

Support Me **All the Day Long** (Paper 3 of 6)

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FROM where did Catherine's supports come? She was a fully alive woman who faced each day in a truly integrated way. Think of her simple unswerving trust in the abiding Providence of God and her light-hearted sense of fun. Catherine admitted herself that rhyming or composing verse was one of her ways of coping with stress. In writing to Mary Ann Beckett (one of the English postulants who had entered in Baggot Street to prepare for the foundation in Birmingham) she tells us about the relief and comfort she found in compiling verses:

"When not far removed from life's earliest stage,
At rhyming I never could stop.
And beginning to feel the pressure of age,
I lean on it now as a prop.
It affords some support and help on the way,
Recalling the days of my youth
In which' twas my pastime, my folly, my play,
And so it is still in good truth".¹

In reading Catherine's letters, we often find a lovely mixture of spiritual exhortation and witty remarks.

Her trust in Providence was remarkable. Think of the momentous decision that she made at Coolock in 1822 to sell all she had and to commit herself to the needs of the poor. How easy it would have been for her to remain at Coolock as mistress, and from the security and comfort of her mansion to help the poor. It could have been very tempting; she was now middle aged; she must have been weary after the deaths of both her adopted parents for whom she had been caring, as well as administering the estate. She had other responsibilities too in caring for several young relatives. Her cousin, Anne Byrne had died of tuberculosis and Catherine had adopted her baby, Teresa, (her god child), and brought her with her older sister, Catherine, to live at Coolock. Mary Macauley was also dying of tuberculosis and her five children spent much of their time with Catherine.

And, as if that was not enough, she had adopted two little girls, Mary Anne Kirwan and Ellen Corrigan, whose parents had died of fever. Sister Austin Carroll paints a heart-rending story of one of these – a little girl thrown out of a cellar by the proprietor after her parents had died of

fever. The little one had looked up and down for a familiar face and, failing to find one, sat down and cried. Catherine, who had witnessed the whole thing, picked her up and carried her home to Coolock. Then there was the old crazy lady, Mrs Harper. Catherine had rescued this eccentric old lady when she found her dirty, unkempt and neglected in one of the tenement squats in the city.

Yet, Catherine felt a further call. We are told in the London Manuscript that she wanted "to make some lasting efforts for the relief of the suffering and the instruction of the ignorant, and she thought of establishing a society of pious secular ladies who would devote themselves to their service, with liberty to return to their worldly life when they no longer felt inclined to discharge such duties".² The first step towards this dream was the building of the house in Baggot Street, financed entirely from her inheritance of the Coolock estate. This dedication of her total inheritance to the realisation of her dream is certainly a powerful witness to Catherine's reliance on Providence. She took her young relatives and protégées with her to Baggot Street but she kept back nothing of her legacy to provide for herself or her family. In that regard, she relied entirely on God. No wonder she could write later: "We have ever confided largely in Divine Providence, and shall continue to do so".³

As we know, Baggot Street had its critics, not least of whom was Canon Kelly of Westland Row. When he had been shown around the House, he conveyed convincingly to Catherine that the Archbishop required her to hand over the work to the Sisters of Charity, but attempted to be conciliatory by suggesting that she might like to keep a couple of small rooms and a side entrance for herself.

"This intelligence pained her, but she prepared to submit with peaceful resignation, considering that as she had transferred her right over the house to his Grace, she ought to acquiesce in his disposal of it," as Mary Vincent Harnett tells us, "she meekly replied, that the Archbishop could dispose of the House as he considered best."⁴

Yet, we can only imagine her thoughts and feelings. We are told that after he left she went to her room and did not appear for some hours. Did she feel cheated? She had given all to this project, not even keeping a pension for herself. She had given up a house and home and had

beggared herself. What was going to happen to those for whom she had assumed responsibility: her young relatives, the orphans she had taken with her, the young women of the House of Mercy, whom she had invited to her house as “to their own home”?

During this, her dark night of the soul, some of her most soul-searching maxims were fashioned which reflect her conviction about the immediacy of God’s presence and consolation. She encouraged her perplexed companions and those depending on her: “If the entire cross upon which Christ died was sent to this House, how impatient would each Sister be to carry it... Far better and more profitable for you to receive with all your heart the cross which God will send you in any form or shape He pleases”.⁵

We know the sequel to that episode: the letter to the Archbishop, his more reasonable proposal to her, and finally the birth of a new congregation, the first for women in the history of the Church that was not bound by enclosure. With such as these in mind, Catherine would say later: “We should never falter in our confidence that God will make all things turn to the best; we ought conform our views to His, and suffer ourselves to be guided unresistingly by Him as our Leader”.

While the time of novitiate was difficult for her, she again rested in God’s Providence, coming to understand more deeply who was calling her, moving her and giving her deeper riches to dispense. She remarked: “I feel a cog in some great wheel”, and so she determined wholeheartedly to put her every resource at the disposal of God and the poor. When she felt the loss of books to read in the novitiate she resorted to verse to express her loss:

“Now in religion all confined
Desiring still to please my mind
On many a shelf I cast my eye
But not an album [book] could I spy”.

But soon she was translating this loss into trust in God’s Providence:

“But after seeking long around
An album fair at last I found
For all that I can wish I see
Comprised my crucifix in Thee”

And she concludes:

“O world I leave them unto thee
Those albums once so dear to me
For oh what albums can I read

While I this sacred book can read
All, All with joy do I resign,
My cross, thou shalt be only mine”.

Years after leaving Georges Hill, she returned there on a visit and jokingly referred to her novitiate: “We visited our dear old George’s Hill – they were delighted and so was I – said I would kiss chairs and tables, but by some mistake I kissed a grand new chair in the parlour; however I took it (the kiss) back and brought it up to the old rush chair I used to sit on in the noviceship”.⁶

We have spoken about the many causes of anxiety in Catherine’s life, opposition to her plans, sickness and death among her followers, controversies over services and property and, at times, unwise decisions and stances. Yet, in reflecting on those, she could say in a letter to Elizabeth Moore in 1839:

“There has been a most marked providential guidance which the want of prudence, vigilance or judgement has not impeded, and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God. I could mark circumstances calculated to defeat it at once; but nothing, however injurious in itself, has done us any injury. This is all I could say: The loss of property has been supplied, the death of the most valued Sisters passed away as of no consequence. The alarm that was spread by such repeated deaths did not prevent others from crowding in. In short it evidently was to go on, and to surmount all obstacles, many of which were great indeed, proceeding from causes within and without”.⁷

But we also get a glimpse of the sense of fun that brought Catherine through some of those dark days. Recalling the legal wrangle surrounding Kingstown, she tells us: “I am hiding from some law person who wants to serve a paper on me personally and sent in to say he came from Dr Murray. I am afraid to remain five minutes in the small parlour. This has caused more laughing than crying you may be sure, for every man is suspected of being the process man and kept at an awful distance by my dear Teresa Carter.”⁸ And while suffering greatly in regard to the ‘chaplaincy controversy’, with no Mass being supplied at Baggot Street, and having to brave the elements in all weathers, she joked: “We go to Westland Row every morning for Mass, which gives us a good appetite for our breakfast”.⁹

Instructing her novices, she constantly exhorted them to place themselves with utter trust in the hands of their loving Father. There are many examples of this, as when she said: “Should we not then undertake our duties with

great courage, for infinite is the love God bears to souls who repose in His protection".¹⁰ Nevertheless, she could temper those lofty ideals with a bit of fun as, for instance, when two newly professed sisters had been lent from Baggot Street to Bermondsey. Unforeseen circumstances delayed their return and one of them in particular, Sister de Sales, was very homesick and unsettled and had asked Catherine to let her come back. Catherine had a lot of business to attend to before she could go to Bermondsey and bring back the two young women to Baggot Street so she wrote to Sister de Sales who had been a noted dancer, in a dancing idiom to cheer her up but also to call her to make her real home in God.

"I think sometimes our passage through this dear sweet world is something like a dance called 'Right and Left'. You and I have crossed over, changed places. Your set is finished now for a little while, you dance no more; but I'll have to go through the figure called 'Sir Roger de Coverly', which is too old for your memory. I'll have to curtsey and bow in Birr, then I'll have a 'See-Saw' dance to Liverpool, and a merry dance to Birmingham, and I hope a second one to Bermondsey, when you and I will dance the 'Duval Trio' on the same ground. But – we have one solid comfort amidst all this tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God, for whom we go forward or stay back".¹¹

The extraordinary success of the venture from Baggot Street brought petitions from all areas of Ireland as well as England to found convents. Knowing the terrible sufferings of the poor, Catherine found it impossible to deny these requests regardless of cost. As we read the stories of her foundations and the vivid letters from them and about them, we realise how much they were founded on Catherine's faith and confidence in God's Providence. In a letter to Mary Ann Doyle, Catherine wrote: "[religious profession] is not a disposition to bestow gifts like benevolent persons in the world, that bespeaks generosity of mind for the religious state. It is bestowing ourselves most freely and relying with unhesitating confidence on the Providence of God".¹²

Some people found it hard to understand Catherine's extraordinary confidence in God's Provident care and considered she took too many risks, as Mary Clare [Georgiana] Moore write: "The spirit of mercy and compassion for the poor which animated, and, as it were 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".¹³

Nothing more than the foundations show us Catherine's trust in Providence and the good humour that carried her through what seemed impossible odds. The fact that ill-health and death continued to snatch off the dearest and best of her sisters did not deter her. "No one is needed – we can all be done without," she philosophised. "Let us never think any one individual necessary for carrying on the work of God".¹⁴ She denuded Baggot Street of its wisest and most experienced in order to staff new foundations. She went to places where other religious had failed to take root and she undertook foundations in places where others refused to go because prospects of material help were so meagre. She took Christ at his word about not being solicitous for the morrow. Her reliance on Providence to the exclusion of financial security is forever enshrined in her maxim that "prayer will do more... than all the money in the Bank of Ireland".¹⁵

Tullamore was her first foundation outside Dublin. The wretched circumstances of the poor in that place had been aggravated by a severe epidemic of cholera. An elderly lady, Miss Pentony, had been nursing the sick with the help of three young ladies and, at her death, left Catherine a tiny cottage and a small annuity to establish a Mercy foundation there. It was a very fragile beginning but Catherine was touched by the misery of the people and, although she had yet very few professed sisters, all of them very young and inexperienced, her trust in God made her able to trust the ones he sent her. She believed that it was God's work, not theirs, and that he was graciously permitting them "to assist Him". She made the Tullamore foundation with only one professed sister and a novice. But she gave of her best – her own profession companion, Mary Anne Doyle, and to her she handed over not only responsibility for the foundation but also the formation of the novice and the three postulants who immediately joined them.

The sisters in Tullamore were very poor in the early days. Funds were low and the living quarters impossibly cramped, especially after the three postulants joined them. Catherine kept encouraging Mary Anne Doyle, telling her never to lose heart, to keep trusting in God's care for them. She wrote very tenderly when circumstances were particularly hard: "The Lord and Master of our House and Home is a faithful provider. Let us never desire more than enough. He will give that and a blessing".¹⁶ She may have been a little disappointed that the Tullamore sisters did not share the spirit of risk and dependence on Providence to the same degree as herself. When a new foundation was called for in Birr, her hope was that Tullamore would provide it since Birr was just 18 miles away. She exclaimed: "This foundation ought to be made from Tullamore – it

is quite a shame to be such creep-mouses – in such a cause”.¹⁷

The Bishop of Cork, Bishop Murphy, found it difficult to accept that Catherine would admit a candidate without a sufficient dowry and he ironically referred to her as “Sister of Divine Providence”. Later, when the sisters had grown to some strength in Cork, she herself was disappointed that they would not make a foundation as Carlow had done and she bemoaned that “there is too much *caution* in Cork”.¹⁸

Charleville tested everyone’s trust in Providence. Mary Clancy had promised substantial support but her subsequent marriage whittled down the original promise of providing a suitable house pending the erection of the convent. The early annals expressed some disappointment at what eventually was offered: “[it was] very far from being as convenient as it had been represented to her, and, on account of a little stream running close by, extremely damp, so that their clothes were quite wet each morning”.¹⁹ The French Sisters of Charity had already withdrawn from the town but Catherine put her trust in the message of the old Charleville woman who proclaimed, “Ah! it was the Lord drove you in amongst us!”²⁰ The newly appointed Superior, Sister Angela Dunne, eventually became so overwhelmed with anxiety because of insufficient funds that she wanted to withdraw all together. Catherine was “grieved to find such faint-hearted symptoms”²¹ among her sisters and she persisted in her hope that “we shall yet have a useful and flourishing Institution in Charleville”.²² She wrote to Mary Angela saying:

“What could excuse us before God – for casting off any charge which we had freely undertaken, except compelled by necessity to do so. Are not the poor of Charleville as dear to him as elsewhere – and while one pound of Miss Clancy’s five hundred lasts, ought we not to persevere and confide in his Providence... I am grieved to find such faint-hearted symptoms among us... Put your whole confidence in God. He never will let you want necessaries for yourself or children. It would afflict me and it would be a disgrace to our order to have a break up”.²³

Her strong words of encouragement worked because a few months later, Catherine wrote to Teresa White: “There was danger of all breaking up – and my heart felt sorrowful when I thought of the poor being deprived of the comfort which God seemed to intend for them. I made every effort & praised be God, all came round”.²⁴

In April 1837, Catherine made a foundation in Carlow and from the outset it was blessed with particular success. At this time, the two earlier foundations at Tullamore and

Charleville were still struggling to make a start and both communities were living in cramped and unhealthy cottages. Moreover, in Dublin Catherine was then the target for particularly harsh criticism and injustice amid rumours that her congregation would never be approved by Rome. She could have been forgiven a little triumphant satisfaction as here was the very first ‘convent’ to be erected for the new congregation. But her letter written to the Carlow sisters as they were preparing to move from their rented quarters to the convent gives centre stage to God’s provident love. She wrote: “You will be all making a holy preparation for that happy day, to draw down the blessing of Heaven... Then God will make it His own and love to dwell amongst you”.²⁵

Boosterstown convent was opened in 1838 and replaced Kingstown as the convalescent home. On the whole it pleased Catherine even though the cells were uncomfortable, the doors too large, the beds in the direct line of draught between windows and doors and the garden quite a wilderness! Some of the old residue of resistance to the Mercies by supporters of the Irish Sisters of Charity lingered here (one of Canon Kelly’s friends was parish priest). However, Catherine’s only concern was that the poor would benefit by the sisters’ presence. This thought buoyed her up and she could say: “Thus we go on, my Dear Sister Frances, flourishing in the very midst of the Cross – more than a common share of which has latterly fallen to my lot, thanks be to God. I humbly trust it is the Cross of Christ. I endeavour to make it in some way like to His – by silence”.²⁶

Catherine constantly emptied Baggot Street of its youngest, most efficient, and most promising sisters in order to staff her mushrooming foundations. She did not cling to Baggot Street: she ‘let go’ because of her realisation that this was what God required of her. She often said: “If the Order is my work, the sooner it falls to the ground the better. If it is God’s work, it needs no one”.²⁷ By 1838, Catherine had given so much by way of personnel to new foundations that she was forced to admit: “We are very near a Stop – I should say, a full Stop – feet and hands are numerous enough, but the heads are nearly gone”.²⁸

It was probably a mark of this depletion that the superior she appointed to the Limerick foundation needed more than the usual level of support. It was a particularly challenging foundation. Limerick was described as “one scene of wretchedness and sorrow” and the Mercies were the third order who had tried a foundation there. The Poor Clares and the Presentations had experienced difficulties too great to persevere. Catherine adopted into the Limerick Community two Poor Clare Sisters, the last

surviving members of the once flourishing community. Elizabeth Moore was so very nervous of her new responsibility that even Catherine had to admit: "We never sent forward such a feint-hearted soldier" [sic].²⁹ Yet, Catherine did not lose heart and soon she was able to say: "She is greatly liked and when the alarms are a little over and a few in the house, I expect all will go on well".³⁰ Before leaving Limerick, Catherine left a parting gift to Elizabeth which is a marvellous insight into her understanding of authority.

"Don't let crosses vex or tease
Try to meet *all* with peace & ease
notice the faults of every Day
but often in a playful way
And when you seriously complain
let it be known – to give you pain
Attend to one thing – at a time
you've 15 hours from 6 to 9
be mild and sweet in all your ways
now & again – bestow some praise
avoid all solemn declaration
all serious, close investigations.
Turn what you can into a jest
and with few words dismiss the rest
keep patience ever at your side
you'll need it for a constant guide.
Shew fond affection every Day
and above all – Devoutly pray
That God may bless the charge He's given
and make of you – their guide to Heaven."³¹

Even death itself did not dent Catherine's confidence in God's Providence. When the two novices of Bermondsey died of typhus before the foundation was even fully established, Catherine was greatly affected by their grievous loss but in a letter to Catherine Leahy she said: "Such is the mysterious Providence of God. I look forward now to their greater progress – to shew that 'His ways are not like our ways – nor His thoughts like our thoughts'."³²

In 1839, a branch house from Carlow was established at Naas. Catherine shared the anxiety of Francis Warde for the welfare of "poor Naas" and she described it as "the little chicken that belongs to the clutch called – creepy crawly".³³ But trusting in Providence, she held out the hope that "it would take a start"³⁴ and, in time, it did. In 1840 there were two further foundations from Baggot Street – Galway and Birr. The Galway foundation was made at the beginning of May and three postulants were admitted. But a month later, Catherine was sitting by the

death bed of one of them, Mary Bourke who died on June 10. In faith Catherine was able to say: "We are founding on the cross now indeed".³⁵

By now Catherine's health was showing signs of deterioration. She referred to the persistent cough that had developed and on return from Galway she confessed: "I think the name of another foundation would make me sick".³⁶ Yet she added in her own witty and courageous way: "But they say I would get up again".³⁷ And she did!

In December, just after Christmas, she undertook a most daunting foundation – Birr. The circumstances leading to this foundation were very unusual. A local schism had been dragging on for more than 12 years and the poor, deluded people, called 'Crottyites' for their mistaken loyalty to a priest who had defied his bishop when he was not promoted to parish priest, had obstinately refused to go near the church. A visiting missionary, the great temperance promoter, Father Theobald Mathew, advised the parish priest to apply to Catherine for a foundation saying that: "the people might yield to the gentler ministrations of the sisters" and that "They will instruct the children and the battle is half over when they are gained".³⁸

Catherine was greatly moved by the plight of the people and by their spiritual poverty and responded to the request. She knew there would be no income or funds to support the sisters, and her own resources were worse, but her confidence in Providence was unbounded. Of the sisters going to Birr, she said in a letter to Frances Warde, quoting Father Mathew, "they must be truly spiritual souls – confiding entirely in Divine Providence as there was no foundation fund".³⁹ We can guess that Catherine's cough, and, as we know now, her incubating lung disease, was not helped by the harsh winter weather of what even the weather experts agree is the coldest part of Ireland in winter. She wrote:

"Here we are surrounded by Newfoundland ice – obliged to keep hot turf under the butter to enable us to cut it... Sister Mary Rose & I walked one mile and half yesterday in all the snow to visit an unfortunate family who were followers of Crotty... All my wardrobe is washing. I came home yesterday – with at least half yard deep of mud – melted snow – and I have not a cold in my head. I was out five hours".⁴⁰

To cope with her hardships Catherine resorted to her other support – humour. She created great merriment as she described herself wearing her morning cloak as substitute for a petticoat, and her big sleeves converted into pockets to keep her hands warm. She ensured that her companions turned difficulty into fun by inviting them to dance around the community room in order to keep

warm and, making light of the poverty of the fare there she wrote: "We have two great comforts here – excellent Bread in the Dublin household form and pure sparkling spring water!"⁴¹ As usual her trust in Providence was rewarded. By the middle of January she could announce: "Our mission goes on very well. Some of the old obstinate party are preparing for confession".⁴² And despite the hardships resulting from lack of resources, bad weather and poor health, Catherine rejoiced to see the gifts of apostolic zeal and generosity called forth by this new foundation. "Hurra for foundations," she wrote from Birr to Cecelia Marmion, "makes the old young and the young merry."⁴³

She left Birr in February having developed a rheumatic condition on her right side from hip to ankle. Like the Galway cough this condition became chronic and made future travelling difficult. Yet she made one further valiant effort. She had agreed to found a convent in Birmingham and had trained four sisters in Baggot Street, and even though she admitted: "I look forward with fear and trembling to my Birmingham journey – I have really got a surfeit".⁴⁴ She nevertheless set out in July 1841 for the foundation. It was to be her last. In August she wrote to Sister Teresa Carton to prepare the infirmary for her return, apologising for giving "such trouble". Yet, before returning she planned for a convent at Mount Vernon, Liverpool, for which she had already trained a sister in Baggot Street. She referred to it as "not yet established though arranged for".

Catherine had hoped to make a foundation to Nova Scotia but it did not happen until after her death. When the priest who came recruiting confided his fear to her that there might be a lack of vocations in Nova Scotia, even if Catherine was prepared to make a foundation there, she encouraged him rather humorously to 'go for it' – "You have often seen a recruiting party come into a town or city. No-one appeared anxious to become a soldier... the drum and fife and cockade, aroused new thoughts, new hopes, and new projects, and the recruiting party is soon followed by a new supply for the ranks. Make the experiment!"⁴⁵

Today, we live in a world where age profiles, development plans, financial projections, strategic goal setting, insurance cover and so on are all part of new undertakings. It is challenging for us to look at Catherine, who even when her strength and stamina were ebbing was able to embrace new ventures with courage, resolution and enthusiasm and yet in a very humanly appealing way while staking her utter confidence on the Providence of God. Her "Suscipe" was composed very near the end of her life. She composed it when she had seen impossible dreams realised and yet had endured enormous losses and 'letting go' in her life. She had begun to feel the nearness of

journey's end as is evident in one of her comments: "God be praised, it is not our fixed abode, only the weary Road that leads to it".⁴⁶

Against that background, let us pray the prayer that could truly be a summary statement of Catherine's own disposition in life.

"My God, I am yours for time and eternity. Teach me to cast myself entirely into the arms of your loving providence, with the most lively unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity. Grant me, O most merciful redeemer, that whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me. Take from my heart all painful anxiety. Suffer nothing to sadden me but sin; nothing to delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of you, my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom. Amen".⁴⁷ ✠

¹ Letter 174 in MCS2.

² MSC1, p. 102.

³ Letter 304 in MCS2.

⁴ MCS1, p. 167.

⁵ Letter 269 in MCS2.

⁶ Letter 142 in MCS2.

⁷ Letter 110 in MCS2.

⁸ Letter 71 in MCS2.

⁹ Letter 60 in MCS2.

¹⁰ *Familiar Instructions of Rev. Mother McAuley*, The new and revised edition, Vincentian Press, St Louis, 1927, p. 11 (herein referred to as Familiar Instructions).

¹¹ Letter 220 in MCS2.

¹² Letter 283 in MCS2.

¹³ MCS1, p. 112.

¹⁴ Familiar Instructions, p. 135.

¹⁵ Letter 280 in MCS2.

¹⁶ Letter 242 in MCS2.

¹⁷ Letter 219 in MCS2.

¹⁸ Letter 90 in MCS2.

¹⁹ MCS1, p. 120.

²⁰ MCS1, p. 120.

²¹ Letter 68 in MCS2.

²² Letter 150 in MCS2.

²³ Letter 67 in MCS2.

²⁴ Letter 96 in MCS2.

²⁵ Letter 82 in MCS2.

²⁶ Letter 88 in MCS2.

²⁷ M. Vincent Hartnett RSM, *The Life of Rev. Mother Catherine McAuley, Foundress of the Order of Mercy, Sisters of Mercy, Roscommon, Ireland*, John F. Fowler, Dublin, 1863, p. 432 (herein referred to as Hartnett).

- ²⁸ Letter 94 in MCS2.
²⁹ Letter 98 in MCS2.
³⁰ Letter 98 in MCS2.
³¹ Letter 103 in MCS2.
³² Letter 210 in MCS2.
³³ Letter 269 in MCS2.
³⁴ Letter 269 in MCS2.
³⁵ Letter 175 in MCS2.
³⁶ Letter 193 in MCS2.
³⁷ Letter 193 in MCS2.
³⁸ Reference in MCS1, pp. 213-214.

- ³⁹ Letter 173 in MCS2.
⁴⁰ Letter 226 in MCS2.
⁴¹ Letter 228 in MCS2.
⁴² Letter 228 in MCS2.
⁴³ Letter 226 in MCS2.
⁴⁴ Letter 270 in MCS2.
⁴⁵ Joanna Regan, RSM, & Isabelle Keiss RSM, *Tender Courage: A Reflection on the Life and Spirit of Catherine, First Sister of Mercy*, Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1988, p. 91 (herein referred to as Regan).
⁴⁶ Letter 198 in MCS2.
⁴⁷ MCS1, p. 188-189.

To Assist in Your Reflection and Prayer (Support Me All the Day Long)

TAKE some time to be in touch with the 'supports' in your own life. Visualise your life as a tree.

Think of its roots. What gives you nourishment and vitality in your life?

Look at the trunk. What supports and strengthens you in your life?

Be aware of the bark. Who or what protects you, comforts you?

Speak to Catherine about her sources of support – her trust in Providence and her sense of humour. Tell her about the supports in your life and also where and how you feel unsupported.

Imagine yourself resting in the arms of God's providence.

- What thoughts and feelings come to you as you rest in God's arms?
- Allow yourself to be there in quiet surrender.
- Receive what God offers to you.

Reflect on your life and the times when you needed support.

- What have you learned from these times,
- about yourself,
- about God,
- about others?

Read slowly through some Psalms, for example:

- Ps 57:1 (pause to see yourself as one who is sheltered under God's wings);
- Ps 61:3-4 (pause to see yourself safe from the storm of life; sheltered in God's tent);
- Ps 62:1-2 (pause to see yourself hidden behind God, our Rock, protected from harsh winds and violent rains);
- Ps 63:7-8 (pause to see your hand in God's welcoming hand);
- Ps 59:16 (pause to see yourself receiving God's strengthening love day by day).

Write your own psalm or poem of trust in Providence or draw an image (mandala) of God's provident care (you might see yourself held in the arms of God, on the lap of God, in the heart of God or another image).

