

Do not be afraid. You have my blessing.

I have chosen you to help to renew the faith, prayer life and moral values of my people once more. In the brokenness of secularism, they are searching unconsciously for wholeness and Mercy. **Will you re-commit yourself today, and support me, in re-evangelising my people?**

✦ **Affirmation and Intercessions:**

In the name of Jesus, who suffered and died for our redemption, and in thanksgiving with Mary, Mother of Mercy, and Venerable Catherine, we make our response to our God who is Mercy:

Holy Mary, virgin and mother – R/ **With you, we pray: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord.**

Holy Mary, inspiration to Venerable Catherine – R/

Holy Mary, Patroness of our Mercy family – R/

Holy Mary, Mother of all our deceased Mercy members – R/

Holy Mary, giver of Mercy to the poor, sick and marginalised – R/

Holy Mary, mediator with God for all women who have fallen – R/

Holy Mary, exemplary wife, mother and homemaker – R/

Holy Mary, source of encouragement to all women who struggle – R/

Holy Mary, fountain of joy to our global Mercy family on this special day – R/

Holy Mary, our inspiration as we pray for true Gospel vision in Mercy through all our tomorrows – R/

As ecclesial women in partnership with Gabriel, Elizabeth our fore mother in faith, and the Church 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.

✦ **Concluding Prayer**

Provident God, we thank you for all the graces that you have bestowed on our Mercy family, friends, relatives and benefactors over the last 175 years. We thank you for your protection, for that of our Mother Mary, and for your inspiration to our Foundress Catherine McAuley. If it is your holy will, may she be raised to the order of sanctity soon. We make our prayers joyfully through Jesus Christ in union with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

✦ **Blessing**

Under the patronage of Mary, Mother of Mercy and Venerable Catherine, on this special day, we ask you God to bless us: in the name of the Father and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



*Venerable Catherine McAuley 1778 – 1841.
Founded the Sisters of Mercy on December 12th 1831.*

Theme:

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord ...”



✦ Greeting

Pour out your love on us, O God of Mercy.

Fill us with the spirit of joy, compassion and service.

Inspire us to reach out afresh to your people in mercy, so that you may be praised and glorified for ever and ever.

✦ Doxology

Glory be to God who is Mercy and Compassion.

Glory be to Jesus our Carer and Redeemer,

Glory be to the Holy Spirit who called us to Mercy.

We, your Mercy family praise you, our God with joy. Amen.

✦ Hymn

Dancing, singing, Circling from the *Circle of Mercy* CD

✦ Antiphon

No work of charity can be more productive of good to society or more conducive to the happiness of the poor than the careful instruction of women. (Ven Catherine).

✦ Psalm

Judith 15: 9-10

“You are the exaltation of Jerusalem,
You are the great glory of Israel,
You are the great pride of our nation!

You have done all this single handed;
You have done great good to Israel,
And God is well pleased with it.
May the Almighty Lord bless you for ever!”

✦ Doxology said by all

Glory be to God who is Mercy and Compassion.

Glory be to Jesus our Carer and Redeemer,

Glory be to the Holy Spirit who called us to Mercy

We, your Mercy family praise you our God with joy. Amen.

✦ Antiphon

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✦ Scripture Reading

Lk 1: 31-35 & 38.

The angel Gabriel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

✦ Meditation

On our special day of thanksgiving and celebration this reading fills me with a variety of intense emotions, Lord:

Tranquility with Mary in prayer,
Excitement at Gabriel’s appearance,
Confusion at your request to a young, innocent virgin,

Empathy with her question,

Utter astonishment at Gabriel’s explanation,
Anger at the ridicule to which Mary was to be exposed, and

Shock at her brave and faith-filled response.

How could you make such a request, Lord?

How could she accept with such calm and trust?

On reflection, Lord, maybe she was supported and comforted by knowledge of the challenges which you presented to her predecessors, and which they accepted and transcended in your name:

Sarah, the aged and fragile wife of Abraham, who at your request welcomed motherhood, and became her foremother in faith through Jacob (*Gen 21:1-8*);

Rebecca, the young girl, who agreed to leave her own people and marry a man she had never met in order to ensure the continuity of your Promise to Abraham and Sarah (*Gen 24*);

Miriam, whose birth seemed inconsequential, but whose faith and persuasive powers with her brothers Moses and Aaron, secured the freedom of your people from spiritual and temporal slavery (*Ex 15:20-21, Num 12:1-16 & 20:1*).

Judith, the young widow, whose prayer and leadership saved Israel from the Assyrians and protected the faith and property of her people (*Judith 14-15:12*).

In hindsight Lord, I ask you to forgive me for allowing my emotions to run wild. I see now that Mary, like her predecessors in faith, has been given to us and to all succeeding generations as an inspiration. We too, must be open to doing your will and serving your people. You’ve continued to call women to ministry down through the ages and to be victorious through their efforts.

Long after Mary’s extraordinary response, your people became victims of poverty and religious discrimination once more. You responded by calling our Foundress, Catherine McAuley, to rescue them. You entrusted her with the privilege of ensuring the continuity of the **Promise** which you first made to Abraham, Sarah and Jacob. This promise, **the redemption of your people**, you had brought to fulfillment through Mary. I praise you for choosing Catherine to follow Mary’s example of faith, self-giving and sacrifice.

With joy she bravely sacrificed everything in the service of women and the poor. Supported by her companions and followers, she unshackled your people across the continents – restoring their faith, and educating them to achieve economic prosperity and positions of power and prestige globally.

Yes my child, but in recent years many of these people’s children and grandchildren have forgotten their roots and lost sight of me. They have turned to the worship of their new-found gods: money, property, pleasure and self-sufficiency just as their ancestors did in Israel. Now, **I need you** to walk in the footsteps of Sarah, Rebecca, Miriam, Judith, Mary and Catherine.

