

— Faith Traditions of Mercy —

Reflection created for MGP by Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand

Mercy is a universal expression and action that has no boundaries for people of many faith traditions or with no faith tradition. To discern Mercy, is to go deep into the human psyche... to reflect more deeply on the importance of justice and compassion...

In our Catholic tradition we have entered into the beginning of Lent, a time for conversion of the heart. Traditionally prayer, fasting and almsgiving are seen as ways we would observe this penitential season. These three practices can be seen in terms of right relationship. **Prayer** addresses the relationship we have with God. **Fasting** calls us to reflect on ourselves and the way we live our lives. **Almsgiving** invites us to consider others, and the fact that we journey through life in community. (Notes from Good Shepherd Parish Auckland New Zealand Newsletter, 7th Sunday Ordinary Time)

Care of our common home, our eighth Work of Mercy is “the urgent challenge to protect our common home and includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.” (Laudato Si, no. 13)

As we journey through Lent, how can we change in ways that enable all to share? “A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more loving.” Querida Amazonia,

“This is Mercy, this is whakawhānaungatanga right relationship which we are all called to as the whole human family together.”

Take a few moments to reflect on the words above ...

Pray together ~ A prayer in Lent

Your face, O God, do we seek.

As this Lenten journey unfolds
lead us by your Spirit to see you anew
in our neighbours' need.

Open our eyes and soften our hearts

by your mercy, to be your Mercy,
to see you beyond our borders
in friends waiting to be met and welcomed.
Give us faith to encounter
those longing to be loved.
May we see the face of Christ
and reflect your love in unexpected ways.

Make us prophets in our times,

able to hear the voices that first reach your ears.
Let us hear their cry and the cry of Mother Earth.
May Mercy be a power in our world
for standing with fragile communities,
for bringing hope and light.
Let our Easter joy be the blessings
we have shared in Mercy's name. Amen.



--Understanding Mercy in other Faith Traditions--

"The tender mercy of God has given us one another"

Catherine McAuley

Islam

According to al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), one of the greatest Islamic theologians and thinkers, perfect mercy is that which actually bestows good upon those in need.

The willing of good for the needy is concern for them.

All-inclusive mercy gives to both the worthy and unworthy.

The mercy of God is perfect and all-inclusive.

It is perfect in the sense that He not only wills the satisfaction of the needs of the needy but actually satisfies them.

It is all-inclusive in that it includes the worthy and the unworthy, this life and that which is to come and encompasses the essentials, needs and advantages which go beyond them. (p36-37)

Buddhism

Where mercy is spoken of, Buddhism advocates karuna, which may be rendered as compassion to those who are grieved, and going further, it culminates in spreading the sentiment of 'friendliness' or love (metta/maithri) to all beings. Compassion, according to Buddhism is the heavy heart one feels when one is encountered with the suffering of others. This suffering or despair could be originated from any number of causes, internal or external, including poverty, disease, death, war, conflict and aggression. The world we share with one another is full of suffering. It is particularly so at present with conflicts generated by political and religious ideologies. (p15)

Judaism

All men and women, irrespective of their age and condition, are called by divine goodness to experience the mercy and love that God spreads throughout the universe, and to fulfil it especially towards the poor, sick, ailing and everyone who needs care and affection. This vocation to be lived in joy and thanksgiving is a priority ethical duty to achieve the imitation of divine virtue, in justice required by reciprocity, and in mercy exceeding mere justice. According to the Jewish Torah, this universal ethical appeal is fulfilled by obeying the precept to love your neighbour (Leviticus 19:18), which extends to love for foreigners who are not part of the Jewish people but enjoy the same citizenship rights (Leviticus 19:34). (p24 -25)

Hinduism

Compassion (mercy) is the basis for the Hindu understanding and practice of 'ahimsa' (non-violence), a core virtue, declared to be the supreme ingredient of righteousness. Compassion is not pity or feeling sorry for the sufferer, because that is marred with condescension; compassion is feeling one with the sufferer, leading to acts of kindness, mercy and charity in selfless service (seva) especially to those in need and in pain. This compassion extends to animals as well. This explains why most of the devout Hindus are vegetarians. (p34)

A time of reflection: Reflect on the quotes above

What phrase or quote has had an impact on you? Why?

What phrase or quote challenges you?

Think of a time in your own life where Mercy was expressed in an interfaith context. What stood out?

— Living Mercy —

Mercy is the force that **Reawakens Us** to new life and instils in us the **Courage** to look to the future **With Hope**. Pope Francis

Reflective Reading

Mercy is a mode of relationship, not a momentary sporadic feeling. It is rather, a habit of mind and heart, a way of organizing and interpreting the world. It is an enduring approach to the world. And, like any relationship, it is a two-way street.

And power. This is the exciting, challenging part. Mercy is only what it is when it is effective – when it survives against great odds and when it empowers all who come within its orbit of care. Because mercy opposes injustice and whatever is degrading, it is likely to involve danger. Conflict is inevitable, struggle enduring. Courage is needed, as never before in our time.

Wounded (but not destroyed) by the suffering of others. If Mercy is com-*passion*, or “suffering with”, it is also com-*fort*, or “standing strong with.” An inner-city minister in Baltimore put it beautifully: “Mercy is justice in tears.”

Patricia Smith, “Mercy Values Today: Ever Ancient, Ever New” in *Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy*, p 932-933

“You are Us and We are You”



Prime Minister of Aotearoa New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, embracing a Muslim woman following the Christchurch massacre at two mosques which killed 51 people and injured many others, in March 2019. Source latheeffarook.net

“...for God proclaims peace. Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and mercy shall kiss.”

Psalm 85 adapted

Closing Prayer

E te Atua Atawhai God of unending mercies
we lift up our voices together with all who are willing
to share their gifts and enrich other lives.
Bless us as we seek to strengthen one another
as witnesses of hope to a broken world.

In the interweaving of our lives with those we serve
and who in turn serve us, we hear your voice.
In the faces we are told not to see,
we witness your presence and discover your joy.
In our reaching out to others,
we are touched by them and are transformed.

Give us courage to follow your call and to do your work.
In the face of oppression and despair,
empower us to bring justice and hope.
Teach us to be open to others, and to learn from them.

Remember all who have gone before us,
those who work with us now,
and those who will follow us in times to come.
Dwell in each of us and among us,
be always our strength and inspiration,
in mercy's name. Amen

Inoi Taketake Prayers for Stepping Forward. 2018. Dennis Horton Adapted
Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand

Additional Resources

“We Are You” by Chris Skinner and James Lyons. This piece of music was composed after the Christchurch Massacre of 51 Muslim worshippers and the injury of many others, in Christchurch in March 2019.

Music can be found at <https://www.chrisskinner.org.nz/we-are-you>

The Dalai Lama speaks on Compassion, Mercy & Universal Responsibility. (18 April 2019)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GbrMyQYjJ8&t=2849s> Note the clip is 1:26:08 long. For the first 41.28 minutes the Dalai Lama speaks, this is followed by Q & A.