

TRANSFORMATION

A. Sacred Scripture: The Calling of Matthew (Matt 9:9-13)

9 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

10 And as he sat at dinner[a] in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting[b] with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

B. Thomas Merton: Mercy and self knowledge

"Mercy is the thing, the deepest thing that has been revealed to us by God. A mercy that cannot fail. (Alaska 1968)

"Simply put, God's mercy transforms us—enabling us to overcome our alienation, to see ourselves as we are, to recognize ourselves as 'having an inner being in which truth is present'. God's mercy frees us to be who we truly are: 'the self-seeking self is liberated....by finding not self but truth in Christ. This 'finding' is the discovery, in grace and faith, that one is 'mercifully understood' and that in the Spirit of this mercy and this understanding one is enabled to understand others in mercy and in pity." (Merton as quoted by Christine M. Bochen "Mercy within Mercy within Mercy..., p. 6)

To receive mercy we must recognize our need for mercy and allow ourselves to be transformed by God's mercy. In a journal entry written in the early fifties, Merton offers the example of Mary of Magdala whose sins were forgiven her "because she had loved much" (Luke 7:46) and Simon and the Pharisees who did not "understand love" and could not "receive the teachings of Jesus about forgiveness." They were scandalized when Jesus forgives Mary's sins. £It does not even occur to them that they themselves need forgiveness and love is a purely abstract one, a canonical question, a matter of jurisdiction." But Mary, who admits her neediness and risks loving, experiences the transforming power of Mercy." (Bochen quoting Merton, p. 6)

C. Dorothy Day: Mercy received and mercy shared

Dearest Cathie—

Please forgive me for presuming to write you so personally—to intrude on you and your suffering, as I am doing, but I felt I had to—because I have gone thru so much the same suffering as you in the confusion of my youth and my search for love. I cannot help but feel deeply for you and for your mother, your family, because now I go through these sufferings over my grandchildren—one or another of them....

But God has been so good to me, again and again, to make one know that when I cry out, even so feebly as calling, "God help me," He answers. ...

I'm praying very hard for you this morning, because I myself have been through much of what you have been through. Twice I tried to take my own life, and the dear Lord pulled me thru that darkness—I was rescued from that darkness. My sickness ws physical too, since I had had an abortion with bad after-effects, and in a way my sickness of mind was a penance I had to endure.

But God has been so good to me—I have known such joy in nature, and work—in writing.... He has given me, over and over again, such joy and strength as He will surely give to you if you ask Him...."

Again, I beg you to excuse me for seeming to intrude on you in this way. I know that just praying for you would have been enough. But we are human and must have human contact if only thru pen and paper. I love you, because you remind me of my own youth, and of my one child and my

grandchildren. I will keep on praying for your healing, writing your name down in my little book of prayers which I have by my bedside at home.”¹

CLIMATE OF MERCY

Introduction: religious life as an “ecosystem” of mercy?

Speaking of religious life, Timothy Radcliffe, has written,

An ecosystem is what enables strange forms of life to flourish. Every strange form of life needs its ecosystem. . . . A rare frog cannot live and reproduce and have a future unless it has all the necessary elements of its ecosystem: a pond, shade, various plants, lots of mud, and other frogs. To be a religious is to choose a strange form of life, and we each will need our sustaining environment: prayer, silence, community. Otherwise we will not thrive. So a good superior is an ecologist who helps . . . build the necessary environments in which [the community] may thrive.

We need ecosystems that sustain in us that sense of paschaltime, the rhythm of the liturgical year which carries us from Advent to Pentecost. We need communities that are marked by its rhythms, by its patterns of feasting and fasting. We need communities in which we do not simply rush through a few Psalms before leaving for work, but where we are sustained as people who even in the wilderness may finally come to praise. We need to build communities in which we can share our faith, and share our despair, so that we bring each other through the wilderness. We need communities in which we may slowly be reborn as brothers and sisters, children of the living God.²

A. Sacred Scripture: Ephesians 2:4-6

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us **5 even when we were dead** through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ[a]—by grace you have been saved—**6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**

B. Thomas Merton on the Climate of Mercy

“Mercy heals in every way. It heals bodies, spirits, society, and history. It is the only force that can truly heal and save...Mercy heals the root of life by curing our existence of the self-devouring despair which projects its own evils upon the other as a demand and an accusation.

When we are enabled by God’s gift to become merciful, we are given the power to understand mercifully, to accept and to pardon the evil of others, not as a fruit of some godlike magnanimity rooted in our own justice, but first of all as the fruit of a self-knowledge which is liberated from the need to project its own evil upon others.” (*Love and Living*, 216-217, as quoted by Bochen, p.8)

C. St. Catherine of Siena on Mercy

Merciful Lord, it does not surprise me that you forget completely the sins of those who repent. I am not surprised that you remain faithful to those who hate and revile you. The mercy which pours forth from you fills the whole world. It was by your mercy that we were created, and by your mercy that you redeemed us by sending your Son. Your mercy is the light in which sinners find you and good people come back to you. Your mercy is everywhere, even in the depths of hell where you offer to forgive the tortured souls. Your justice is constantly tempered with mercy, so you refuse to punish us as we deserve. O mad Lover! It was not enough for you to take on our humanity; you had to die for us as well.

¹ *All the Way to Heaven* p. 397.

² http://www.op.org/global/sites/www.op.org/files/docs/en/masters_order/Radcliffe/bear_nun.htm (accessed September 7, 2008).