

11th November 2014

Catherine McAuley - Commemoration Mass of her Death and Life.

Homily

Who is my neighbour?

There was a play on in Dublin a couple of weeks ago entitled 'JESUS the Man' - it was a one man show by the actor Simon Callow of 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' fame - not to be mixed up with Simon Cowell of X Factor fame! I heard Simon Callow interviewed on radio about the play. The play depicts a number of important happenings in the ministry life of Jesus such as the raising of Lazarus, the wedding feast at Cana and the journey into Jerusalem. The actor takes on the persona of the different characters in each episode and tries to portray their responses and reactions as if it were the *first time*. He plays Mary as she asks her son to change water into wine and the sister of Lazarus when she tells JESUS that her brother has died. He plays all these characters inviting us to enter into these stories afresh as if they were happening *now*.

Imagine being at the wedding at Cana and realising what had happened.

Imagine being the sister of Lazarus and seeing with your own eyes the miracle unfolding.

As I began reflecting and writing on this, memories returned to me; memories of spending time with my nieces and nephews when they were children - of reading stories and watching films with them. They would want to hear the same story over and over and dare you try to take a short cut! The same films were played again and again - I could probably write the script for Pocahontas! The child knew every detail of the story and yet drew even more delight from it on each reading or viewing. In this play we are challenged to hear afresh the stories of Jesus, to engage with childlike delight and curiosity, and to enter into dialogue with Jesus anew each day.

Today we remember Catherine McAuley and her life. When I heard the interview with Simon Callow I began to wonder what life must have been like for Catherine's first companions, the first women who heard her and became acquainted with her.

Jesus right from the beginning of his public life began to attract people, people were naturally drawn to him, following him around, listening to him and eventually living their lives based on his example. So what must it have been like for Mary Anne Doyle and others who followed Catherine around, who listened to her, spent their days with her, and began doing the things that she was doing. What messages would they have picked up from her first hand, by osmosis and passed on so that now years later we choose to live our lives in the light of the same values?

Our readings today give us some insight into Catherine's own spirituality. The gospel story of the Good Samaritan is alive with passion. Jesus, in telling the story, is giving us a vision of mercy, of compassion.

'Who do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?'

'A neighbour', he said – he didn't ask who should have responded, no, he said 'Who is the neighbour?'

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians captures this same passion and compassion. If I can have prophetic powers, understanding of mysteries, have faith enough to move mountains and do not have love - I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I do not have love - I am nothing and I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind, rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

One of Catherine's earliest companions, Clare Augustine Moore, was a gifted artist and we have on the front of our booklet today an example of her art work - it is an illustration of the letter M the first letter of the word MERCY. And if you examine it closely you will see that it is a portrayal of the story of the Good Samaritan - you can actually make out the figures of the characters and the road to Jericho. So why would Clare Augustine Moore choose this story to spend so much time and effort on? The only explanation can be that this story was exceptionally close to the heart of Catherine and one she herself based her life on. Clare Augustine had picked up from Catherine the essence, the essential meaning, of mercy and compassion.

As we remember Catherine today let us hear afresh her invitation to us to be women of passion and compassion with a deep love for the neighbour whoever the neighbour may be. We are called to be women of understanding, of quiet confidence and strength. We are called to embody the gifts of her heart, gifts of love, sympathy, tolerance and forgiveness. We are called to embody the gifts of her mind and of her spirit - gifts of ideals, principles and of purposes, gifts of prayer, peace and a strengthening of faith, hope and charity.

On this day, the 11th November, we also remember and pray for those who fought and died in the first and second world wars. In the 'remembering' we are brought face to face with the paradox that we have to 'fight' for 'peace'.

May each of us choose peace today, by the way in which we relate to our 'neighbour'.