



Lent 2011 – Week Six

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

Mercy and Union

We can say that MERCY was the source of all the charismatic qualities of Catherine McAuley. These gifts converged into her focal charism through the extension of her spirit, into her community and further into the Church. Her charism of union embraced many dimensions: inner spiritual union; union with God, union within community, union with all the people in God, and union with the whole of creation. She understood union to be the gift of knowing and loving God, of being known and loved by Him. It was a believing union, a hoping union, a loving union in a context of Mercy. She received it as a merciful gift from a merciful God opening and bearing fruit in a merciful giving of union, a merciful bringing into union. Thus she says to her sisters and to all our Mercy family:

“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 with Him here by love and fidelity and hereafter by enjoyment and beatitude”.

The particular attribute of Jesus that resonated in her heart was His ***“compassionate tender pity.”*** She, like Jesus, was ***“moved with compassion”*** when confronted by the plight of so many suffering people around her. This was not just an exercise of the heart evoked by the presence of the poor and needy. It was something physical that gripped her and wrung compassion from her. She had watched her father respond with great love to the poor all around him in Stormanstown. She imbibed the fire of his enthusiasm and zeal and allowed it to mature all through her life. Having experienced poverty, homelessness and life as an orphan dependent on the charity of others, she had first-hand knowledge of these states. She experienced great stability when she was adopted by the Callaghans and repaid their generosity when they died by using her legacy to provide home and shelter for many poor and homeless women and children in Baggot Street. The House of Mercy opened in 1827 and it became a haven of comfort for countless people. She taught her sisters that ***“Mercy bestows benefits, receives us anew and pardons us again and again.”***

She and the Congregation she founded gave a great gift of mercy to the Church. It was a faithful, hopeful, loving mercy which showed itself in gentleness and strength, in joy and cordiality, in humility and goodness and in tireless service of the poor and needy. This gift of Mercy encompassed sorrow as well as joy, delicacy as well as candour, fortitude as well as light-heartedness.

Catherine’s actions came from the rich well of a caring heart and from this heart too came her legacy to her sisters. ***“Preserve union and charity as you have hitherto done and your joy will be such as to cause you to wonder.”*** As a Mother Superior, she was constantly concerned with maintaining sensitive relations between her sisters: a relationship of union in mercy. The same charismatic thrust characterised her dealings with all those whose lives she

touched in ministry. From this thrust comes her observation that **“there are things which the poor prize more highly than gold, though they cost the donor nothing. Among these are the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient bearing of sorrows”**. So carefully and sincerely did Catherine personify the charism of union that she never had to reverse her statement of January 13, 1839 to Sr. M. Elizabeth Moore. **“One thing is remarkable, no breach of charity has occurred among us. The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger. This is our only boast.”** All through her life as a religious, she never lost sight of the truth that the visible apostolate of the Sisters of Mercy was not just the commitments of the active ministry but was a witness to the ideal of consecration.

She kept before them the necessity of living in holy recollection in order to attract others to His love and service. **“A Sister of Mercy should endeavour to have always a cheerful countenance... It is God’s will that everyone called to His service should be happy... Nothing disturbs the real happiness of a Religious, because she lives by faith... Good purposes are the result of serious reflection grounded on faith.”**

The way Catherine graced the scenes of her day was a multi-faceted interpretation of the Gospel message of Mercy, which is so much part of the Old Testament. God made a covenant with his people and Catherine extended that covenant to the poor of 19th Century Ireland and England. She walked in the shadow of her God and she carried His love to those, who neither knew nor practised it. Love underlay the good example which led to the conversion of the Callaghans, her sister Mary and her young family. Love directed her capacity for friendship, for relaxation and for playfulness. Love showed itself in her capacity to meet all with peace and ease. Love, most surely, underlay her ability to forgive those who hurt her most.

She appreciated Salvation History and its twin concepts of charity and mercy. **“What would the charity of God have profited us if His Mercy had not come to our aid”?** A recently canonized saint John Henry Newman described her as a person **“of such noble self-command, so crucified in the flesh, so meek, so tender-hearted, so forgetful of injuries”** that he would declare her to be a saint. All saints have a divine exemplar and every saint is said to portray some outstanding virtue of Jesus Christ. In the case of Catherine this is love. She was sent by God and she modelled herself on His Son Jesus Christ. She was entrusted by Him with a special mission and she gave her life for that mission. She possessed in rare degree the personal holiness that is required for effective Christian service. She had a singularly keen eye for the special needs of her time and a quick perception of the methods by which to meet them. She understood in an eminent way that the Gospel service of the poor must be rendered to them in person; it is a service which enters into hardship of daily life and daily suffering with them; it lightens their load by taking on part of their burdens. She passed on that legacy to her congregation of Mercy and she is our inspiration and our aspiration. May we be faithful to her legacy of Mercy.

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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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