

YOUR EVER AFFECTIONATE, M.C. MCAULEY

It was a moment of great joy when the CD, incorporating some excerpts from Catherine's letters, was launched during our Symposium in Castleblayney on April 25th. 2009. We have all read these letters, but, somehow, when we hear them we become aware of a new dimension. They uncover a rich mine of the understanding and insight of our foundress. Here we meet her in all the facets of her life, her spirituality and her personality. It is in her letters to her sisters that we have the most precious insights into who Catherine was – this warm, witty, wise, passionate, playful, loving, lively, compassionate, caring, humorous, holy, tender, talented, and yet utterly, simple, human woman.

While listening to these letters we make direct contact with Catherine's spirituality, which flows out in response to the actual situations and events of her every-day life. Again and again, we find expressions of her deep faith, her confidence in a gracious, provident God, her trust in prayer, her understanding of compassion and her love for her sisters.

Unable to attend the Profession Ceremony of Sr. Mary Joseph who professed vows in October, 1841, Catherine wrote the following words just a month before her death: *'How sincerely, how joyfully, I congratulate you on the completion of your ardent hopes and wishes. What a sweet and blessed union you have formed. Now it is that you must prove your love and gratitude by going hand in hand with your Divine Redeemer, nothing to interest you but what relates to His greater Glory. May He grant you every grace and blessing, and make you one of His dearest and best beloved'*. Surely, these words came from Catherine's own lived experience.

Again, on hearing that Sr. De Sales White, who had been lent to Bermondsey Convent, was suffering from homesickness Catherine light-heartedly uses as metaphors some English Country Dances that she had learned years before to show that there will soon be an end to moving about. She declared *'We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centred on 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 feelings. If He looks on us with approbation for one instant each day – it will be sufficient to bring us joyfully on to the end of our journey. Let us implore Him to do so at this season of love and Mercy'*.

In a letter to Sister M. Catherine Meagher, Catherine voices her concern for the predicament of young people in Dublin in 1840. There was very little employment and the young women were largely unprotected. She speaks of two in particular: *I am sure I spoke with two yesterday who were hungry, tho' of nice appearance. Their dejected faces have been before me ever since. I was afraid of hurting their feelings by offering them food and had no money.* Sometimes, all we can offer is our compassionate presence.

I have enjoyed listening to and praying with the Letters and I invite you to sit down with the CD listen for yourself. Then you will reclaim Catherine's rootedness in

early Celtic Christian belief that we are in relationship with all creation and that this relationship is modelled on that of the Three Persons of the Trinity. We see her openness to an eternity beyond this world - openness to an eternal life already made known and being experienced right now in the diversity and richness of all life.

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