

Venerable 20 Years On

Twenty years on

Saints surprise us. Their stories remind us of the unpredictability of what happens when a person allows the raw data of her human life *'to be transformed'* by divine grace.

Saints experience the same things as we do but what is different is their insight into what they experience; they carve out a fresh and formative insight into the depth of love God produces in them as they say with Christ *'not my will but yours be done'*. Doing God's will in their everyday lives is what every saint has in common and this is what makes every saint unique. It is also what makes holiness ordinary, yet extraordinary. Saints are ordinary because they are one of us and extraordinary because they are beyond us; because the virtue of the saint is heroic, meaning that the way in which she responds to God's love goes beyond what would be expected of the ordinary good living Christian.

Saints are not holy because they are virtuous but they are virtuous because they are holy. As Frances Warde said about her good friend Catherine McAuley, *'she was a woman of God and God made her a woman of vision.'* In a Church rocked by scandal and disillusion it is the saints among us who will surely lead us back to the heart of Christianity to Jesus Christ. Evangelisation in our time will come through the inspiration of the lives of holy people because *'a holy person is worth more than a thousand theological concepts.'* (Von Balthasar)

The making of a saint?



The making of a saint is an act of religious imagination; the saint imagines what it would be like to live her life as Christ did in total obedience to God the Father. The community recognises the saint and tells her story which is also an act of religious imagination. If the person is truly holy her story will be told and retold. Since the time of her death Catherine McAuley's story has been told, re-told and told all over again.

On the 9th April, 2010 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the declaration by Pope John Paul II of Catherine McAuley as **Venerable**. On this day 20 years ago the decree was issued by the Pope declaring publicly that Catherine was indeed a holy woman. With this declaration came the fulfilment of the belief in her holiness by the Sisters of her Congregation and many others who knew her and who were responsible for setting her Cause in motion in 1903.

What does it mean to be called Venerable in the process of Canonisation?

The decisive and most difficult phase of any process for canonisation on behalf of a non-martyr is proving heroic virtue. Thus the declaration was also the culminating moment of a lifetime of hard and dedicated work by Angela Bolster rsm, who, over a period of 20 years or more had gathered and collated all available historical documents and other materials that related to Catherine McAuley and in collaboration with the then Postulator Mons. John Hanley and the Realtor of the Cause Fr. Peter Gumpel S.J. prepared an excellent comprehensive Positio* for presentation to the Congregation of Causes.

Every Positio is in fact an interpretation of a life according to a scheme of things illuminated by the light of faith. What is presented is considerably less than a full autobiography but something more

than a mere recital of facts. What the readers find is a chronology of the holy person's life, set in an historical and social context to illuminate the importance of her life and work. For Catherine the interpretive scheme fruition in her total mercy-filled dedication to the poor of Dublin of her day. When the Positio was scrutinised and discussed, the vote was unanimous



Twenty years on... what next?

As happened before the declaration of Venerable many graces and favours have and continue to flow from the heart of God through the hands of Catherine to people who invoke her intercession. A miracle that can be accepted as such by the Church criteria has not yet come to our notice. We know that when the time comes in God's plan for such a happening we will be ready and waiting with *lamps alight*. Until then we continue to pray humbly and with certainty that one day Catherine will be canonised and recognised in the Universal Church for the unique facet of God's loving – kindness and mercy that is her particular charism.

As we wait and pray for God's time and favour in Catherine's regard we are also learning many things about what God teaches us through Catherine's example. Leon Bloy in his book '*La Femme Pauvre*' says '*there is but one sadness and that is for us not to be saints.*'

There is a growing realisation that '*no-one is so much herself as the saint who disposes herself to God's plan, for which she is prepared to surrender her whole being body, soul and spirit.*' (Von Balthasar) Increasingly men, women and children from all walks of life and from all parts of the globe are being drawn to Catherine – to her story, her example and her path to God, certain that she was a woman who was very much herself and very much of God.

Invitation

At this time of celebration will you share an insight about Catherine's life with somebody else and pray together for her beatification or for a particular intention through her intercession?

Brenda Dolphin rsm

Postulator for the Cause of Catherine McAuley

* The Positio Super Virtutibus is presented to the Congregation for Causes and is usually organised as follows:

1. A documented life story of the Servant of God
2. Testimony of either witnesses (if they are still alive) or documentary evidence for an ancient cause (which is how we describe Catherine's cause)
3. Reputation for holiness of the Servant of God (meaning that people who knew her passed on to others the certainty that she was indeed a holy woman and her fame for holiness continues to spread up to the present day)
4. The pastoral benefit that the Church can expect from the canonisation of the Servant of God
5. The *informatio*, which is a brief summary of the arguments and evidence of the existence of virtue in the life of the Servant of God.

