

Acceptance speech of Leader Margaret Casey rsm

It is in a spirit of humility but with great joy and delight that I accept the degree of Doctor of Philosophy *honoris causa* conferred on me today as congregational leader of the Sisters of Mercy.

I thank the Pontifical University, St. Patrick's College Maynooth for conferring this honour on our Congregation. It recognises the work done by Sisters of Mercy since Catherine McAuley opened the first house in Baggot Street – those who went out into the local towns bringing care and education and working with local people to improve the lot of all. It honours too the Sisters who from the earliest days crossed continents with the same mission and it honours us who still carry the flame of Mercy in a very different world. We give thanks for our lives as Mercy women among you all, and accept the ongoing challenge to respond anew in hope to our call to be a compassionate presence of God in our differing realities; to seek out ways which will deepen our understanding of the diversity that is among us and to seek ways that will allow our place in the interdependent and interconnected community of life to influence us.

Mercy is the responsibility of each of us. It connects the world and calls forth a response daily.

We still have the problem of homelessness, addictions, human trafficking, poverty and deprivation, migrant people, people whose lives are ravaged by war and conflict. We can support all by our prayer, we work with many people in these groups through our various projects and we endeavour to help in other ways those dispensing mercy around the world today. The challenge for us is to continue to reach out in whatever way we can for as long as we can – as Pope Francis says 'by the warmth of our presence and friendship and by allowing the cry of those wounded people to become ours'. In *Misericordiae Vultus* he asked us not to fall into the humiliating indifference or monstrous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new. More recently Pope Francis reminded us that 'Today there is a need for people who are witnesses of the mercy and tenderness of the Lord which shakes up those who are resigned, revives the discouraged and ignites the fire of hope'. Let us be those witnesses. Catherine McAuley as Joanna Regan and Isabella Keiss acknowledge

in *Tender Courage*, somehow grasped that Mercy is gift given in response to need, neither earned nor deserved. She did not shrink from the demands mercy places on whoever would extend it. She knew that rendering the merciful service was not an act of beneficence but one of gratitude to God for mercy received.

So on this occasion we thank God for mercy received and shared through all with whom we have lived, worked and shared the journey. You made it possible and continue to make it possible for us to be mercy. As someone said 'mercy is to give like God, to forgive like God' - we are grateful we have had this opportunity in our lifetime.

Catherine McAuley reminds us that we are a lamp kindled with the fire of Divine Love shining and giving light to all. May it continue to burn brightly in all of our lives.

In conclusion I warmly thank Monsignor Hugh Connolly and Fr. Michael Mullaney for extending the invitation to me to receive this honorary award and Archbishop Eamon Martin who conferred/presented it. I thank you for inviting so many of us to be here to share the joy and I thank all those who worked in preparation for the occasion. May you all be blessed.