



Lent 2011 – Week Seven

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

Confidence in God

Catherine’s virtue of confidence in God is a fundamental principle of her apostolic spirituality – her simple, unswerving total trust in the abiding confidence of God. Catherine spent many years in the wilderness where her future must have seemed very dark and obscure.

During those long years of waiting, her trust in her God of Mercy never flagged. She knew He would not fail her and the ‘light when it came was **‘almost too bright’** according to her own words to Frances Warde not long before she died. Catherine’s loving and simple trust in God underpinned all her decisions and actions. Even in the midst of suffering she derived her deep peace of heart and her constant serenity from her trust in God. She exhorted her novices with these words: **‘We should undertake our duties with great courage; for infinite is the love God bears to souls who repose in His protection’**. She knows well the demands that will be made upon their energy and strength so therefore she exhorts them to courage. And the courage to which she exhorts them is based on trust- trust in the loving promise of the Lord. The strength of her own courage resided in her closeness to Jesus, in whose footsteps she constantly walked. She knew his love and passionately believed in His words: **‘Infinite is the love God bears to souls who repose in His protection’**. The word **‘repose’** is an invitation from Catherine to her young Sisters.

She was urging them to ‘let go’, to be at ease, resting quietly in the Lord’s love and power, recognising him in the person of the poor they served. She could say with all confidence, **‘There has been a most marked Providential guidance which want of prudence, vigilance or judgment has not impeded, and it is here we can most clearly see the designs of God’**.

It was Catherine’s confidence in God’s guidance that gave her the courage to take quite extraordinary risks, leaving herself and her plans entirely in his hands. When she inherited the Callaghan’s estate she could have remained in Coolock and from the security of that great mansion have helped the poor with benevolence and kindness for the rest of her life.

But Catherine would not choose mediocrity; she would not offer her Lord any half measures. She would give Him everything. So, she sold Coolock and undertook the building of Baggot Street for the protection of women and young girls. She, herself, would soon be poor and living with the poor. She would no longer be a benefactor, but their friend. We see this in a circular letter she wrote in 1827 when her building was officially blessed and opened. She, the heiress, had no money and was begging her wealthy friends and neighbours to support the new House of Mercy.

Catherine again displayed total confidence and trust in God when harsh criticism of her Institute grew in intensity. At its height one of the priests of their parish of Westland Row

visited Catherine and asked to be shown over the house. At the end of the tour he expressed himself as greatly pleased by all he had seen and then said: **'Now Miss McAuley, the Archbishop wishes you to hand over this good work to the Sisters of Charity. Of course, you will be able to keep a couple of small rooms and a side entrance for yourself'**. Catherine replied: **'The house already belongs to the Archbishop. He is free to do with it whatever he wishes'**. The priest departed and Catherine went to her room, and did not appear again for some hours. She had given her all to God and now God was asking her for this. It seemed like the end of her dreams. But she did not falter. She quietly wrote a note to the Archbishop telling him she was willing to do as he wished. Next day the Archbishop called and assured her that he had no intention of taking over her apostolic work nor her house. He had not authorised the priest to visit her. Touched by Catherine's noble response the Archbishop then spoke to her about the advisability of becoming a religious acknowledging that she did not want to hamper her work with the poor by accepting the law of enclosure. He sought permission from Rome for the new order.

Within five years of being founded Catherine was once more called to walk unknown paths. Bishops, priests and people begged her to send some **'walking nuns'** to the aid of the people. She answered many calls and sent her best. She made her first foundation in Tullamore by sending there one professed sister and one novice. She parted with her novitiate companion Marianne Doyle because she knew that she would live out her Mercy life in holiness, in close union with God, witnessing to His loving Mercy. She entrusted the training of the novice and the three postulants who joined them in Tullamore, to her. She had the freedom of soul, the lack of personal ambition, the confidence in Marianne and in God's guidance to hand over to her and to each of the Superiors in her fourteen foundations complete autonomy, in the administration of the foundations and in safe-guarding and handing- on the true mercy spirit. She trusted them utterly. She continued to guide and support them by visits and frequent letters, encouraging them in difficult times by her own cheerful spirit. **'The Lord and Master of our house and home is a faithful provider. Let us never desire more than enough- He will give that - and a blessing'**.

On setting up each new foundation she unselfishly sent out sisters from Baggot Street living up to her declaration: **'Let me know when you are closely pressed, and I will divide with you, be it ever so little'**. She trusted in God to provide for their needs. For example she wrote before the Birr Foundation: **'The sisters going to Birr must be truly spiritual souls, confiding entirely on Divine Providence, as there is no Foundation Fund'**.

Today we live in a world of hopelessness – a world beset by fear and despair. Let us draw strength from the knowledge that our sure and only hope is in the faithful covenantal Love of our merciful Father. Let us, with Catherine, find courage in knowing that God is never-changing in his faithful love, and let us firmly believe with her, that we will bestow ourselves most freely, when relying with unhesitating confidence on the Providence of God.

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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

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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