

## Reflections for the Sixth Sunday of Easter ~ 22 May 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today is the Sixth Sunday of Easter, the last Sunday before the feast of the Ascension and then Pentecost. Today also marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Clare's Mercy Hospital – although 22 May 1922 was on Monday, it also followed the Sixth Sunday of Easter and came a few days before the Ascension.

The profound impact of images of newness (that persistent Easter essence) is visible in our first three readings this morning. In the first reading, we see a record of the first formal meeting of church leaders, what we know as the Council of Jerusalem, which is also recorded in a slightly different way in Paul's letter to the Galatians 2:1-10. This gathering made the firm decision about a new beginning – the good news would be preached to Gentiles as well as Jews. There were four “rules” that Gentile Christians should live by: abstain from food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. These were not rules the Gentiles must follow in order to be saved. Rather, the



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This image of inclusion is embedded in a written letter from the apostles and the elders to the believers of Gentile origin (Acts 15:23) to be shared with the early Christian communities so that there would be no misunderstandings about this important decision. And the decision is framed beautifully, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28).

In Psalm 67, we hear that beautiful blessing, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make God's face to shine upon us (Ps 67:1). Imagine what God's face shining on you, on me, on us really means. Think of light shining on the face of someone you love. Think of the light of the sun shining on Earth, on the trees, on the tops of the waves, on the growing grass. Think of the light of the full moon shining across the water. Now think of the light of God's face shining on you. Be still and ponder the joy and wonder of God's face shining on you. Rejoice and be glad that God loves you enough to do this every single day.

This verse from Psalm 67 echoes the blessing in Numbers (6:24-26) which is so familiar to us.

May God bless you and keep you;  
May God's face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
May God countenance be lifted upon you and give you peace.

Did you know that the oldest existing text of the Scriptures is this text from the book of Numbers? Two silver amulets were found rolled into tiny scrolls in a burial cave in Jerusalem (one amulet is nearly four inches long and the other – the one shown here – an



inch and a half long). They are about 500 years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls and date to about 700 years before the coming of Jesus. This is one of God's many surprises – the oldest surviving text is an intimate blessing from God to all God's creatures! In the words of the Psalm, this blessing is how God's "way may be known upon Earth" (Ps 67:2).



The image in Revelation is the most dramatic of all. The spirit brings John to a high mountain from which he looks down to see the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It is radiant like that rare jewel jasper and clear like crystal. Jasper is the traditional birthstone of the first month of Spring which protects and empowers, keeping people strong and healthy, stable and secure. It is a healing stone, connected with Mother Earth. Crystals are templates of light and conductors of energy. They, too, are connected with healing and with restoring harmony and balance. Both jasper and crystals come in many colours, reflecting the wonder of diversity for this new city in the new heaven and the new earth.

The new city connects the past and the present as it brings us into the future. The number twelve (gates and foundations) and the four directions (east, north, south, and west) indicate completeness with the past still nourishing the present through the angels and tribes, the present alive in the reference to the apostles, and the future inviting us into the presence of our God and the Lamb.

The Gospel passage from John speaks about love, keeping God's word, and peace – all Easter themes but spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper before his suffering and death. Not only do Jesus's words here at the Last Supper anticipate what will happen after the resurrection, they also anticipate what will happen at Pentecost, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). Veronica Lawson rsm says so beautifully, "Jesus is the word of God in human form, the embodiment of God's communication with the cosmos. Jesus keeps God's word."

Listen in your heart to these words, "the Holy Spirit will remind you of all that I have said to you"! Remember the words of Mary and Cleopas at Emmaus, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32). We do not always hear the words right away or understand them right way or keep remembering them. But we do not have to worry – the Spirit is always there giving us gentle reminders!

"Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (Jn 14:27). The founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, reflects these words in a prayer which we Sisters sing on many occasions, including our farewell to our Sisters who have begun their journey into eternal life:

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.  
Teach me to cast myself entirely  
into the arms of your loving Providence  
with a lively, unlimited confidence  
in your compassionate, tender pity.  
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,  
That whatever you ordain or permit  
may be acceptable to me.

**Catherine McAuley**  
**Gael O'Leary**

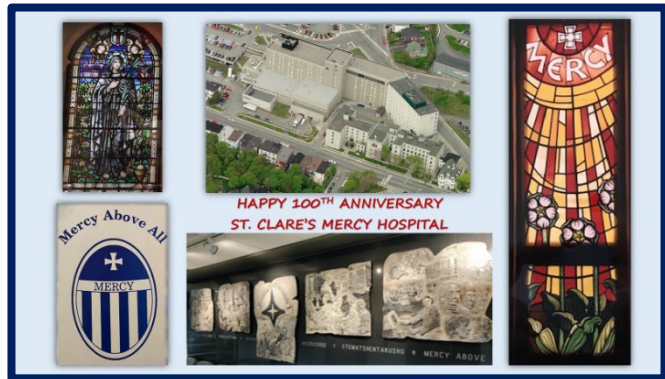


Take from my heart all painful anxiety;  
 let nothing sadden me but sin,  
 nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of You,  
 my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom.

This prayer echoes both the words of Jesus and the words from the blessing in Psalm 67 – our delightful hope that we will see God’s face.

On this one hundredth anniversary of St. Clare’s Mercy Hospital, I also use images to bring our hearts and spirits into the joy and gratitude of this day:

- i. St. Clare, the woman healer and leader after whom the hospital is named, a hospital founded by women as a place of healing
- ii. the stained-glass window with the pitcher plant linking St. Clare’s to its place in our beloved province and a Mercy cross reflecting the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy – both connected with each other by vibrant colours of green, gold, red, white and black, marking the inclusion and creativity born from this connection
- iii. Gerald and Esther Squires’ ceramic, *For Mercy Has a Human Heart*, with its panels showing the hospital’s history, mission, and ministry; the word *Mercy* engraved in our most-used languages: English, Innu-aimun, Inuttitut, French, and Mi’kmaq; and the final scroll, “God’s mercy is from generation to generation”
- iv. the Hospital’s motto, “Mercy Above All” which speaks to the spirit, energy, and dreams of all the people who have come through the doors of St. Clare’s whether as members of its diverse community, as patients, or as loved ones of the patients.



This anniversary of one of our most precious Mercy ministries, celebrated in these Easter days in which it began, reminds us of the strengths of our past, the hope of our present, and the promise for the future, all held in the embrace of the God whose name is mercy. in the words of the poet, Mary Wickham rsm:

May your own need and knowing of mercy  
 lead you to its need and its knowing in others.  
 Mercy be the name;  
 Mercy be the path;  
 Mercy at the heart.  
 Ever, ever. Amen.

Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to St. Clare’s Mercy Hospital, a sacred place of healing and hope, and to all the people who have made it so!