

Ecc 15:15-20; Ps 118:1-2. 4-5; Cor 2:6-10; Matt 5:17-37

As you know I have been thinking about Lent: about Fasting, Prayer and Almsgiving. What I am going to stop doing, what am I going to start doing. But over this past week I have been rethinking this, and asking myself “Where do I want to be after Easter?” I feel that I do not want to be where I started before Lent. I do not want Lent and Easter to be an endless cycle of past Lents and Easters. I don’t wish to run on a hamster wheel. I wish to walk on a path to a destination beyond a date on the calendar, with Prayer, Fasting and Almsgiving to accompany me and strengthen me.

On Monday I was at prayer before the face of our Lord. I was trying to pray the rosary but my words became all jumbled up and I had to start again and again. I simply could not get past the Creed. I spent at good 45mintues struggling on. What was distracting me was an article in a newspaper that said that the City of Vancouver in Canada had just decriminalised being in possession of up to 2.5 gms of Cocaine or Heroin. I know it is – as we like to say - ‘complicated’ but all I could think of was one young junkie’s words: *‘So the police won’t arrest us now? I guess they’ll just be here to help with the bodies.’*¹ That really is the truth of the decision to decriminalise these soul destroying drugs, society has given up on these abusers and turned its back on them. Then I thought was, I will pray that God sends them a saint, someone like Mary Potter, whom I have added to our list of saints after our Marian prayer at the beginning of Mass.

On Tuesday Bishop Patrick Celebrated Mass for the 35th Anniversary of Mary Potter being declared ‘Venerable’. This means that she has been declared to have lived a life of ‘heroic virtue’ and at least one miracle has been attributed to her intercession. She is not yet a saint for the universal church, but can be venerated by the local church where she lived or died.

Mary Potter moves us out of safe space of ‘theology’ and into the dangerous space of lived reality in the world– something Deacon Andrew spoke of last week. Mary Potter was the Foundress of the Little Company of Mary, which came into being in Nottingham in Hyson Green. She is remembered in Nottingham by a tram that is named after her, and a medical centre, but how many know that her mortal remains now lie in St Barnabas Cathedral and that she was a Catholic Nun?

Mary Potter was not born a holy person in Bermondsey, London 1847: she allowed herself to be formed into one. Her mother was a convert to Catholicism when it definitely was not popular, - rather like now - and it certainly was not popular with her husband, who subsequently abandoned her and the family. The man she was to marry encouraged her to think deeply about her faith, which led her to break off the engagement so that she could respond fully to God. As Mary developed a deeper relationship with God, and an understanding that she was called to found a religious order dedicated to the care of the dying. She encountered resistance, scepticism and scorn from her family and sometimes the church. However, her naturally sunny disposition was transformed from being gentle and frivolous to being substantial and courageous as she followed the path God called her to.

¹ I’m holding crack cocaine in my hand – but in Vancouver, the police don’t care’ telegraph, 31 Jan 2023, accesses9th Feb, 2023.

Returning from Mass while visiting Brighton on 13th January 1877 she could not get the words '*Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*'² The next day she travelled up to Nottingham to meet with Bishop Bagshaw. Her congenital heart condition, weak lungs, and later the cancer which she would die from in 1913, did not hinder her from undertaking the hard work she was charged with, because all was God's. In Hyson Green, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Mary worked amongst the poorest of the poor. One instance is recorded by a fellow sister when they went into a heavily derelict building to visit an Irish shawl woman.³ She spoke no English and was illiterate. Her husband had died and left her destitute, starving, surrounded by rats and unable to breast feed her new born child as the baby was too weak to draw milk. She was distraught beyond measure. Mary took the woman's breast into her mouth until she drew milk and then passed the child back to her. Mary Potter would go on to establish a hospital in Rome and her organisation would reach around the world.

Mary Potter felt that she was called to serve God on Calvary, at the feet of His crucified son, alongside His Mother, with particular care for the dying. What of us? Are we also called to Calvary, alongside our Lord's Mother? I think we may be. Perhaps the venerable Mary Potter, whose mortal remains rest just up the road, can start to show us the way. Her's is the path of Easter which always goes through Lent.

Mary Potter... Pray for us.

² Ripley, Rev. Francis, *The Mary Potter Story* (John S Burns and Sons, Glasgow, 1954) p.9.

³ A reference to the way they dressed, head covered with a shawl. They were often Gaelic speakers, illiterate. If their husbands died working they were left absolutely destitute, in a poverty and abandonment we cannot really imagine.