



A poem for Catherine

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Foreword

Pope Francis asked the Church to celebrate 2015 as a year dedicated to Consecrated Life. It is also the 21st Anniversary of Catherine McAuley's being declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II on April 9th 1994. To coincide with this and Pope Francis' love for the virtue of Mercy, the Canonisation Committee (in 2013) invited Sisters, Associates, Circle of Mercy and Together in Mercy members to write poetry about Catherine McAuley. The poems were submitted to the committee by November 11th 2014 and published in mercy@live each month with the last being printed by April 2015.

The poems are now presented in booklet form. Sheila Carney RSM kindly gave permission to reprint her summary of Catherine's life: Catherine McAuley and the Path of Mercy. It seems fitting to have it as the introductory chapter as background and context for the poems.

As we approach the Jubilee Year of Mercy we pray to Catherine for a renewed commitment to living the joyful call to mercy (*Pope Francis in Misericordiae Vultus*).

As we savour the poems and try to make Catherine known and loved may we all "laugh and play together" and enjoy the "blessing of unity" which Catherine so desired for her sisters and friends.

November 20th 2015
Year of Consecrated Life.

Introduction

Catherine McAuley and the Path of Mercy

Sheila Carney, RSM

First published in Sisters of Mercy

Edition du Signe, 1996

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The Pathway Appears

Catherine McAuley was born on September 29, 1778 at Stormanstown House just outside the city of Dublin, Ireland. Through his work in the building trades her father, James McAuley, was able to provide comfortable circumstances for his wife, Elinor Conway, and their children. In addition to Catherine, the McAuleys had a daughter, Mary and a son named James.

Even more than comfortable circumstances, James McAuley provided his family with the example of a heart stirred by the plight of the poor. Often gathering poor children who lived in the vicinity of Stormanstown House, he taught them the truths of the Catholic faith. Even though Catherine was only five years old when her father died in 1783, his compassionate spirit continued its formative influence.

The death of James McAuley marked the beginning of a long period of instability for his survivors. Elinor McAuley, described as charming though somewhat frivolous, was not as financially astute as her husband and, under her unskilled management, the family gradually declined into poverty. They became dependent on the goodness of relatives and eventually moved into the home of her brother, Owen Conway. Two years later Elinor contracted tuberculosis. She had given up the practice of her religion at her husband's death fifteen years earlier. She now faced her own death tortured by fear and anxiety. Her disturbed and disturbing passing left its mark on Catherine, engendering a fear which did not leave her until late in her life.

Soon financial reverses assailed the Conway household. To relieve them of concern for her, Catherine joined her sister and brother in the home of another relative, William Armstrong. Under the influence of these Protestant relatives, Mary and James had given up the practice of their faith. In this environment, there was little tolerance for the Catholic religion. Catherine was often put to the test. Despite the limitations of her own religious education and total lack of support, Catherine steadfastly held to her beliefs in the midst of regular questioning and ridicule.

Preparing for the Journey

In 1803, God's goodness manifested itself in the form of an invitation to take up residence with Catherine and William Callaghan, friends of the Armstrong's. The Callaghans had recently returned from many years in India. As Mrs. Callaghan was in delicate health, they offered Catherine a position as her companion. This was to be a twenty-year sojourn, a time of learning and of deepening conviction. Here the tender power of mercy began to more clearly shape Catherine's life.

Long unable to freely study or practice her religion, Catherine found herself now at liberty to do both. She began to attend church services and sought out local clergy who instructed her in the tenets of her faith. Though the Callaghans gave financial support to Catherine's charitable works, they asked her not to display religious artifacts in their home. Respectful of their wishes, she knelt before the intersecting panels in her bedroom door or found the sign of the cross in the interlacing tree branches. Inspired by her father's memory Catherine began catechetical instructions with the household servants and the poor children of the village. She taught needlework to young women and opened a small shop to sell their wares.

As Mrs. Callaghan's health became more frail, Catherine gradually assumed increased responsibility for the management of the household and for Mrs. Callaghan's care.

A member of the Society of Friends, Mrs. Callaghan took great comfort in having the scriptures read to her. This Catherine did by the hour. Ultimately, inspired by the devotion of her gentle caregiver, Catherine Callaghan converted to Catholicism.

The loss of those she loved was a constant theme in the life of Catherine McAuley. The death of Mrs. Callaghan was followed by that of Anne Conway Byrn, Catherine's beloved cousin. Anne left four small children who Catherine brought to live with her at Coolock House. As Mr. Callaghan's health began to fail, he looked to the disposition of his property and fortune. Considering Catherine as one of his heirs, he inquired of her what use she would make of a possible inheritance. She responded that she would use the benefice to provide protection and education for young servant girls.

William Callaghan's will named Catherine McAuley and Robert Powell, his niece's husband as joint executors. Unfortunately, this gentleman was overheard by Mr. Callaghan remarking on the ungracious treatment Catherine would receive when Mrs. Powell became mistress of Coolock House. These remarks led William Callaghan to add a codicil to his will naming Catherine sole residual legatee.

She was to inherit William Callaghan's entire estate -amounting to approximately \$3,000,000.00 by today's reckoning.

A Direction Chosen

Because the Powells contested the will, the Callaghan estate did not become available to Catherine immediately. When it did, she began to put into effect her plan to educate poor servant girls. Her inheritance allowed her to think now in broader terms and so she extended her vision to include a variety of social services for poor women and children.

In 1824, she leased property at the corner of Herbert and Baggot Streets in Dublin and hired a contractor to commence work on the building. The McAuley family looked askance at this project, her brother James christening it "Kitty's Folly." There was, however, no folly in Catherine's choice of location for her social service center. It was in the heart of an affluent Dublin neighborhood. Her clear intention was to bring the wealthy into daily contact with the poor. Her hope was that those who God had blessed with material security would thus be moved to support and perhaps join in her service.

During the three years required to erect the building, Catherine prepared herself for the work ahead by studying educational methods. She travelled to France to observe the educational system there, visited the prestigious Kildare Place Society Schools around Dublin and became an instructor at St. Mary's Poor School. She continued to oversee the management of Coolock House while she prepared for its sale. During the illness of her sister Mary, she moved into her home to care for her and her children. Mary died in 1827. When her husband also died two years later, their five children chose Catherine as their legal guardian bringing to eleven the number of her children in her care.

The house on Baggot Street was ready for occupancy on September 24, 1827. Coincidence or act of providence, the fact that this date is the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy inspired Catherine and her co-workers to give the name House of Mercy to the new building. Thus they claimed an identity and a spirit for their works. Anna Maria Doyle and Catherine Byrn, who had joined Catherine in the preparations, moved into the building and began the works of mercy for which it was intended. For the next three years, the House of Mercy and its works flourished. The first year saw two hundred girls enrolled in the school. To the ministry of education and the refuge for young women were added the visitation of the sick poor.

Many volunteers attracted by Catherine's spirit and inspired by her work, joined their energies to hers.

A Path Named Mercy

A core group of twelve women lived at Baggot Street in these early years devoting themselves full time to the works of the House of Mercy. Over time, they adopted a common horarium, began to dress simply and similarly and lightheartedly called one another "sister". The question of their status gradually became a serious one, however. Archbishop Murray of Dublin and several others among Catherine's friends and advisors encouraged her to consider establishing a religious congregation. The fact that religious communities of women were, in this era, cloistered made this idea uncongenial to Catherine. But assured that she and her companions would be able to continue the work among the poor, which had become so central to their endeavors, she finally consented.

On September 8, 1830, she, along with Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley, went to the Presentation Convent on George's Hill, Dublin to begin their novitiate. Catherine was 52 years of age. Fifteen months later, on December 12, 1831, the three novices professed their vows giving birth to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy. Catherine's vision was expressed concisely and clearly in the original constitutions: "The principle aim of this congregation is to educate poor girls, to lodge and maintain poor young women who are in danger . . .and to visit the sick poor." What had begun as a personal dream, had, through the benefice of William Callaghan and the urging of the Church, now taken its place as the central purpose of the new order.

Eight years later, asked to recount the beginnings of the congregation, Catherine offered this simple and self-effacing description:

"It commenced with two, Sister Doyle and I. The plan from the beginning was such as is now in practice. In '27 the House was opened. In a year we were joined so fast that it became a matter of general wonder ...Seeing us increase so rapidly, and all going on in the greatest order almost of itself, great anxiety was expressed to give it stability. We who began were prepared to do whatever was recommended and in September 1830 we went with dear Sister Harley to George's Hill to serve a novitiate for the purpose of firmly establishing it. In December '31 we returned and the progress has gone on as you know."

(Letter to Sister Elizabeth Moore, January 13, 1839)

The Pathway Branches

The concluding phrase of this simple narrative, "...progress has gone on as you know," embraces an amazing story of growth and expansion. As Catherine's passion for the poor took root in the hearts of her companions, the gift of Mercy spread across Ireland and England. In the ten years between the founding of the order and her death, Catherine founded nine Convents of Mercy. The first was to the town of Tullamore in April, 1836 and the pattern begun here was repeated in many subsequent foundations. What drew Catherine to Tullamore was the severe poverty and the need of the people. "If we don't take Tullamore, no other community will," she declared, relying as usual on her Provident God to prosper the work and provide for the sisters. As superior of this new community, she took her first companion Anna Maria Doyle, now Sister Mary Anne.

Here Catherine initiated the practice of remaining with a new foundation for its first month, assisting in the establishment of the ministry and leading the Thirty Days' Prayer for the success of the foundation. Another custom begun in Tullamore was the practice of holding a public profession ceremony in order to introduce the townsfolk to the life and spirit of the Sisters of Mercy and to inspire other young women to enter the community. Before Catherine left Tullamore she had the pleasure of welcoming two new members.

Over the next five years, Convents of Mercy were opened in the Irish towns of Charleville, Carlow, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Birr. Bermondsey and Birmingham in England are also among Catherine's foundations. Although she was quick to note that "every place has its own peculiarities and feelings which must be yielded to when possible," she also, in each place, repeated the pattern established in Tullamore. To each foundation she provided her loving presence and prayer until the sisters were reasonably secure and the ministry well established. Where possible, she conducted public ceremonies of reception or profession to introduce the townsfolk to the meaning of lives dedicated to God. Time after time, she depleted the number of sisters at Baggot Street in order to respond to a need urgently expressed. She placed her whole confidence in God who rewarded her generosity in kind. In a January, 1839 letter to Sister Elizabeth Moore, Catherine wrote: *"We have now gone beyond one hundred in number and the desire to join seems rather to increase, though it was thought the foundations would retard it, it seems to be quite otherwise. There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence, vigilance, or judgment has not impeded, and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God."*

Two years later she wrote again to Sister Elizabeth Moore (Easter Monday, 1841) describing the spirit, which characterized the congregation and its members:

“All are good and happy. The blessing of unity still dwells amongst us and oh what a blessing, it should make all else pass into nothing. All laugh and play together, not one cold, stiff soul appears. From the day they enter, reserve of any ungracious kind leaves them. This is the spirit of the Order, indeed the true spirit of Mercy flowing on us . . .”

Catherine was also being depleted by the constant travel necessitated by the growth of the congregation. Her delight in these experiences, however, is captured in a letter to Sister Cecelia Marmion of January 4, 1841: "Hurrah for foundations makes the old young and the young merry."

While each new foundation was governmentally independent of the motherhouse at Baggot Street, Catherine linked them to one another through a constant round of visits and, more often, letters. The latter she called her Foundation Circulars. In them, she conveyed news of the congregation, offered or sought advice, created verses to amuse or to soften a correction, shared her joys and disappointments. To Sister Mary de Sales White she describes this constant round of travel as a series of dances:

The letter then changes spirit as from this playful account she draws both insight and consolation:

“We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back. Oh may he look on us with love and pity and then we shall be able to do anything He wishes us to do, no matter how difficult to accomplish or painful to our feeling.” (December 20, 1840)

The Journey's Toll

Catherine's letters are also sprinkled with news of her health -a fall down the stairs, a painful inflammation of the mouth, a sore leg. “I feel the frost most acutely in my right side from my hip to my ankle,” she wrote to Sister Cecilia Marmion. “I have put on a great flannel bandage with camphorated spirit, and trust God it will, like a dear good old acquaintance, carry me safe back.” (February 5, 1841) More and more it is her “cough” of which she writes. “To create some pious excitement my cough was worse last night than any cold night in winter.”

(To Sister Frances Warde, May 1841) “I need not say much about the cough. If I bring it back it will speak for itself, if not, we have no objection to part this one companion.” (To Sister Julia Hardman, May 13, 1841) A letter to Sister Theresa White in 1831 indicates that the fear of death which had accompanied her earlier years had blessedly faded. "There is a most simple, inviting tomb just opposite the cell I occupy ...It looks delightful and excites meditation of the most consoling kind."

Catherine's last journey was to Birmingham. She set out for this final foundation in the happy knowledge that the Holy See had granted confirmation of the Rule and that her congregation was now firmly established. Once in Birmingham, illness began to make its claim on her. While she remained for the Thirty Days Prayer, her thoughts turned to preparation for her last days at Baggot Street. She wrote to Sister Theresa Carton with instructions for the preparation of the infirmary adding at the end, "It is strange to me ... to write so much about myself and to give such trouble." (September 8, 1841)

A Step Towards Eternity

Once at home, Catherine began quietly to put her affairs in order. By early November she became bedridden and on the 8th she received the last sacraments. Visits from family and community members filled her last days. For each she had a personal word and a blessing. Although she had completed her formal will before leaving for Birmingham, she now told the sisters who kept vigil at the bedside that her legacy to the Institute was charity. She urged them to preserve union and charity, adding "Do this and your happiness shall be so great as to cause you wonder." Concern for the fatigue of the sisters gathered round her led to her now cherished wish that they should "...have a good cup of tea when I am gone." Catherine McAuley died on November 11th, 1841 and, according to her wishes, was laid in the ground like the poor. The deep sorrow of family, friends and community members is perhaps most simply and poignantly expressed by Sister Theresa White: "I feel sad to have outlived her."

"Each day is a step we make towards eternity," she told her sisters, "and we shall continue thus to step from day to day until we take the last step, which will bring us into the presence of God."

The path of Mercy upon which Catherine McAuley faithfully walked, had finally led her into the presence of the God she loved and served with her whole heart.



A poem for Catherine

Another Knock/Another Birth

Sitting in prayer in the early morning hours,
enveloped by the darkness of this yet emerging day,
I wonder what the next move will be,
as yet another knock comes to the door of my heart.

To trust in our loving God, who gifts us for this work,
to risk the invitation of another opening to God's mercy,
to keep going on when it seems "enough is enough,"
yet this is the adventurous, dynamic history of our lives.

The body ages, the mind isn't so sharp,
yet still there is always more to do, more to deepen,
another knock on the door, the mind, the heart.

The darkness of our world, held within the living mystery of our Beloved,
is the womb from which mercy is given birth, over and over again.
That womb doesn't close,
women are birthed to be Mercy.

Catherine is born over and over again.

Susan DeGuide rsm
September 12th, 2014





A poem for Catherine

Caring for the Callaghans at Coolock,
And enjoying the kindness they showed
Taught Catherine to share her inheritance
Her time and her talents too.

Each day she worked with the needy
Reluctant religious at fifty-three years
Interesting message of mercy reached many ears
New foundations aplenty while Catherine
Encouraged sharing 'a comfortable cup of tea'.



*Alice Carroll
Mount Bolus Circle of Mercy*



A poem for Catherine

Catherine McAuley --- Abu

James McAuley gladly fed them – mind and body,
Those hungry Dublin children – gaunt and shoddy;
His blond-haired toddler Catherine doled out food,
With her Papa - the Sunday interlude!

In seventeen eighty three God called James Home,
His little helper – not yet five –used roam alone
Since Mama Elinor ne'er showed
Desire to tend the poor near her abode.

The widow's income from her real-estate
Ere her demise did all evaporate,
So when she died, in seventeen-ninety-eight,
Her three offspring were forced to separate.

Mary and James with Protestant Armstrongs stayed,
While Catherine, with Uncle Owen a brief home-made.
He became bankrupt; she, uprooted once more,
Was led by Providence, to the Callaghans' door.

This childless Quaker couple were impressed,
By qualities and manner she possessed,
And valuing the caring by her shown,
Soon wished to adopt her as their own.

In the Apothecaries Hall each day,
William Callaghan works the hours away,
In Coolock House – his home – as daylight ends
He joins extended family and friends.



Here so many of Catherine's needs are met,
Her mid-life now is truly blessed – and yet
She yearns to progress, in adult ways,
Her knowledge of her Faith of earlier days.

Patient, in quiet prayer, she now will wait,
See to the needs of the poor in th'estate,
Trust she'll get guidance some fine day.
To lead her safely on the Christian way.

At a Milliner's shop, and in no great hurry,
She fitted in a call to Daniel Murray –
A curate in St. Mary's Parish then -
Who guided her in living faith again.

Her foster-parents, glad this news to hear,
Asked that no catholic emblems did appear
Within the home – where most guests did not relish
The faith that Catherine did so dearly cherish.

The foster-mother's health was rather sickly,
And in eighteen o six it worsened quickly;
Now Catherine nursed the invalid , night and day,
And eased pain and distress in every way.

The patient, watching Catherine, now believed
That, from the sacraments, she help received;
To know their power herself, - before she died
At Coolock House a priest was by her side.

William missed his soul-mate - true and kind,
Concern for Catherine's future filled his mind;
Discerning her compassion for the poor,
He made her then financially secure.

Desiring that a Catholic he would die,
She asked him allow a priest come by;
He made his will, - an heiress she became,
He even wished that she would take his name.

And as his life did slowly ebb away,
Her sister – Anne – dying of TB – did say –
“Keep safe my baby Teresa in your home –
And watch the other five, where'er they roam”



Once Catherine's legacy was made secure,
Her plan to serve the poorest did mature;
She leased a plot of land on Baggot St.
Where it with poorer Herbert St. did meet.

In July twenty four building began,
To none did Catherine yet divulge her plan –
A fact for which she was not ever sorry -;
Her brother Willie dubbed it “Kitty’s Folly”

At Coolock Catherine often did reside,
At Military Rd. – did frequently abide –
To help with rearing Mary’s children – five-
And now she sees her “Folly” come alive.

Anna Marie Doyle did volunteer,
To join a venture to her heart so dear;
The heiress asked her young niece, Catherine Byrn,
To join with them; All three would live and learn.

Anna craved a date for an open door,
And Catherine named September twenty four,
Neither realised, till later on,
The name of the feast they’d hit upon.

The House of “Our Lady of Mercy” – to be sure!
So apt a name for this home for the poor!
The “House of Mercy” was soon its shortened name;
It really looked imposing, all did claim.

There followed the sale of Coolock Estate -
Meantime the new building was causing debate –
Homeowners in Baggot St. now did complain
On seeing rag tag people usurp their domain.

Her mentor Edward Armstrong, to Catherine did say
To put her whole trust in God alone each day;
To Archbishop Murray he lauded her vision,
And his own legacy to her was support for her mission.

Destitute youngsters in droves came to find
Food for the body, the spirit and mind;
Young women and girls constantly came to stay,
To be safe, and prepare for employment someday.



The wretched slum hovels where lay sick and dying,
The ladies did visit – on shank’s mare relying;
Access to the hospitals, in her Swiss carriage,
Miss McAuley and Co by astuteness, did manage.

With co-workers technically temporary - all-
And lest a mishap to their building befall,
Catherine, in her wisdom, decided she must
Carefully set up a Baggot St. Trust.

For Christmas Day dinner, in eighteen – two- eight,
Both Catholic and Protestant did goodies donate,
And Daniel O’Connell, while carving the meat,
Joked with the children; their joy was complete.

Sometimes there was bigotry – tempers did rise
As when Dr. William did come to realise
That both his dearly loved Marys, daughter and wife,
Had secretly become Catholics during their life.

Still young he caught fever and his death was near;
Catherine cared for him and calmed his fear.
Left free to choose their guardian, his kids opted for their aunt –
So Catherine took them to her house, and never said “I Can’t”.

To these five and another five she was adoptive mother,
And had crazy Mrs. Harper, too, who acted like no other.
And even when her three nephews to Carlow College went,
She always was responsible for how their time they spent.

By eighteen thirty five it did seem that all was going well,
And yet, through signs, overt and covert, Catherine could tell
She needed to discern now, if, despite innate aversion,
She should consider, for her venture, a really new digression.

Her ladies served within the house, but equally without,
And countless Nosey Parkers queried what they were about;
In every quarter there were those who saw them flout the norm,
And said that, to prevailing customs, they should now conform.

The slogan of these critics was – “Become nuns now, or scatter -,
Just join with an existing group, which one it does not matter”!
Though quite upset at such a thought they would discern and pray,
And trust that God, in his Mercy, would guide them on his Way.



On September eight the co-workers all felt a certain chill,
As Catherine, Ann and Elizabeth set out for “George’s Hill”,
Where Presentation Sisters would help them to prepare
To become Sisters of Mercy for the needy in their care.

The three pioneers had a strict regime of prayer and work each day,
While, in the House, the other ten – to overwork a prey –
Did rise too early, eat too little and did toil too late,
Decline in health, - and even death – was very soon their fate.

Catherine was in “Georges Hill” when Caroline passed away,
The House had still no local plot in which the dead to lay,
But Carmelite Fathers in Clarendon St. quickly came to the fore, -
They buried her body in their Church’s vault, and later another ten more.

December twelve in eighty three – “the” day it came to pass –
Our trio they professed their vows during an early Mass;
A brand new Congregation was founded there and then –
Three Mercy Sisters hurried home to Baggot St. again.

Such smiles, and tears and hugs galore awaited them at base!
Their religious garb was scrutinised - that coif around each face!
So glad to hear that as “walking nuns” they’d still do Visitation –
Catherine, herself, at fifty –three, felt ‘twas good news for the Nation.

Next day Archbishop Murray called and addressed her as “Reverend Mother” –
She never wished for that title – for “Superior” or any other;
From now on Mary C. Mc A. was her signature;
She was humble, cheerful, compassionate – generous and mature.

Preparation for eight ladies for Reception was completed –
Elizabeth, dying of T.B., was from the list deleted ;
The ceremony private, the habits makeovers – such fury raged without,
That ever since, for all ceremonies, the public were never locked out.

A first bazaar was organised, as costs were running high,
Just then the rumours circulated – cholera was nigh;
One night Catherine did carry home, in her own shawl wrapped up well –
A cholera victim’s baby whom she settled to sleep in her cell.

The Board of Health converted for use the Depot in Townsend St;
Eight Mercies bravely toiled there – the needs of the victims to meet;
Catherine also supervised eighty lay nurses there;
Archbishop advised that the Sisters, pro tem, have port wine and chops for their fare.



For seven long months the valiant eight served in shifts from dawn till late,
Their early zeal to change clothes and fare, due to fatigue, did soon abate;
Catherine – ever striving their spirits to raise – constantly ,
in doggerel, their efforts did praise;
Her naming a Sister’s knees, - swollen and sore – put
“Cholera” and “Cholere” on record for evermore.

To compile a Rule and Constitution for the Congregation,
Catherine worked and prayed, - and not always with elation!
Propaganda Fide was so slow in giving approbation,
And a decade elapsed awaiting Gregory Sixteen’s confirmation.

Meanwhile with Mercy spirit her Sisters she imbued,
Increase in the membership often ensued;
Through suffering, illness and deaths she always led the way –
Nine Irish towns and two English cities got convents in her day.

‘Twas Fr. Matthew pleaded for a foundation for Birr –
A town where deep divisions for ages did occur;
The first stage of the journey there was anything but banal,
Eight hours of snow on a slow flyboat atop the Grand Canal.

Despite being “petrified with cold” she soon called Birr her “pet foundation”,
Its only flaw – the “toy tea-cups” – just five refills for one libation!
A full six weeks away from base some of the bishops thought excessive –
Poor Catherine’s cough, acquired in Birr, was proving to be quite progressive.

She summoned excellent doctors to treat the ailing sisters,
But, in her own case, she self – dosed, avoiding medic misters;
To cover basic costs for the upkeep of nine foundations,
Bazaars, charity sermons and begging, too, were sources of vital donations.

She lived union and charity and plain common sense –
Action and trust in Divine Providence –
Acceptance of crosses, hearing Jesus’ advice -
To know he desires “mercy not sacrifice”.

Ere she set out for Birmingham in October forty-one,
Catherine wrote to Baggot St. to say what needed to be done –
To prepare an infirmary –room to suit her needs aright,
Lest her incessant coughing disturb others through the night.

Through pain filled days and sleepless nights the Mercy life she shared;
She suffered in stomach, mouth and lung, but her mind was not impaired;
No directives she gave about who’d succeed her – or any other matter –
Just joined the sisters, when she could, in light-hearted peaceful chatter.



At nine a.m. on November eleven it did come to pass
That Rev. O’Hanlon, Carmelite, presided at a Mass,
The sisters assembled round her bed, - all of them white cloaks wore –
And all those who were gathered there bright lighted tapers bore.

And as her final hours wore on, till ten to eight that night,
The Foundress, - ever quite alert – and pitying the sisters’ plight –
Asked that, at her going, they’d all come together, for comfort and “a good cup of tea”.
Concluding, with conviction, that in God their real comfort would be.

On November fifteen, after Office and Mass, the funeral cortege did wend its way,
From Carmel Chapel to garden – cemetery, to lower the coffin down into the clay;
A small white wooden cross then marked the spot where her mortal remains lay,
And people come to her tomb, to pray, up to this very day.
If Catherine - now Venerable since nineteen-ninety-four –
were to come back to Dublin to-day –
She’d wonder why her House – in appearance so unchanged – might now be called M.I.A.
To the Mercy Global Family Baggot St. is now home for all of twenty years –
Congregations, Institutes, Associations of Mercy have shared there both laughter and tears.

Just two Mercy Sisters – C. Mc A. and M.A. Doyle! – beginnings were quite small!
Over fifty thousand have now served the needy – answering the Mercy call;
How the digital explosion expanded its influence and still expands it to-day!
The Mercy World eNews – Hurray! – The on-line Newsletter of M.I.A.

Within thirty years of Catherine’s demise, dozens of Convents dotted our land –
From them willing groups of sisters set out to follow the destitute emigrant band –
To the vastness of Canada, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Kenya and Argentina;
Some more sailed for Turkey to nurse the war-wounded;
Florence Nightingale was there in the Crimea.

In the past thirty years there’s a contrary flow, -immigrants needs are now to the fore;
Their provenance varied, their culture diverse, - most adrift as never before;
The acronym MECPATH signals Mercy’s efforts to end trafficking people
and child prostitution.
Creatively offering to social injustice a possible practical solution.

To promote the vision of Catherine and its influence to grow,
Mercy Global Concern, set up sixteen years ago,
Brings the Mercy spirit to the UNO.

The God, who is rich in Mercy was Catherine’s inspiration,
The ’31 Divine Mercy Message is spreading to every nation;
The encyclical “Rich in Mercy” came from the pen of “John Paul Two”,
Pope Francis begs that we make MERCY the hallmark of all that we do.

Venerable Catherine ABU!

Sheila Costello rsm
Western Province





A poem for Catherine

Catherine – Pearl of Great Price

Seed of God before time began,
For Catherine our God had a plan.
Sower of seed and potter of clay,
Fashioning in her the role in life she would play.

Born into comfort, destined to be poor,
No stranger to sorrow and grief.
Bereft of parents, homeless and impoverished,
Strong in faith was Catherine's enduring trait,
Trust in God her daily power.

Relying on God to provide for and save her,
By divine intervention good fortune
Once more she would savour.
Around her the starving, the sick and dying too!
Catherine knew what she had to do.

Ever mindful to succour the poor,
Rights for God's people she would procure.
Dignity in life, educating the young,
Peace for the dying,
These merciful acts all prayerfully provided.

Help quickly needed, like minded women
Compassionate and kind flocked to her side.
No delay dared hold sway as day by day,
The longed for relief was provided.
The motto being, mercy and loving care for
God's own people where 'ere.

Catherine the Venerable now in Heaven resides,
The seed that God planted long long ago,
Still a little way more to grow.
To wear the crown of life's endeavours,
Sainthood dear Lord bestow.

So woman of compassion and love,
Raise your prayers to heaven above.
Seek sainthood for Catherine –
The Pearl of Great Price,
Who gazes forever on God's beautiful face.



*Nancy Irwin
Loughcrew Circle of Mercy,
Laytown, Co. Meath.*



A poem for Catherine

Catherine McAuley, Woman of Mercy

Catherine McAuley, woman of Mercy
Having known the joy of Mercy
Wished for the poor, unceasing Mercy
She shared with all, God's loving mercy

In the corporal works and spiritual works
She gave her all to do these works
The inheritance got, the riches got
Were all then passed for God's works

Young in prayer, yet full of mercy
She turned to God, to find this Mercy.
Courageously sought to learn of mercy
She founded thus, The Sisters of Mercy

God the Father and God the Son
God the advocate Holy Spirit
Three in one, yet great in thee
Bless for us Mother Catherine.



*Felistas King'ori rsm
Kenya Province*



A poem for Catherine

Catherine's Rhymes

Catherine often wrote in rhyme,
a custom common in her time,
she leaned on it as a prop,
at rhyming she could never stop.

When cholera was all about
and Sr. Doyle's knees wore out
Catherine noted her dedication
and rhymed a note of affirmation.

To novice Vincent she also rhymed
to explain how they'd passed the time
going to Carlow on market day
Though they almost lost their way.

Her love for Francis Ward she penned
when absent from this special friend.
Advice she gave to Elizabeth Moore -
Superior in Limerick was her great
chore.

When '38 yielded to '39
Sr. Potter got a rhyme -
New Year was a time to begin
to be mild and meek and avoid all sin.

From Galway Catherine showed her
delight
when Fr. O'Hanlon, the Carmelite,
celebrated morning Mass –
A welcome reprieve from the cross.

The menu she sent to Baggot Street –
tea and coffee, eggs and meat,
but having enjoyed that hearty meal,
the carriage suddenly lost a wheel.

Of partiality she did not approve
for all deserve the same love.
This gentle reminder to Cecilia in Birr,
challenges us to really care.

If Catherine were alive today
I guess rhyming would be one way
of sharing her many Mercy tales
and wouldn't she just love e-mails!!



*Bernadette Maria Knopek rsm
Convent of Mercy, Charleville, Co. Cork.*



A poem for Catherine

Pre-dawn Plea to Catherine

Every time I hear the Suscipe
I sink into a miracle of Mercy -
Drifting on a
Single Truth that I am God's
For all of time
And for Eternity.

Catherine,
Mystic kaleidoscope -
twirling thousands
Of walking nuns -
Thrill me anew
A Trinity of vision.
Bless me a kind word
To soothe the sudden sadnesses
Of twenty fifteen.
Dazzle me a
Look of compassion,
Gentled by a crossbeam
From a door in Coolock.
Tickle my ears
With listening skills
Cherished by poor women
On a corner of Baggot Street.

Catherine,
Honer of single symbols
Shawl me a silence of simplicity.
Why should I cripple
in anxiety
As Convents close?
Tiller my craft
Away from sea-cave Caverns.
Pummel me Easter Energy,
To arc a morning star.
Peeping over dawn's liminal horizons!
Brilliantly blazing
Mercy Resurrection.



*Bina Hogan rsm,
Southern Province*



A poem for Catherine

Reminiscing with Catherine

**Dear Catherine, you asked me to write you a poem
Be it ever so long... well it's nearly a tome!
I got carried away while recalling your story...
So enjoy while you dance with the angels in glory!**

.....

A seed of compassion God nurtured with care
In the home of your childhood... Mercy was there!
And the seed that God planted thrust roots deep and steady...
In soil rich and fertile your heart was made ready.

But quickly your young life became so confusing!
From family to friends – great loss and uprooting!
From plenty to poverty- you learned a hard lesson!
On God's winding ways you were schooled in compassion.
Through suffering and prayer God moulded and made you
A woman of great love- God's mercy flowing through you.

The Callaghans loved you as their own cherished child,
And you tenderly cared for them both till they died.
They had seen how you anguished for the poor all those years;
Often roused from your slumbers you would burst into tears!
You had no way of knowing- you could never imagine-
That because of their kindness, you'd inherit a fortune!

Your new house of Mercy stirred storms of indignation!
What a plan! For poor children - good care and education...
For young working girls - a shelter and support...
And a residence for women who might join you henceforth.



Mary Ann was a godsend- she shared in your vision;
Other young women followed to help your new mission.
And the news would spread far that your house was wide open
To the poor...and the homeless... the sick and the orphan.
But trouble was brewing... you were only lay women!
Yet you lived just like nuns - which was out of the question!
You're faced with a formidable religious decision-
To conform to Church laws - or the poor ones abandon!

You felt great reluctance, but, you bowed to God's will.
For the sake of the poor you set out for George's Hill.
Your new religious group would gain greater stability;
In serving the poor it would bring continuity.

But that human journey wasn't easy- ups and downs in succession...
With Mary Ann and Elizabeth - fifteen months and then Profession...
Who can guess the heartfelt joy on that day of celebration-
Smiles and tears and radiant faces in your new congregation!

Your little band of angels became a presence so consoling...
Such a comfort to the poor to the sick and to the grieving.
With dreaded fevers raging and the tomb ever open,
Your tender compassion relieved the heartbroken.
The Cross never far- plenty bitter in your cup-
It was your trust in God' Providence that kept your spirits up.

You faced weighty challenges, though often tired and weary.
Your playfulness and wit kept your sisters bright and cheery.
With your humour and teasing you'd dispel dark despair...
Avoiding all things gloomy with a light-hearted air.

But God's plan was much wider than for Dublin's fair city!
Calls for Mercy from afar! No end to God's pity!
With great joy and "Hurray!" you embarked on new foundations
By canal boat, coach or rail in the direst situations.
And you always acknowledged who the real founders were...
Those humble benefactors so willing to share.

Your strength slowly ebbing, you bestowed yourself more freely!
With resources declining, your giving kept increasing!
'Round the age of sixty two, when Newfoundland was calling,
Your love for the poor stirred up your own yearning.



Notwithstanding your fatigue, and that cough that so plagued you,
You took the boat across the ocean when the call for help reached you.
And your heart was cheered greatly by those fine English women
Coming joyfully to serve the poor... Christ's fire brightly kindling!

Worn out from all your travels, and your health fast declining,
You eventually conceded that indeed you were dying.
You got everything ready in the silence of your heart.
And when the time came you were ready to depart.

Of the one who had hurt you, you humbly asked forgiveness!
Then you blessed all your loved ones with exquisite sweetness.
"With a good cup of tea tell them comfort one another!"
And your very last advice – "Love one another!"

Your Suscipe you lived... now you died with serenity.
"My God I am yours for time and eternity."
When you breathed your last, you knew all was not ending...
For the charism was God's... His fire always kindling!

It has touched us in our time to walk the path of Mercy...
To be a compassionate presence...in challenging diversity;
To urgently awaken to the cry of our earth...
And to live in the Mystery bringing God's dream to birth.

These moments, dear Catherine, recalling your story,
Have filled me with wonder! To God be the glory!
I've glimpsed your compassion... your humour so admirable...
Your heart overflowing... no wonder you're venerable!
We know you are with us... we trust you will pray
For the places that are hurting in our world today.



Noreen Foley rsm
Southern Province



A poem for Catherine

A Song for Catherine

As freezing foul fog feels its way long the Quays
past banks and great houses aglow in their heat,
a young woman sighs in despair; on her knees,
no food, no hope, no love – defeat.

A bundle of rags shiver close 'gainst the cold,
two starving wee waifs lying wrapped in her shawl,
the struggle to love, not the years, makes them old,
and the bright spark of life gutters feebly in all.
God's mercy and love gives young Catherine a call,
to bring hope to the beaten, the sick and the weak,
loving women and children rejected by all,
some food, comfort and the warmth that they seek.
The Sisters of Mercy have long carried the flame,
that no-one is lost, or unworthy of life,
but loved and protected in God's holy name,
from the brutal, the angry and hunger's sharp knife.
It started with Catherine but soon there were more,
to educate women, gain respect for their role,
willing to serve, bring God's touch to the poor,
provide for their needs for the body and soul.
Catherine fought long and hard for her dream,
she would not be stopped – so much to be done,
and many days found her fighting the stream,
as slowly, but surely, her battles she won.
Now her soul is in heaven, her body at rest,
but her work the world over continues to grow,
from away in the East and the ends of the West,
the spirit of Jesus her followers show.



Pat Crawley, Circle of Mercy, Newry.



A poem for Catherine

Venerable Catherine McAuley

Who is she, so fair and stately,
Treading through the mud
And Dublin mire,
Eyes uplifted spreading sunshine
As she raises spirits high that were
Crushed by sickness, poverty and petty
crime?
Heart of mercy, beating strongly
Fed by pity, love and time,
Reaching out to those who suffer –
Young and old or in their prime –
Beaten down by laws that left them
Dispossessed of all their pride.
See her, loving heart of mercy, and
Her angels moving round
Spreading hope and joy and healing
So that what was lost could
Once again be found!

What have years and times of ‘progress’
Meant to lives ordained by God
To have life and in abundance,
Full of joy and love for all!
Sad to see how things unfolded
Human life to cheapened now
In a world grown cold and heartless
Coarser, harsher hour by hour.
Horrors come and woes unending
Human trafficking.... lives are pawned....
No time to see so many grieving
No time to ask what is the cause.

Where’s the spirit of Venerable Catherine?
Where’s the heart with love aflame?
Let’s muster up a workforce holy
To serve the marginalized – the anawim.
May we find the zeal that
Fired her and her heroines of old
To alleviate the pain that people carry
And set them free once more.



*Sr. Baptist Leen
Southern Province*

*Venerable Catherine McAuley made two ‘responses’
to Sr. Baptist’s poem and they are presented below.*

Baptist, a chroí
Fair dues to thee!
For taking up the challenge
To pen a poem about me!
Though Venerable I may be
I’m just your loving “Mother mo chroí”
Watching over you, and all
My nuns that be,
So much has been done
Since the rising of the sun
Of Mercy, in your hearts, in dear Tralee
As you reach out to those in need
For the marginalised you plead –
But the poem is something else and dear to me!
Blank verse you say it is,
What would Milton or Dryden think of this??
Or, doggerel verse you say
May be the big take of the day
Poor thing, don’t throw it away just yet?
For there cometh the day
When the real poets lose their sway
And the humble rise up and take their stand
Without fear of jeering elders
Or smart remarks from cheeky childers,
In a world where justice is at bay.
But give woman a free hand,
Or a nun, a rubber band!
Then you’ll see Mercy again along your way.

.....
Siúr Baiste, a stór
You must have been ‘maith go leor’
When you sat to compose
A poem about me!
Despite your lack of the art
Of the poetic craft
It gladdened my poor heart
And pleased me
To hear once more, our story retold,
And the gaisce done by many a Mercy nun,
In the beautiful vale of Tralee.



A poem for Catherine

We are Yours for Time and Eternity

The Church in Belfast is quiet
As I gaze at the computer screen,
I see two coffins lying there
And my heart breaks at the scene.
The people gather; groups come in
And the depth of their pain I can see –
As they mourn the loss of two dear friends
Mercy Sisters, Frances and Marie.
Suddenly I am in their midst
Right there among the crowd
And I feel Catherine's presence
"Grieve" she says, "*but also be proud.*
For years ago they vowed to God
To persevere until this day
As dispensers of Mercy to all in need
And so they did, following my way."
The mantle of Our Mother of Mercy
Descends on all those in prayer
And those watching from far and near
Of Calvary, they are fully aware.
They know where this Congregation
Was founded; they know the pain, tears and loss,
For Catherine, too, knows what it's like -
She lived very close to the Cross.
We thank you, Frances and Marie, for
The sacrifice that made us all understand
That love, kindness and Resurrection
Will always go hand in hand.

Laurenza Kelly
Southern Province





A poem for Catherine

Sr. Assumpta McVeigh Speaks with our Foundress Catherine

Assumpta: It is a great privilege for me to speak with you Catherine. I have much to discuss with you and I would cherish and value your wisdom on many issues relevant to our day.

Catherine: Yes, I am fully aware of changes taking place in my Mercy family worldwide, but my advice is the same; “Trust in God’s providence and be united in love – Never let the sun go down on your anger”.

Assumpta: But Catherine, you may not know that things have changed drastically down here since your founded us. We are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Bishops; instead all our undertakings are governed by the congregation.

Catherine: But sure that was my plan or wish from the start. All I ever wanted was to serve the poor and help to educate the less fortunate as a lay person in the house I purchased in Baggot Street, Dublin. All my sisters are aware of that. However, to be able to do that then, I had to become a Sister, and sister of Mercy came into being. God does often write straight with crooked lines.

Assumpta: Yes Catherine, we fully recognise that you were a woman of vision who would have welcomed change in all its forms – and change no doubt has come.

Catherine: What are these changes, and what are your concerns in relation to them. Surely all change must be rooted in deep prayer and trust in our all loving and caring God. Always remember my dear sister in Christ – it is not in Doing that matters – but in Being.

Assumpta: Well one thing for sure Catherine, we can no longer be regarded as the “Walking Nuns”. Life has become so complex and diverse, with cars outside every one of our houses and we have very few “traditional convents” now. We are flying now to Zambia, Nigeria, USA, England, United Nations etc. You name it and there we are.

Catherine: For me that is very inspiring and uplifting, as long as my sisters don’t allow secularism and materialism to enter their lives. Hence a greater need than ever before for each Sister to be immersed in the “Word of God” and to make that word become flesh in all whom you meet and minister to. Let the Passion of Christ be your strength and nourishment.

Assumpta: Yes Catherine in keeping with your vision, many of the Sisters are now living in the wider communities of the Laity.

Catherine: So my original dream is becoming a reality –touching I hope the lives of the most vulnerable and needy in your midst.

Assumpta: Our ministries too have changed – very few Sisters are involved in the schools or in health care, since the State is providing these services now, but I must say, not with the same commitment and dedication that you Catherine pioneered.

Catherine: A Sister of Mercy, by being a compassionate presence wherever they are, will no doubt be an influence for good in the wider society. So have confidence in God’s loving guidance.

Assumpta: Yes Catherine, the Sisters are adapting to meet the needs of our time, and so are engaged in capacitor programmes which help to eliminate the stresses and strains of modern day living. By art therapy too is providing a vital means of communication and assisting people to explore and unknot some of their deep seated problems. Some of our Sisters are involved in counselling and psychotherapy which enables people to unravel their inner tensions, fears, guilts etc. and so empower them to reach their full potential – their true selves in Christ.

Catherine: So “Mercy” is fully alive, and what a joy that is for me. Keep striving to become a more authentic compassionate presence to each other and to all with whom you come in contact.

Assumpta: Yes we have abundant opportunities given to us to deepen our inner selves and to mature into the kind of Sisters you wanted us to be, what with retreats, days of renewal, sabbaticals etc. sure we should be Saints long ago. Oh Catherine we have this guy with us at the moment – a stylish trendy out of this world type of person by the name of Fr. Daniel O’Leary. He’s getting us to let go of clericalism and institutionalism. Oh let go – let go – be free to be yourself he insists. He’s getting us to think Bigness – to risk – to have confidence in ourselves – to cast out fear – to love ourselves. He speaks passionately about “intimacy” – intimacy with self – with others and with God. In our day, we weren’t allowed to have any particular attachments! So what a change in emphasis now, and rightly so. As Fr. Daniel highlights – one often lived from - “a false self” not our “true selves”.

Catherine: Assumpta, you must remember I was asked to follow that old rigid school of thought too, but in spite of that I followed my inner instincts and convictions, and trusted totally in the Passion of Christ strengthening me. In that way I was able with God’s help to bring many, many women to answer God’s call to bring “Mercy” to the most needy and disadvantaged.

Assumpta: You have no idea Catherine, how much “the Ireland” of your day has changed. We are now an international and multicultural Ireland, and the Sisters are striving to address issues of human trafficking, homelessness, addictions, suicide prevention and are challenging governments and society to work for justice. Even though vocations are scarce, you must indeed be proud of your Sisters who are keeping alive your spirit and vision of Mercy and compassion in a fast changing and ever expanding Ireland. In fact some of our Sisters are immersed in Global issues working with United Nations, so I can hear you chuckle and say “Mercy is still fully alive!”.

As you once wrote Catherine, “Mercy” the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following him has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the poor and needy, as in them they see the face of God himself. We, your followers Catherine are earnestly endeavouring to do just that.

Catherine: Assumpta – don’t get too much caught up with lack of vocations. Where God’s work is concerned – he will provide the means and the way. The role of any Sister of Mercy is to be his presence – his witness, and that involves being constantly united with him in prayer. Assumpta – you know as I know – without him we can do nothing. As I speak with some of the Saints and Prophets up here – their teaching and advice is similar – “with God on our side all things are possible”.

Assumpta: I'm glad you have mentioned Prophets and Saints. You must have some lovely discussions with Jeremiah, Jonas, Paul, Augustine and the lot of them up there. Sure we too are being directed and guided by some great modern day Prophets like Joan Chittester, Sandra Schneiders and Pope Francis, not to mention Fr. Daniel O'Leary himself. Sandra Schneiders, a major prophet's voice of our time, reminds us that Pope Francis has validated our best insights about the nature of religious life as a prophetic vocation in the Church charged with preaching the Gospel – our mission is to promote the reign of God, especially among the oppressed and marginalised. Catherine, wasn't that your original vision and mission? Yes, it certainly was but as far as I'm concerned it got lost and indeed buried along the way. What a pity – can we redeem it yet Catherine?

Catherine: Yes Assumpta, everything is redeemable with Christ – nothing is lost in His loving embrace. Sandra is after my own heart, in that she emphasises a key theological insight central to our life as “Mercy Sisters” especially, is our conviction that Ministry is intrinsic to our form of religious life. Was that not my aim and vision when I founded the House of Mercy in Baggot Street and emphasised so strongly – “The poor need our help – our voice – our hands today not tomorrow or next week!” In keeping with Sandra's vision for the 21st Century – I myself in my time, living in an impoverished and unfair system in the Dublin of the 20s and 30s stressed many times as Sandra does, that religious denotes a way of being, not a role or function. Yours Assumpta “is a particular kind of relationship with Jesus Christ”, as Sandra reminds you (expressed in consecrated celibacy) and a particular kind of participation in his mission – “full time prophetic ministry”. Making Christ alive and active in a broken, bleeding world of you day Assumpta. Strive, dear Sister to keep faithful to this task, as a minister of the Gospel.

Assumpta: Catherine, but Sandra is also stressing forcefully “that ways to create affective and spiritual community will have to be developed, many of them electronically, “what a huge shift for us Catherine. I don't know yet how effective your communication system is in Heaven, but it must be tops with Himself at the helm, but down here it's nothing but computers, iphones, tablets, ipads, internet and streaming. We can now see our Sisters in any part of the globe by the touch of a button. We can talk with them and exchange our views worldwide, so that's community life today Catherine”. Watch out, we could be ministering from the moon space yet! It's well Catherine you were blessed with an infectious broad sense of humour – you sure would be needed down here, to guide us through this ever changing web of religious and all of life. But be of good cheer Catherine, we have some exceptional talent among us, all of whom are continuing to follow your mission and adapt to the needs of our time! As our congregational and provincial leaders emphasize “we must allow our place in the interdependent and interconnected community of all of life to influence us. Catherine, do keep walking and enlightening us on our ongoing journey.

Catherine, it was a privilege speaking with you, and reflecting together on the ever changing ace of Mercy. I thank you for listening attentively to me, and for your reassuring and inspirational responses. We were very saddened Catherine by the tragic deaths of Sr. Marie Duddy and Sr. Frances Forde. They both worked tirelessly in education and brought mercy and hope and love to all whom they nurtured. They indeed were a compassionate presence to all and true followers of yours Catherine. Give our best regards and sincere love to all those great and ever faithful Sisters sharing God's Kingdom with you. Who knows, we may soon be able to glimpse a view of Heaven online and even talk to you all in person. What a dream!

*With much love
Your loving Sister in Mercy
Sr. Assumpta McVeigh*





A poem for Catherine

HAVE A CUP OF TEA!

Make a cup of tea when I am gone!
And do not wail and forget
The mission which you have been called to,
As my eyes are soon fading away, I can see twinkles in your eyes
I see your anguish and the emptiness in your hearts
As I lie here in bed, but take courage!

Have a cup of tea when I take this last breath,
For I am going to my Lord and my real home
Where death has no place and suffering is vanquished.
And joy reigns.

Have a cup of tea when I am gone,
To brighten your faces
As I rather you laugh and make merry
And march on with the message Christ gave us
We cannot stop even for a while
When he needs us out there
For the poor, the hungry and the needy.



Have a cup of tea when I die
This will give you the energy to live the gospel
Do not focus on my weary body, as my soul is assured,
It will be at peace with the Father
But you have to continue and get strength to proclaim him to the world.

Have a cup of tea when I die
And wear smiles on your faces
As I will now watch over you dear daughters
As Christ lives in me
May He live in you.

Pauline Kingori rsm
Kenya Province



A poem for Catherine

Mercy Was Her Pearl

*I*t all commenced on 29th September, 1778 in Dublin,

When her parents received a precious gift that was a mystery to them,
As God told Prophet Jeremiah, “before you were conceived, I knew you.”
God had chosen and set her apart to be the Heroine of Mercy and Compassion
to the suffering poor of Ireland,
Mercy was her food, mercy was her pearl.

*M*y youthful Foundress underwent suffering at her tender age,
She embraced them with fortitude, trust and gentleness,
She said, “this is your life; joys and sorrows mingled, one succeeding the other,”
To her these were stepping stones to Eternity,
Mercy was her food, mercy was her pearl.

O Prayerful woman of mercy, she expressed it in one of her sayings,
“your whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer,”
The gift of mercy encouraged her daughters to pray well and never grow weary to pray.
She loved diversity because she rejoiced in the God of diversity,
Mercy was her food, mercy was her pearl.

*O*ur pioneer in mercy, our Heroine in Faith,
A holy woman whom God endowed with a faithful, loving heart,
whom he shaped to his own divine purpose,
Your spirit is so Great, your spirit has gone beyond Europe, your spirit is alive,
your spirit is seducing hearts of the young and old,
May it live and live forever,
Mercy was her food, mercy was her pearl.

*T*he mention of your name Mama, brightens faces and delights the hearts of both lay and Religious,
They call on you with due respect,
Pray for us Mama, pray for your daughters O charitable One,
Mercy was her food, mercy was her pearl.



Willimena Ayan rsm
Kenyan Province



A poem for Catherine

The Mercy Star

(to Catherine McAuley, inspired and inspiring still)

When you found the quality of Mercy-
a burning compassion shining in your heart
like a pulsing star-
you fell in love with its blinding
protective intensity.

It became your guide.
It led you through deserts dry with old dust
and mountains of unbearable heights
with no beaten paths for guides.
It bathed you in its shimmer
and fed you with food
not to be found in any other place.

It was the Mercy Star that led you
unerringly through lands
as unknown as the moon. And –
against all odds and obstacles –
you followed it faithfully
through criticism
misunderstanding
from those dearest to your heart
and obstacles to your own unfolding.

Later, it led you home, leaving us-
the daughters you would never know
who also glimpsed the Mercy Star
through your eyes –
to find and follow it through
as many unknowns as you also did.

Not through our works
not through our education,
or our buildings or our monuments
rightly built to women
who lived their lives through wars
of all kinds to make this world brighter
for women and the poor –
those countless who could not and cannot
find their way alone –
no-

but through the Mercy Star
guiding our hearts.
That's what you plucked down
from the heavens
and embodied:
no less shining
even as our monuments fall down;
even as our works transform
beyond recognition
and our numbers dwindle and disappear –
the Mercy Star continues to shine
finding receptive hearts
unknown
in worlds yet to emerge.



*Brenda Peddigrew RSM
(Newfoundland)*



A poem for Catherine

Words for Catherine

I am sitting on a dictionary
Called “Mercy Words for Today”
And wonder what you’d think of it -
Wonder what you would say.
I’ve read your many letters
And poems written for me,
They encourage, help, support
And admonish so gently.
We have meetings to prepare meetings
We have conversations – *we have what?*
To process, discern and facilitate,
Now, what do you think of that?
Did you draw graphs to count
How many sisters were young or old?
Did you worry about tomorrow?
“Trust in God – stay in His fold”

I search for you in a sea of words
But I do not find you there –
Your message is so simple,
Love, listen, give and care.
I am challenged by the Bible
the Constitutions give me life:
“Reach out a helping hand to all
In pain and hurt and strife.”
Is there still room at the Mercy Inn
For those of us who are frail and weak?
We may be old, infirm and grey
But God’s will we will always seek.
May Mary, Mother of Mercy,
Bless all those in this holy place,
May we together love Jesus
Who fills us with love and grace.



*Laurenza Kelly rsm
Southern Province*



A poem for Catherine

The Fruit of Mercy

Catherine her name, she lives among us,
A seed sown in Dublin, a gift to humanity,
Grew up an orphan, quite young bereaved,
Poverty in Dublin, a pitiful sight it was.

Doors opened wide, among the Callaghans,
A Christian family, values practiced,
Generosity to the poor, Catherine learned,
All visited, in their heart of misery.

A steady woman, Catherine was,
In touch with reality, a practical woman,
A dream began, a call to Mercy,
The dream made real, in Dublin of 1831.

Mercy at heart, mercy in action,
All to feel welcome, whom society rejected,
Women, girls, the poor- God's children,
All welcomed, Mercy house Dublin.

Enthusiastic girls, inspired to dream too,
To share in her dream, they turned up,
The call to mercy, spreading its wings,
Far and wide, mercy travelled.
To Africa, Mercy travelled,
In Kenya, Catherine arrived,

Mercy to all, the poor and aged,
God's people, God's children.

Mother McAuley, we celebrate you,
Among the Holy ones, we salute you,
For us pray, your daughters all,
In Mercy we journey, with you we walk.

For us pray, Mother Catherine,
The fruit of Mercy, to thrive more,
South, North, East, West,
God's compassion, all to experience.



*By Catherine Wamboi rsm
Kenyan Province*