

The Divine Whisper

Discernment in the life of Catherine McAuley

3 Loving

At times of crisis, when we are unsure what to do for the best, it is good to recall how Jesus trusted his own gut reactions, literally so. St Mark's Gospel recalled how *'his insides churned with compassion'* (Mark 1:40). It prompted him to embrace a leper, which to others seemed wrong. Catherine McAuley often followed her heart. When her feelings stood in the way, however, she was able to put them to one side.

"The spirit of mercy and compassion for the poor which animated and consumed her, made her sometimes adopt plans for their relief which to some appeared beyond the limits of prudence; but the success with which her undertakings were usually attended showed that she was guided by a heavenly wisdom..." (Sr Clare Moore)



"... When the cholera was raging in Dublin, the Sisters attended the cholera hospital in Townsend Street daily... Although our Reverend Mother had a natural dread of contagion, she overcame that feeling and scarcely left the hospital. There she might be seen among the dead and dying, praying by the bedside of the agonised... Almighty God preserved all the Sisters from the disease, and they continued to attend the hospital, encouraging and consoling the poor patients." (Sr. Clare Moore)

Catherine considered writing to the mother of Princess Victoria (soon to be Queen), asking for some royal handiwork to sell in aid of cholera victims' families. Some people scoffed at the idea, but *"a most gracious answer was returned, and her Royal Highness sent some of her own beautiful work, with drawings executed by her Royal daughter. This extraordinary contribution... realised a very large sum of money."* Catherine would always consult before taking any action, though, as you can see, she did not feel bound by other people's thinking.

Instead, love was Catherine McAuley's principal guide. The right course is always the most loving one, even if it carries the risk of being laughed at. As St Paul said, *'The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom.'* (1 Cor 1:25) Showing love to someone, of course, does not always mean saying 'yes' to them. Saying 'no' may sometimes be the more loving thing to do... and it may cost us more dearly still.

Recall a difficult decision you once had to make. What was the struggle?