

Sarah B. '22

Ring Speech, Mercy Day/Ring Day 2021

Today, women are expected to be strong and encouraged to go above and beyond. This narrative is evident in every single Mercy girl. We are each empowered to be strong women and as we continue through life, we will use our experience from Mercy to empower the future generations of women to be strong as well. For me, this narrative starts with my two grandmothers, Mama Luz and Abuelita Lilia – the strongest women I have ever met in my life.

Even when Mama Luz faced struggles throughout her two failed marriages, she would work hard every day to make sure her children lived a better life. She would walk an hour every day until she reached the market at the Colombia-Venezuela border to sell merchandise. She did not care about the hot desert sun beating on her back while she carried the weight of her family's promise so long as she could make sure each one of her children went to school with breakfast in their stomachs. She has persevered by drawing her strength from her inner self and God, just as Catherine McAuley did to establish the House of Mercy, which is the reason we are all fortunate enough to be here together as part of the Mercy community.

When Abuelita Lilia was faced with divorce, something that was taboo in Colombian society, she was left with the task of raising ten children on her own. Just like Mama Luz, she worked hard to make sure that every day there was food on the table and that there were clothes on her children's backs. She made sure every single one of her children excelled in their studies and graduated from university. She instilled in her children that everyone has the strength to get through even the toughest of times, which is a value the Mercy community lived during this pandemic. We all had each other to rely on during the difficulties of online learning and to support one another as we started our journey back to some state of normalcy.

When I think about my grandmothers' stories, I want to remind you - strength is within you. There is overpowering inner strength within each and every one of you. And if you feel as if it is tough to harness that inner strength, look at your ring. I have realized that the Mercy ring represents the inner strength that we each have. It is there to remind us that even through tough times, when you feel as if you cannot live up to the narrative of a strong woman, you are a strong woman. We each have the strength to stand up for what we believe in, to be the best versions of ourselves, to fight injustice, to harness our power as women to do good and create change.

The Mercy ring is also there to remind us that we are not alone. When I think about Mercy, a poem by Rupi Kaur comes to mind: “You are one person/ but when you move/ an entire community/ walks through you // *you go nowhere alone.*” Whether it is competing for the Field Day trophy (which we will win again this year), staying up late FaceTiming with friends to figure out how to write a geometry proof the night before exams, or yelling DIDLS back to Mr. Davis at 8 in the morning, we always have each other to rely on for the big and little things we need strength for. And even after we graduate, we will look down at the ring on our finger and remember that the collective strength of the Class of 2022 and the Mercy community is with us.

Today, Abuelita Lilia is thriving at the age of 96 and Mama Luz is here with me, as she always is when I celebrate an important accomplishment. Mama Luz, me enseñaste que cualquier cosa que pasa, yo puedo encontrar fuerza en mi misma. Yo veo los sacrificios que tú y mi Abuelita Lilia han hecho con sus esfuerzos, y por eso soy la mujer que soy hoy. Mama Luz, you taught me that whatever happens, I can find strength in myself. I see the sacrifices that you and my Abuelita Lilia have made with your efforts, and that is why I am the woman I am today. The strength that we have garnered during our four years at Mercy will only become greater

as we move on through life. However, today we empower ourselves and others to bring Mercy into the world.