

Catherine McAuley

Features of the Foundation of the Sisters of Mercy

Catherine McAuley
had a dream.

*"We have the privilege of knowing it,
We have the responsibility to understand it,
We have the duty to protect it and
We have the honour of living it!"*

MARIA MCGUINNESS



Name _____



The following information is taken from the Mercy International Association website

<http://www.mercyworld.org/foundress/landing.cfm?loadref=129>

Early Childhood

The birth of a human person is both an extraordinary and a very ordinary event – holding great, God-given promise in the humble simplicity of human form. Catherine Elizabeth McAuley was born probably on September 29, 1778. Although there is an irresolvable uncertainty about the year, some writers thinking it was 1787 (which is not possible) or 1781, many biographers generally accept 1778 as the year of her birth in Dublin to James and Elinor Conway McGauley. Catherine had a sister Mary, and a brother James who was born a few months before their father's death in 1783.

Catherine's early childhood was characterized by family love, the inspiring example of her father, and filial happiness. Then her father died, leaving Elinor McGauley to raise the three small children. When Catherine was almost twenty, her mother died an uneasy death, conscious perhaps of her own casualness in the Catholic formation of her children.

Life at Coolock House

Having lived for a time with her uncle Owen Conway, and then with Protestant families named Armstrong and Callaghan, Catherine moved in 1809 to Coolock House, the twenty-two acre estate of William and Catherine Callaghan, an elderly and wealthy Protestant and Quaker couple, where she served as household manager and companion to Mrs Callaghan. The estate was a few miles northeast of Dublin, and Catherine remained there for the next twenty years, until she sold Coolock and moved permanently into the House of Mercy she had built on Baggot Street Dublin – probably by February 1829.

The years at Coolock were a kind of desert retreat. Here Catherine developed her merciful spirit and grew in her personal grasp of Catholic faith and practice, her love for those who were poor and neglected, and her determination to serve them in the manner of Jesus Christ. Though she retained her love of singing and dancing to the end of her life, these were years of growing detachment from the preoccupations, pleasures, and values of the social world around her. She is known to have meditated often on the words of the "Universal Prayer".

"Discover to me, O my God, the nothingness of this world, the greatness of heaven, the shortness of time, and the length of eternity."

An Insistent Vocation

Slowly the example of Jesus Christ assumed more compelling force in Catherine's life: she began to feel an insistent vocation to devote her life to the service of the poor, the sick, and the uneducated, especially those suffering debilitating ignorance of God's consoling love.

She soon realized the much social, economic, and political oppression under which they struggled, and she had bitter experiences trying to find shelter for abused servant women and homeless girls who were turned down by bureaucratic institutions with little sense of the urgency of their situations. These experiences left indelible sorrow and determination in her mind and heart.

An Extraordinary Gift

The Coolock years concluded in an extraordinary girl. After a long illness, and aided by Catherine McAuley's presence and prayer, Catherine Callaghan died in October 1819. Three years later William Callaghan asked to be received into the Catholic Church before his death on November 10, 1822. The influence of Catherine on him was fully



complemented by his influence on her.

While he lived he shared his wealth generously with the poor whom she served. After he died, he revealed his full admiration for her and her work: by codicil to his will, after other designated bequests, he named Catherine the sole residuary legatee of his estate and his life's savings valued then at about £25 000.

Though she continued to reside at Coolock for the next six years, she radically increased her social work among the poor, teaching them religious doctrine, reading, industrial crafts, and other useful skills, and formulating her long-range plans.

She consulted priest friends about how best to meet the needs of the destitute. She also consulted the Irish Sister's of Charity, though she was convinced that the work she was projecting could not be affiliated with any religious congregation for she had an aversion to certain aspects of convent life and to the restrictions she thought religious life would impose on the works of mercy to which she felt called.

House for the Poor

Finally, with the advice and encouragement of three priests – Joseph Nugent, Edward Armstrong and Michael Blake – Catherine decided to use her inheritance to build a house for poor servant girls and homeless women on Baggot Street, in fashionable section of southeast Dublin. The foundation stone was laid in July 1824.

On September 24, 1827, the feast day of Our Lady of Mercy, Catherine's adopted cousin Catherine Byrn and Anna Maria Doyle, who offered to assist the new work, moved into the partly finished House of Mercy. Yet Joseph Nugent's death in 1825 and the death of Edward Armstrong in May 1828, cast Catherine more and more on the help of God alone, as Armstrong had counselled:

“Do not put your trust in any human being, but place all your confidence in God.”

(Derry Manuscript, in Sullivan, Catherine McAuley, 49)

Legal Guardian of Nine

Meanwhile Catherine's sister Mary had died of consumption in August 1827, leaving five children: Mary, James, Robert, Catherine, and William (Willie) ages sixteen to six. Mary's husband Dr. William Macauley was a surgeon at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

To help the family Catherine often stayed at their home on Military Road, but went daily to work at Baggot Street, taking with her the two girls, occasionally young Willie, as well as her young adopted cousin Teresa Byrn, age six. Hair-raising stories tell of Willie's unsupervised escapades with Catherine's horse and carriage.

Then, suddenly in January 1829, Dr. William Macauley died of fever and an ulcerated throat. Catherine was now the legal guardian of nine children, including the Byrn children and two orphans she had earlier welcomed to Coolock House.

Moving to Baggot Street

Having sold Coolock House in September 1828, Catherine moved permanently into Baggot street in early 1829, taking the girls with her, and placing her nephews as boarders in Catlow College. IN September 1828, she had written to a Carmelite priest, indicating that the House of Mercy was not a convent nor the group of lay helpers living there a religious order, even though they shared life, work, and prayer in common, and dressed simply:

Ladies who prefer a conventional life, and are prevented embracing it from the nature of property or connections, may retire to this House. It is expected a gratuity will be given to create a fund for the school, and an annual pension paid sufficient to meet the expense a lady must incur. The objects which the Charity at present embraces are daily education of

hundreds of poor female children and instruction of young women who sleep in the House.

Objects in view - superintendence of young women employed in the house, instructing and assisting the sick poor.....

(Sullivan, ed., Correspondence, Letter 6)

Misunderstanding and Criticism

Despite the full approbation of Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, Catherine and the House of Mercy suffered the public misunderstanding, criticism, suspicion, and even jealousy that sometimes afflict new ventures in the mission of the Church. Catherine was called an upstart; her work among the poor was judged unfit for proper women to perform, or worse, a meddling of the “unlearned sex” in the work of the clergy.

She was accused of indirectly deflecting support from the work of established religious orders and of imitating them without abiding by their rules. Neighbors of the House were chagrined at the begging letters left at their doors, seeking blankets and clothing for the women sheltered in the House. All this created uncertainty among present and prospective co-workers.

A Difficult Decision

In 1829 – 1830, Catherine faced a hard decision, one that seemed at first to override her previous inclinations and hopes for her intended work. The long term futures of the works of mercy she had begun and her continued attraction of co-workers seemed to depend on her willingness to found a new religious congregation whose nature and purposes would be unambiguous. However, some clergy did not favour the creation of another religious order for women in Dublin, presumably out of loyalty to the existing orders.

Catherine now sought the advice of Michael Blake, a dear friend who supported her the rest of her life. As parish priest of Saints Michael's and John's, he was known throughout Dublin for his vigorous, personal service of the poor. Later, as Bishop of Dromore, he would serve porridge every morning to the poor children of the neighbourhood. Blake assured Catherine that a new religious congregations could be founded and approved which would be faithful to her purposes. It did not have to be like existing congregations; it could be unenclosed and uninhibited in its work on the streets of Dublin.

The First Sisters of Mercy

Slowly Catherine and the community of Baggot Street assented. On September 8, 1830, she and two co-workers, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley, entered the Presentation Convent on George's Hill, Dublin, to make canonical novitiate prior to profession of vows. Fifteen months later, on December 12, 1831, she and her two companions professed their vows as the first Sisters of Mercy. The vows Catherine professed that day expressed the deep confidence in God's merciful providence that had brought her to this moment:

“I, Sister Catherine McAuley, called in religion Mary Catherine, do vow and promise to God perpetual Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, and to persevere until the end of my life in the congregation called of the sisters of Mercy, established for the visitation of the sick, poor, and protection and instruction of poor females . . . “

(Sullivan, ed., Correspondence, Letter 12)



That very day Catherine returned to Baggot Street. The next day Daniel Murray formally installed her as mother superior of the Sisters of Mercy, a title she refused to use of herself, agreeing only, and reluctantly, to be addressed as Mother.

Mercy Spreads

Over the next ten years Convents of Mercy spread throughout Ireland and England, Catherine herself personally founding autonomous communities in Tullamore (1836), Charleville (1836), Carlow (1837), Cork (1837), Limerick (1838), Bermondsey, London (1839), Galway (1840), Birr (1840), and Birmingham (1841), and branch houses of the Dublin community in Kingstown (1835) and Booterstown (1838).

Her ready response to human need, her willingness to be separated from beloved co-workers, and her determined effort to “begin well” led her to undertake difficult travels from Dublin, by stage coach, canal boat, steam packet, and railway, and to remain with each new founding community for at least a month, often much longer.

Final Requests

The rule of the Sisters of Mercy was formally confirmed by Pope Gregory XVI on June 6, 1841. On November 11, 1841, Catherine McAuley died at Baggot Street of tuberculosis. Just six weeks before, she had returned, greatly fatigued and wracked by coughing, from establishing the foundation in Birmingham.

Now as she lay dying, Catherine had two requests: the Sisters of Mercy were always to

*“Preserve union and peace amongst each other -
That if they did they would enjoy great happiness
Such that they would wonder where it came from”*

(Elizabeth Moore to Mary Ann Doyle, November 21, 1841)

And the grieving sisters gathered around her bed were to

*“Get a good cup of tea ... when I am gone and to comfort one another - but
God will comfort them”*

(Mary Vincent Whitty to Cecilia Marmion, November 21, 1841)

Servant of God

In 1990, John Paul II recognized the profound charity of Catherine McAuley – clothed here in selfless affection and solicitude – and declared her Venerable:

*“The Servant of God Catherine McAuley... practiced to a heroic degree the
theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity toward God and
neighbour, and along with them the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice,
Temperance, and Fortitude”*

(Decree, April 9, 1990, Congregation for the Causes of Saints)

OUR STORY

Catherine McAuley

Taken from the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy Website.

Available online at <http://www.ourladyofmercy.org.uk/ourstory/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=90>

Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy was a courageous, holy and public-spirited woman. She was born to make a difference. To understand Catherine we need to understand the times and context in which she lived.

The industrial revolution was gathering momentum. It was a period of tremendous energy, creativity, and discovery, with exciting innovations in machinery, in science and medicine and new farming methods. It was a period of great expansion in building - the era of the great Georgian houses, tarmac roads, canals, steam engines and railways; it heralded the beginning of mass production and great wealth for the new industrialists and the upper classes.

But there was a darker side. History records: massive development of slum towns and the movement of people from country to town. There was widespread exploitation of workers, women and children, particularly, for they were cheaper to employ. Children as young as six had to endure long hours in factories, mills and in chimney sweeping. A spirit of laissez faire ruled - no restraints on money making enterprises; misery and degradation with no means of redress for the mass of the population. All this was compounded by famine and the long- standing, oppressive penal code.

Yet amidst the darkness there was hope. The period produced some great humanitarian and altruistic movements; movements for reform and the betterment of people fired by compassionate, courageous men and women.



Such a woman was Catherine McAuley. She was born in Dublin in 1778 just as the Industrial Revolution was getting under way and the penal laws were starting to relax under pressure from the powerful leadership of men like Wolfe Tone and later Daniel O'Connell.

Like many nineteenth century reformers, Catherine was appalled at the exploitation of workers and the terrible conditions which they and their families endured. Her father, though a Catholic, was a wealthy tradesman and Catherine learned from his example to respect and succour the poor and the oppressed. She experienced poverty and deprivation herself when both parents died and she and her younger brother and sister were left without means of support. They were cared for by the Armstrong family, kindly Protestant relatives. At about the age of twenty Catherine went to live as a companion to an elderly, wealthy lady and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Callaghan. They were Quakers and though very suspicious of all things 'Catholic' were very supportive of Catherine's ministry to the poor of the neighborhood of Coolock where they lived.



Catherine learned from them a great love and knowledge of the Scriptures. When Mr. Callaghan died, shortly after his wife, he left his entire fortune to Catherine knowing it would be well used.

Catherine was forty-four years of age when she inherited this large fortune and to the consternation of her rather worldly family she used it to build a House of Mercy in Baggot Street - a very fashionable part of Dublin.

Image on right: bronze Bust of Catherine by Michael Burke created from a description of Catherine written by a contemporary, Sister Clare Augustine Moore.

This was a daring action. The year was 1827. The 'Catholic Emancipation Act' was still being mooted in Parliament. Her plan was to bring the poor to the doorsteps of the rich. The building was ready for occupancy on the 24th September, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy. This was a providential coincidence which gave the House and later the Congregation its name. The large building comprised a school for the poor, an orphanage and, a hostel and training centre for vulnerable young women who worked, or sought work in the houses of the rich.

The house was designed to provide living accommodation for Catherine and the ladies, who would, hopefully, volunteer their services. Many likeminded women did in fact join her. They soon became involved in nursing the sick and the dying in their homes during the cholera epidemic. At first all the ladies worked as volunteers. Later it became clear that God was calling them to devote their whole lives to these works of mercy and to form a new congregation. This would be un-cloistered but give their work stability and permanence.

Consequently, Catherine and two companions Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley entered the Novitiate in the Presentation Convent, Dublin and on the 12th December 1831 professed the Vows Poverty, Chastity and Obedience which the Catholic Church required for members of a Religious Congregation. Very soon a fourth vow: was added '*to serve the poor, sick, and the ignorant.*' Thus expressing the nature and purpose of the Institute or as we Sisters say 'our charism'

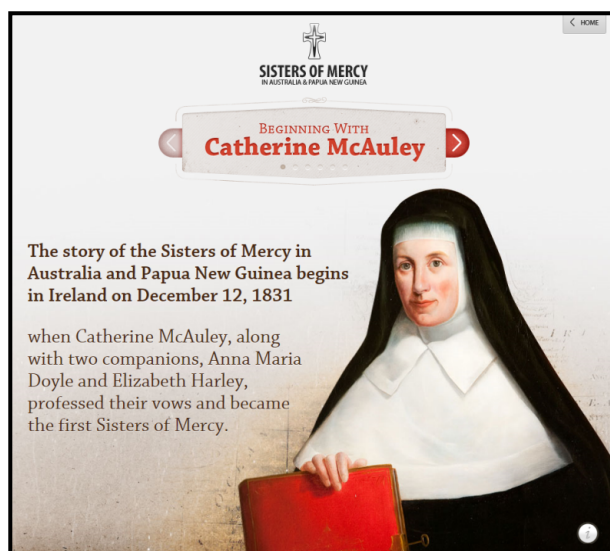
Catherine was fifty-three years of age when she professed her vows. Her Religious life was to be very short - ten prodigiously fruitful years. Under her *Spirit-filled* guidance the Congregation spread very rapidly.

In those ten years she opened ten new Convents in Ireland and two in England. Others including Liverpool, Newfoundland and Pittsburgh, America, were already planned when she died in 1841.

She inspired her followers with her own love and zeal. The moving words of her closest companion and confidante Francis Warde gives an insight into the power of Catherine's example. Francis is writing from America to another Sister:

"You never knew her. I knew her better than I have known anybody in my life. She was a woman of God, and God made her a woman of vision. She showed me what it meant to be a Sister of Mercy, to see the world and its people in terms of God's love; to love every one who needed love to care for every one who needed care. Now her vision is driving me on. It is a glorious thing to be a Sister of Mercy" (A letter to Sr. Mary Gonzaga O'Brien in 1879)





Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea

Available online at <http://www.mercy.org.au/history/>

The Founder

Much is written about why Catherine, at the age of 53, founded a religious order. Here it is enough to say that she recognised it as God's way of enabling her and the several women who had joined her, to continue their critical work among the poorest people of Dublin.

House of Mercy

That work began systematically in 1827 with the opening of the House of Mercy which Catherine had built and equipped with her own inheritance. Dedicated to Mary the Mother of Mercy and given over to Works of Mercy, it was a centre to which people came for refuge and from which Catherine and her friends went daily into the streets and hovels caring for the sick and dispossessed.



Catherine's Lifetime Concerns

In a real way, the House of Mercy witnessed to Catherine's life-time concerns. Influenced by her father, a man of faith and refined social conscience, from early childhood she had demonstrated deep sensitivity to people who suffered the extremes of poverty and all her adult life she had cared for those who were destitute, denied education, meaningful employment or any other opportunity to achieve a fair quality of life.

Social Reformers

There is a sense in which Catherine and the women she inspired to join her could be regarded as social reformers. In a society marred by socio-political forces that protected the privileged and oppressed the poor, the majority of whom were Catholics, they spent themselves and their resources trying to confront the causes of chronic poverty and to alleviate its demeaning effects such as ignorance, ill health and homelessness. And while their outreach was to all, they had a special care for young women and girls vulnerable to exploitation.

Women of Gospel Faith

However, before they were social reformers, these Sisters of Mercy were women of Gospel faith. They believed that God, in whose image every person is created, is the source of human dignity. They understood that God, self-revealing in Jesus, is full of compassion and that no-one is unworthy of God's love. They were convinced that if God's wisdom and justice guides the leaders of a society, no person need be excluded from life-giving opportunities.



Catherine exemplified such faith. It was at the heart of all the ways in which she carried out the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (Isaiah 58:6 -10; Matthew 25:34 - 40). And it was her whole-hearted commitment to serving those who were longing for God's Mercy that encouraged other women to share in her life's work.

First Foundations

By 1841, when Catherine died she had made ten autonomous foundations of Sisters of Mercy throughout Ireland and two in England. Wherever they were, the sisters tried to respond to needs too long neglected. They established schools and clinics, cared for the sick and dying in their homes, consoled the bereaved, provided refuge for homeless people, and befriended prisoners and their families.



Reflections on Living the Charism of Mercy

The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley

1818 – 1841

(Primary Sources of Information)

What is most moving about the letters of Catherine McAuley (1778-1841), the founder of the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831, is not any gleam of overt or expected virtue, but everyday love immersed deep in the human grain of her friends' and co-workers' lives. Departing from the conventions of her day about how a well-bred woman should compose letters, Catherine wrote not from a script, but from her heart – to offer affection, to give encouragement, to cheer, to affirm the demands of justice, to console, to incite laughter, to express gratitude, to keep playfulness alive. Some of her letters were indeed written to launch or settle business matters: these she had to write. But most of them were unsolicited, penned late at night or in the last moments before a post, from no requirement, but the command to love.

Sullivan p.23

69. To the Reverend James Maher, Convent Baggot Street Carlow-Graigie January 10, 1838

My Dear Father Maher

I am very sorry you did not complete the full week's attendance, which according to the regulations of this diocese, would have entitled you to one pound or guinea, whichever you liked best.¹ The statutes are now most rigorously observed and I really cannot say, without making enquiry, whether a broken week is payable. You will excuse me, I am sure, for taking this little advantage, for you know, although I should be simple as a dove, I must also be prudent as a serpent – and since there is very little good can be accomplished, or evil avoided, without the aid of money, we must look after it in small as well as in great matters.

Humour

I have now to deplore the loss of a superfine veal cutlet, specially provided for this morning, also a dear nice little kettle to supply boiling water for the second or third cup as might be required – and then my poor infirm hand, employed far beyond its power making the fire burn brilliantly, giving a sharp edge to a knife set off the cutlet, roasting a plate, etc. etc.

Friendship

Most sincerely thanking you for past services, and earnestly wishing for a renewal and continuance of the same, I remain

*My Dear Father Maher in real sincerity,
Your ever grateful
Mary C. McAuley*

Don't forfeit all chance of the pound – perhaps we can make up the week – with-out violating the law.

¹ This letter to Catherine's friend James Maher has sometimes been misinterpreted as a serious complaint. Father Maher, whom she met at the founding of Carlow community in April 1837, had evidently spent a few days in Dublin, and celebrated Mass each morning at Baggot Street. When he returned to Carlow where he was now parish priest, Catherine wrote him this teasing letter, insisting on 'the regulations of this diocese'. This straight-faced letter is no doubt a sustained parody, set in another context, of the serious conversations they must have had about the chaplaincy issue and the chaplain's salary she was expected, but could not afford to pay. Catherine's claim to be writing 'in real sincerity' is an ironic tip-off to the tongue in cheek character of the letter.

(Sullivan, M., The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841, Four Courts Press, Dublin, page 117)

78. To Sister M Frances Warde, Baggot Street Carlow February 17, 1838

My ever Dear Sister Mary Francis

How deeply, how sincerely, I feel this second trial²⁶ which it has pleased Almighty God to visit you with, not in His anger – we will humbly hope – but to purify and render the foundation solid and according to His own heart – established on the Cross. The innocent amiable young person you have parted was, it would seem, particularly designed for what has come to pass – for we did everything that was calculated to alter her intention, at least I did.²⁷ Knowing how much these afflictions press on your mind, I will be most anxious to hear that you are yourself again.

You have given all to God without any reserve. Nothing can happen to you which He does not appoint. You desire nothing but the accomplishment of His Holy Will. Every thing, how trivial soever, regarding you will come from this adorable source. You must be cheerful and happy, animating all around you. This [advice] is quite unnecessary, for I know you do not want²⁸ counsel – or comfort – yet I cannot entirely give up my poor old Child. You may be sure we all pray fervently for you, which is the best we can do. If you could have seen the general feeling that prevailed at recreation yesterday evening, you might almost have thought we were strangers to such sorrows.

You will soon now have an increase – the comfort comes soon after a well received trial. May God preserve and bless you, my own dearly loved child. Remember me most affectionately to all. Sister Ursula forgets me.²⁹

*Yours ever faithful and fondly attached
M. C. McAuley*

Leadership

Friendship

Faithfulness

Community

²⁶ The death of Kate Coffey, a Carlow postulant, occurred on February 14. The 'first trial' Frances experienced was the death of Dr. Edward Nolan on October 14, 1937.

²⁷ Kate Coffey apparently sickly before she entered, perhaps with some weakness of the lungs, and Catherine McAuley had evidently tried to discourage her entering the Carlow community on the grounds that convent life might be too hard for her.

²⁸ That is, lack.

²⁹ Ursula Frayne was still temporarily in Carlow, and had apparently not written recently to Catherine McAuley.

(Sullivan, M., *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, page 125)

241. To Sister M de Sales White, Baggot Street Bermondsey

February 28, 1841

My Dearest Child

I have felt quite anxious to write to you and my dear Sister M. Xavier – but my old cough has made me so nervous that I could not – nor cannot now write distinctly. You must read with patience.

We have imported the London Influenza – six on the Infirmary's list – Sister Lucy Vincent⁹⁶ has been very ill indeed, the only English patient amongst them. Poor Mother M. Cecilia, Sr. M. Austin, Sr. M. Ann, Sr. Fanny Vigne – a postulant – Sr. Vincent Whitty & Sr. Lucy – all going on well.⁹⁷ I often think of my old Galway Nurse that would not allow me a little stirabout.

Now, my dearly beloved child, I hope you are exceedingly cautious as to the fast of Lent – remember, obedience is above every other sacrifice, and you will be far more mortified in taking that which you do not like to take, than in abstaining from it. You have not sufficient strength to fast. Take a good collation in the morning, the usual allowance here – and some light supper. Take in the day a crust – or something if you have a long walk. Sister M. Xavier will I know take care in this particular – I lay this obligation on you.⁹⁸

How rapidly the days, weeks & months are passing. Another month ended, that seemed but a few days begun. If we have not forfeited the friendship of almighty God – but have been trying to love Him more and more and to serve Him faithfully, they were Blessed days for us. Oh let us endeavour to make these days such as we should wish the past to have been. Let us enter into the spirit of the Church – making this to us a truly penitential season, mortifying the pride of self opinion, performing all with an humble heart. – “You are but dust, and unto dust will soon return.” Our poor bodies only, but our precious immortal souls – after passing through these few years of pilgrimage, pain and sorrow – will, if we are faithful, soon enter on the joys of a blissful eternity.

The simplest and most practical lesson I know – my dear Sister de Sales – is to resolve to be good today – but better tomorrow. Let us take one day only in hands – at a time, merely making a resolve for tomorrow. Thus we may hope to get on – taking short careful steps, not great strides.

God bless you, my Dear children. Pray fervently for your ever affectionate Mother in Christ -

M. C. McAuley

Do all you can to comfort my Dear Mother M. Clare. I will not expect to hear from you during Lent – except something should make it necessary – but you shall hear from us.

*Concern and
consideration
for others*

*Service to
others*

Pious

Realist

⁹⁸ Catherine is writing on the first Sunday of Lent.

(Sullivan, M., The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841, Four Courts Press, Dublin, page 364)

283. To Sister Mary Ann Doyle Baggot Street Tullamore

July 24, 1841

My dear Sister Mary Ann

You are on the secure high road of the Cross – have the most strong and lively confidence that your Convent will be firmly established, for it certainly will. “Be just & fear not.” Acquit yourself with justice towards God – let no temporal consideration influence your words or actions, when the duty of your state is in question. I could not think any person with very cautious worldly views – worthy to be admitted to holy Profession. It is not a disposition to bestow gifts, like benevolent persons in the world that bespeaks generosity of mind for the religious state. It is bestowing ourselves most freely and relying with unhesitating confidence on the Providence of God.

Determination

When our innocent – yet very sensible, Sister Chatell was about to hand over all she possessed, making it impossible to ever command one shilling, her Mother told her she ought to have some security, as many persons were of the opinion this House would not be established – and said to her, What would you do then? She answered – “Wont I have my sweet Lord?” – and sweet He was to her indeed to the very last moment.²⁵ Tho’ we may not often have the consolation to meet such noble universal disengagement as hers – yet a spirit directly opposite, I humbly hope will never make its abode amongst us.

Do not fear offending any one. Speak as your mind directs and always act with more courage when the ‘mammon of unrighteousness’ as in question. Let me know when you are closely pressed, and I will divide with you, be it ever so little.²⁶

I wish I could hear of your getting up a lottery or raffle occasionally. Sr M. Teresa has, made £80 in Galway at different times. If you had two good prizes – and all the rest trifles, you would sell £25 worth of tickets between this and Christmas at 1 S[hilling] per ticket – by giving 10 to every [one] you know to sell them. The drawing could be in the school room – 3 blanks to a prize. We have just had one – and did not expend more than £1-10.

Courageous

Write soon. Most earnestly praying God to direct and strengthen you.

I remain with great affection etc., etc.

M. C. McAuley

Leadership

²⁵ Mary de Chantal McCann, the widow of Dr. John McCann, a Dublin physician, had entered the Baggot Street community in October 1832 and professed her vows on July 1 1835. She died of typhus fever on October 27, 1837.

²⁶ Catherine may be thinking of Matt.6:24 and 1Tim 6:9-10. When the Tullamore community is in financial straits, she will divide with it whatever money the Baggot Street community has.

My God, I am yours for time and eternity,
Lord, I am yours forever.
It's you that must teach me to trust in your
Providence,
Loving Lord.

You are a God of love and tenderness.
I put my faith in you, O Lord,
And I ask that you grant me
acceptance of your plan, O
Loving, Lord.

Take from my heart all
painful anxiety.
Let nothing sadden me
but sin.
And let my delight be
hoping to see your
face, God, my all.

Amen



Reflection on Catherine McAuley's Suscipe

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.

Our Lives are gifts from God and we belong to God in this life and in the next. Our lives are lived against the backdrop of eternity and union with God as our final happiness and rest. As St Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Each of us is known personally to God, and he desires a close relationship with each of us. It is this charism of love which inspires the Sisters of Mercy and our school in its mission.

Teach me to cast myself entirely into the arms of your loving Providence with a lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity.

At times we don't always know what is best for us, but we trust in God to guide us and to keep us. The Gospels reassure us that "every hair on our head" has been counted, and God knows what our deepest needs are. True wisdom comes from knowing ultimately, that it is only God who is worth putting our trust in. We are also reminded that our ability to trust in God, and to follow his providence comes from his grace, and him teaching us. We are aware at times of change and uncertainty of a power beyond us which supports and upholds us.

Grant, O most merciful Redeemer, that whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me.

It is by God's grace that whatever happens in our lives, God's grace will bring about our growth and flourishing. At times we don't feel that our lives are flourishing and it is in those times we need to trust that what God puts across our path will be for our good. God can bring good out of surprising situations. The openness with which Sister Helen and Sister Monica embraced the request to move from Abingdon is a powerful witness to the vows of poverty and obedience where we place our own desires and plans at the service of the community.



Take from my heart all painful anxiety; let nothing sadden me but sin, nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of You my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

So often life can be filled with silly worries and needless anxieties. The abandonment we are encouraged to make leads us to a freedom of spirit, which perceives the world with a sharp eye to what is important and what is not and this is certainly a gift of the religious vocation lived by both Sister Helen and Sister Monica. It is a healthy reminder to each of us that we are on a journey to the Father's house, which at times means the virtue of stability and being rooted, and at other times calls us to be ready to move and go where God calls, trusting that in doing so, God continues to lead us to the fullness of life. We pray for Sister Monica and Sister Helen, and the whole religious order, that their life, witness and work will continue to enable them, and all those they meet to flourish and grow.

The above reflection was written by Chris Sumner when he was a teacher at Our Lady's School Abingdon. Chris is now Head of RS at St Joseph's College, Reading. Our thanks to Chris for letting us use his reflection on the Suscipe.

Watch the talk available online at

<http://www.mercyworld.org/spirituality/view-reflection.cfm?loadref=0&uuid=AF00675C-0036-3933-0985FB57192CC454>

Here we hear about some of the facets of Catherine's life which tell us more about the person Catherine was, the development of her faith and the witness that she gave to the Catholic religion as well as her struggles. It is interesting to hear how the life of Catherine correlates to the Sisters of Mercy in contemporary society.

Gathering the Harvest of Catherine's Faith

A reflection from Mary Reynolds rsm

Presentation given on 29 September, 2013 at the Second National Symposium on Catherine McAuley, Charleville, Ireland.

Mary illustrated how Catherine's Faith was rooted in her total commitment to living like Jesus. She was unswerving in that commitment and, through her example, she persuaded others to do likewise. The challenge is the same for us today



*"I charge you my dear child,
not to be sorrowful, but
rather to rejoice if we are to
suffer this humiliating trial.
God will not be angry. Be
assured of that and is not
that enough."
(Letter 100)*

(Letter 90)

Mark proclaims '
*All things are possible for the
one who has faith'*
(9:23)

*"Pray fervently to God to take
all bitterness from me. I can
scarcely think of what has
been done to me without
resentment. May God forgive
me and make me humble
before he calls me into his
presence".*

*'Put your whole trust in God
- He will never
let you want'.*

*'While we place our whole confidence in God, we must act as if it
all depended on our own exertions'*

Latest News

Catherine McAuley: a woman who continues to inspire

October 30, 2010

Catherine McAuley established the Sisters of Mercy in 1831. Nearly 180 years on, why does she continue to inspire people throughout the world?

Catherine McAuley lived in Ireland at a time when poverty and injustice were entrenched. Unemployment levels were high and educational opportunities few; health and welfare systems were virtually non-existent and social and religious prejudices endemic.

Alert to the needs of people who were suffering and struggling in life, she dared to envisage and create a better life for them.

So what influenced Catherine's altruism and spirituality?

It is said she inherited a mix of her parent's qualities: her father's religious commitment and concern for the poor and her mother's intellectual independence and social capabilities.

Despite her birth into the upper middle classes, Catherine experienced considerable suffering and poverty in her formative years, including the death of her father at an early age, precarious financial situations, separation from family, the responsibility of caring for her mother and siblings, as well as religious discrimination and ridicule.

These experiences could easily cause despair, but Catherine trusted in God whom she described as her "faithful provider". She possessed a hopeful and indomitable spirit and acknowledged the blessings of people and circumstances.

After her mother's death, the Callaghans, a Quaker couple, invited her to live with them on their large estate near Dublin. Catherine remained with them for 20 years and in that time took opportunities to nurture her faith and reach out to people in need.

Following the Callaghans' deaths, Catherine became the sole heiress of their property. In 1822, aged 44, she used the bulk of her considerable inheritance to expand her outreach to those in need and began to build the House of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin.

Her plan was to gather young women, especially from the middle-classes, who would help her to provide educational, religious and social services for women and children at risk of homelessness through poverty and exploitation.

Catherine obviously had strong leadership skills and a charismatic quality that encouraged and empowered others because the response was remarkable.

But there were critics both from within the Church and society. Some deemed the work to be inappropriate, especially for a lay group of women. Eventually the Archbishop of Dublin encouraged her to establish a religious congregation. This was never Catherine's intention and she struggled with the idea, but finally agreed to give stability to her works.

At age 52, she and two other women began their training in religious life at the Presentation Sisters' novitiate. A year later in 1831, they took their vows as Sisters of Mercy. The Mercy congregation was



born, and so too, a new form of religious life was being shaped that allowed religious women the freedom to move beyond the cloister.

Catherine died in 1841, aged 63, but the work she began did not. By 1855, the congregation numbered 3,000 and had spread throughout Ireland, England and Scotland, and to Newfoundland, North America, Australia, New Zealand and South America.

Today, thousands of Sisters of Mercy, their co-workers, associates and friends across the world are engaged in numerous works of mercy, each one reflecting the vision of Catherine McAuley. One such work in Australia is Mercy Works Inc.



The way Mercy Works Inc. operates with communities reflects the principles of Catherine McAuley...

- giving people a key to their own independence by building their capacity through education and skills training;
- paying particular attention to providing education and training for women and girls, recognising their key role in society;
- working in partnership with local people, responding to the needs articulated by local people;
- being informed by the broader local context and community in order to understand a situation and respond in the most appropriate way;
- and where possible, attending to the most immediate needs first, before expanding.



How Catherine McAuley inspires you

Paul Lentern, Mercy Works Inc. Board Member and Dean of Mission at Mt St Benedict College Pennant Hills, Sydney, says: “I’ve always been attracted to the way Catherine both articulated and lived a vision of mercy. It seems to me that she drew on her own experience of hardship and vulnerability to develop an empathy with those who suffered disadvantage. I think it is significant too that she had the vision to educate people and saw this as fundamental to their liberation.”

Kate Anderson, ‘Mercy 5’ Co-ordinator, the five Sydney secondary schools established by the Sisters of Mercy, says: “The main thing that inspires me about Catherine is the way she worked to not only help with the immediate

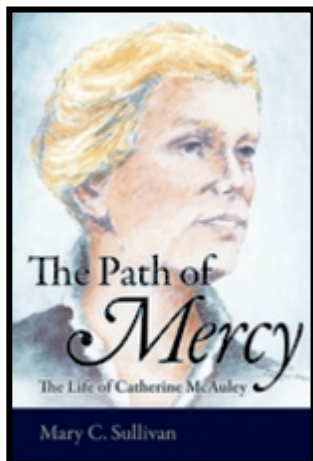
needs of people but the way in which she concentrated on developing the dignity and self belief in people to enable them to lift themselves out of poverty for good.”

Anila Issac RSM, Pakistan-born Sister of Mercy, theology student and volunteer English as a Second Language teacher at the Academy of Mary Immaculate, Melbourne, says: “Catherine McAuley is a woman of all time... a universal woman; a woman with whom any woman can identify... Catherine’s deep faith in the providence of God inspires me. Her awareness of the poor and their needs... is a source of inspiration... She was not afraid to stand with the poor and needy of her time.”

Kate Garrone, Facilitator of the Mercy Young Adult Network across Australia and Papua New Guinea, says: “I am inspired particularly by how Catherine’s experience of being loved by God could not but flow out of her to others. This deep compassion and love sustained her in all the challenges she faced and gave her a freedom to respond creatively, lovingly and in ways that empowered and encouraged others. Mercy Works Inc. responds to needs in communities with the same creative, loving and empowering energy that Catherine McAuley had.”



Additional Reading

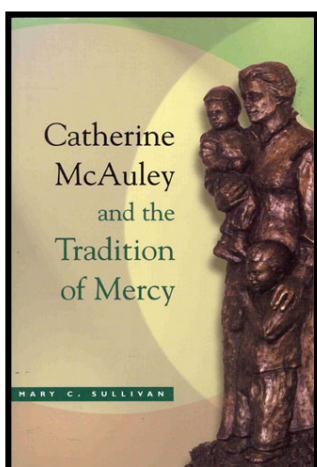
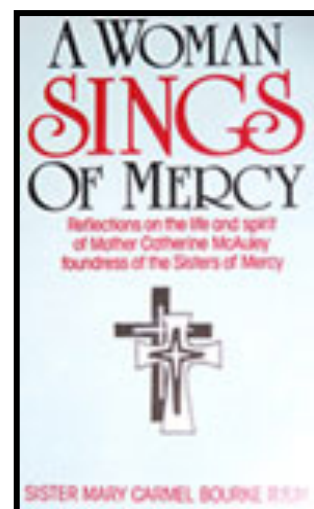


CHAPTER 10 - Beliefs and Motivations

Pages: 154-171

The predominant motivations of Catherine McAuley's adult life seem to have been her gradually deepening theological understandings. It is not possible to study her letters, the prayers she is known to have prayed, her recorded instructions to the first Sisters of Mercy, her expressed reactions to events of her life, or her own actions, without recognizing, however fragmentarily, the interior source of her attitudes and actions. While important clues to what moved her can be discerned in previous chapters, it seems necessary to pause here and try to articulate some of the central elements of her theological beliefs.

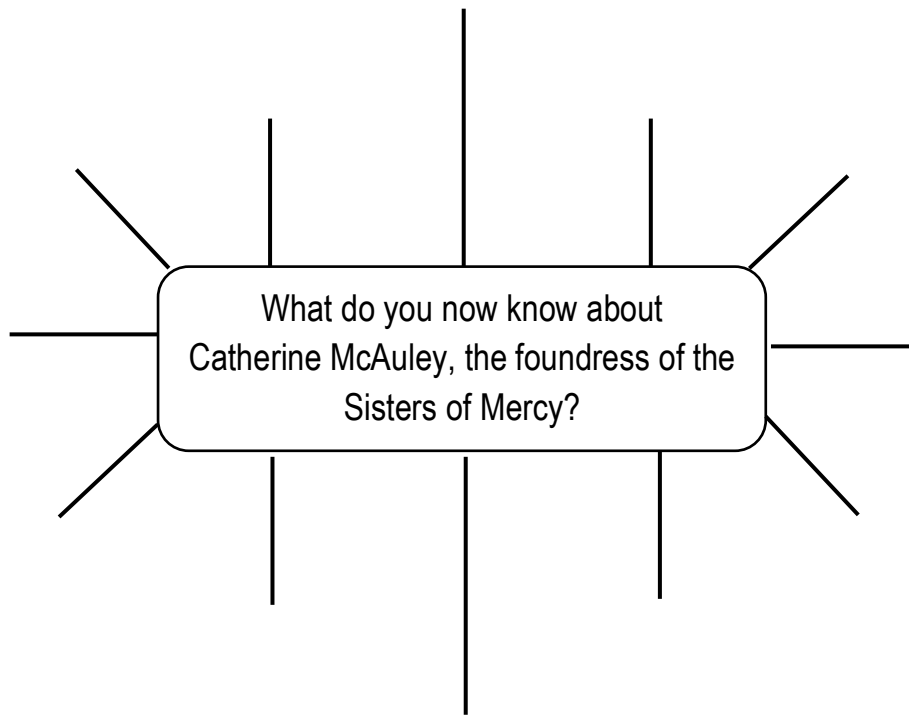
From her journey in faith to her relationship with God this book contains reflections on the life and spirit of Catherine McAuley. Her concept of community, authority, leadership and Mission are all explored by Sister Mary Carmel Bourke.



Pages: 9-25

A chronology of Catherine McAuley's life

Guided Research



If you were asked to write about the influence Catherine McAuley has had on the identity and growth of the Sisters of Mercy, what might you include about her early life, vocation, religious life, influence on society at the time, lasting impact on the society today.



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Extended Answer Questions

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2. From your experience and limited knowledge explain how Catherine McAuley's legacy has continued today through the various ministries of the Sisters of Mercy?

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