



Lent 2011 – Week Five

Light a candle

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Open the prayer time by reciting or singing the Suscipe of Catherine McAuley

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Input on Catherine McAuley

Holiness and Union with God

‘To cultivate some degree of union of heart with God for us is absolutely indispensable. We are formed by God for Himself alone, to be united within by love and fidelity, and hereafter by enjoyment and beatitude.’

(Catherine McAuley)

At the beginning of the Institute of Mercy, Catherine asked the Archbishop ‘What shall we use as a Rule?’ and he replied simply, ‘The Chapter on Union and Charity of the Presentation Sisters.’ At the end of her life Catherine told those gathered about her deathbed, ‘My legacy to the Institute is Charity.’ In between these two iconic moments union and charity became the lynchpin of Mercy community life. Despite the wide diversity of temperaments, gifts, talents, and backgrounds of her followers, they aimed at living in loving concern for one another. So, Catherine was able to say in all earnestness, ‘The sun, I believe, never went down on our anger.’ By this she did not mean that nothing ever disturbed their harmony. But, if there were differences of opinion, or hurt feelings, or misunderstandings, forgiveness was sought and given so that they knew peace before sunset.

It was this mutual love and support that motivated them to go out and be a loving, reconciling and healing presence among those they met and served. It was this, too, that attracted many others to join the ranks of the early followers of Catherine. When asked by a priest what attributes she looked for in a young woman wishing to join her she wrote: ‘an ardent desire to be united to god, and to serve the poor.’ This was a spontaneous, simple but profound expression of her spirit. It was the response of a woman whose soul was united to God, because she always walked in His presence. From early childhood, Catherine had been open to the Lord’s action in her life and responsive to His love, which drew her to Him. Through all the long, lonely, isolated and uncertain years she had never wavered in her trust in God and she was always willing to accept with resignation and cheerfulness whatever was His will for her. Her serenity was particularly noticeable and her novices described her as having ‘contagious sweetness.....that portrayed the love of God within her’. Somebody also said, ‘She had a particular talent for imparting cheerfulness, especially when difficulties arose’. And yet another said about her, ‘Quiet and gentle in her movements, there was not the least appearance of hurry or excitement about her.’ These sayings and many more come together to form a picture of great serenity, the serenity of someone who walks with God.

Doubtless during the twenty years Catherine spent in Coolock she surely achieved a high degree of holiness and union with God. It was not by chance that she found herself there in a household of religious people who exhibited a generous love for the poor. She was exposed to a great devotion to the Word of God and a generous and practical concern for anyone in need. This fed her desire to share her love, her time and her worldly goods with the needy and her foster parents gladly encouraged her compassionate desire to be of service to those in want.

The Callaghans were the first people since her father's death, with whom Catherine made contact, who really lived their religion with sincerity, and they made a deep impression on her. As Mrs. Callaghan grew older her sight became very impaired, and Catherine nursed her with the same loving care with which she cared for her own mother. She read Scripture to her every day and in this way Catherine discovered the riches of the Bible and grew to love and treasure it. She was able to say later to the young sisters in her company 'What Jesus said and did was said and done to give us an example, which our lives should be spent in copying'.

It is a total miracle of transforming grace that Catherine, who had disdained Religious Life, gave herself totally to God for life by her Profession of vows. From then on, she valued this gift of Religious Life so much that she spent a lot of time bringing novices to an understanding and value for what God was inviting them to. Again and again, we hear her counselling her sisters, in words that have been passed down to all Sisters of Mercy, 'How can we teach the love of God if our own hearts are cold?' and again 'No occupation should withdraw our minds from God. Our whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer'. She knew that 'the very best apostolate we can engage in is the witness of holiness of life'. She could afford to encourage these thoughts in her young sisters because she lived out of this conviction. It was the basis of her actions, attitude, and of her serenity at all times, even in the midst of suffering and affliction. The strength of her courage lay in her closeness to Jesus, in whose path she walked. She knew His words and was comforted by them.

She wrote to the sisters in Bermondsey: 'We have one solid comfort amidst all this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God for whom alone we go forward or stay back'. These words held for Catherine, and hold for all of us the heart of the Mercy spirit. She wanted us to give our all to God, and to withhold nothing that would hinder our union with Him.

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5 minutes silent reflection on what has just been shared about Catherine McAuley

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Take 5 minutes to allow everyone to share aloud the names of those they know who are sick and in need of prayer. Each person will write the names of the people they wish to pray for, on a piece of paper, and place them in a basket.

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Spend 15 minutes in silent prayer for the sick

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Conclude with the prayer for sick through the intercession of Catherine McAuley

Prayer for the Sick

GOD OF LOVE AND MERCY
YOU INSPIRED CATHERINE MCAULEY
TO SERVE YOUR SON
BY RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF HER TIME.
MOVED BY HER CARE FOR THE SICK,
WE ASK THAT THROUGH HER PRAYERS
YOU REACH OUT WITH YOUR HEALING LOVE
AND RESTORE

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TO FULL HEALTH.
WE ASK THIS IN COMPLETE CONFIDENCE
THROUGH JESUS CHRIST YOUR SON.
AMEN

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