NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

'In the fullness of time, God's purpose will be revealed'

Theresa Kane | Aug. 9, 2010

Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane (NCR photo/Joshua McElwee)

The following are edited portions of Sr. Theresa Kane?s talk, ?Woman, Why Are You Weeping?? given July 22 in Chicago at the Celebration conference on effective liturgy. We see Mary of Magdala in the garden as someone who has experienced the torture and death of a close, intimate friend. She was a companion, certainly a benefactor to Jesus, and a disciple. We, too, have all wept at the death of loved one.

As we enter that garden scene, we feel the depth of grief, the anguish and pain at so horrible a death, and we also sense that Mary probably had a conviction that a grave injustice had been done. When one has a clear vision and insight about injustice, one weeps not only with anguish but from anger, even rage. Rage comes from courage, and at any injustice, all of us should be filled with rage. Such an emotion is core to righting the wrong, to bringing about justice.

Let me speak of the women of our Catholic community today. Why do we weep? Without the full incorporation of women into leadership, discipleship and all church ministries, full participation in the liturgy -- which was the vision of the council -- we do not experience community as women at liturgy, and we do not experience life-giving worship. Our presence at liturgy has become and continues to be a source of anguish, sadness, even emptiness. We continue in severe tension over exclusive, sexist language, and this has gone on for decades, the continued use of terms like *man*, *his* and *mankind* that deny our very presence.

In 1978, Pope John Paul I said publicly, and I have never forgotten this and continue to proclaim it, ?We need to call God ?mother? as well as ?father.? ? It was a powerful statement. I can still remember him saying it on television. Because until we do that, our language of God remains exclusive, patriarchal and militaristic.

One of the real tensions is between the vision we have of community and a governance that is monarchical. I have been with bishops who say, ?We are not a democracy.? And the question to the bishop is, then, what form of governance are we? And do we not respect cooperation and participation and inclusion?

Catholic women weep because male Catholic leaders, many of them bishops and pastors, are culturally ignorant and culturally impotent regarding the presence, the potential, the human aspirations of women to be adult, mutual co-responsible collaborators. A wonderful word, *collaborate*. It means we co-labor. We are radically

equal.

Why are we weeping today? We are in crisis. Many women have already moved out of traditional Sunday worship. Other women have begun very courageous, strong, alternative liturgies, which we believe are valid, mystic, pastoral, spiritual, all the qualities that are needed for the human soul.

Many are moving to other Protestant traditions or are doing feminist liturgies, taking turns presiding, co-presiding, and are perfectly comfortable with it. Maybe it is the beginning of a new church. Maybe this is how we have to look at Pentecost. I think we need to be willing to address it. To continue in an exclusively male priesthood is in my judgment both a form and expression of idolatry.

An example: A group of sisters in the Midwest were having their community assembly. Out of courtesy, they invited the bishop. We generally do not invite the bishop because we are such good friends and want to celebrate, but unfortunately -- and I feel very sad about this -- we do it because it is expected and out of courtesy. The bishop wrote back and said it must be in a parish church and not at the motherhouse, you must have altar boys come in to assist me, and no sister may carry the cross in the procession. They prayed about it and decided not to have liturgy. The real tragedy is that a magnificent opportunity was lost for a bishop to gather with a group of women to worship.

As Catholic woman, I continue to hope. Why? At gatherings such as this I meet so many women and men who are open and want to make this a new church. I go home inspired. I don?t really have a need to run back to traditional worship. There are many organizations that are very much alive, spiritual and Vatican II -- Call to Action, Women?s Ordination Conference, FutureChurch, and the congregations of women religious ourselves.

I find hope from the words of scripture. In the fullness of time God?s purpose will be revealed. When will the renewal come? In the fullness of time. It may be tomorrow. Maybe next week. But it?s God?s time, not my time. I also have the deep conviction that nothing is impossible with God. People say to me, ?You can?t do that, it?s not possible.? With God, all things are possible. And this gives me great hope.

[Mercy Sr. Theresa Kane is a former head of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.]

To hear more on the Celebration conference, read Meeting urges Persistence for church renewal[1].

For the extended version of Sr. Theresa Kane's talk, read Sr. Theresa Kane speaks on effective liturgy at Celebration conference in Chicago[2]

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