

3

Responding

The 'shining lamp' was a powerful image of hope for Catherine McAuley.

- ▶ What images of hope are strongest for you?
- ▶ Imagine you could make one significant change in your current role so that you could foster hope in someone who is despairing. What would you change and why?
- ▶ In what ways could your ministry or workplace be a circuit-breaker, a concrete sign for those yearning for something or someone to help give voice to their hopes and dreams?



Hope

4

Re-imagining

- ▶ What might 'hope-lessness' feel like from the inside or look like from the outside?
- ▶ How might a fleeting glimpse of hope grow into a deep-seated conviction that our future is abounding in hope and possibility?
- ▶ What hopes and dreams do you have for the entire Earth community?



Hope

“[W]e should be shining lamps, giving light to all around us”

(Oral Instructions)

With these words, Catherine McAuley presented a powerful image to the early Sisters of Mercy. In Catherine's time, oil or gas lamps lit the streets and homes of Dublin, dispelling the surrounding darkness. To be “a shining lamp” in this context is to illuminate the way forward, to be a beacon of hope. Catherine was urging her sisters to recognise their ability to shine and to project a future of hope to all those whom they encountered.

Catherine's use of the image of the shining lamp may well have been sparked by Jesus' teaching: “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others” (Matthew 5:15-16). Jesus' exhortation to be a source of light is, at the same time, a call to be a source of hope.

Jesus ignited hope by proclaiming “good news” through his teaching, healing and inclusion of the outsider and the poorest. His ministry offered hope that those bent over by injustice might be able to stand up straight again. In Mark 16:15, Jesus commissions his followers to “proclaim the good news to the whole creation”. We can read this commission as an invitation to offer hope to the entire Earth community.

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Recognising the interconnectedness of all creation, we understand that a flourishing Earth community requires a healthy planet. The current ecological crisis disrupts the welfare of all, but particularly of the most vulnerable. Young people may well wonder what the future of our planet will hold for them. This, in turn, affects their capacity to experience hope. As Pope Francis declares: “Our era is in great need of hope! Young people should not be denied hope, young people need to hope; we must offer those experiencing pain and suffering concrete signs of hope” (*Address*, February 21, 2015). Our Mercy ministries need to foster hope. This requires us to have hope ourselves so that we can engender hope in others. In effect, we are to be “shining lamps”.

Aware that difficulties can and do arise, Catherine McAuley gave this practical advice: “The simplest and most practical lesson I know ... is to resolve to be good today – but better tomorrow. ... Thus we may hope to get on – taking short careful steps, not great strides” (*Letter to de Sales White*, February 28, 1841). Underlying this message is the hope that we can, in things great and small, find a way forward.

The following words of St Paul can provide a blessing for all our ministries:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”

(Romans 15:13)

Hope

1 Reflecting

Find a quiet space where you can be alone for a little while. Briefly recall the people with whom you have interacted today. Give thanks for them, especially if the interaction was challenging for you.

- ▶ When you look kindly on our world, what glimmers of hope do you see before you?
- ▶ Think of a ‘hope-filled’ person who has influenced your approach to life’s challenges. What is it about this person which inspires hope within you?

2 Connecting

Re-read the reflection on Hope.

- ▶ Are there any phrases which surprise you or invite you to consider ‘hope’ from a different perspective? What is the ‘gift’ in this surprise?

You are invited to read the texts below.

Matthew 5:15-16a

Romans 15:13

- ▶ Where are ‘shining lamps’ most needed in your neighbourhood or workplace?

