

Catherine's Healings And Favours

When I sat down to write this I had a phone call from Sr. Sheila Carney who is the Vice Postulator for the Cause of Catherine McAuley in the United States. Sheila called to give an update on the diocesan inquiry into an alleged miracle that happened through the intercession of Catherine. The diocesan inquiry is taking place in the mid-west of the USA. The witnesses are still giving statements and the materials from the tribunal are still being collected and processed so it will be the New Year before they will be finally collated and sent to Rome. It will be February or March before we know if the case will proceed to the next stage.

This is not the first time that we have had word of favours received through Catherine's intercession. Since her death in December 1841 people in Ireland and later, as her fame for holiness spread beyond the shores of her native land, people from all over the English speaking world and beyond have shared stories of favours received through her intercession - stories that result from their strong belief in the power of her intercession with God.

These stories range from ordinary everyday situations like that of the farmer's wife who prayed that the cattle on their farm would pass the bovine TB test, or the stories about family reconciliation, of people turning away from various addictions and the resultant positive impact on family life, or of anxious students passing examinations and finding pathways in life they had been hoping for, or the settlement of workplace difficulties in unexpected and remarkable ways.



Catherine's Tomb

The stories of healing are also widespread. There is the documented story of the woman whose arm was paralysed and who came to visit Catherine's tomb in Baggot Street and as soon as she put Catherine's thimble on her finger she began to feel life coming back into her hand. She never looked back after that.

There is also the story of the young mother who had a very aggressive cancer, so severe that she could not undergo radium treatment. Her distraught husband prayed for her cure through Catherine's intercession and promised that if his wife was cured he would make it known after three years. His wife began to recover and soon was able to take the required treatment

and continued her return to full health. This happened many years ago when cancer treatment was in its infancy.

There are people of all ages from all over the world who allege that they were cured from cancer, widespread sepsis, trauma due to accidents. The geographical spread is great but it has been noticed that healings and favours have been recorded with consistent regularity on the east coast of North America up to and including the present.

Formal records of these healings and favours began to be kept from 1937 onwards even though stories had filtered through since immediately after Catherine's death in 1841.

It is interesting to note that contemporary manuscript sources (from Catherine's time) concur in listing charity as Catherine's favourite virtue and humility as the next most important in her order of priorities. Indeed she advised her sisters that "they should never desire to lead, even in virtue" (Retreat Instructions p.80)



Sr. Teresa Austin Carroll

After her death her sisters entertained no doubts about her sanctity. However, the following statement from the first edition of Sr. Teresa Austin Carroll's biography¹ of Catherine is quite significant:

"when it was first discussed among friends of the order to send an appeal to Rome to have Catherine McAuley declared venerable several were of the opinion that she would use her power in heaven to prevent this" (p.271).

Further on, on the same page Carroll goes on to say:

"We often smile at what we see to be Catherine McAuley's plan. She cannot find it in her heart to leave the sufferer in pain, while she seems equally determined to lead the hidden life:"

¹ The Life of Catherine McAuley (1866)

therefore, she obtains the cure but in such a manner that we cannot prove it done through her. She obtains it certainly, but not instantaneously". (p.271).

This is precisely the area that renders the present alleged cure so noticeable i.e. the time line between the trauma and the person's return to health. So, as ever we continue in faith and wait and see if this is God's time in relation to Catherine and mercy.



Catherine McAuley

Whatever about her feelings around canonisation, if the thought ever entered her head at all, Catherine gives us solid workable examples of what it is to be women of faith. As always we look to her letters to meet the woman herself.

What comes through in all her letters as she encourages, persuades, challenges and consoles her companions is her faith that God is at the heart of all life and that whatever God permits is a blessing. In today's language you could say that she advises us "to be grateful and never look a gift universe in the mouth", meaning that to be attuned to God and God's will for us is nothing less than being warmed and vitalised by gratitude. We owe it to our Creator to be grateful, to appreciate, to be as happy as we can and to keep God central in everything, no matter life brings our way. In this Catherine is very much of her time and tradition and still relevant for today

Catherine's approach is voiced by Ester de Waal² when she writes:

"The Celtic approach to God "opens up a world in which nothing is too common to be exalted and nothing is so exalted that it cannot be made common". Catherine was steeped in her own tradition in that she listened for God at the heart of life, she saw God as the life within all life and so everything around her - be it the beauty of flowers, the smell of fruit in a basket that had been sent by Elizabeth Moore, the making of fun in a teasing poem, the anxiety and frustration with mounting unpaid bills, or the receiving of devastating news of the death of a close family member or friend spoke to her of God.. She looked deeply into life and found God in it and out of this was born her closeness to God, her closeness to people, her deep down joy despite everything.

² Ester de Waal, "Living the Sacramental Principle (2012) p 63 ff., in *Catholic Spiritual Practices* (Brewster, MA, Paraclete)

Catherine communicated hope, especially in the face of death. Death was no stranger in her life. During the cholera outbreak she could say that “the tomb was never closed” where she was standing. We all know that there are few words that can be said when death comes calling especially to those we love and hold dear.



Catherine communicated hope at the time of death through her recognition that our hope is based on Love and not on biological life. She realised that in order to be able to face death when it comes we need to try throughout life to love as fully as we can and tell those we love that we love them. In the face of death, our own death and that of others there is always regret. Regret at the time of death is not centered on failures or shortcomings but on the realisation that so much love has been un-lived, unexpressed or unappreciated and time has run out. Time is a very scarce commodity, it is the one thing in this life that we never seem to have enough of.

Catherine was a very ordinary, loving and lovable woman, who cared deeply. Her capacity to love others led her to risk, to step outside social convention, to fight the odds in order to achieve her dream which was to build a home where homeless women or women in danger, could find a safe resting place; a place too where poor children could be educated, especially young girls whose influence on future families would be paramount.

Every day men and women in hospitals, clinics and healing centres all over the world face major obstacles and in spite of severe illness or horrific injuries they never give up. The underlying power that fires a passion so strong that major obstacles are overcome is love and a zest for life.

The ability to love and the zest for life belongs not only to the few, the courageous, the heroes. Love and the zest for life are deeply rooted in the heart of every human being and all of us in our own way try to keep in touch with these deep down desires. *“There lives the dearest, freshness, deep down things”* (G.M. Hopkins).

The ordinary person may not be in a position to do something spectacular like Catherine did but love and the desire for life feed faith and hope and a willingness to do “one thing more” so that someone else other than oneself can have life once more, can have one day more, can smile once more. This is a constant occurrence in our world - unsung certainly, often unspoken and even unnoticed.



As one year fades into the sunset and as we open our hearts to a new one on the horizon, what is your story of goodness, hope and love from life's experience this year? Don't hesitate to share it.

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