

The Economics of Mercy

In the bizarre statistics of grace where the Spirit thrives,
acts of mercy are confoundingly unquantifiable:
the large, the small, the fleeting, the enduring,
the chance encounter, the decades of incremental nurture.

Who can say at what very time and in what very way
a glimmer of light queries the dark, or even a small slice of comfort sates a hunger;
who can know when the alchemy of healing imperceptibly eases a breathing,
or how one real cup becomes a defining symbol of care, warming a heart?

We endorse the expansive policies and projects, the buildings and boards,
and we trust the little moments, the daily and the unplanned,
but so much we will never know of when the Spirit shifts the balance,
restoring hope or enabling a life.

It is our business mostly to be where the gentle gaze of person to person
engenders a shy smile or flare of joy,
the sitting with, the patient listening that Catherine knew was the making of mercy.

We do what we can, where we can, attuning to the whispered blessings
and the jolts of unexpected calls, as well as events unsought and unwelcome.

Mary of Nazareth, our Mother in Mercy, embodies the economics of mercy,
being part of the big picture and steady companion to the minutiae.
Consider the mystery of mercy and its variations as it played her life:
her brave acquiescent perplexity at Gabriel's visit;
her joyful right reckoning of God's topsy turvy priorities in the Magnificat;
the wedding feast of Cana, trusting her child to render the scarce into superb plenty;
the bittersweet tastings of the Last Supper, the sheer helplessness of being at Calvary;
and her half-glimpsed life with John near Ephesus as widowed elder, wisdom treasure.

Mary of Nazareth sits with us, we learn from her, all of us servants of the Gospel.

Mary of Nazareth sits with us, and if we listen, we will learn from her.

Whatever our moment of graced mercy this day,
the apparently large or the seemingly small,
may we own the paradoxical wonder of it,
trust the quiet subtlety of its power to transform,
rejoice in its secret, never fully known, Spirit-sent methods,
and hold firmly but humbly to its source- God, who is Mercy.

a poem by Mary Wickham rsm for Mercy Day 2024