



A poem for Catherine

Sr. Assumpta McVeigh Speaks with our Foundress Catherine

Assumpta: It is a great privilege for me to speak with you Catherine. I have much to discuss with you and I would cherish and value your wisdom on many issues relevant to our day.

Catherine: Yes, I am fully aware of changes taking place in my Mercy family worldwide, but my advice is the same; “Trust in God’s providence and be united in love – Never let the sun go down on your anger”.

Assumpta: But Catherine, you may not know that things have changed drastically down here since you founded us. We are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Bishops; instead all our undertakings are governed by the congregation.

Catherine: But sure that was my plan or wish from the start. All I ever wanted was to serve the poor and help to educate the less fortunate as a lay person in the house I purchased in Baggot Street, Dublin. All my sisters are aware of that. However, to be able to do that then, I had to become a Sister, and sister of Mercy came into being. God does often write straight with crooked lines.

Assumpta: Yes Catherine, we fully recognise that you were a woman of vision who would have welcomed change in all its forms – and change no doubt has come.

Catherine: What are these changes, and what are your concerns in relation to them. Surely all change must be rooted in deep prayer and trust in our all loving and caring God. Always remember my dear sister in Christ – it is not in Doing that matters – but in Being.

Assumpta: Well one thing for sure Catherine, we can no longer be regarded as the “Walking Nuns”. Life has become so complex and diverse, with cars outside every one of our houses and we have very few “traditional convents” now. We are flying now to Zambia, Nigeria, USA, England, United Nations etc. You name it and there we are.

Catherine: For me that is very inspiring and uplifting, as long as my sisters don’t allow secularism and materialism to enter their lives. Hence a greater need than ever before for each Sister to be immersed in the “Word of God” and to make that word become flesh in all whom you meet and minister to. Let the Passion of Christ be your strength and nourishment.

Assumpta: Yes Catherine in keeping with your vision, many of the Sisters are now living in the wider communities of the Laity.

Catherine: So my original dream is becoming a reality –touching I hope the lives of the most vulnerable and needy in your midst.

Assumpta: Our ministries too have changed – very few Sisters are involved in the schools or in

health care, since the State is providing these services now, but I must say, not with the same commitment and dedication that you Catherine pioneered.

Catherine: A Sister of Mercy, by being a compassionate presence wherever they are, will no doubt be an influence for good in the wider society. So have confidence in God's loving guidance.

Assumpta: Yes Catherine, the Sisters are adapting to meet the needs of our time, and so are engaged in capacitor programmes which help to eliminate the stresses and strains of modern day living. By art therapy too is providing a vital means of communication and assisting people to explore and unknot some of their deep seated problems. Some of our Sisters are involved in counselling and psychotherapy which enables people to unravel their inner tensions, fears, guilts etc. and so empower them to reach their full potential – their true selves in Christ.

Catherine: So "Mercy" is fully alive, and what a joy that is for me. Keep striving to become a more authentic compassionate presence to each other and to all with whom you come in contact.

Assumpta: Yes we have abundant opportunities given to us to deepen our inner selves and to mature into the kind of Sisters you wanted us to be, what with retreats, days of renewal, sabbaticals etc. sure we should be Saints long ago. Oh Catherine we have this guy with us at the moment – a stylish trendy out of this world type of person by the name of Fr. Daniel O'Leary. He's getting us to let go of clericalism and institutionalism. Oh let go – let go – be free to be yourself he insists. He's getting us to think Bigness – to risk – to have confidence in ourselves – to cast out fear – to love ourselves. He speaks passionately about "intimacy" – intimacy with self – with others and with God. In our day, we weren't allowed to have any particular attachments! So what a change in emphasis now, and rightly so. As Fr. Daniel highlights – one often lived from - "a false self" not our "true selves".

Catherine: Assumpta, you must remember I was asked to follow that old rigid school of thought too, but in spite of that I followed my inner instincts and convictions, and trusted totally in the Passion of Christ strengthening me. In that way I was able with God's help to bring many, many women to answer God's call to bring "Mercy" to the most needy and disadvantaged.

Assumpta: You have no idea Catherine, how much "the Ireland" of your day has changed. We are now an international and multicultural Ireland, and the Sisters are striving to address issues of human trafficking, homelessness, addictions, suicide prevention and are challenging governments and society to work for justice.

Even though vocations are scarce, you must indeed be proud of your Sisters who are keeping alive your spirit and vision of Mercy and compassion in a fast changing and ever expanding Ireland. In fact some of our Sisters are immersed in Global issues working with United Nations, so I can hear you chuckle and say "Mercy is still fully alive!".

As you once wrote Catherine, "Mercy" the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following him has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the poor and needy, as in them they see the face of God himself. We, your followers Catherine are earnestly endeavouring to do just that.

Catherine: Assumpta – don't get too much caught up with lack of vocations. Where God's work is concerned – he will provide the means and the way. The role of any Sister of Mercy is to be his presence – his witness, and that involves being constantly united with him in prayer. Assumpta – you know as I know – without him we can do nothing. As I speak with some of the Saints and Prophets up here – their teaching and advice is similar – "with God on our side all things are possible".

Assumpta: I'm glad you have mentioned Prophets and Saints. You must have some lovely discussions with Jeremiah, Jonas, Paul, Augustine and the lot of them up there. Sure we too are

being directed and guided by some great modern day Prophets like Joan Chittester, Sandra Schneiders and Pope Francis, not to mention Fr. Daniel O'Leary himself. Sandra Schneiders, a major prophet's voice of our time, reminds us that Pope Francis has validated our best insights about the nature of religious life as a prophetic vocation in the Church charged with preaching the Gospel – our mission is to promote the reign of God, especially among the oppressed and marginalised. Catherine, wasn't that your original vision and mission? Yes, it certainly was but as far as I'm concerned it got lost and indeed buried along the way. What a pity – can we redeem it yet Catherine?

Catherine: Yes Assumpta, everything is redeemable with Christ – nothing is lost in His loving embrace. Sandra is after my own heart, in that she emphasises a key theological insight central to our life as “Mercy Sisters” especially, is our conviction that Ministry is intrinsic to our form of religious life. Was that not my aim and vision when I founded the House of Mercy in Baggot Street and emphasised so strongly – “The poor need our help – our voice – our hands today not tomorrow or next week!” In keeping with Sandra's vision for the 21st Century – I myself in my time, living in an impoverished and unfair system in the Dublin of the 20s and 30s stressed many times as Sandra does, that religious denotes a way of being, not a role or function. Yours Assumpta “is a particular kind of relationship with Jesus Christ”, as Sandra reminds you (expressed in consecrated celibacy) and a particular kind of participation in his mission – “full time prophetic ministry”. Making Christ alive and active in a broken, bleeding world of you day Assumpta. Strive, dear Sister to keep faithful to this task, as a minister of the Gospel.

Assumpta: Catherine, but Sandra is also stressing forcefully “that ways to create affective and spiritual community will have to be developed, many of them electronically, “what a huge shift for us Catherine. I don't know yet how effective your communication system is in Heaven, but it must be tops with Himself at the helm, but down here it's nothing but computers, iphones, tablets, ipads, internet and streaming. We can now see our Sisters in any part of the globe by the touch of a button. We can talk with them and exchange our views worldwide, so that's community life today Catherine”. Watch out, we could be ministering from the moon space yet! It's well Catherine you were blessed with an infectious broad sense of humour – you sure would be needed down here, to guide us through this ever changing web of religious and all of life. But be of good cheer Catherine, we have some exceptional talent among us, all of whom are continuing to follow your mission and adapt to the needs of our time! As our congregational and provincial leaders emphasize “we must allow our place in the interdependent and interconnected community of all of life to influence us. Catherine, do keep walking and enlightening us on our ongoing journey.

Catherine, it was a privilege speaking with you, and reflecting together on the ever changing face of Mercy. I thank you for listening attentively to me, and for your reassuring and inspirational responses. We were very saddened Catherine by the tragic deaths of Sr. Marie Duddy and Sr. Frances Forde. They both worked tirelessly in education and brought mercy and hope and love to all whom they nurtured. They indeed were a compassionate presence to all and true followers of yours Catherine. Give our best regards and sincere love to all those great and ever faithful Sisters sharing God's Kingdom with you. Who knows, we may soon be able to glimpse a view of Heaven online and even talk to you all in person. What a dream!

With much love
Your loving Sister in Mercy
Sr. Assumpta McVeigh

