

LIVING SIMPLY

In this passage from the Bermondsey Archives, Mother Mary Clare Moore describes what life was like for the young orphaned Catherine McAuley when, after her parents' death, she was taken into the care of her uncle Owen Conway, an Army Surgeon.

‘She lived some time with an uncle, her mother’s brother, and his daughter Anne Conway to whom she was devotedly attached ... Surgeon Conway’s affairs became embarrassed, and at last he was reduced to ruin, so that she suffered great poverty. Often an entire day spent without food, they had nothing but a little bread at night, with many similar privations; but her cheerfulness never failed, and she has often said that she took her rest more contentedly on the [floor] boards than when surrounded by luxuries.

From these circumstances she used to conclude that we are much better able to endure hardships in God’s service than we usually imagine, and that happiness does not depend on the enjoyment of temporal comforts since many in great poverty are still most joyful. Christ Our Blessed Lord and His holy Mother had no temporal comforts, and yet were always full of peace and joy. She had a remarkable talent for thus drawing instruction from every occurrence, and made useful reflections on all passing events, teaching us to be careful in like manner to derive spiritual profit from all things.’

1 *What kind of things seemed to matter most to Catherine?*

2 *How possible is it to be poor but happy?*

Clare Moore goes on to describe how, having lived very comfortably for many years with Mr and Mrs Callaghan, Catherine embraced poverty once again... this time, of her own accord.

‘Everything purchased for the use of the Sisters was of the poorest and plainest kind, and she would never allow a large provision of anything to be laid in, saying it was not according to [holy] poverty to have those kind of stores... Her meals were very scanty. As she thought best to carve the dinner for the Community in the Refectory, it generally happened that all had nearly dined before she could sit down, so that her

repast was merely nominal... She rarely had a cell to her own use, being always ready to yield it up for the accommodation of others, and on one occasion, when some Sisters arrived late in the evening from another Convent and there were not cells for all, she quietly brought one of them to hers, and next morning it was discovered that she had had neither cell nor bed that night.

When she went to found Convents, she invariably chose the poorest and cheapest mode of travelling, often to her own great inconvenience, and her bed was usually on the floor, as she never waited for a new Convent to be comfortable arranged... She relied on the loving Providence of her Heavenly Father that all necessities would be supplied, and she was never disappointed. This, her confidence in God's goodness, was so well known that the late revered Bishop of Cork, the Right Reverend Dr Murphy, used to style her 'Sister of Divine Providence.'

- 3 *Is there a particular action of Catherine's in this passage that speaks to you in some way?*
- 4 *Which teachings of Jesus does this passage call to mind?*
- 5 *The Suscipe of Catherine McAuley prays, 'Teach me to cast my whole self entirely into the arms of your loving Providence.' What might this mean for us day by day?*

Notes

