’s as though her soul was drawn to be with her cousin Elizabeth. Who could begin to understand her but her beloved cousin?

There’s this beautiful parallel between Mary and the faces of the young women Catherine and all of us following in her footsteps continue to aim for. Like Elizabeth, we have opened our arms to the young women in our midst at a most critical and formative period of their life.

I invite you to draw your attention to that last line: “Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months and then returned home.” What happened in those three months? How did Mary decide she was ready to return home and “face the music”? I can imagine Elizabeth’s soft words of encouragement and comfort to Mary.

May we be the voice of Elizabeth to the young women in our care. May we be the voice of Catherine to the young women in our care.

Reader 5:

And we will close in the Hail Mary. A prayer so deeply grounded in feminine spirituality as we use the words of Elizabeth. As we pray this together, let us call to

mind specific names and faces of young women we serve who we would like to offer this prayer for.

[pause]

Reader 6:

And so, we pray,

Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Source: "Reflecting on Ten Gifts of Mercy Spirituality" from *Be As Shining Lamps*, p. 47