

THE LIFE OF MERCY

In this passage from the Bermondsey Archives, Mother Mary Clare Moore describes the young Catherine McAuley in the days when she was live-in companion to the wealthy Mrs Callaghan. At that time, she and Mr Callaghan resided at 31 Mary Street, Dublin.

‘Charity was Catherine’s characteristic virtue. She loved all, and sought to do good to all, but the poor and little children were her especial favourites; these she laboured to instruct, relieve, and console in every possible way, so that she began even then to practise those works of Mercy to which she afterwards so fully devoted herself.

One or two examples of her heroic charity will suffice to shew the spirit by which she was animated. It was her custom to visit the sick poor in the wretched streets and lanes of St Mary’s Parish, Dublin. Having discovered in one of those abodes of misery in Liffey Street a poor demented old woman, who had formerly been in better circumstances, but was now deserted by everyone (this poor creature was of good family, and a Protestant if she could be said to be of any religion), instead of getting her into an asylum, Miss McAuley brought her to her own house, and took care of her till her death, which happened about five years afterwards...

During these years, her benefactress had much to endure from her as, with the perversity of dementia, she from the first conceived an absolute hatred for Miss McAuley, and her language in speaking of her was generally virulent and contemptuous. Besides this, her habits were most filthy, and she had an inveterate custom of stealing everything she could lay her hands on, hiding those things she could not use, so that the inconvenience was great. Miss McAuley’s patience never seemed disturbed by these continual annoyances, nor would she permit the servants to tease the poor creature...’

- 1 What does the story of old Mrs Harper tell us about Catherine McAuley?
- 2 What hesitations might there be nowadays about such a well-intentioned intervention?

In the following excerpt from the Limerick Manuscript, Sister Vincent Harnett describes Catherine at a later period of her life when she was Reverend Mother in Baggot Street.

‘Mercy being the title which it pleased Almighty God should be given to the Institute, she used sometimes at Community Recreation to turn the conversation to the merits of that virtue, comparing it with charity [love], and showing how peculiarly appropriate it was for the Sisters, and how often they were called on to exercise it.

The mercy of God, she would say, comes to our assistance and renders practical His love for us. Mercy not only bestows benefits, but receives and pardons again and again, even the ungrateful. How kind and charitable and merciful, then, ought Sisters of Mercy to be...’

- 3 *How does Catherine McAuley explain the difference between love and mercy?*
- 4 *What learnings are there from these two passages for ourselves?*
- 5 *What is our prayer?*

Notes

