

## ***Mercy, the principal path .....***

### **Introduction**

“You not only have a great history to remember and to recount but also a great history still to be accomplished. Look to the future to where the Spirit is sending you to do even greater things”<sup>1</sup>.  
(St. JP II).

We gather here in Melbourne today to tell our story, to relive our great history, in order to say thank you to God, to strengthen the bonds of unity that exist between us, to deepen our sense of belonging, and to be inspired and challenged into the future.

Time is a most precious gift. From the perspective of time, as we journey on our path in life,

- we learn to accept with gratitude our past as Pope Francis says, (Digress: we cannot change our personal past, but if we learn to accept it with gratitude we can change the impact it has on us in the present)
- we use our released energy to co-create the future responsibly
- while we live the present as call. As Catherine McAuley said: “The present moment is where I find God”
- The past is history – the future mystery – the present is eternity

Together we will explore something of the pathway of life walked by this woman Catherine McAuley - a woman who had a real heart for Mercy, so that we may once again take hold of something of the legacy she left us, in the hope of discovering anew ways by which her life can encourage and challenge us, to live the gift of Mercy as we walk our path of Mercy in our time and in our space.

What is our common history that we recall?

It is the story of Catherine McAuley, from Dublin, Ireland of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy (December 12<sup>th</sup> 1831). This is a life story with which all of us here are familiar; however it bears some repetition and I would like to approach it this morning from the perspective of the “unexpected”.

Those unexpected in Catherine’s life

1. Catherine became a wealthy heiress without having any expectation in the world that such a thing might happen to her.
2. Catherine became the founder of a congregation of religious women without ever having any intention to do so when she started out on her journey.
3. Without having any personal ambition in that direction Venerable Catherine McAuley is now on the road to being declared a saint in the Catholic Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Vita Consecrata no 110.

Soren Kierkegaard's (d. 11<sup>th</sup> November 1855) words in relation to life are pertinent in this instance: "Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." It is only in retrospect we see the influences that have impacted us; the surprising twists and turns on our path that have formed and reformed us into the people we are. It is only when we take time to reflect that we become aware of the golden threads of God's loving Providence and Mercy at work in the tapestry of the discrete happenings of our life.

Meister Eckhart tells us: "this then above all things; be ready for the gifts of God and always for new ones".

What about you?

When you reflect on your life, where are the God surprises, the unexpected turn of events? How have you/do you negotiate the unexpected in life? Let us turn back to Catherine McAuley to see how she negotiated the unexpected in her life.

### **Catherine McAuley, heiress, founder, saint.**

Catherine McAuley was born on September 29<sup>th</sup> 1778 to wealthy middle class Catholic parents in Dublin, Ireland. To be wealthy and Catholic was not the norm in the Ireland of that day. Due to the Penal Laws, in vogue at the time of Catherine's birth, to be Catholic was practically synonymous with being poor.

Her father, James McAuley died in 1783 when she was just five and shortly afterwards her mother sold the family home and land left by her husband and with her three children Catherine, Mary and James went to live in the inner city in Dublin because she was a society loving woman at heart.

Her mother died of tuberculosis in 1798 (when Catherine was twenty) leaving her young family in very difficult financial circumstances and dependent on the kindness and good will of relatives. Catherine's siblings went to live with William Armstrong, a family friend and distant relative, who was a wealthy Protestant and who willingly provided housing and lodgings for the orphaned adolescents. Catherine, for her part stayed with the Conway family, Catholic relatives on her mother's side. Sometime after her mother's death, the Conway family fell on very hard times and Catherine had to leave the family so as not to burden them any further. She joined her sister and brother in the Armstrong household.

In 1803 when she was 25, Catherine was invited by William Callaghan to be a companion to his ailing wife, also called Catherine. The couple, recently returned from India was childless and lived in Coolock House on the outskirts of the north side of Dublin not far from Stormanstown House which had been Catherine's home when her father was alive.

Catherine spent some twenty years, that is, all of her young adulthood into middle age with William and Catherine Callaghan. In their home and company she grew into mature womanhood, humanly, socially and spiritually.

Humanly, she was obviously loving, responsible and sensible since the elderly couple grew fonder of her as they entrusted the running of their home and estate to her. She in her turn nursed the ailing Catherine Callaghan quietly and dependably. After Catherine Callaghan's death she cared for William Callaghan until his death. She was kind, considerate and generous to the Callaghans and to the members of the household and workers on the estate, their families and children.

Socially, she was like any other young woman of the Irish upper middle class of her time. She went into the city; she in her turn learned to organize parties and entertain on behalf of the Callaghans. **At the same time as her social skills were being honed, Catherine was growing into an acute, responsible, social awareness of the advantages and inequalities of the social and political situation within which she lived.** Dublin of her day was a city of contrasts. On the one hand it was socially one of the liveliest cities in Europe for the wealthy. On the other hand the extreme poverty of the majority of its citizens was shocking and beggars belief. Even though she had the advantages of wealthy middle-class living, Catherine never forgot who she was or what her story had been. She showed herself to be very sensitive to those less fortunate than herself. Her experience of the loss of people she loved, of home and status, her experience of dependency on the goodwill of others affected her deeply. She did not turn in on herself, she did not lament her misfortune, instead she learned from the experiences that life offered her and so she used every means she had, to go out to others, to try and help alleviate the poverty both material and spiritual that she met in her daily life. She would give material help whenever and wherever she could, often from the Callaghan household with the blessing of William and Catherine but quite frequently too from her own pin money which she could have used for another purpose like buying a new bonnet! Encouraged by her good friend Dr. Murray (a priest in the Dublin diocese at the time and later to be Archbishop of the diocese), she began to practice her Catholic faith openly and discretely. She began to teach the children of the estate their catechism. As time passed she extended her service of the poor to St Mary's Parish in Abbey Street, where she taught the women and girls from the surrounding slums who came to the parish to learn. She visited people in their homes. She did this simply without drawing attention to herself. Her keen sense of respect for the other meant that she focused on helping women and young girls to help themselves. She taught them skills like needlework and craft work. She followed up on her teaching with market research and found customers among her well-to-do acquaintances to buy the articles produced.

She put into practice the old saying,

*"If you give a man a fish he will have food for a day, if you teach him to fish he will have food for life".*

And so her generosity to the poor. So we see that Catherine was not only aware of the poverty and hardship in the society around her but we find that she tried as best she could, within the limits of her ordinary day to day life, to do **something** about it. This is something that is in the DNA of the charism, of the expression of Mercy, handed on by Catherine, a trait you see in Mercy Sisters and in their collaborators all around the world; they will always try and do something practical to

alleviate a difficult situation. This is an aspect of Mercy that Pope Francis continuously underlines today – **Mercy is love in action.**

This was the seedling expression of Catherine's call which at first she understood as something modest and personal, as she communicated to William Callaghan when he asked her what she would do when he was gone. She told him she hoped she would live quietly, teach poor children and use whatever means she had to help those fortunate than herself.

When later, she unexpectedly became Callaghan's sole residual legatee, her vision expanded to something more public and audacious. Hers was a conviction that never dimmed but strengthened and grew steadily to the extent that she withstood obstacles, derision and uncertainties until it found its concrete expression in the opening of the House of Mercy in Baggot Street in 1827.

Where did this strength come from?

It came from an inner spiritual strength, from her intensely personal relationship with God. It was during her time in Coolock, this period that led up to her inheriting the Callaghan legacy that Catherine also grew and developed **spiritually**. As an adolescent Catherine had to stand up for her Catholic faith particularly while she lived in the strongly Protestant Armstrong household. William Armstrong was very well meaning. However, he was intensely opposed to the Catholic religion. What Catherine found most difficult in this household was that she had to listen to people who derided and despised the Catholic religion. She tried to defend it, knew that what was being said was not always true but she did not have the training or understanding herself to counteract what she heard being said around her. (The Cottage Controversy).

When she came to Coolock House, she was in an atmosphere, which was not inimical to, but neither was it supportive of, Catherine's adherence to her Catholic faith. Once again we see Catherine's respectful yet determined character. She found her way around the situation. Due to her innate courtesy she did not publicly display pious objects in her surroundings as this would have been distasteful to those in whose home she lived; **her creativity** enabled her to see the cross in the branches of the tree outside her bedroom window or in wintertime on the wood panels of the door to her room.

She sought out well known and well educated priests as spiritual directors and guides, so that she could be clearer and more enlightened about her Catholic faith.

Side by side with what was happening exteriorly, Catherine's interior spiritual life was growing apace. Coolock was in a sense Catherine's real novitiate. Scripture was integral to her life there (possibly due to the fact that she read from the scriptures every day to Catherine Callaghan who was a professed Quaker). Her own life was the companion volume to the Scriptures in the study of which she found the secret of life and love. Jesus was central to her life and it was during this time that her love for Jesus crucified intensified. Her prayer patterns and preferences were established in this period, practices that stood her in good stead for the rest of her life.

## **Conclusion**

Catherine was an ordinary woman of her time, who was aware of what was happening in the world around her and to which she made an intentional, practical response, guided by an ever deepening relationship with God in Jesus Christ, all of which it would seem, readied and prepared her humanly, socially and spiritually to respond responsibly to the unexpected advent of the legacy that was entrusted to her by William Callaghan. Catherine in her response to the unexpected enables us to understand more deeply that “unless God has found you he does not let you seek him: that God does not let you act until you have become mature for the activity to which he calls you and God gives you authority only when you have been humbled and have learned true humility in him. This latter is something that comes clearly into the light when we look at the second “unexpected” in Catherine’s life.

### ***The second “unexpected” in Catherine’s life***

#### **Catherine becomes a Foundress**

If Catherine had not founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, I doubt that we would be gathered here today recalling initial flame of Catherine’s loving, practical care for the poor.

Yet, as you know, in building the House of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin, Catherine set in motion an expression of God’s merciful love, a bush fire, that in the Providence of God continues to spread, develop and deepen in ways that were completely hidden to Catherine when she began.

Catherine never intended to found a congregation of religious women. What she had in mind initially was to gather around her a small group of lay women who would volunteer their time and energies for a certain length of time and then she expected that they would return to their families of origin.

However, Life took over as her dream began to take shape. Initially the band of young women who joined her, inspired by her generosity and vision felt a need to establish regularity in their day to day life in the house on Baggot Street. By regularity here I mean that they rose, prayed, ate, recreated and slept at regular times and dressed simply. They also began playfully to call each other “sister”. This was done simply for convenience sake.

It was people outside the group, who, for their own reasons were either suspicious of or jealous of what was happening in the big new house on Baggot Street and who began first to whisper, then to proclaim more loudly that the Archbishop of Dublin (Dr. Murray, at the time a very close friend and mentor to Catherine), had surreptitiously introduced a new congregation into the Dublin diocese. Pressure was brought on the Archbishop to clarify the situation. Thus Catherine was faced with a new “unexpected” in her life. She was faced with the choice of either regularizing the situation of the House of Mercy canonically by founding a religious congregation to carry on the work she had begun or else she could hand over what she had built and established to an existing religious congregation that was already engaged in the same kind of care for the poor of the city.

Catherine was obviously nonplussed by the Archbishop's directive; however, she was not diverted from her conviction and vision. Founding a congregation of religious women had never been on her agenda, but she was big enough and free enough interiorly before God to reread what she had planned herself in the light of the actual situation as it presented itself. (Our "all" often needs stretching and developing in order to respond to God's "all" as we see in the life of Mary of Nazareth and of all the great saints).

Initially she would have been prepared to hand over the project to another congregation while maintaining a small apartment in Baggot Street for herself as her home, but congregations of women religious at the time were enclosed and did not go out among the poor, which for Catherine was an essential aspect of how she saw that help and care needed to be offered. This was pivotal for her final decision.

Finally, at fifty two years of age on September 8<sup>th</sup> 1830, she chose to undergo a novitiate (together with Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley) in preparation for making vows and thus canonically put herself in a position to establish and lead a religious congregation that would be accepted within the structure of the Catholic Church.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for this middle aged, cultured, society lady who was investing every penny she had inherited in a project for the poor, to leave it completely in the hands of a small group of much younger and very inexperienced volunteers, while she literally cut off all contact for fifteen months in the novitiate of the Presentation Convent in Georges Hill in Dublin? Geographically, George's Hill is not very far from Baggot Street, but Catherine might as well have been over here in Melbourne for all the contact she had with her fledgling band. Much could be said about what Catherine must have endured during this time as she could only imagine what was happening across the River Liffey in Baggot Street in her absence.

What **we do appreciate in hindsight** is that she seems to have learned to keep her own anxiety in check, to trust absolutely that if this was what God truly wanted then it would turn out for the best. Her trust was not misplaced. Even though humanly things deteriorated in Baggot Street while she was away, the project did not falter.

**So the second great "unexpected" in Catherine's life brought her to the point where she was enabled to give shape and form to an expression of Mercy that is known far and wide in our world today, but which had been completely outside Catherine's vision of how things would work out. (Brings us face to face with Mystery in life)**

What shape and form of Mercy is embryonic in our lives today which will bring Mercy to a place completely outside our vision? Prophets of a future not our own

Back to Catherine. What is the enduring impact of God's preparation of Catherine for this second unexpected twist in her life?

One area where we see this impact is in the writing of the **rule of life** that was to guide the nascent congregation and which would inspire and illuminate the lives of the many thousands of

women who followed in her footsteps, though living in many and varied places throughout the world.

Catherine's Rule and Constitution for her fledgling community was based on the Rule of the Presentation Sisters with whom she made her novitiate, founded on Augustine with traces of Angela Merici and Frances de Sales. Catherine used the Presentation Rule basically but the small differences written in by Catherine reveal much about herself and her attitude to a way of life that was very new and in many ways alien to her. When compared with the Presentation Rule, Catherine's Rule for her Mercy Congregation:

1. Is more tender in expression (tenderness)
2. Is more humbly stated (humility)
3. Is more confident in the good judgment of those who observe the rule (trust)
4. Indicates a well-founded respect and affection for co-workers (respect)
5. Is focused on the practical and immediate care and alleviation of the suffering of the poor (Mercy).

The rule of life reveals a prudent, compassionate woman, who is tender, humble, trustful, respectful and merciful - intent on practical help for the poor. Inflamed by a mercy-filled passion she could be innovative, take risks, and stand outside a system. As a founder, she managed to ensure that the members of her congregation were not bound by enclosure (unusual for the time) that they could **go to the poor** rather than expecting the poor to come to them. This innovation earned the title "The Walking Nuns" for herself and her sisters as they moved among the poor and sick of Dublin in the early nineteenth century. (The Presentation founder Nano Nagle started the same practice for her sisters but after her death the practice was dropped for many years). Catherine's inner freedom gave birth to a reality she could not envision but could embrace. What is she saying to us today?

**The third unexpected in Catherine's story, she is declared venerable by Pope Saint John Paul II on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1990.**

**Many people say to me** "sure Catherine would never have wanted to be made a saint" and my invariable reply is that I could not agree more. However, it is not Catherine, but firstly the people who lived with her and then the Church who recognize her for the truly holy person she is. Catherine's cause was opened in 1903 (62 years after her death). For historical reasons in Ireland and in the world at the time the cause was not pursued for a further fifty years.

In 1954, an historical commission was established in the Dublin diocese to gather all the extant materials written about and by Catherine. Twenty years later in 1973, Angela Bolster RSM began to write the *Positio super Virtutibus* (a detailed compilation of the life, writings and reputation for holiness of the servant of God) which resulted in Catherine being regarded as having lived a life of heroic virtue and in due course being declared venerable in 1990.

When the Church looks for virtue lived to a heroic degree, she usually looks at the last ten years of the life of the Servant of God.

Catherine McAuley's last months, her terminal illness and death are an example par excellence of a heroically virtuous woman. Her delicate courtesy and kind thoughtfulness even when she was 'in extremis' give pause for reflection. Catherine didn't suddenly arrive at her deathbed and manage to exude the serenity, confidence and joy we associate with her. At one point in her life even, she was very frightened of death.

However, she had been growing into these attitudes as she journeyed through life. Her day by day trust in and surrender to God even in the minutiae of her everyday life. Catherine is certainly the epitome of "as you live so shall you die".

Catherine spent the last ten years of her life as an indefatigable founder of ten convents in Ireland and England (9+1). In those short years, through her letters, her poetry, her retreat instructions, the type of religious extracts she copied from spiritual books, we see the maturity of spirit, heart and mind that first showed signs of blossoming in Coolock coming to fruition

I would like to highlight two facets of the remarkable life of this fascinating holy woman that were highlighted by the theologians who read the positio of her life and writings and which I think challenge us today.

### **Prayer**

Frances Warde, possibly Catherine's closest friend and confidante said of her:

***"You never knew her, I knew here, better than I have known anyone else in my life: She was a woman of and God made her a woman of vision"***. (1879. Letter to M. Gonzaga O'Brien).

All through her life with its ups and downs, its joys and demands, its difficulties and adversities Catherine grew step by step into her confident loving relationship with God through prayer. She would say that;

*"Prayer is a plant the seed of which is sown in the heart of every Christian but its growth depends on the care we take to nourish it. If neglected it will die. If nourished by constant practice it will blossom and produce fruit in abundance"*.

In our own lives we know that when no one listens to us, God does. When we can talk to no-one we can talk to God. Prayer is essential to our spiritual life; without it we lose our relationship with the Lord. What inspires and challenges us in Catherine is not only that she came to a very deep and close relationship with Jesus Christ, but it was to the **abandoned Jesus on the Cross**, whom she called "my Christ", that she related most intimately. The desire to draw close to Jesus crucified was her constant yearning. As mentioned already Catherine's prayer was rooted in the Gospel and in the traditional spirituality of her day. (The Psalter of Jesus, the Eucharist, the Passion and the Sacred Heart were her favourite devotions). She inspires and challenges us (especially through her letters) to persevere in prayer, not to lose heart, to make it the beginning and the end of all our undertakings, the central focus of our lives. Theologians found no such mentality in Catherine's spirituality. Instead, they found courage and perseverance.

## Hope

Catherine's life was centered on Jesus and she **took seriously God's promises of fidelity** to us (Jer:31:3). **She clearly recognised that the care of the God of Mercy is to be seen in the ordinary and extraordinary events of our lives.** Catherine often declared her trust in the "*steady and steadying love of God*". She was utterly convinced that all things in life work together towards God. This was the kernel of her hope, her trust in Divine Providence which found practical expression in her perennial youthfulness, her attitude of freedom and lightness in relation to herself (she did not take herself too seriously), her sound judgment and practical common sense in relation to life in general.

The growing intensity of Catherine's hope bestowed on her that ability to stretch out towards the "more"; it endowed her with that adaptability and readiness for the whisper of the Spirit, that strong hearted freshness, that resilient joy, that steady perseverance in trust that so distinguish the young and makes them so lovable. It gets harder as we get older. It made Catherine youthful and lovable to all who knew her, especially the young. In some respects we could say that she mirrors what Ralph Waldo Emerson once said:

"as we age, beauty steals inward"

or what Paul in 2 Cor 4:16 declares:

"Even though our outer nature is decaying yet our inner nature is being renewed day by day".

## Humility

The theologians who studied Catherine's life noted how she lived Faith, Hope, Love, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance as well as Poverty, Chastity and Obedience but they emphasised that the virtue that underpinned all of these and unified them in her relationship with God was her unwavering **humility**.

**Catherine understood and lived Humility** in the Marian sense. Like Mary of Nazareth, she accepted herself as she was before God; an acceptance founded on unwavering trust in the Merciful love of God. She was convinced that once she trusted God would give the increase.

## Mercy

**The upcoming Jubilee year of Mercy** will provide all of us with a precious opportunity to deepen our understanding of the Merciful Love of God. The hebrew words "hesed" and "rachamin" or the Greek word "eleos" which are used to describe Mercy open up for us something of the breadth, the length, the height and the depth that is the gracious Mercy of our God.

Today, I would like to focus on Catherine and her legacy of Mercy

Catherine was vitally aware of God's mercy at work and would say;

“If Jesus did everything inspired by charity, if his Mercy did not intervene few would be saved”.

**Such** a statement could only come from a heart that fully recognised the utter tenderness and warmth that is God’s merciful love for us and the humble, clear recognition of our need for Mercy

. She wrote a type of poem about mercy:

*Sweet Mercy, soothing, patient, mild and kind: softens the high and lifts the fallen mind*

*Knows with soft rein and even hand to guide: nor yields to fear nor knows exacting pride.*

*Not soon provoked, it easily forgives: is all to all and with a look relieves*

*Soft peace it brings wherever it arrives: removes our pains and crowns with peace our lives.*

In words “poetical” as she would say herself, Catherine captures something of the essence of Mercy.

She recognises the connection between Mercy and forgiveness.

She recognises the reciprocal power of Mercy to influence both the giver and the receiver.

She recognises that Mercy requires strength of character and the power to look into the face of the other.

She recognises the restorative power of Mercy, that it enhances dignity and does not strip the other of this most precious of human attributes. It brings justice one step further.

She recognises that Mercy is moved to compassion by the pain of the other. Mercy is a deep seated feeling for the other, especially the one who suffers.

She recognises that being merciful brings with it the reward of true inner peace.

Earlier this year, Pope Francis echoed much of what Catherine says in a morning homily at mass in Santa Marta when he was reflecting on the reading for the day which was the story of the woman taken in adultery.

Francis pointed out that mercy is something that goes beyond forgiveness, it does not condemn. Talking about God’s forgiveness, Francis said that not only does God not condemn he “restores a sense of self respect and dignity to the person through his attitude of tenderness and respect (As Jesus showed to the woman in the story).

**Also** Pope Francis speaking of Mercy said:

“Mercy is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life”.

With these words the Pope challenges us as Catherine does to look our neighbour in the face. When we do that in openness and trust the seed(gift) of mercy within us is activated.

For Catherine her charism, her expression of Mercy is truly feminine in that it is eminently practical. The corporal and spiritual works of mercy were always her focus. She understood how useless it is to preach the gospel to one who is hungry. At the same time, when she relieved the hunger of the other, she never failed to help the person turn in gratitude not to herself but to the giver of all that is good, God. "Charity that does not give God as well as material help gives too little".

The corporal works of mercy are to:

feed the hungry; give drink to the thirsty; clothe the naked; welcome the stranger; heal the sick; visit the imprisoned; bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are to:

counsel the doubtful; instruct the ignorant; challenge the sinner; comfort the afflicted; forgive offences; bear insults patiently; pray for the living and the dead.

**Catherine was very aware of the fact that in the end we will be judged not by our sins but by our omissions, our failures to do good.** "I was hungry and you did not give me to eat....."

Mercy more than justice (which in its essence means giving everyone including God, including ourselves what is her/his due) is a matter of attentiveness, sensitivity to the needs we meet with in our day to day life, going one step further. (We will have to answer for our failure to look our brother and sister in the eye, our tendency to look the other way).

The charism of Mercy, especially practical mercy, that seeks to put the spiritual and corporal works of mercy into practice day by day highlights a four fold poverty in our world (Walter Kasper: Mercy):

1. physical, economic poverty
2. cultural poverty e.g. illiteracy
3. lack of relationships e.g. loneliness, isolation, the loss of a partner.
4. mental or spiritual poverty.

This fourfold description of poverty points to the pervasiveness of the human need that calls for Mercy and we are reminded starkly of Jesus' words "the poor you have with you always".

In the 1820' s and 1830' s in Ireland Catherine was faced with enormous physical and cultural poverty. The nation was not self-governing. There were no social service back-ups to be had. Poor people had little or no access to education, healthcare or social services and there was no state aid for someone who fell ill or was out of work.

Today we may have the social fabric that meets the basic human needs of the people of our country (education, health care, social security) but where are the lacunae in these services and in other areas, where are the gaps? What are the needs that call to us to be conduits of the heart of the merciful God today

## Just two points to conclude

1. Catherine used **her imagination** in planning how she would use her inheritance for the poor. **John Henry Newman says that a heart is reached not through reason but through imagination.** Unless we can imagine something we cannot do it. It is our imagination that helps us to make God more real in our lives. If the imagination is not touched or nourished the great realities of faith such as Mercy will remain vague, shadowy, conceptual or unreal. If Mercy is not on fire, then it is merely notional. Notional mercy was not Catherine's way!
2. Catherine's **merciful heart drew her constantly into relationship with others.** Her letters are an excellent reminder to us of this quality of mercy in her. Our Mercy tradition gives priority to relationship with God and others as the normal and necessary birthplace of personal identity and personal growth. In this world of relationship **gift has priority over achievement.** A good example is the first smile of a baby. This first smile is a response of love to a mother who has loved this baby first. This first smile is pre-verbal. It is as if the baby is saying "I know you love me". (M.P. Gallagher on Mercy, 2015).

***What are some of the trends that we meet in our world today? How can a heart for Mercy find enough oxygen to beat in this world of ours? Who are the poor of our time?***

***Our respondents will light up some important avenues for Mercy expression in our world today.***

***Thank you.***