



Letter From Catherine McAuley

Sister M. Elizabeth Moore
Limerick

Convent, Baggot St.
October 18, 1840

My Dearest Sister Mary Elizabeth

I have been speaking so romantically of Limerick that the English Sisters asked would it be possible for them to see it after their Profession, should they succeed, etc., etc. This is a long look-out – till next August. I at first answered that it would not be possible. Sister Mary Cecilia begged to say it would – and that Limerick was the only convent so many could visit – as the travelling to each by the Boat would be only 30 shillings there and back – and no coach could carry them elsewhere. Stopping at Shannon Harbour, etc., would make it about £2 to each.¹ This they seemed to think no difficulty. If 9 went it would be £18.² Ought I to sanction such application of money if it were found on a hill? The Rational and the Irrational powers have been contending ever since the thought was suggested. They discoursed as follows:

R - would not so much money accomplish some good & useful object?

IrR - perhaps that money might not be forthcoming for any other purpose, but lie dead & doing nothing.

R - would not a mere visit of such distance tend to dissipate the fruit of their meditations for & after profession?

IrR - seeing a branch of the Institute, so short a time formed, now fully and regularly established, might rather serve to strengthen their pious resolutions and to animate their hopes for what they were about to undertake.

R - could they not be told of it – surely they would not entertain any doubt.

¹ Catherine imagines their taking inland passage boats on the Grand Canal from Dublin to Shannon Harbour, near Banagher, where they could take a steam boat on the River Shannon to Limerick. If they stopped at Shannon Harbour, and were picked up there by carriage or Bianconi car, the trip would cost £2 per person; it would cost less per person if they went by boat all the way to Limerick, though the journey by water would take more time. Passage boats departed for Shannon Harbour from Ringsend, Dublin at 7.00am, and at 2.00pm for connection with the steamer to Limerick (Dublin Directory [1839] 184-84).

² The nine travellers would be the seven English sisters: Mary Juliana Hardman, Mary Xavier (Ann) Wood, Mary Vincent (Lucy) Bond, Mary Cecilia (Eliza) Edwards, Marianne Beckett (who was apparently still in the Baggot Street community), Margaret Polding, and Caroline Borini, as well as Mary Cecilia Marmion, mistress of novices; and Catherine McAuley.

IrR - what we are told by unquestionable authority inspires confidence – but what we see confirms it.

R - where would they lie down at night?

IrR - anywhere

R - they could not get into the Refectory.

IrR - they could get in, but it would be difficult to get out, I admit – there would be more fun than feeding.

Well now, after all this nonsense, I was seriously thinking of a great improvement might be made in the refectory. If the wall was removed and the passage added up to the Kitchen – the door of the Kitchen opening into refectory.³ It would make a great addition tho' it appears little now – or if the kitchen wall was also moved – and a little from the Kitchen also added – the K[itchen] would be large enough. If any difficulty arises from obstructing/breaking the passage through the Hall, a small slip would be taken for that purpose – the Pantry taken down – a good press would do very well. Look at it with all your brains and you will soon make a great improvement. We find the Kitchen opening into Refectory most convenient.

If you wrote such a letter as this is, I would be seriously alarmed for your poor head.

I hope Sister Mary Teresa⁴ will write soon to say she is getting quite strong. Three letters to announce the safe arrival of Dear Sisters Mary de Sales and Mary Xavier – a most affectionate one from Mother Mary Clare – returning thanks. We are to have profession and reception in about three weeks.⁵

Mother de P. and I have kept up a regular convert of sighing & moaning since the Sisters went – but this day I was resolved not to be outdone, or even equalled, so commenced groaning for every sigh she gave, and our sorrows have ended in laughing at each other.

Good-bye for about a month. God bless you and all with you. My affection love to dear Sister Mary Teresa – and each one of the sweet family.

Your ever attached

M.C. McAuley

My Dearest Sister Mary Vincent, give me a real true opinion on the disputed question you will hear of, but oh for pity's sake, speak in a whisper – or it will fly – that we are all – English and Irish – going to move.

³ Having Just returned from Limerick the week before, Catherine envisioned how the refectory and kitchen there could be improved. As one who had partially designed or at least critiqued the construction of several new convents, and lived in many, she had developed a practical architectural sense about what worked in terms of convenience.

⁴ Mary Teresa (Catherine) White, who had stayed in Limerick when Catherine returned to Dublin.

⁵ The next ceremony at Baggot Street took place on November 26, 1840; Mary Elizabeth (Clare) Butler professed her vows and Margaret Polding and Caroline Borini received the habit, taking the names Mary Magdalen and Mary Angela, respectively. On December 15, 1840, Mary Rose (Catherine) Lynch professed her vows. In this letter, written on October 18, Catherine McAuley is anticipating the ceremony on November 26, which was originally scheduled for November 19. (The Dublin Register incorrectly dates Mary Elizabeth Butler's profession, October 26, which cannot be accurate, given the information in Catherine's extant letters.)

Pray for your ever affectionate

M.C.M.

Get all the prayers you can for our valuable Sister Teresa who is looking very bad this day – and for my poor James McAuley who is in the last stage of consumption. Thanks be to God, he has complied with all religious obligations & is quite resigned to die.⁶

⁶ This last paragraph is a post script to the whole letter. It is written on side four of the stationery. The note to Mary Vincent Harnett is written below the closing, at about mid-page on side three. Catherine's nephew James Macauley, the eldest of her sister Mary's three sons, was now living in Blackrock and afflicted with consumption, like his two sisters, Mary and Catherine and his brother Robert. James was twenty-five years old. His death came on April 29, 1841 (Burke Savage 351)