

SACRED HEART CHURCH, Bayside, NY, held an evening with parishioners to look at the whole issue of Racism and Xenophobia, which is on the rise worldwide.

Sister Deirdre Mullan (the Congregation) was the featured speaker for the event. Using her latest publication – *Who is my Neighbor*¹, she asked all present to reflect on the phrase – “There is no us and them – only us”. Deirdre invited the participants to reflect on one of the hallmarks of Jesus’s ministry of reaching out and bringing in those perceived as different and outside the box. She reminded us that the Gospels show us Jesus going to people who lived on the fringes of Jewish society – tax collectors, prostitutes, Roman centurion and many of the sick and reminding his disciples that for God there is ***no us and them***. There is only US.

All present were asked to remember that as a community of believers we know our faith is tested by the equality of justice among us, that we can best measure our life together by how poor and vulnerable people are treated.

Using three short films the audience were asked to think about Nelson Mandela’s famous quotation –

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion.”

No one also means **everyone**. You, me and everyone beyond this room, and all those who are currently alive on land, sea and air, some even in space.

¹ *Who is My Neighbor* – Deirdre Mullan and Carol Rittner

We are diverse. Yes, we have different colors and shapes and genders. Yes, we speak different languages, some with different accents and dialects. Yes, we have different cultures and ways of expressing our zest for life. Yes, we have different faiths and ways of expressing our understanding of the source of our creation. But does that make us different? So different that some choose to consider their color, culture, gender or religion to be more 'pure', 'true,' superior and/or exclusive?

Let's for a moment take stock of who we are as individuals, but also part of a 7 billion strong and growing human family.

Clearly, some of us are intellectually more gifted than others. Some of us are physically more powerful. Some, economically more powerful. And some are richer in cultural appreciation. Does that give us the right, either as individuals or collectively, to consider ourselves superior to others? No, it does not!

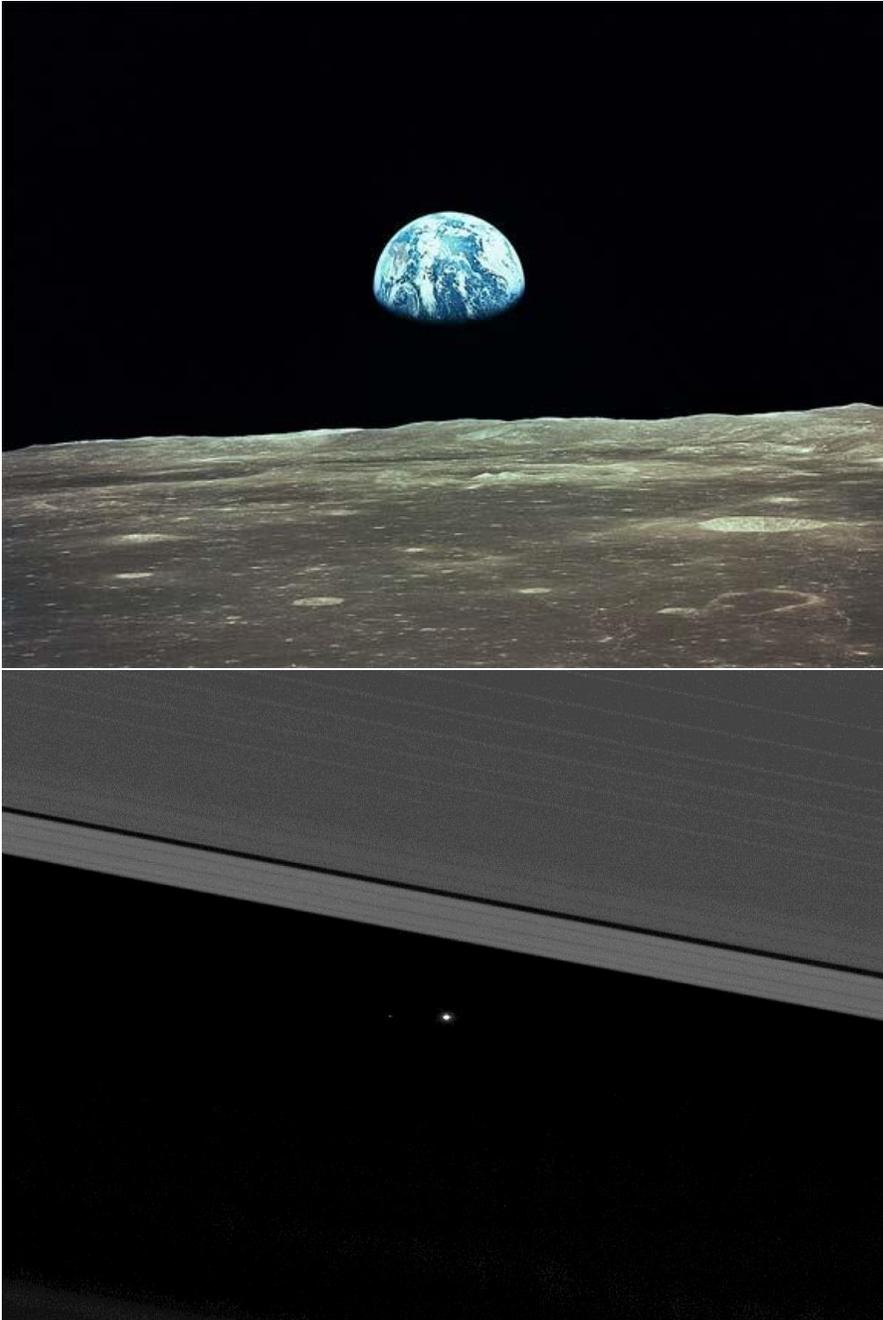
Even if we were the most intelligent, the strongest or richest individual or nation on Earth, let's take a journey to gain some perspective on who we really are in the context of the known Universe.

Astronauts who have had the privilege of peering down upon the Earth from Space have commented on how unified the Earth looks without human-made political borders.

If we leave Earth and journey to the end of our Solar System, the Earth will have disappeared to the naked eye.

The next two pictures say it all.

- The first shows the Earth from the Moon.
- The second shows daytime on Earth from below the rings of Saturn.



The first image shows that we exist on a jewel of the Universe, in a world that, to date, is the only known planet teeming with life. The second helps us to appreciate that we live on a pale blue dot. Literally, on a moisturized speck of dust in the vast expanse of the Cosmos.

Our galaxy is but one of billions of galaxies across a known Universe that is estimated to be 14 billion light years across. And, if the 'Big Bang' theory marks the beginning of time, scientists calculate that the Cosmos is still expanding and gathering speed. With this perspective, we realize that, in fact, we are little more than insects who are relatively young and very vulnerable in a fathomless existence. To look out is to look back into history, for the light that reaches our eyes from distant stars has, other than the sun, travelled longer than we have lived on Earth. Such thoughts are awe-inspiring and should be humbling. They teach us that in the vast speckled darkness within which we exist, those who believe themselves more intelligent and powerful and, therefore, more entitled, are truly ignorant, lacking the understanding that should move us to compassion.

The Cosmos teaches us that we are yet infants learning to walk, dipping our toes into the lapping waves of a vast ocean of knowledge beyond us. Catherine McAuley appreciated this when she said:

How quietly the great God does all His mighty works!
Darkness is spread over us, and light breaks in again and again, and there is no noise of drawing curtains or closing shutters.ⁱ

Such thoughts help us to realize that we have a great responsibility towards one another, to ensure that the miracle that is each one of us is cherished and given every opportunity to grow, irrespective of our skin pigmentation, social background or religious or secular beliefs. They help us to realize that perhaps our greatest endowment is the gift of **consciousness**,

through which we can ponder and contemplate the great privilege of being.

Catherine McAuley knew this and when she founded the Sisters of Mercy, she envisioned a group of women who would serve and be served as part of the great community of life, recognizing that we have a deep responsibility towards one another.

For more information:

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ⁱ Limerick Manuscript, in Mary C. Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy*, UND Press.