

# Sisters of Mercy– Walking in Service



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# Going Deeper

# Sisters of Mercy– Walking in Service

## Prayer Opportunity One

### We Reflect

Catherine McAuley is the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

Catherine's faith led her to dedicate herself to serving the poor, sick and uneducated. Throughout her life she was deeply aware of the human suffering caused by social, economic and religious injustice.

To "comfort" and to "animate" are among the most frequently used words in Catherine's writing. These words reflect the outgoing, life-giving and self-sustaining nature of her life and ministry.



[www.sistersofmercy.ie](http://www.sistersofmercy.ie)

'Animation' was the word Catherine repeatedly used to describe the desired effect of her sisters' lives on those they had contact with. Through acts of comfort, love and mercy she strove to impact and 'animate' lives. To be animated by the spirit of Christ is part of the spirit of the Mercy order.

Catherine used every opportunity to applaud and invigorate her sisters and she deliberately nurtured their God-given gifts. She *animated* them through her words, her example, her presence, her affection, and her own concrete commitment to works of mercy.

Hospitality was a fundamental part of Catherine's sense of service. The story is told that even as she laid on her death bed with sisters travelling from far and near to pay their last respects to her, her first concern was their comfort.

"Be sure to give them a cup of tea" was her instruction which has become a symbol of Mercy hospitality and servant leadership.



# **Marian Spirituality**

As we focus on the prayers to Mary it is important to reflect on the place Mary has in our spiritual heritage as Catholics.

Marian spirituality is about exploring our lives in the light of Mary's life journey. It is about looking for insights from her life and her response to being an active part of God's love which may guide us in our responses and our lives.

Marian spirituality can be reduced to praying 'to' statues and reciting prayers without thought. It is not about pleading to Mary in heaven to intercede on our behalf. While these are some of the pious practices in Marian spirituality, they are simply an expression of a richer and deeper prayer approach.

Marian spirituality looks at the life of Mary and how she lived it, what her life can teach us and what she believed. It builds on this and makes connections to the realities of today. It becomes a way of living and responding, grounded in the model of living given to us by Jesus' mother herself.

As you explore the life of Mary scripturally, theologically and historically a picture evolves of a woman who knows what it means to be human. We know that Jesus grew in wisdom and grace under her guidance. We know that she supported Jesus in his ministry, travelling with him. We know that Mary was there at his crucifixion, remaining with him to the end.

We knew she was with the disciples in the upper room and that her role in the early Christian church was crucial.

She begins as the mother of Jesus and ends as the mother of the Church.

Declan Marmion SM writes about Mary as a 'spiritual resource' for all of us striving to walk through our lives in the footsteps of Christ.

*"...we can see Mary as a woman of the people, in solidarity with those who are oppressed by an occupying force; as a refugee fleeing with her new-born child from the tyranny of a murderous ruler; as a bereaved mother of a victim of an unjust execution. This is the woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile. And these are the situations which cannot escape the attention of those who would wish to live the Gospel after the manner of Mary."*

*Marimon D. Mary as model [online] 2002 May; Available from URL:  
<http://www.catholicireland.net/pages/index.php?nd=273&art=414>*

A Marian spirituality has much to offer those who seek to respond to God in the everydayness of their lives.

## **Prayer – Marian Prayers**

There are many Marian prayers in the Catholic tradition. The Hail Mary and the Angelus were highlighted during the staff prayer. Here is another.

The Magnificat, also called the Canticle of Mary, is recorded in the Gospel of Luke (1:46-55) where Mary visits Elizabeth and proclaims God's goodness. The author of 1 Samuel 2:1-10 provides the original use of this style and structure where Hannah praises God.

In Latin, magnificat means 'it praises'. As you pray the Magnificat, take a moment to reflect upon the model of leadership and service Mary lived for us and the ways God shows us favour.

### **Magnificat**

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
My Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour  
For He has looked with favour on His lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed.  
The Almighty has done great things for me,  
And holy is His Name.

He has mercy on those who fear Him  
In every generation.  
He has shown the strength of His arm  
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones  
And has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things  
And the rich He has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of His servant Israel  
For He has remembered His promise of mercy,  
The promise He made to our fathers,  
To Abraham and his children for ever.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

# Sisters of Mercy– Walking in Service

## Prayer Opportunity Two

### We Reflect

The Leadership of Catherine McAuley and that of the sisters who followed her is a model of service. Seeking to meet people where they are the Sisters of Mercy visit prisons, hospitals and homes. They have developed and built schools, hostels, clinics and hospitals.

The servant leadership they strive for in the communities they enter, works to not only provide physical resources for those in need but perhaps more importantly to be a source of care, of dignity, compassion, solace and inspiration.

As foundress, Catherine McAuley once wrote -  
*"It is for God we serve the poor, not for thanks."*

The Sisters of Mercy's work is about seeing and responding to the needs of all those they are called to serve. The needs can be either of the body or spiritual and are responded to through teaching, counselling, comforting and praying.

The Sisters of Mercy have played a key role in the story of our Archdiocese and in the growth and staffing of many parish schools in particular. In addition, our Catholic Teachers College was named after the founder of the Mercies, Catherine McAuley and our Brisbane Catholic Education Centre is built on the site of their original college.

When we answer the call to serve, may we realise it in the spirit of the Mercy sisters. May we respond not with shallow gestures or hollow words but with actions that recognise the presence of God in us all.





## **Marian Prayers**

There are many Marian prayers in the Catholic tradition – here is another popular one.

The prayer of the *Memorare* comes from the Latin word for 'remember'. Traditionally it is thought to have been composed by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. It emphasizes Mary's role as intercessor and her history of answering the prayer of those who call to her. Before praying the *Memorare*, spend some time with Mary speaking to her of the challenges in your life.

### **Memorare**

*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided.*

*Inspired with this confidence, I fly to you, O Virgin of virgins, my mother.  
To you I come; before you I stand,  
sinful and sorrowful.*

*O Mother of the Word Incarnate,  
despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer me.  
Amen.*

### **Memorare (modern)**

*Remember, most loving Virgin Mary,  
Never was it heard that anyone who turned to you for help was left unaided.*

*Inspired by this confidence, though burdened by my sins I run to your protection.  
For you are my mother.*

*Mother of the Word of God,  
Do not despise my words of pleading  
But be merciful and hear my prayer  
Amen*

## **Catherine McAuley 's Prayer**

My God,  
I am yours for time and eternity  
Teach me to cast myself entirely  
Into the arms of  
Your loving providence  
With the most lively, unlimited  
Confidence in your  
Compassionate, tender pity.

Grant me  
O most merciful redeemer  
That whatever you ordain or permit  
May be acceptable to me.

Take from my heart  
All painful anxiety;  
Suffer nothing to sadden me but sin,  
Nothing to delight me  
But the hope of coming  
To the possession of you  
My God and my all,  
In your everlasting kingdom.

Amen.