

LIVING HUMBLY

In this passage from the Bermondsey Archives, Mother Mary Clare Moore describes Catherine McAuley in her dual role as Reverend Mother and Mistress of Novices.

‘Her lessons on humility, being supported by her own unvarying example, made a deep impression on the minds of her spiritual children: the least shadow of pride was odious to her. She told them that they should carefully shun speaking of themselves or of their works, and try as far as possible to banish even the words ‘me’ or ‘myself’ from their conversation... She taught them to love the hidden life, labouring on silently for God alone, for she had a great dislike of noise and shew in the performance of duties. “See how quietly,” she would say, “the great God does all His mighty works; darkness is spread over us, and light breaks in again, and there is no noise of drawing curtains or closing shutters.”

Our Reverend Mother, when instructing the Sisters, loved to dwell on those words of our Divine Lord: ‘Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart,’ saying, “With what loving devotion ought a religious Sister to impress them on her memory, and try to reduce them to practice.” She allowed any of the Sisters to guide and direct her... and would good-humouredly call those Sisters “her Mistresses”. She loved simplicity in others and practised it herself, telling the Sisters to adopt a simple style of speaking and writing... and never to affect worldly expressions or manners... If a Sister said casually, “I hate such or such a thing,” she would remark, “We ought to hate nothing but sin.” Even in piety she disliked high-flown aspirations or sentences, and, to a Novice who was writing something very exalted in that way, she observed how much more suitable those simple phrases found in ordinary prayers would be...

When she went to found a Convent, she would not take precedence over the Sister appointed Superior, though as Foundress she might reasonably have done so, and she would have been glad to lay down her authority altogether, and place herself under entire obedience...’

- 1 *How would you describe Catherine’s style of leadership?*
- 2 *What do you think she meant by ‘the hidden life’, and why was this important?*

Mother Mary Clare Moore describes an incident involving Revd Mother Catherine McAuley which was likely to have taken place in one of the new Foundations, probably Bermondsey.

‘Very much more might be said of her humble submission... but one act which occurred within the last four years of her life ought not to be passed over in silence. It was related with tears to a friend by the Sister who was the subject of it. Catherine had spoken, as she thought, rather sharply to her, and a few hours after, she went to the Sister and asked her if she remembered who had been present at the time. As several had been there, the Sister answered she could hardly say, for she had not noticed which they were, but as our Reverend Mother requested her to try and call them to mind and bring them to her, they were summoned. When all assembled, our dear Reverend Mother humbly knelt down and begged her forgiveness for the manner in which she had spoken to her that morning.’

- 3 *What example was Catherine setting this fledgling Community?*
- 4 *How does it feel to say sorry or make some public apology?*
- 5 *What might be our prayer?*

Notes

