

Twenty five years. In a marriage, in religious life, in commitment to a ministry, this is a length of time to which we attach particular meaning. It signifies fidelity, forbearance, compromise, commitment, love that endures. We look back over the span of those years and focus on moments that were turning points, people who were influential, graces asked for and received. On the strength of those years we dare to re-commit, trusting ourselves and our God.

But what does it mean that Catherine has been twenty-five years Venerable? We look back to the exhilaration of April 9, 1990 and then to all the intervening years and we see a waxing and waning of energy, focus, hope and expectation, interest. Sometimes it feels as if we are stuck in a holding pattern, in Limbo, waiting for that thing that we cannot make happen – a verifiable miracle that will open the door to the next stage in the process of canonization. And then we'll wait again. In this in-between time, it's helpful to reflect on the years of patient waiting in Catherine's life in the hope of finding some inspiration.

We used to call the Coolock years "the hidden life of Catherine McAuley" as if those twenty years were sort of an ante-room to the "public", more important phase that was coming. In reality, those years were full of activity and growth as Catherine focused on the person before her, the need before her. During this time, by responding as best she could and by looking always for better ways to respond, she amassed an amazing array of experiences as nurse, housekeeper, mentor, estate manager, teacher, student of religious doctrine and entrepreneur. By being in the moment and meeting the present need she was, unwittingly, preparing herself for a future not yet in her imagination.

There were other seasons of waiting - the years that it took to resolve William Callaghan's will, the years to build the House on Baggot Street, the time caring for her sister Mary which delayed her arrival at the House of Mercy. In each case, while Catherine waited, she put her energy to the task that was before her and learned that it is the day-to-day unfolding of our lives which shapes us rather than great events. In God's providence, the experiences and influences in all these intervals shaped her for what was to come.

Once the community was established, we see Catherine's gift of expectant waiting in her longing for time with her sisters, news of her sisters. Her letters are filled with evidence of her yearning.

To Mary Delamere – "Of one thing, however, I am sure and seriously so that I seldom look forward to any change in this world with such happiness as I do to our meeting." July 2, 1836.

To Frances Warde – "I look forward with happiness to the time when I hope to see you." April 9, 1838.

To de Pazzi Delaney – "How anxiously I long to be with you in the community, alone, telling you all the queer things I met since we parted." November 15, 1838.

To Elizabeth Moore – "Write soon, it is a great comfort to me to hear from you often, do not get tired, half your paper not written on, a little nonsense will be acceptable." January 13, 1859.

In all of this we see in Catherine's waiting the same qualities we celebrate in other silver experiences - fidelity, forbearance, compromise, commitment, love that endures. As we commemorate the jubilee of her being declared Venerable, as we wonder how much longer we will wait for Blessed to appear before her name, we can hear her urging us to do as she did. When, in her name, we focus on the present, when we are intent on the person before us and the need before us, when we seek ever more loving and effective solutions to human suffering, then our waiting is vibrant and fruitful and merciful. And when the day comes that her sainthood is officially recognized by the Church, we will bring to that celebration the fruits born of our faithful efforts to follow her path.

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