

In the later years of her life Cathleen McCarthy spent most of her holiday in Ireland with her older sister, Mairin. By then, just those two were left from a family of seven siblings. It had become their custom to invite various Daughters of Mary and Joseph of the Irish region to visit while Cathleen was home. In those evenings together in Mairin's house, a delicious meal and plenty of lively and interesting chat, with lots of laughs, were always assured.

Even with ongoing health issues, Cathleen continued to come on leave to Ireland. While it was obvious that she had become frailer, I remember vividly a lovely evening together in December 2011. After enjoying Mairin's home cooking, Cathleen and I, as was customary, were banished to the sittingroom so that we could have 'DMJ chat', while Mairin got on with the wash-up and other chores! We exchanged news of the English and Irish regions as well as more general topics – Cathleen never waned in her interest in the Congregation, Church, politics and much more!

The next time I saw Cathleen was just after New Year's day 2012, in hospital in Dublin. Having had various treatments in different units, she was eventually moved to Intensive Care (ICU). With Mairin, I visited her regularly during the weeks she spent there. Even when it was obvious that she was not at all well, Cathleen always made an effort to smile and to communicate. It was striking that her 'special' nurses invariably spoke of her with great affection and had even spotted her dry wit.

Visiting Cathleen in ICU was for me an intensely sobering experience, a moment or, rather, many moments of profound truth, stark, with an honesty that cut to the core. This was Cathleen, the strong, able woman who had been and done so much in so many places, with so many people, during her life. Here she was now, physically frail, in a hospital bed, wearing a hospital gown, with an array of tubes and monitors, surrounded by staff on whom she was dependent for all her needs.

Here was Cathleen, bereft of everything, of all material things. In ICU there was no locker with even a few personal effects, nor was Cathleen able to notice or care. What suddenly struck me like a blinding flash of light was not anything new but, rather, the simple truth, seen with a new clarity and at a new level, that as a DMJ the only thing that matters is to absorb and be absorbed by our charism of compassion. It was as if I was seeing this like I'd never seen it before, despite having heard it, read it and said it so often to myself and to others over so many years.

*Our Founder experienced God
as all-merciful, all-compassionate,
and he calls us to reflect in our lives
the merciful love of God,
centred on the heart of Christ...
... growing in (Christ's) attitudes
of tenderness, humility and patience
we become flexible instruments
of the mercy of God. (Consts #2)*

From everything that makes up one's life, however long, diverse and noteworthy that life may be, all that will endure in the end are those attitudes of the heart of God which, through God's Spirit, have become our attitudes. To become the embodiment of God's mercy is the *one thing necessary*.

It is now five years since Cathleen died. As I write these few words with thanksgiving on 6 March 2017, the 200th anniversary day of our Foundation, I pray to be open to all the people whose lives challenge and inspire us *to live in a distinctive way the beatitude of mercy*. (Consts #39)

Joan Roddy dmj