

Image: © Anne McMillan rsm




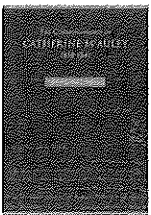

***"Our Centre is God"***  
***Sustaining the Spirit of Mercy***  
AMSSA Conference, Melbourne, 2017

Catherine:

"We should be as the compass that goes round its circle without stirring from its centre – our centre is God, from whom all our actions should spring as from their source."


[Retreat Instructions, p. 154]

Mary C. Sullivan rsm




Elizabeth Davis rsm

*Wisdom and Mercy Meet*




Bill, one of the thousands of children who were fostered in the 19th century



19th century Dublin was fashionable on the surface but hid vast populations of poverty

Dublin's slum dwellers lived in poverty.

Workhouses



Catherine McAuley (1778-1841)

Born in Dublin into a prosperous Catholic family in 1778

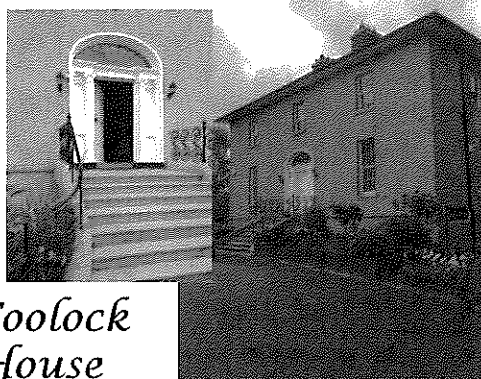
Her father died when she was young (in 1783) and her mother died in 1798.

**Father: faith, responding to the needs of the people around her**

**Mother: education and social graces to participate with ease in society**

**In 1803, she moved into the Dublin home of a Protestant couple, William and Catherine Callaghan.**

William Callaghan



*Coolock House*

### *Catherine's Time at Coolock House*

Graciousness, courtesy and hospitality fully developed here [*Path of Mercy*, p. 32]

🎵 Dinner parties, dancing, singing, cards 🎵

Received guidance in her Catholic faith

Daniel Murray (later Archbishop of Dublin) and several other local curates

### *Catherine's Time at Coolock House*

**Mrs Callaghan – a Quaker**

**Her charity to the poor**

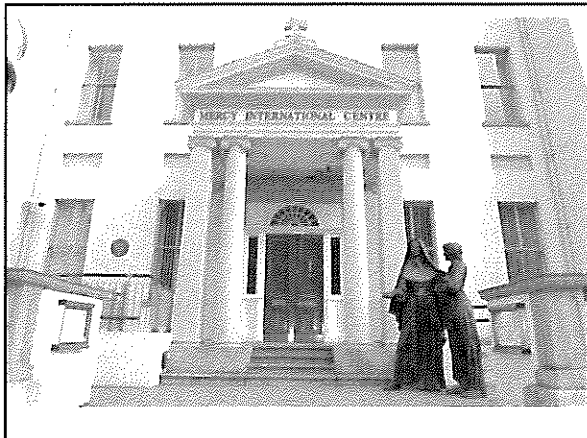
Catherine responded to material and spiritual needs in the surrounding area (as her father had done).

**Devoted to reading the Scriptures**

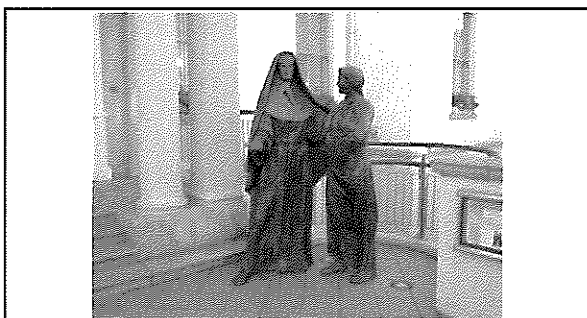
**Bedridden for last three years of her life.**

Catherine nursed her and "often read for her some book of moral and religious instruction" [*Path of Mercy*, p. 41]

**After the death of Catherine Callaghan in 1819 and William in 1822, Catherine inherited their estate and became a wealthy woman.**



**September 24,  
1827**  
**First house of Mercy  
in Baggot Street,  
the fashionable  
area of  
Dublin**



**The House of Mercy provided vocational training  
for young women at risk, education for poor young  
girls and a residence for homeless women and girls,  
and some orphans.**

**Catherine originally had no intention of  
forming a new religious order.**

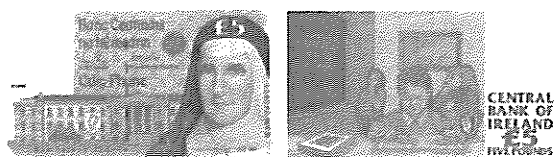
**Eventually, Catherine agreed to form a  
religious congregation.**

**It was to be unenclosed and uninhibited  
in its work on the streets of Dublin.**



**Site of Presentation Convent, Georges Hill**

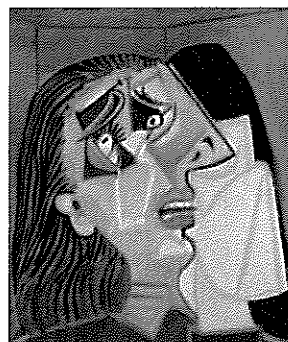
**Issued in 1994**



**Issued in 1978**



**What leads a  
wealthy  
heiress to  
spend all her  
fortune to  
help the poor  
and sick?**



Pablo Picasso, *Weeping Woman*, 1937

***Exod 3:7-8***

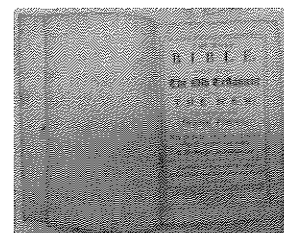
**"I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come ... to deliver them ... and to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..."**

### ***Catherine's Words***

- "If the love of God really reigns in your heart, it will quickly show itself in the exterior." [*Retreat Instructions*, p. 145]
- "If we love God, we will undoubtedly love our neighbour also; they are as cause and effect." [*Retreat Instructions*, p. 147]
- "It is for God we serve the poor, and not for thanks." [*Familiar Instructions*, p. 140]
- "The Order is God's work – not mine." [*Familiar Instructions*, p. 136]

**"The life and teachings of Jesus Christ should be as a book always opened before us ..."**

[*Retreat Instructions*, p. 87]



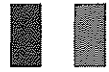
- Following the example of Jesus in the Gospels
- "It is not sufficient that Jesus Christ be formed in us – he must be recognized in our conduct. [*Retreat instructions*, p.72]
- Young women drawn to her [crowds to Jesus]
- Catherine mixing with poor and wealthy [similar to Jesus]

***John 15:12***

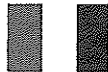
***"Love one another as I have loved you"***

***John 10:10***

***"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."***



While the house of Mercy was being built, Catherine went to France to learn the best educational practices and techniques.



**NOTICE.**  
**PREVENTIVES OF**  
**CHOLERA!**

Published by order of the Sanitary Committee, under the sanction of the Medical Council.

**BE TEMPERATE IN EATING & DRINKING!**  
*Avoid Raw Vegetables and Unripe Fruit!*  
Abstain from **COLD WATER**, when heated, and above all from *Ardent Spirits*, and if habit have rendered them indispensable, take much less than usual.

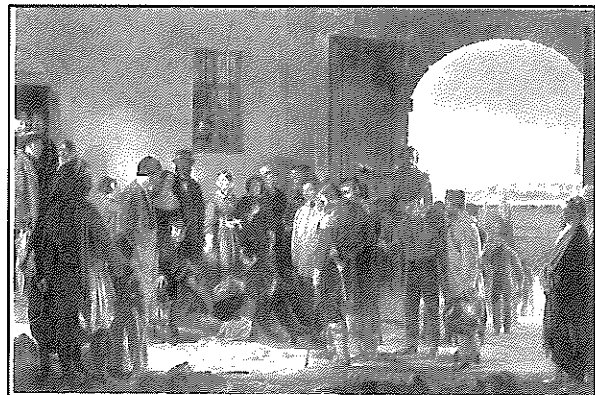
**SLEEP AND CLOTHE WARM!**  
**DO NOT SLEEP OR SIT IN A DRAUGHT OF AIR.**  
Avoid getting Wet!  
Attend immediately to all disorders of the **Bowels.**

**TAKE NO MEDICINE WITHOUT ADVICE.**  
Medicine and Medical Advice can be had by the poor, at all hours of the day and night, by applying at the Station House in each Ward.

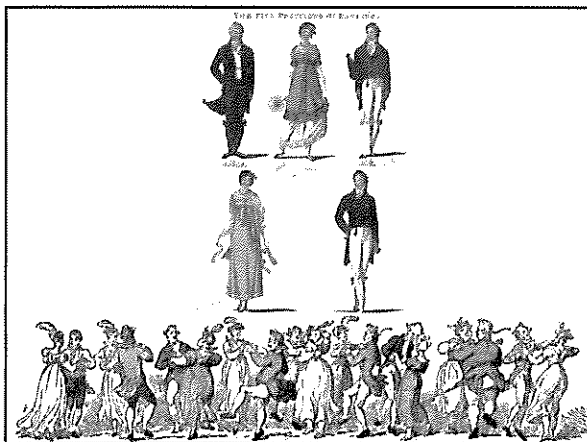
**CALEB A. WOODHILL, Mayor.**  
**JAMES KELLY, Chairman of Sanitary Committee.**

**Cholera  
Epidemic  
in Dublin  
in 1832.**

- Catherine oversaw the eighty poorly paid nurses
- The head physician regarded the sisters as "of the greatest use . . . The hospital could not be carried on without them; they kept the eighty nurses in order – which was hard to do."  
[Path of Mercy, 118]



*The Mission of Mercy: Florence Nightingale Receiving the Wounded at Scutari, Jerry Barrett, 1857*



### *Catherine and Scriptures – Letters*

"McAuley cited Scripture authoritatively to direct, motivate, and support her new community. She confirmed her leadership by weaving Scripture through all her letters and using Scripture-like blessings at the conclusion of each letter" [Wisdom and Mercy Meet, p. 67]

### *Catherine and Scriptures – Letters*

“Oh death, where is thy sting” (1 Cor 15:55)  
[Letter, August 15-30, 1837]

“[God’s] ways are not like our ways, nor  
[God’s] thoughts like our thoughts” (cf. Isaiah  
55:8) [Letter, Nov 13, 1840]

“The sun never, I believe, went down on  
our anger” (cf. Ephesians 4:26) [Letter, January 13, 1939]

### *Catherine and Scriptures – Letters*

Endings to her letters:

“May God bless and animate you with  
[God’s] own divine Spirit” [Letter, October 23, 1837]

“May God preserve and bless you” [Letter,  
December 23, 1837]

“God bless you, my Dear Sr. M. F., and send  
you every comfort and restore you to  
health.” [Letter, April 25, 1838]

### *Catherine and Scriptures – Letters*

- “May God bless the poor Sisters of Mercy and make them very humble ... impress humility and meekness by example ...” [Letter, July 28, 1840]
- She frequently quoted “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt 11:29) [*Path of Mercy*, p. 214]
- Prepared herself for her own death, trusting in Jesus’ words: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” [*Tradition of Mercy*, p. 124]

Drawing on work on Beatitudes by Elaine Wainwright rsm

**Blessed are the poor in spirit ... (Matt 5:3)**

- Those who know their dependence on God, the community, the Earth.
- Those who have the respect and humility to know the interconnectedness of all creation (cf. *humus*, the earth)
- Those who refuse the way of *hubris*, the arrogance which assumes human mastery of creation.

**Blessed are the meek ... (5:5)**

Meekness or gentleness (like the humility of the poor in spirit) is associated with the strength to be in right relationship.

**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be mercied (5:7)**

They shall receive mercy AND together they shall be shaped into mercy by their actions



By Macaaa - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30411980>

Mercy creates a spiral of  
right relationships;

The interconnectedness  
of giving/ receiving;

The dance of mercy.

This beatitude speaks right to the core of our  
Mercy tradition.



Image: © Anne McMillan sam

## *Catherine and The Rule*

- The original Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy
- Most chapters were largely copied from the Presentation Rule. Catherine made some adaptations.
- Two additional chapters on distinctive works of the Sisters of Mercy – “Of the Visitation of the Sick”, and “Of the Admission of Distressed Women”

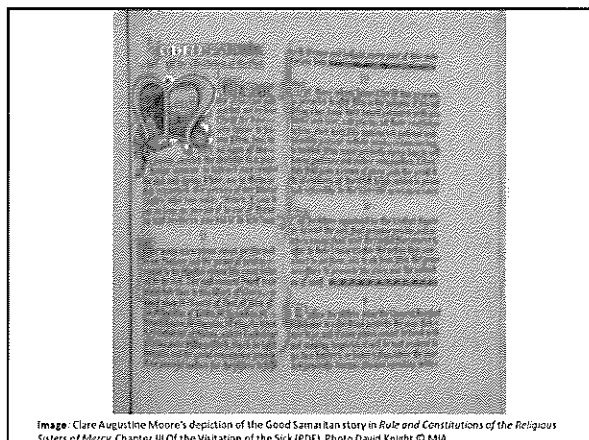


Image: Clare Augustine Moore's depiction of the Good Samaritan story in *Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Sisters of Mercy*, Chapter III Of the Visitation of the Sick (PDF). Photo David Knight © MIA.

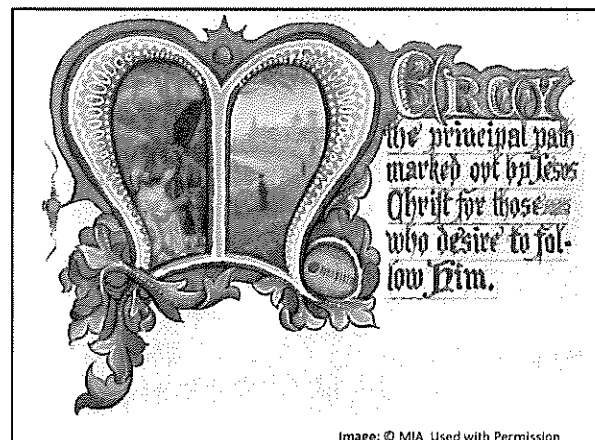


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## *“Of the Visitation of the Sick”*

Mercy inspired Catherine “ ... to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them [she] regarded the person of our Divine Master, who has said, ‘Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me.’”

[*Rule and Constitutions*, Chapter 3]

## *Matt 25:31-46*

- Final ethical teaching of Jesus before the passion narrative
- From this story, the tradition of the corporal works of mercy developed

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me."

"When was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?"

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, my sisters and brothers, you did it to me."

### *Corporal Works of Mercy*

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Visit the prisoners/ ransom the captives
- Bury the dead



*The Works of Mercy*

The Master of Alkmaar, Circa 1504



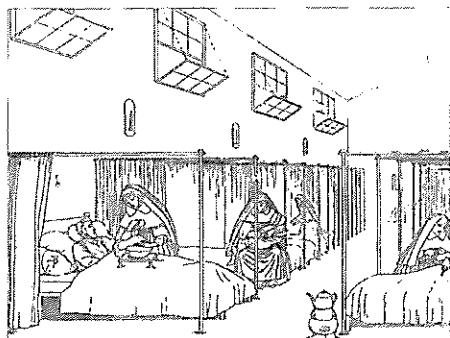
*The Seven Works of Mercy*

Caravaggio, 1607

### *Spiritual Works of Mercy*

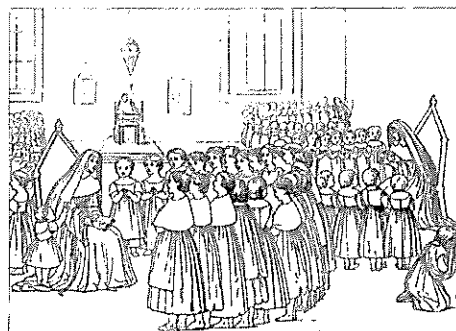
- Counselling the doubtful
- Instructing the ignorant
- Admonishing the sinner
- Comforting the sorrowful
- Forgiving injuries
- Bearing wrongs patiently
- Praying for the living and the dead





For I say to you as long as you did it to one of these my least you did it to me

Clare Agnew's drawings of Sisters of Mercy engaged in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy  
©Mercy International Association



Those that instruct many unto justice shall shine like stars for all eternity.

Clare Agnew's drawings of Sisters of Mercy engaged in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy  
©Mercy International Association



I was thirsty and you gave me to drink.

Clare Agnew's drawings of Sisters of Mercy engaged in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy  
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I was a prisoner and you visited me.

Clare Agnew's drawings of Sisters of Mercy engaged in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy  
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Bury the dead.

Clare Agnew's drawings of Sisters of Mercy engaged in the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy  
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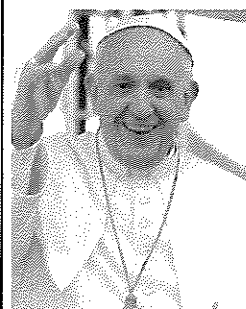
- "The corporal and spiritual works of mercy which draw religious from a life of contemplation, so far from separating them from the love of God, unite them much more closely to [God] ..."

*[The Spirit of the Institute]*

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, my sisters and brothers, you did it to/for me."

Pope Francis – Earth is amongst the least, the poorest

Canticle of St Francis of Assisi – Brother sun, Sister moon, Brothers wind and air, Sisters water and Earth



Message for  
The World Day of Prayer  
for the Care of Creation  
1<sup>st</sup> September, 2016

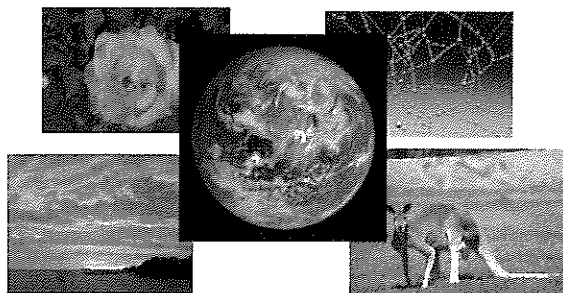
*A New Work  
of Mercy*

**Care for our  
common home**

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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=34837917>

### *Care for our common home*

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a "grateful contemplation of God's world" (*Laudato Si*, 214) which "allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us" (*ibid.*, 85).



### *Care for our common home*

As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires "simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness" and "makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world" (*LS*, 230-31).

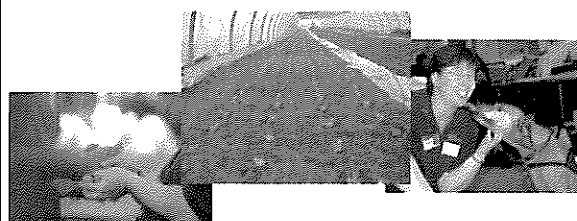


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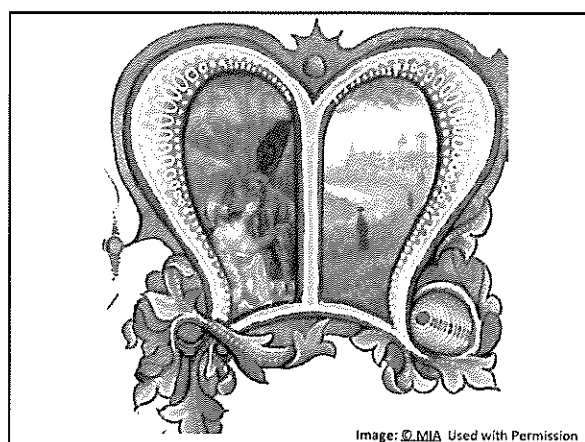


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The Samaritan also 'sees' but his response is different.

His seeing 'leads to life-giving touch' (Anne Elvey)

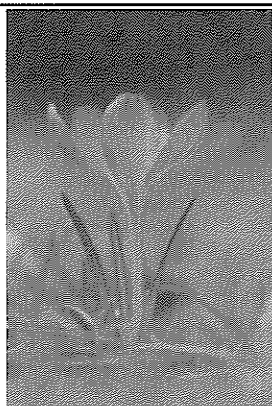
He is 'moved with compassion' - *splanchnizomai*

*splanchna* – inner parts, entrails

*splanchnizomai* is to be moved with compassion/mercy to the very depths of your being. It impels you to action.

"Scripture significantly influenced [Catherine] McAuley and the community of religious women she founded. That influence has extended over 170 years, to more than thirty countries and approximately thirty thousand women who have been Sisters of Mercy [and to their partners in ministry] and millions of people whose lives the sisters have touched in their ministries ..."

[Elizabeth Davis, *Wisdom and Mercy Meet*, p. 63]



*Prayer is a plant the seed of which is sown in the heart of every Christian, but its growth entirely depends on the care we take to nourish it.*

[Retreat instructions, p. 90]

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*Prayer will do more ... than all the money in the Bank of Ireland. Let us pray well and never grow weary.*

[Letter, July 20, 1841]



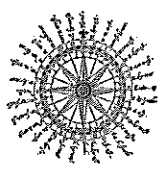
By Ardfern - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12442249>

No occupation should withdraw our minds from God. Our whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer.

[Retreat Instructions, p. 43]

For Catherine, prayer was not primarily words, but remembrance, recollection. It was like a mariner's compass, an inner orientation, that "goes round its circle without stirring from its centre" and "our centre is God".

[Path of Mercy, p. 149]



## *Catherine's Suscipe*

My God, I am yours for all eternity. Teach me to cast my whole self into the arms of your providence with the most lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity. Grant, O most merciful redeemer, that whatever you ordain or permit may always be acceptable to me. Take from my heart all painful anxiety; suffer nothing to afflict me but sin; nothing to delight me, but the hope of coming to the possession of you, my God, in your own everlasting kingdom.

[Available from [www.mercyworld.org](http://www.mercyworld.org)]