



Lent 2011 – Week One

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

Witness to Holiness

“The most effectual means of rendering ourselves useful to our neighbours is to give an example of holiness of life”.

Proclaiming the Gospel must always be a witness involving what we say and how we live. It is a witness in which the personality of the witness counts more than the method of evangelization used. Catherine demonstrated this when it was said of her “Everyone who approaches her carries away some of her contagious sweetness and feels a new degree of love for Him whose spirit her whole exterior so beautifully portrays.” Her personality radiated her love for God. She had one aim only to love Him and to transmit that love to others. Her own words speak sincerely to us: ***“What Jesus said and did was said and done to give us an example which our whole lives should be spent copying...Jesus Christ should be in the eyes of a Religious like a book constantly open before her, from which she is to learn what she is to think, to say and to do.”*** Like Christ her life was an act of complete surrender to the will of God. She did this even when it was initially, personally distasteful to her to do so, as when she came to understand that the continuation of the House of Mercy in Baggot Street necessitated that she become a Religious. Then she became the very best religious. It was difficult for her to enter a novitiate and submit to regulations intended to curb the impetuosity of youth and supply the deficiencies of inexperience and to foster virtues which Catherine already had in abundance. However, she submitted to its customs, discipline, privations, restrictions and observances without reservation. ***“She took as her inspiration Christ’s union with the Father”*** the Father and this ideal was foundational to her every thought and action. One of her favourite sayings was; ***“We have one source of consolation in all our tripping about: Our hearts can always be in the same place, centred on God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back.”*** Yes Catherine was fully aware of doing always the thing that pleased Him.

She told her novices: ***“ We are all called to imitate Christ in His sanctity.”*** She had learned at her father’s knee to love God above all things and her neighbour as herself. As she grew older this was firmly rooted in her mind and heart. She showed great trust in her sisters and when she appointed them local leaders she spent some weeks with them in their new foundations and then trusted them to carry on. She took a real interest in them from a distance and supported them by letter and frequent visits. She was a sympathetic respecter of persons and fostered an atmosphere of freedom and understanding among her sisters. Although idealistic she was eminently practical. She was constantly available and sensitive to the needs of others and she urged that it was not generosity in bestowing gifts that was important for religious but their generosity in bestowing themselves. She really meant it literally when she said she was ready to suffer cold or hunger rather than: ***“ the poor of Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford them.”*** She was open and receptive to all and she

valued the primacy of human relations. She had a lively and mischievous sense of humour. Indeed her holiness was so unobtrusive, that one forgets repeatedly, in the fascination with her social and intellectual gifts, that she was a woman of great holiness. Many people of her day saw it, including Fr. Armstrong and Bishop Blake, who said of her that she **“was the second among his countrywomen, St. Brigid being the first.”** Her friend Fr. Maher was her staunch admirer. He frequently said of her: **“Your Foundress was a saint, a great saint.”** Her teaching on love was key to her way of life. This love was the secret of her complete forgetfulness of self for Christ and his service. She firmly believed that love had to be experienced before it could be exercised. Her references to love are expressions of a lived commitment. It was the bond of union with God, with her Sisters, with God’s people and with the whole of God’s creation. She set great store by the **“the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of sorrows....For if we look to the glory our lives may give to God, to the edification we owe to others and to our own sanctification, we shall perceive that nothing can rank in importance to gentleness of manner and sweetness of demeanour towards others.”** Again and again she repeated **“exercises of charity performed abroad have no value before God if there be not established at home a solid foundation of this virtue.”**

During the years when she suffered attacks on her faith, her defence was the fervent living of that faith; her deep and prayerful study of Christ as revealed in the New Testament was the pattern on which she modelled her life and before the Crucifix she poured out her soul to her Redeemer whose Cross overshadowed all her life’s achievements. Accumulated crosses and trials brought her into ever closer union with Christ. She showed this in the way she accepted family deaths and the deaths of many young sisters in the years when **“sorrow clung close to Baggot Street”**. Like Christ her life was a complete surrender to the cross. She understood well the true meaning of integrated spirituality and demonstrated in her life how prayer fuelled action and action called forth prayer. Indeed, her Rule blended the sanctity of contemplative life with the varied interests of the active apostolate. The salient characteristic of Catherine’s vision and her whole life was an expression of love of God through service of the poor. She knew that the deepest human need is for God and she held that the primary apostolic function of the Sister of Mercy was to portray Christ.

For this reason, the mission of Catherine and her sisters was to be love, to be mercy, to be tenderness, to be compassion, to be inspiration and a cause of joy to all with whom they lived and ministered. Her purpose was to try and alleviate human need, to use the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy as a means of growing closer to God. She compared a Sister who did not actively serve God’s people to a well that becomes stagnant from lack of use.

Catherine took Christ literally by her fulsome response to His love of renunciation for the sake of the Kingdom. Throughout her life she surrendered all – money, time, talents, the trappings of fashionable society, offers of marriage and, finally, her very life. She imitated Christ who emptied Himself even to death on the Cross, and she was ready to pay the price of discipleship. She was a woman for others but she was primarily a woman for 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

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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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