

# Leaves From The Diary Of A Postulator

## Some Frequently Asked Questions

### *Why is it important that Catherine McAuley be canonised?*

On Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> October 2009, five saints were canonised in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome by Pope Benedict XVI. Among them was [Damien de Veuster](#), better known as Damien of Molokai [and Jeanne Jugan](#), Foundress of the little Sisters of the Poor. I knew something about Damien from reading his life story many years ago. Of Jeanne Jugan I knew nothing until that Sunday. Her life story was widely portrayed over the weekend of the canonisation and I was deeply touched by her strength, courage, deep humility and surrender to God especially in the final 30 years of her life when she was arbitrarily deposed (after being re-elected General of the Congregation she founded) and sent into a forced retirement that lasted 27 years.

When people ask me why it is important that Catherine McAuley be canonised, something of what I felt hearing Jeanne Jugan's story strikes me. If and when Catherine is canonised there is no knowing how many lives will be influenced for the good by the story of the Dublin woman who put her life and all she had on the line for Jesus Christ. Canonisation means that Catherine's life and the Charism entrusted to her, and which she lived so faithfully, will be shared by the Universal Church in a way that cannot happen otherwise.

### *Will there be financial implications for our Congregation if Catherine is canonised?*



There were five people canonised in October 2009. That means that costs for the Canonisation Ceremony were shared. People often ask me if there will be financial implications for the Congregation if and when Catherine's canonisation takes place. To answer that question let me explain how a Cause is financed. When a cause is established the **Petitioner** (for Catherine McAuley, the petitioner is the Superior General of the Irish Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy) undertakes to see the Cause to its conclusion, which includes financial implications. In the Congregation for Causes it is understood that once a Cause begins to move it becomes self-financing. It is supported by donations directly to the Cause. An account specific to the Cause

is established in the Vatican Bank into which donations are lodged and out of which direct expenses for the Cause are withdrawn. The Postulator is strictly held to account (**both to the Petitioner and to the Congregation for Causes**) about monies spent for the Cause. When a Cause is finished and the person canonised, if there is any money left in the account it is not returned to the petitioner but is in fact absorbed into a general fund for Causes to be used in places in the Church which cannot afford to seek someone's canonisation. My experience of using money directly from the canonisation fund of Catherine McAuley was when I sought the professional opinion of two doctors from the Consulta Medica in the Congregation for Causes about a number of alleged miracles that we were investigating over the last two years. Meetings and gatherings that are held about Catherine are supported in the different areas by the various Mercy Congregations worldwide or they are self-financing.

### *How does the wider Mercy World express its desire for Catherine's Canonisation?*

St. Peter's Basilica and the Square were packed to capacity for the canonisation on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2009. The Pope spoke in Polish, Spanish, Flemish and French as well as in Italian and there were many other

languages to be heard in the Basilica and outside. People do want their own to be canonised. They are willing to travel long distances to be present when it happens. ***Around the world there is growing enthusiasm to have Catherine McAuley canonised and people are very willing to travel long distances to learn more about her.*** Since I have become Postulator, I have met with a number of groups of Mercy Sisters and Associates, some in Ireland, mostly in Great Britain and I have found that there is a very strong desire especially among Associates and Colleagues in Ministry alike to seek help from God through Catherine's intercession and to have the joy of seeing her canonised. There is a thirst in people to know Catherine better and one of the most heart-warming parts of the meetings I have attended was the way in which people opened up their hearts to the Sisters present as they put their requests for prayers into the basket. I was also very affected by the enthusiasm of the ***Young Mercy Associates*** (Great Britain) who were very much to the fore in all these meetings.

My experience is just one of many that are happening around the world. In Australia in 2008, a symposium on Catherine was attended by hundreds of associates, colleagues in ministry and Sisters. ***Sr. Mary Duffy***, the Vice



Postulator for Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines gives witness to the electrifying responses given to the main speaker by lay colleagues at that symposium.

In Ireland, the symposium on Catherine was held in Castleblaney, Co Monaghan in April 2009 was attended by three hundred and fifty people, many of whom were associates. ***Sr. Anne Hannon*** who is the Vice Postulator for Europe and Africa and those who organised the event with her were really heartened and excited by the responses they received to the excellent input and the joyous interaction what was palpable at that gathering.

Around the world one of the most talked about experiences of Catherine and her influence comes to us through visits organised in and through Mercy International Centre in Baggot Street. Groups (and individuals) come from all over the world and are changed forever by their visit to the 'Well of Mercy', visiting Catherine's tomb, praying in her room, walking the corridors she walked, eating in the place she ate, sleeping under the same roof! Someone who can attest to this is ***Sr. Sheila Carney***, the Vice Postulator for the Americas and Canada, who has led or been part of at least eight groups who came from the USA to visit Catherine's home in recent times.

### ***Do people believe in Catherine's intercessory power?***

Catherine is certainly coming into her own among men and women of today who do not belong to the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy but who wish to be associated with the Sisters, to share the gift that Catherine is to the Church and the world, to drink at the well of the Mercy of God with Catherine, following her example of putting Jesus Christ and not themselves at the centre of life and going against the current of today in order to do so. The Vice Postulators and I hear of many graces and favours received through Catherine's intercession. I find it a great help to my own faith to see how deeply and

trustingly people confide themselves to Catherine's care. The faith of people in North America is a case in point. Story after story tells of how people are strengthened, calmed, confirmed in their faith, and often healed because they asked her to intercede for them. How can this be? How can a woman who lived and died in Ireland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> – early 19<sup>th</sup> century continue to be so palpably present to people trans temporally and trans culturally if she isn't a woman of God? People often say to me that **'Catherine would not want to be canonised'** and I couldn't agree more. If Catherine were they type of person who wanted to be canonised, I doubt that we would be talking about her like this today. It was the people who knew Catherine who wanted her canonised. People who were present at her death knew that this was indeed a holy woman. The **origins of the canonisation process** come from the practice in the early church of going to the tomb of someone who was martyred and praying together there, asking the martyr to intercede with God for those who were left behind. It is the ordinary people of God who present the person they see as holy to the Institutional Church, asking that this person be publicly declared holy. I feel sure that Catherine does not seek her own canonisation, but if it is God's will that she be canonised, and if people are helped to come to God through her example and her charism, then I believe that she would give everything she had, including her own privacy, her own wishes for hiddenness, her all, so that others could share in eternal riches just as she shared her material riches with all who came to her while she was alive.



*Brenda Dolphin rsm in Rome*

***Are any other Congregations at the same stage as we are in the process of canonisation of Foundresses?***

I am often asked this question. Sr. Teresa Keegan in whose community I lived, is the Postulator for the Cause of the Foundress of the [Poor Servants of the Mother of God](#). The Positio on Mother Magdalen Taylor is in the process of being written at the moment.

Sr. Lucy Troy of the [Presentation Sisters](#) who also lived in Sr. Teresa's community has done the Studium course which prepares those who do it to be Postulators. The Cause of Nano Nagle has moved forward and she was declared Venerable in 2013. Fr. Peter Gumpel S.J. who was the Director of Catherine's Cause when Angela Bolster was writing the Positio (before Catherine was declared

Venerable) is now directing the Cause for Mary Aikenhead who was declared Venerable in 2015 for the [\*Irish Sisters of Charity\*](#).

Fr. Liam Bergin, Rector of the Irish College in Rome is the Postulator for the [\*Cause of Matt Talbot\*](#). In Matt Talbot's case, they are waiting for a miracle like we are.

So when ***people ask how long it takes for someone to be canonised***, the answer is that it takes a long time. Catherine's Cause was first mooted in 1909. At that time a person had to be dead 60 years before a cause could be initiated. Now the Congregation for Causes allows a cause to be initiated 5 years after a person's death. When Catherine's Cause was first started, historical situations militated against moving it forward and it really wasn't until the 1970's when Angela Bolster began to collect the historical materials, that the Cause really sprang into life. It is now 29 years since Catherine was declared Venerable. However, it is only a little over 12 years since the World Mercy Canonisation Committee has come into action and the momentum gathered in that time is staggering.

### ***What can you do to promote Catherine's Cause?***

Through your prayers, through introducing Catherine to people you know, through sharing Mercy by your living and loving, you too can be an active shareholder in the tsunami of Mercy that is enveloping the world.

*Brenda Dolphin rsm*

*Postulator for the Cause of the Canonisation of Catherine McAuley*