

The Life of Catherine Elizabeth McAuley

Daring To Be Different
Foundress of The Sisters of Mercy

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Since 1994 she has been involved as a volunteer in the life of Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street. Being invited to write the story of Catherine which would appeal to young people, has been one of the greatest joys of her life.

Stormonstown House

The Early Years

James and Elinor

Chapter 1

“No delays this evening Larry my good man. Something tells me this just might be the day we’ve all been waiting for”. James McAuley noted the time on his watch that he drew from his inside pocket, smiled kindly at his old friend and faithful driver, then climbed wearily into the family carriage. It had been one of those long, weary, difficult days. There seemed to be no end to the problems of being a respected and much sought after builder in Dublin towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Larry took the reins and with his usual cock whisper, “Take it away my Beauties”, he urged Daisy and Bella the two old mares into a steady trot. Down Fishamble Street then turning right at Murphy’s corner, they made their way along the quay crossing the bridge which spanned the Liffey and headed in the direction of Stormanstown House in the north county Dublin, the home of the McAuley family.

As the carriage trundled its way noisily over the cobbled streets James McAuley settled himself comfortably and prayed a silent prayer that on this day above all other days there wouldn’t be the usual delays in getting home. Elinor, his young and very beautiful, wife was close to giving childbirth to their second child. He wanted to be home for the great event, not that he was sure it would happen on that particular day, any more than with Mary their first child who was born two years previous. She gave three false alarms before finally coming into the world.

James smiled to himself as he pondered his life. How fortunate he was to have met and fallen in love with Elinor the daughter of his good friend and business partner John Conway. Despite a considerable difference in age James and Elinor had a wonderful relationship. They enjoyed many of the same things and they loved each other deeply. Elinor was warm and witty. She was very attractive and dressed in the most fashionable clothes. Above all else she was charming hostess and had a reputation for throwing some of the finest dinner parties in all of Dublin. James was so proud of his young wife who filled his life with joy and laughter and who would soon bring their second child into the world. Would it be a boy or a girl? Neither of them had any preference. Whatever God sent they would be grateful for.

“There we are Mr McAuley, sir almost home”, shouted Larry through the window of the carriage. James McAuley sat up with a jolt. He had dozed off. “that nap did me a power of good,” he muttered to himself as he peered out through the tiny carriage window. Sure enough they were home. He could see his beloved Stormanstown House in the distance surrounded by its magnificent woodlands which were beginning to show the faintest signs of autumn. This was both his and Elinor’s dream house. He had purchased it just before they were married. Set in twenty acres of rich grazing land with magnificent gardens and lots of open space, this was the perfect place to raise a family.

As the carriage turned into the avenue Daisy and Bella whinnied with delight. They knew they were home and it was oats time! James McAuley's heart pounded in his chest. He was anxious, of course, and as was natural for him in moments of fear he again prayed a quiet prayer, "Dear God may all be well inside". The carriage ground to a halt. As he alighted onto the steps of the great house. May Kelly, Larry's wife, who was as broad as she was tall, toddled through the hall door to meet her master. May was in charge of all the household affairs and was as faithful as Larry her husband. "Not a sign of anything yet, Mr McAuley, and her ladyship is in fine form, thanks be to God". May announced at the top of her voice from the hall door. "The doctor has just gone and said we can all sleep in peace tonight. There won't be any child born in this house before sunrise".

The master patted her on the shoulder as he came through the door, and thanked her for her care and concern towards all the family. He was a man who cared about people and appreciated the goodness of men and women like Larry and May Kelly. James McCauley proceeded down the hallway and began to climb the stairs making his way towards the bedroom. He was anxious to see Elinor and throw his arms around her and assure her that he would be around. He had decided that no matter how many more days of waiting there would be he was not going to work until it was over.

As he reached the top steps of the stairs he looked back at Mary who was still standing there, hands on her hips as usual, waiting for instructions about dinner." what date is tomorrow, May?"Ive lost all track of time these days."I'll be September 29th, sir", May replied." and at what time would you be liken' your bit of dinner at? And a bit is just what it is ill have you know after all the poor creatures that came to the kitchen door today. The whole day long I was dipping into the pot. You've heard of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, well this was the miracle of the stew and spuds! But I did what you told me to do. Mr.McAuley, I fed them all and no one went away hungry from the house".

"well done May I know its not easy on you attending to all the households tasks as well as showing kindness to the poor people who come looking for help. But you know how strongly I feel about the terrible poverty around us and how we must share what we have in this house as long as we have it. God has given to me and my family many blessings. Our way of saying thanks is by sharing them." And that you do indeed sir. May God reward you. Now tell me what time would you be liken the bit I saved for you?"

"Given me a half hour and mean time I'd love a long drink of your famous gooseberry juice, if you haven't given it all away to the poor visitors, that is", chuckled James McAuley shaking his finger at May in jest as she wandered away to the kitchen to unearth from its hiding place the "poison potion," as every one called it." How in heavens name can the man drink the stuff? And my Larry loves it too. One day empoisoned and then what'll we all do?" May muttered to this herself as she put the key into the lock and opened the cupboard revealing dozens of jars of her own gooseberry juice.

James McAuley tapped gently on the bedroom door. A tiny voice invited,"come in". He turned the knob and pushed in the door,"Elinor, dearest."James, darling, i'm so happy you're home. It has been a long day and according to the doctor it may be a long night. But we must be patient and wait for god's time. Now come sit with me and tell me about your day in the city. Then we must talk again about names for the baby"

Catherine Elizabeth McAuley

Chapter 2

Day dawned over north county Dublin on this bright but rather chilly morning of September 29th 1778. Stormonstown House was awakened out of its peaceful sleep, not by the cooing of the doves in the wooded areas around the house, nor the neighing of Daisy and Bella in the distant field, but by the loud cry of a newly born baby on the second floor of the great house. Elinor the wife of James had given birth to their second child, a beautiful healthy daughter, Catherine Elizabeth McAuley.

With admiration in his eyes, James smiled at his dear wife as he bent down and lifted baby Catherine out of her crib. She was barely a few hours old but it was as if he had known her forever. He sensed an extraordinary bond. She was absolutely beautiful! He gently placed a kiss on her tiny forehead and closed his eyes and prayed, "Thank you God, thank you. " Opening his eyes he gazed at the bundle of beauty he held in his arms and for a split second he was filled with a realization that an even greater beauty had been born. His eyes filled with tears as he carefully placed Catherine in her mother's arms and sat on the side of the bed.

"Yes, James I know exactly what you are thinking. She is a very special child. We have really been blessed, I want to cry for joy too," whispered Elinor as a tear trickled its way down her cheek. James reached over fondly and wiped away the joyful tear with his little finger. "Don't you drown the little mite now before we introduce her to the world, sure you won't! Oh! I love you so much, James McCauley, you old dote.! They both laughed heartily and kissed each other warmly.

"Is it time to show the baby to her big sister ? " May Kelly stood in the doorway of the bedroom with two year old Mary, in her arms. "Daddy, Daddy, Mammy, Mammy!" Mary wriggled her way free from May and ran to her father. James lifted his first child high in the air and then gently lowered her onto the bed. "Who's that ?", Mary whispered pointing in amazement at the bundle lying in her Mammy's arms. Elinor and James both answered together, "Catherine Elizabeth, your new baby sister."

What a perfectly happy family the McAuley's now were with two beautiful daughters and everything they could possibly want. James was in the fortunate position to have been a successful master carpenter and builder and had gained himself a reputation which made him very wealthy. At this time in Ireland being rich and Catholic was unusual and also quite difficult. Many wealthy Catholics were forced to abandon their faith in order to be accepted in society. Families often found themselves turning to the protestant faith because they were afraid of being laughed at or worse than that for some people, they were afraid of not being invited to the many exciting and lavish parties that were part or the "in thing" in Dublin at the time.

James McAuley did not give into any kind of pressure. He believed that it was right for him to remain in the Catholic Church into which he was baptized. He was determined that by his example his children would do the same. He couldn't be so sure about Elinor though. While she was a very good wife and mother, her Catholic faith wasn't as important to her as it was to James. She loved to party. Being invited to the big social events in Dublin and to be seen mixing in the right circles was to Elinor more important.

Baby Catherine was born at a time of change in Ireland. Many of the Penal Laws, which over the years had caused the poor Catholics great suffering, were

just beginning to disappear slowly. The people took courage and began to ignore many of them. They had nothing much left to lose. They tried to get on with life as best they could. It was very difficult for a lot of people because they were desperately poor and so often hungry. Families were large and those who rented land from landlords found that by the time they paid the rent they had little left.

The Catholic children had no schools to go to and so most of them were unable to read or write. Indeed many knew little about their Catholic faith. Some were fortunate enough to meet with a man like James McAuley who helped them in whatever way he could to understand and appreciate the faith of their ancestors.

This was the Ireland that Catherine was born into and influenced by. She was fortunate not to know the awful misery of being hungry in her early years. Later on in her life she was to experience her own kind of misery, which would have destroyed the life of many a young girl but made Catherine into a most remarkable woman. Who would ever have thought that this little bundle of joy, snuggled up comfortably in her Mammy's arms, would one day light a fire in peoples hearts, a fire that would burn forever not only in Dublin, Ireland but all over the world?

A Special Day

CHAPTER 3

“Make sure everybody has enough to eat. That’s the most important thing of all.” May Kelly scurried along the basement corridor and up the stairs which led to the elegant dinning room. She was carrying two trays of her delicious apple tart, cut into thick generous slices. All food portions in the McAuley house were given in generous quantities, not just for family, but for the faithful workers and the poor who constantly called to the door.

“Over laden as usual May, me ould pet”, Larry joked as they all but collided on the stairs. “Funny man now ain’t ya, Lar Kelly. If you’re not careful it’s wearin’ this you’ll be and not eatin’ it,” May retorted with a twinkle in her eye as she pointed a tray of apple tart in the direction of Larry’s head. He ducked and blew her an affectionate kiss.

“Anyway I thought you and Ned were gone to Queen Street to pick up the new nanny for the children.” “We were, we did and we’re back all in one piece, complete with Molly Murphy. A grand woman she is too. Comes from the tenements at the back of Queen Street. She used to work for that Mrs. St. George, her ladyship’s friend.” May threw the eyes to heaven at the mention of Mrs. St. George as if to say “God preserve us”, and carried on with her trays of appletart.

The dinning room table was filled with a banquet fit for a princess’s birthday. And sure wasn’t it just that indeed! It was baby Catherine’s baptismal day – her new birthday and a cause for great celebration. Little did anyone know what God was preparing for this wee helpless infant as the waters of Baptism were poured on her tiny forehead.

James McAuley realized the importance of this day in the life of his little Catherine. Becoming a child of God had great meaning for him and so he was delighted with the Celebrations. Elinor was thrilled with the glamour of the day. The well off middle class society with whom she mixed were always welcome guests at any celebration in her house.

As she saw it she could never understand her husband’s strange behaviour towards the poor. They were forever around the place. If he wasn’t feeding them he was finding work for them. As for the children, well, he really went a bit too far where they were concerned. Bringing them around to the house not only to feed them but to teach them about God and their religion, was more then she could take at times. But James McAuley would not allow anyone to interfere with what he was doing. He was a Christian man, a follower of Jesus and that was that. Elinor knew she was never going to be a winner on this particular matter. She would usually wind James around he little finger on most things but on this she was wasting her time.

May and her little band of helpers from the neighbourhood who were always ready to roll up their sleeves and give a hand when needed in Stormanstown House did a wonderful job. Of course for days beforehand they were up to their eyeballs in pheasant feathers. At least a dozen of the plumpest birds you ever saw were brought in from Santry demesne, about a quarter of a mile away as the crow flies. These were roasted to a golden brown and served with Mays tasty plum sauce. For those who preferred fish was a fine catch from River Tolka at Glasnevin, brought in the day before by Larry and his young brother Ned. Ned was a great help to Larry around the

bog house. He often drove on the carriage with him and was the only man around who could shoe Daisy and Bella without getting lashed by their long hairy tails.

James McAuley and Ned were good friends. Ned had lost his wife very suddenly. A dreadful fever took her within a few days, leaving him with four young children. They lived on a small parcel of land over in Balcorris which they had rented from a wealthy landlord. Tess, his wife, God rest her, had worked hard for the landlord up in the big house. That paid the rent but of course when poor Tess died they had no way of paying anymore and were evicted.

All land lords were not like James McAuley. Many of them were hard uncaring as the case with poor Ned and his family. When the master Stormonstown heard about this he had Larry Hitch up Daisy Bella to the old cart in the yard and the two of them headed over to Balcorris. Within the hour Ned and four little ones, together with their few belongings were on their way back to Stormanstown.

They moved in with Larry and May who had no children of their own and who were happy to share their home with them until they got on their feet again. And that they did soon enough with the help of James McAuley who had one of the old cottages fixed up for them. Little by little Kelly's cottage was a happy home once more. Catherine and her father became frequent visitors. James McAuley never arrived empty handed. If it wasn't a nice lump of bacon for Ned it was a pocket full of treacle coffee for the little ones. Always before the master and Catherine went home Ned would take down his fiddle from its perch on the kitchen wall.

He was a well known fiddler and there wasn't a wedding or a wake from Finglas to Artane that Ned the Fiddler Kelly, as he was known as, wasn't invited to. This part of the visit was Catherine's delight. Chairs pulled back, table pushed aside as they would all take to the floor and dance 'till they dropped. Thanks to the generosity of James McAuley new life and laughter was brought to Kelly's Cottage.

Ned Kelly could never forget the kindness of a man like that. So when it came to special days up in the big house he was always ready to supply a fine catch from the river or to do whatever jobs needed to be done around the place. What a fine caring man the Master of Stormanstown House was. No wonder people liked him a lot. No wonder so many came to celebrate with him and his dear wife Elinor, the Baptism of their second child Catherine Elizabeth McAuley.

Family Life

Chapter 4

Elinor and James loved their children dearly and enjoyed watching them grow up. When Mary was seven and Catherine was five a third child was born, James William McAuley. Nanny Murphy had her hands full now. Though Elinor loved her children she was quite happy to have Nanny do most of the rearing while she saw to the important household arrangements, especially the dinner parties which she loved to plan. She was an extravagant lady in many ways and spared no expense where entertainment was concerned.

James on the other hand, though a very busy man, spent a great deal of his time with the children. He was not at all a man who enjoyed his wife's dinner parties but because he loved her and understood the great difference in their ages he never stopped her. But he did throw his own parties. They were for special little people/ Sunday mornings were a sight to behold on the lawns of Stormanstown House.

Dozens of barefoot, poorly dressed little waifs would arrive all starving with hunger and longing to be fed.

Baskets of bread and butter smothered in gooseberry jam were always prepared in advance by May Kelly. Then there was a pail of fresh butter milk from the dairy which Catherine, when she was old enough would distribute. It was indeed a sight to see this tiny four year old help her father pour the milk for the wee ones and not spill one drop of it. James McAuley was very proud of his second child. She had a heart that was big, just like his own. She was beautiful, not only to look at, with her blond curls and enormous blue eyes, but there was a real beauty inside this child. Nanny Murphy recognised it too. So often she would remark. "You have a rare beauty indeed." He would smile, nod his head in agreement and whisper. "Born to be great, born to be great."

The baskets of bread and jam devoured, mouths wiped clean of all traces of buttermilk, the satisfied little creatures would then gather around on the lawn with the master of the big house for story time. James McAuley was a wonderful story teller. They would sit, Mary and Catherine in the middle of them, listening to stories about Ireland long ago and how difficult it was for their grandparents and great grandparents to remain Catholic and how important it was for them to be strong even when it would be difficult. But the best stories of all, as far as Catherine was concerned, were the ones he told about Jesus. Although she was very young, she knew that her Daddy was great friends with Jesus. If he wasn't, how come he knew so much about him? Catherine in her own little mind had it all figured out and she too wanted to be great friends with Jesus just like her Daddy.

"If I live to be a hundred I'll never understand my husbands carry on every Sunday morning" Elinor McAuley remarked with annoyance as she gazed out over the scene on the front lawn. "And just look at my Catherine Elizabeth right in the middle of it all. That child is only happy when she's playing with those Urchins or worse still when she's giving away her toys to them. Nanny Murphy was busy tending to baby James while the mistress was letting off all the steam. She made no reply to any of her ladyship's remarks but in her heart she was on Catherine's side.

Elinor McAuley prattled on. “ Only last Saturday she brought those four Kelly children up to her room to show them the rocking horse her father made her. Young Tom wouldn’t get off when he had finished his turn and started to cry. So our Catherine tells him he can take it home. And wait till you hear the best part of the story Nanny. When I tell her father what happened he just smiles and tells me not to worry my pretty little head that he’ll make another one. Now I ask you what would you do with a man like that? Sometimes I think I have four children not three.” You have three children and one very kind man for a husband, me lady. Not too many like him around! I’d be thankin’ God for him if I was you and by the way he should get a cough medicine for that ould cough he has. It seems to be staying along time with him.” Larry glanced at Ned as they watched the master struggle into carriage on a bright June morning some weeks later. They both had the same thoughts but said nothing to each other. James McAuley didn’t look well. “maybe you shouldn’t go to the city today Mr. McAuley sir” Larry said as he leaned over on the door of his carriage. “Me and ned could hop in and see how things are goin` in Mary street. “a few days in bed wouldn’t do ya any harm at all” Ned added, “you’re workin` far too hard lately.” “maybe you lads are right, perhaps it would do me good to take a bit of a rest today. This cough has me kind of worn out.”

Larry, relieved at the masters display of common sense pulled open the carriage door and helped his good friend back on to the steps of the big house. Little did either he or Ned know that it would be their last time standing with the master on the steps of beautiful stormonstown house.

James McAuley was seriously ill, never to recover. He died some months later towards the end of July 1783 at the age of sixty leaving behind a heart broken Elinor, still a very young woman, Mary who was seven, Catherine just five and baby James William only three months old.

Life without James McAuley

Chapter 5

James McAuley's death was a huge shock to all who knew him and a great loss to many people who respected and loved him. While it was widely known that his health was failing for some months nobody wanted to believe that he was going to die, least of all Elinor who was completely shattered by his passing away.

If ever a Dublin man had a grand funeral James McAuley master of Stormanstown House had. Hundreds of mourners lined the road to say a last farewell to this kind, decent man who had helped to make life a lot easier for many of the poor. Men lifted their tattered hats out of respect for their friend as his body was carried to its final resting place, while women and little children wept openly. They too had lost a great friend. Who would they turn to now when food was scarce? And what about the wonderful stories on the lawn on Sundays? Was all of this now at the end?

Unfortunately this was to be so. Elinor completely broken by her husband's death had no thoughts other than her own grief and that of her children. James William of course was too young to know anything of what was going on but the girls were aware. Although both very young they were old enough to know that their daddy was not coming back and that mammy was terribly upset. Nothing seemed to console her. May Kelly and nanny did their best to keep the house together.

Mary was the only one who seemed to be able to bring any kind of a smile to her mammy's face. They had a good relationship of course. Catherine's little heart was breaking. She missed her daddy so much and bed time was the worst of all. No more kisses and cuddles before being tucked in bed but worst of all no more wonderful stories about Jesus. And what about the Sunday morning parties for all her little friends on the lawn? Catherine knew that her mammy wouldn't be having any of those and she was sad, very sad indeed.

'Elinor you've been moping around for months now. You must pull yourself together for the sake of the children at least. They need their mother.' Owen Conway, one of Dublin's best known doctors sat forward in his armchair and poked at the smouldering blocks of wood. He glanced over at his sister wondering if she was listening at all. 'I know Owen, you're right; I can't go on like this. Everything is getting out of hand. I'm simply not able to manage a house of this size on my own. I miss James desperately, he took care of everything.'

'Would you consider selling here and moving to a smaller house closer to the city?' her brother asked. 'It did cross my mind lots of times and we would be nearer to you too, Owen,' Elinor replied. 'I know Catherine would be happy being closer to your little Ann. They're great friends and so alike in lots of ways'.

Elinor McAuley took her brother's advice and indeed the advice of many of her protestant friends who lived closer to the city. Her distant relatives, the Armstrongs, who lived in Mary Street were also happy with her decision to move. They were very fond of the children and interested in their welfare. They too were Protestants of course.

Some months later Stormanstown House and much of its contents were sold. While it was difficult for all of them to leave the big house and those in it they loved, it was most difficult for Catherine. She was the apple of her Daddy's eye and so many things there reminded her of him. But James McAuley's spirit was alive in his

daughter, young as she was. She would bring him with her wherever she went the rest of her life.

‘God save all, your ladyship.’ Ned Kelly and his young son Tom pulled their cart alongside the carriage just as Larry was about to send Daisy and Bella on their last official journey to Glasnevin, where Elinor McAuley had purchased their new family home. ‘Young Tom has somethin’ for ya Miss Catherine.’ Ned announced as he pointed to Tom who was sitting in the back of the cart holding on to a rather large object covered with an old bit of a sack. Catherine’s little hand appeared through the carriage window just in time to see Tom reveal what was hidden. ‘You can have it back cause your Daddy didn’t have time to make you another one before Jesus brought him to heaven,’ Tom said, as Catherine gazed in absolute amazement at her now well battered rocking horse.

If Catherine McAuley left Stormanstown House with a pain in her heart she also left with a broad smile on her face revealing the joy she felt at that moment. Her Daddy’s rocking horse was going with her to Glasnevin!

INTERVENING YEARS

Queen Street Chapter 6

In 1787 three years after moving to Glasnevin the McAuleys moved to Queen Street right in the heart of Dublin. Mrs St. George, a very old protestant friend persuaded Elinor that it would be much more convenient for her and the children to live closer to the city. Being the kind of person who was easily led, she took the advice and bought a lease on part of Mrs St. George's property at No. 52 which was to be their home for the next twelve years.

By this time Elinor had become used to life without James, and with the help of her many friends and relatives she began to make her way back into the social circle of Dublin's middle class city life. While she was busy enjoying life she did not neglect the education of her children. She realised the importance of a proper tuition. Their religious education was less important to her. She was very much influenced by her protestant friends who constantly pressed her to forget her catholic roots and adopt their faith. But Elinor wasn't really bothered too much about any faith. Her life style didn't leave her much time to practise anything. She was a most extravagant woman, and spent money like there was no end to it and of course there was. Her fortune began to dwindle bit by bit but Elinor gave no thought to the future.

Mary was growing up to be a lot like her mother in every way, fun loving and also extravagant. She adored getting dressed up for parties and enjoyed all the fine young men who came calling on her. As the years rolled on Catherine and herself grew close. They shared many things in common but Mary failed to understand Catherine's passion for the poor. When she and her mother would set off on shopping expeditions to keep up with the latest Paris fashions, Catherine would set out usually with her cousin Ann Conway, on her own expedition to visit her beloved poor. So like her father, she was amiable and kind. The two would take whatever food they could carry and not a bit was ever brought home. Not only did they bring food to the poor but they also brought comfort by their presence.

During the years living in Queen Street despite no encouragement from her mother and plenty of opposition from the protestant friends, Catherine received the gift of the Spirit in Confirmation in St. Paul's Arran Quay. God was busy in Catherine's life. Seeds of courage were planted and she was allowing them to grow. God was daring her to be different and she was being just that. During this time too she received her First Holy Communion. She met Jesus in a special way and now she would get to know him just like her daddy did.

The latest fashion in clothes was far from the most important thing in Catherine's life but sometimes just to keep Mary and her dear mother happy she would wear something beautiful and accompany them to whatever occasion it might be. Heads would turn at the sight of the McAuley girls, Mary so elegant and Catherine always dignified, James was very proud of his sisters. He loved to introduce them to his friends. "May I present my older sister Mary and my younger sister Catherine or if you like "Kitty". And by the way she's the best dancer in Dublin!" That was the truth. If the occasion was a ball, Kitty was never off the floor!

On September 28th 1798 Catherine was 20 years old. Elinor was not her usual self on that day. It was obvious she had been loosing weight and she also had a very nasty cough. "Mammy are you not feeling well?" Catherine inquired. "No darling I'm afraid I feel awful.! Within three weeks Elinor McAuley's health deteriorated rapidly. Not only did she suffer the dreaded disease of lungs and chest but her mind was in turmoil. She had neglected her faith, the faith of her children was deeply troubled. Catherine suffered for her mother and this had a lasting effect on her. It pained her to see her so disturbed. On October 21st Elinor died. It had been a difficult struggle and Catherine carried with her for the rest of her life a terrible fear of dying.

From Home To Home

Chapter 7

Despite James McAuley leaving his family comfortably well off, by the time Elinor died the children had little left except for some small investment in the Apothecaries Hall in Mary Street. William Armstrong, a distant relative of Elinor was the Director of the Hall and he and his wife offered a home to the McAuley children. Catherine's Heart was breaking .She was faced with a big decision.

Her uncle, Owen Conway had invited her to live with him in East Arran Street. If she accepted his invitation she would be separated from Mary and James, but she would be living in a Catholic Atmosphere which would be a wonderful gift for her. Should she live with the Armstrong's there would be great tension. Religion was bound to be the big discussion, as always was the case, around the dinner table and Catherine realised she would not be able to defend what she believed in. The background Knowledge of her faith was poor, but she had what was most important of all and it was deep in her heart. Jesus was alive in there and over the years she got to know him as a real friend. He would give her the courage to be daring when she needed it.

This was probably one of the most difficult decisions of her life but she listened to her heart, trusted her friend Jesus and accepted her Uncle Owens's offer while Mary and James went to the Armstrong's which was only one stones throw away. Ann Conway was thrilled to have her cousin Catherine. They were great pals and had a lot in common. Ann shared Catherine's love for the sick and the poor. As in the past, (but of course they were a lot older now), they would walk the streets of Dublin seeking out the hungry little children to feed them with whatever food they had.

Clothing was a big problem too. Many of the little ones had often very little to wear and of course not one of them had a shoe. But Catherine and Ann and some of their friends had plans to change all that. Many an old pair of curtains, once hanging on the "well to do" windows of Queen Street, Mary Street and other streets now hung on the backs of many a wee child in the neighbourhood. Catherine begged and borrowed of her well off friends and neighbours. Ann, her friend, sat up into the early hours of the mornings converting drapes into dresses until their eyes popped out of their heads. They worked hard but loved every minute of it. It was a real gift to be able to help in some small way these darling little ones who had so few of life's necessities.

Catherine adored her new home. While she grieved for her mother and missed the company of Mary and James, who were both happy in their new home she was very content. She had a freedom that she hadn't known before. She would attend Mass in nearby St. Paul's Arran Quay or up in St Mary's in Liffey Street, without the fear of being teased and ridiculed. Ann introduced her at this time to Fr. Betagh, a holy and wonderful old priest. They became great friends and talked a lot, as all friends do. He helped Catherine to understand more fully her Catholic faith which was a huge help to her in the months and years to follow.

"How can I tell her, Daddy?" Ann said to her father as he put his arm gently around his daughter Ann and drew her close. "I'm so sorry darling, I just don't know how it all happened. We have no money left. We can hardly keep the roof over our heads".

Catherine who was about to come through the door had heard the conversation. "Uncle Owen are you bankrupt?" Catherine inquired softly. Ann ran to her cousin and dear friend. They both held each other tightly. "I'm afraid so my dear but don't worry we'll manage somehow".

They didn't manage. There was barely a crust of bread to eat at times. Circumstances became so desperate that Catherine soon was herself sleeping on the floor. The winter of 1800 was bitter. There was nothing to heat the house with, no money to buy wood or turf and no hope of things improving. Catherine must again make a decision. If she went to live with the Armstrongs it would ease the burden in the Conway house. One less mouth to feed, one less worry for them.

Again her heart was breaking, but she knew that God was once more with her. This time Jesus was filling her with an even greater love for the poor. Now she really knew what it was like to be hungry and to go to bed cold. "Please don't cry Ann, we're only around the corner from each other" Catherine smiled, always with such warmth in her big blue eyes. "And I feel so much more confident now thanks to you and Fr. Betagh." "The Armstrongs won't know what hit them," Ann chuckled between tears. "Well they are certainly going to see a different me.

I'm not the Catherine McAuley who was. I'm the Catherine McAuley who is bolder and stronger." "You're daring friend to be different, dear friend, that's what you are," Ann whispered as she walked Catherine to the horse drawn carriage which had arrived to take her to yet another new home.

The Callaghans

Chapter 8

“Since our friends the Callaghans arrived home from India Mrs. Callaghan hasn’t been feeling too well. The old climate didn’t agree with her at all,” William Armstrong announced as he crossed his legs and settled himself on the chaise longue. Rosie, the brown and white lively spaniel puppy, curled up behind her master’s legs. “That dog gets more attention than any of the rest of us in this house,” Mrs Armstrong joked as her husband pulled Rosie over onto his lap. “Hush woman and wait, your turn will come next”, William Armstrong retorted with a wide grin on his handsome face. “I’m so looking forward to meeting these people,” remarked Catherine looking up from her book. “You won’t have long to wait,” Mrs Armstrong replied. “I’ve invited them to dinner on Friday evening.”

William and Catherine Callaghan arrived perfectly on time. Of course they only lived up the street, within walking distance. They were a delightful couple, she a quaker and William a protestant, as were all the Armstrong friends and dinner guests. Mary was excited about the dinner party for two reasons. Firstly it was an opportunity to get all dolled up in the newest edition to her wardrobe and secondly, her latest boyfriend Willy was invited.

William McCauley was a student doctor at the Apothecaries Hall and the Armstrongs approved of the romance. Mary couldn’t wait to show off to everyone, especially to Catherine, who in time grew very fond of him, as did James. Of course they weren’t to realise at this point that he was to be their future brother-in-law.

“And how about you, Catherine,” William Callaghan smiled down the table. “Any eligible young men in your life at the moment?” Catherine was about to answer but James jumped in before her. “our Kitty has had so many lads take her out walking and to more balls than any other girl this side of the Liffey - all of them very eligible and with plenty of prospects. She’ll walk with them, dance with them, but as for getting serious about any of them, well, they haven’t a hope!”

“Brother James thinks of nothing else these days only getting me married off to to some of his wild, wealthy, friends,” Catherine responded as she gave James a friendly kick under the table. “Ouch Kitty, that hurt.” “And so it should, it was meant to,” Catherine laughed heartily. “To answer your question, Mr. Callaghan, now that I have put my baby brother in his place, no, there is no particular young man in my life right now.” Catherine nodded up the table at the gentle elderly man and they both laughed.

Having met Catherine for the first time both Callaghans were impressed by her charming personality. As the months passed and Catherine became a regular visitor to the Callaghan house on Mary Street, they grew extremely fond of her and invited her to come to live with them. Catherine welcomed their invitation.

They had no children of their own and were now getting on in their years. Catherine brought laughter and new life into the home of the elderly Callaghan couple. She displayed such wonderful qualities that they were thrilled to have invited her to share their home and their vast wealth. While they too disapproved of her strong determination to remain Catholic, they very much approved of her work among the poor and were extremely generous in their contributions. Catherine, her cousin Ann and their little band of helpers were able to continue helping the needy.

The city of Dublin was not the safest place to live at this particular time. The Rebellion of 1798 and all that followed had left its mark. Law and order in many

cases had broken down and it was often not safe for the well off middle class to walk the streets. William Callaghan was fearful for his family and so he bought a house in the country about six miles from the city.

“Kitty dear, don’t worry about leaving your poor friends. You can have the carriage any time you wish and come to visit them.” William Callaghan understood what was in Catherine’s heart. “Thank you, Mr Callaghan, you are the most generous and caring. I love the thought of going back to the country but I couldn’t bear the thought of leaving my beloved, poor friends.” It will all work out dearest daughter, don’t worry,” William Callaghan put his arms around Catherine’s shoulders reassuringly and hugged her.

COOLOCK HOUSE

Coolock Chapter 9

“Coolock House” was magnificent. The Callaghan’s had chosen wisely. Stately oak trees lined the avenue leading to the mansion which was set in twenty acres of woodlands and gardens with a gate lodge at the entrance. It reminded Catherine of Stormanstown House so long ago. They all adapted to country life very quickly. In no time at all Catherine became acquainted with the young Fr. Nugent, parish priest of Coolock, who introduced her to the poverty that surrounded them.

If Catherine thought that her dear friends in Dublin were poor, she discovered that here in Coolock things were even worse. Fr. Nugent shared her passion for the poor so they became good friends. He saw in Catherine an extraordinary gift and knew that God was saying hi calling her to something special. He introduced her to two priest friends, Fr. Armstrong and Fr. Blake, who were later to become her very dear friends and advisors.

Catherine and Fr. Nugent became familiar faces in the back lanes and streets of Coolock Village visiting the sick and dying and bringing food as well as words of kindness to the hungry. Catherine was in the fortunate position to have been given the support of the Callaghan’s in her work of mercy. They were more than generous and gave her the freedom to share their good fortune with the needy. Besides helping so many people in the village Catherine took a great interest in the servant girls, not only in her own house but in the numerous grand houses around the area and surrounding neighbourhood. Many young girls were treated badly by their masters, who often took advantage and Catherine’s heart was filled with pity for them. In her heart she hoped that one day she might have the money to buy a little house where she could give shelter to young girls like these.

The gate lodge in time became a hive of activity too. The children, ragged and dirty, flocked here not only to be clothed and fed but to learn. Catherine, so like her father before her, had an amazing influence on these little ones. She told them stories about Jesus and talked to them about their Catholic faith beneath the tree in the garden. She taught them her favourite prayers. “Jesus have mercy on us”, Jesus help us”. These little ones began to realise that Jesus was their friend and that he was with them just as He was with the people in the stories.

Despite the huge amount of work to be done among the people in Coolock, Catherine continued her visiting of the poor sick in Dublin. Sometimes she barely got a few hours sleep at night but she seemed to carry on. She had a strength which could only come with Jesus and it seemed to grow stronger each day.

Despite having no religious objects in the house, because the Callaghans preferred it that way, Catherine could find many objects around which spoke to her of God’s love. The cross beams on the doors and in her bedroom window reminded her

of Jesus on the cross. Sitting in the shade of the oak tree in the front lawn listening to the song of the birds filled her with the reminder of how good and great God was. Her greatest joy of all, of course, was her freedom to attend Mass in the little parish church. William and Catherine Callaghan didn't approve but they did not stand in her way.

As time went on Mrs. Callaghan's health failed. She was no longer able to run the affairs of the house as efficiently as before and so Catherine took on much more of the responsibilities, as well as spending a great deal more time with the dear elderly lady. They became wonderful companions and very close friends. Catherine's responsibilities now included hosting the frequent dinner parties which were always a great success. Elinor McAuley had taught her daughter how to entertain with charm and Catherine did just that. The Callaghans were so proud of her and confident that the guests would always feel welcome.

Among the guests to dinner in Coolock House quite often was James McAuley, Catherine's young brother who had become a doctor and of course Mary her sister who eventually married Willy, now a famous surgeon in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. Both Mary and James had long abandoned their Catholic Faith which caused Catherine great sadness. Cousin Ann Conway, now Ann Byrne, happily married with a young family, was also among the guests.

While Catherine enjoyed entertaining the many visitors to the house, her heart was always below stairs with the servants and the young women who often sought refuge. A familiar caller over the years was Ned, the fiddler Kelly. Often Ned would pop in on his way home from a wake or funeral and he and "Miss Catherine" as he always called her, would enjoy a good cup of tea together and have a long chat about the old days.

James McAuley was still remembered the length and breath of Dublin. Of course May and Larry were long dead. The fever took both of them. Catherine always liked to catch up on the family news. All Ned's children were grown up. Even young Tom had married and was a proud father of four. Ned never went home without playing "an ould bar of a tune," as he called it himself, for everyone below stairs. Chairs and tables pushed aside, skirts lifted above the ankles, including Catherine's, the dance would begin. It was Kelly's kitchen all over again, twenty years later.

Catherine McAuley Heiress

Chapter 10

After many years of suffering Mrs. Callaghan died having become a catholic on her death bed. Her husband knew nothing of this until a few years later when he was baptized into the Catholic Faith before he died. William Callaghan's death left a great gap in many people's lives. Catherine was heart brokem. Once again she had to go through the pain of losing both parents. She loved and cared for these wonderful people right to the end. For twenty years she had lived in Coolock House bringing much more then joy and laughter into the lives of Catherine and William Callaghan. She brought whatever it was that caused them to become Catholic.

They saw in Catherine a beautiful young women who dared to be different despite a lot of opposition. It was not surprising that when William Callaghan's will was read it was discovered he had left almost his entire fortune, including the magnificent Coolock House and contents to his beloved Kitty McAuley. Catherine was astonished by this gesture of generosity. Of course others were astonished too and many began to wonder what she might do with her huge fortune.

I think you should be very careful now, Kitty. I know plenty of eligible young men who would be only delighted to have a chance to propose marriage to a good looking, wealthy woman like yourself." James McAuley yawned, stretched himself lazily in the armchair and winked Gleeefully at his older sister Mary, who was busy tending to William the youngest of her five children. "Oh do be serious James for just once in your life," Mary replied as she turned towards Catherine who was busy leafing through some papers on the dining room table. "Kitty dear, things will surely change for you now. After all you're the mistress of Coolock House and a wealthy mistress at that. Isn't it time to start thinking about yourself and your future?" Catherine looked up from her papers and smiled at her sister. "Yes Mary, I really am the mistress of this fine house." "Then shouldn't you be taking your proper place in society? Haven't you spent enough enough time looking after the needs of the poor, not to mention the homeless? This house is beginning to look and sound more like an orphanage every day. Whatever are you going to do with those two little ones you took in last month, Mary Ann Kirwin and Ellen Corrigan? Sure you can't keep them forever. Especially now since cousin Ann died and your caring for Catherine and baby Teresa. You'll soon have every orphan from Coolock to Clontarf arriving on your doorstep."

Mary looked in the direction of brother James hoping he might give her some support but as usual he had nodded off and hadn't heard a word of the conversation. James always felt very much at home in Coolock House as did Frances his lovely wife. The children adored their Aunty Kitty and never missed an opportunity to visit. There was always something exciting happening in Coolock, always plenty of children around to play with. Aunt Kitty was forever having little visitors staying over like Mary Ann and Ellen. And then of course there was the old lady who really caused a stir when Aunt Kitty arrived from Liffey Street one snowy afternoon complete with the dirtiest poor creature you could imagine. Mrs Harper had been living in dreadful conditions when Catherine found her. She put her into the carriage and brought her home to Coolock House. What a job it was to clean the poor lady up. She hadn't seen soap and water for about fifty years, but Catherine treated her like a queen. The biggest excitement of all for the children were the pet mice the poor old lady had hidden away in her pocket and which escaped when the old dear's apron was taken

almost by force from around her tiny little waist. They were probably the only creature company she had experienced in a very long time.

Mrs. Harper was not the easiest person to love. She could be quite unkind and indeed abusive towards those who were good to her and poor Catherine was her favourite target. But being the understanding person that she was, Catherine put up with the abuse because she could see the sufferings of Jesus on the cross in this sick old lady. Of course, everyone thought that Catherine was out of her mind to tolerate the woman and weren't slow to tell her. The biggest voice of all being Mary's. But Catherine's heart was rich in love and mercy and nothing could change that.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR

Chapter 11

William Callaghan's death left Catherine with greater freedom in many ways. She now had more time to spend on her many works of mercy. She continued to involve herself in the lives of the poor and the sick in Liffey Street and Mary Street. Her friend, Fr. Nugent, had moved to this part of the city and was doing wonderful work among the people.

He had opened up a school for poor girls in Abbey Street and Catherine took a great interest in it. She travelled in every day and spent many long hours teaching the young girls how to sew and make all kinds of fancy garments suitable for the wealthy ladies who lived in the area, many of them friends of Catherine.

They opened up a little shop next door where all the work produced went on display and was sold for a good price. Catherine believed that the girls should be given a sense of how important their work was. She realised how necessary it was to teach them to be independent and to make them use the gifts God had given them.

Catherine McAuley was an heiress with a difference. Most women in her position would have taken their fortune and travelled the world. She had no thought for herself. Her only thoughts were for others. This was the secret for her great joy. She was happy when she was giving, when she was making life easier for the hungry, gently comforting the sick and teaching the un-educated young girls who came to her. She was content when she was roaming the back streets and laneways of Dublin searching for the many who were often ashamed of being so poor and who had lost all dignity.

Catherine had some wonderful friends both Catholic and Protestant who didn't quite understand what she was about but who were very influenced by her strong charming personality. She had a way of melting people's hearts and there was always that twinkle in her eye. Catherine had been giving a lot of thought to what she might do with her fortune. She had in her mind a dream house, a plan for a House of Mercy that only herself and God knew about. But God had a plan too, that only God knew about.

HOUSE OF MERCY

The best that money could buy Chapter 12

As the months passed Catherine became more excited about plans for spending her fortune. she confided in her friend Fr. Nugent who suggested she seek advice from his trusted friends, Fr Armstrong and Fr Blake. These priests knew Catherine to be an amazing woman and had watched her roam the alleyways of the city for many years. They took her very seriously when she told them what she had planned to do.

Her plan was to build a house, a fine house in a good location, where she could have a school for young girls and children. There they would secure a solid religious education. They would learn how to read and write, how to cook and sew and many other things that other girls should know.

She realised there were girls who were homeless and needed a place to shelter. She would provide them with a place to stay and then of course the sick- so many dying in dreadful conditions with little or no comfort. She must do something for them. Catherine wanted the best that her fortune could buy. She didn't want her friends going to schools in the backlanes of Dublin city, nor did she want them hiding away in the alleys in second rate accommodation. No, she wanted the best for the best so she asked Fr. Armstrong and Fr. Blake to find a suitable site. They got working on it immediately. They knew Catherine was anxious to get things started and in no time they had found a site on the corner of Herbert Street and Baggot Street right in the heart of an exclusive residential area. The rich and the poor would be living side by side. Catherine was very pleased with the location and with the builders chosen to erect the building. She told them exactly what she wanted to build. There would be lots of classroom space with plenty of windows to let in the light, large dormitories for homeless and those who seek shelter and then some rooms for the ladies who would be willing to help with the works of Mercy. If all this wonderful work was to succeed a lot of prayer was needed, so a chapel was included in the plan. God was in charge of this important work. In July 1824 the builders moved in on the site. A House of Mercy was no longer a dream. Catherine could hardly believe it was happening. Neither could many of her friends and relatives who were rather puzzled by the whole appearance of the building as it began to take shape. "I'm afraid to even think about this," James McAuley half whispered to his sister, Mary, as they strolled in the grounds of Royal Hospital Kilmainham on a sunny September afternoon. "This building in Baggot Street is beginning to look more like one of those dreadful convents every day. It's Kitty's folly as far as I'm concerned." Mary glanced behind to make sure Kitty was not within ear shot. They were safe enough. Kitty was in deep conversation with William her brother and Frances her sister in law.

Do you think she might be thinking of turning it into some kind of nunnery? She has enough young ladies around her to fill at least two convents." Don't be crazy James, Kitty isn't that silly. Her life is centred on visiting the sick and seeking out the poor. If she turned it into a convent they would have to stay inside and that would have to stay inside and that would put an end to that.

So I wouldn't worry too much James." I hope you're right "but what about the ladies?"

"Well if it's the convent life they're interested in they'll join up with Miss Aikenhead's followers or head off to Rathfarnham to join those nice English ladies who arrived a couple of years ago". Mary seemed certain that Kitty had no intentions that way, so James was somewhat relieved. "Here come the chatterboxes." Mary held out her hand to husband William who patted it gently and enquired how she was feeling. "The fresh air has done me good, thank you dear" Mary had not been feeling well lately and everyone worried secretly.

James and Frances had gone on ahead to the McAuley residence where the family was gathering to celebrate Aunt Kitty's birthday. Catherine was at the end of the avenue surrounded by the younger folk, the nieces, nephews and of course Catherine and Teresa Byrne. Mary Ann and Ellen were also considered part of the family at this point. "All we need now is Mrs. Harper to complete the family picture!" Aunt Kitty joked as they all screamed in sheer terror at the thought of it. "Let's catch up with the rest of the family and get the party started. It's ages since we all had a 'hooley' together and my feet are just itching to dance."

"That's the spirit, Aunt Kitty. Your body might be almost half a century but you have the heart of a four year old!" Mary McAuley, Catherine's fourteen year old niece, who sounded like a sixty four year old, linked arms with her aunt and friend. They strolled happily together towards the house, followed at a distance by the rest of the clan who were making sure they'd be heard as far away as Baggot Street.

Convinced of God's Call

Chapter 13

The house of Mercy was well on the way to being completed. It was decision time again for Catherine. No longer was it sensible for her to hold on to beautiful Coolock House. Apart from needing the money which the sale of the house would bring in, she was spending a great deal of time in Kilmainham with Mary and her family. Mary in a very short time had become seriously ill and was not going to recover. Catherine nursed her with love and concern and saw to the welfare of the children as well.

Besides all of that Catherine travelled to Baggot Street almost every day to see that everything was going smoothly. Meantime Coolock House was put on the market and she trusted God to get her a good price. With so many poor hungry people to help and feed as well as the huge cost of building the House of Mercy, Catherine needed all the money she could get. Those who knew her never ceased to be amazed that she would actually give away her whole fortune. Some people who were supposed to be her friends considered her crazy and were very harsh to her. She was very humar and this made her sad. However Catherine was still convinced this was what God was calling her to do. She would continue as long as the funds lasted and she had the energy.

In August, 1827, Mary McAuley died. While Catherine's heart was breaking and she knew life without Mary would not be the same their was a joy deep down. On her death bead Mary had made her peace with God and returned to the Catholic faith. Catherine took on the role of a mother to the five children and continued to spend a great deal of time in Kilmainham. William, Mary's husband was completely shattered and just didn't seem to be able to cope. He depended a lot on Catherine.

On 24th September of that same year, the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, the House of Mercy was completed and opened wide its doors. Catherine McAuley dream was no longer a dream. A Catholic school was now standing in a fashionable Dublin Street, a shelter for homeless girls was now available and little orphan children at last would have a place to call home.

Many young women continued to offer themselves as helpers in the works of mercy. Some were willing to live in Baggot Street on a permanent basis, others came daily. Anna Marie Doyle, a beautiful young Dublin girl was the first to move into the house along with Catherine Byrne. They were Catherine's right hand helpers and kept things running smoothly until finally Catherine herself was able to move in altogether. Soon they were joined by Frances Warde and sometime later by another young girl called Ann O'Grady. Catherine was so pleased that these lovely young women shared her dream and were daring like she was in many ways.

Part of the dream for the House of Mercy was that it would be a happy home. Catherine hoped that there would be a lot of joy in the house, that the young women who joined her in the great work would feel at home and be free to go when they felt it was time. She understood how difficult it might be for people to commit themselves for a long time. Above all else the House of Mercy was to be a place where God would be at the centre of everything. Certain times every day were set aside, when the Sisters, as the ladies began to call themselves, would gather as a family to pray. This too was Catherine's dream coming true. As in all happy families there was time for

fun s it wasn't long before everyone realized how much Catherine loved to dance in the evening time when the day's work was done.

A Dream Come True

Chapter 14

In June 1828 Catherine finally moved into the House of Mercy. While she was very happy that her dream had become more real and she knew that God was with her in everything, there were times when she was sad and extremely lonely. Many of her dear friends who had loved and supported her were dead. Fr. Nugent, her friend from way back caught the fever and died. Fr. Armstrong, her trusted adviser, had also passed away, then her dear sister Mary. Now William, Mary's husband was seriously ill. Catherine was to say some years later that "the tomb was never closed" and that was so true. But she had an amazing trust in God and that dared her to go on. The parting words from her dear friend, Fr. Armstrong, lingered in her heart and she was never to forget them. "Do not put your trust in any human being, but put all your confidence in God".

Though Catherine had moved into Baggot Street she still spent quite an amount of time in Kilmainham, especially when it was realised that William was not in great health. She would often take the children, especially the younger ones to spend the day in the House of Mercy. Robert was sensible enough, but young Willie was a handful. Aunt Kitty was usually a nervous wreck by the end of the day when he was around.

"Robert McAuley, where has that young brother of yours disappeared to this time?" Aunt Kitty scurried around the kitchen in Kilmainham looking for young Willie. "There you are, you little rascal. If you want to come with me today, get yourself out from under that table right now and into the carriage I have an early meeting with Mr. O'Connell and I can't keep such a busy man waiting." Daniel O'Connell had become a trusted friend and supporter of the House of Mercy and Catherine valued his friendship. 'I remember him at the Christmas party,' Willie piped up as he made his way out from the table. 'He brought us all loads of sweets and told us ghost stories. Do you think he might have any sweets with him today?' Robert enquired licking his lips at the mere thought of those gigantic slabs of sticky toffee they had on that day. 'Right boys, that's it. If your not in the carriage by the count of twenty I'm gone without you.' Aunt Kitty had that certain tone in her voice which meant business. The pair were gone in a flash.

'Good morning, Richard,' Catherine addressed the coachman in her usual gracious manner and stepped into the carriage to be greeted not by Robert and Willie but by their two pet goats, Venus and Diana. 'Ah no boys! Not today above all days, Please!!' Catherine chuckled to herself. She loved the pair of kids, but this was not the day to take them for a drive. She stuck her head out the window of the carriage and called. 'Boys, where are you?' Robert appeared followed by Willie beaming all over. 'Please, Aunt Kitty?' 'No, absolutely no. Now get in here if you're coming with me. Richard please could you take the pets back to their pen and let's make a move.' 'I bet Mr. O'Connell loves goats,' Robert chirped as he and his brother climbed into the carriage. 'I'm sure he does,' Aunt Kitty replied, 'but he'll see no wild goats roaming the House of Mercy today. Bad enough having Rowdy Robert and Wild Willie running loose.' Robert nodded his head in agreement but Willie true to form made a face behind his aunt's back. Aunt Kitty of course knew what the little scallywag was up to and pretended not to notice. She was rather lenient with poor Willie. He was the youngest and had lost his mammy. It could not have been easy for him.

William McAuley died quite suddenly in the end. This was tragic. Five children between seventeen and seven now orphaned. Catherine took on the responsibility of caring for them because that was what the children wanted. Their father in his will had given them the choice of living with Uncle James or Aunt Kitty. Catherine took the two girls to live in Baggot Street and arranged a governess for them. The boys were sent to boarding school in Carlow. Willie objected strongly he didn't want to go without Venus and Diana but Aunt Kitty eventually persuaded him that boarding school was not the place for kid goats.

There was always sadness somewhere around and yet Catherine trusted in God despite everything. There was great joy too. So many little ones were now happy. They had a nice school to go to and there was food to eat. Many girls had a home where they felt safe and secure and now Catherine had permission to visit the hospitals in Dublin. She and her young ladies were free to bring God's love by their presence to the countless dying souls who were all alone with no one to comfort them in their last hours.

Georgina Moore, the young governess to the girls, tapped gently on Catherine's door. "Come in." "I know you're busy, Sister dear, but there is a visitor to see you and I think you had better come." "Who is it, Georgina?" "It's Archbishop Murray himself." Catherine stood up slowly, took a very deep breath and prayed to Jesus, her friend. "Dear Jesus Strengthen Me." To have the Archbishop call without making an appointment was to say the least unusual.

Catherine Faces Decision

Chapter 15

“Miss McAuley how nice to see you again.” Archbishop Murray stood up from his chair as Catherine came through the parlour door. “This is a most unexpected visit so soon after you being here for the dedication of the chapel, Your Grace.” Catherine smiled her usual warm smile at the Archbishop as he indicated to her to sit down. She liked this man a lot.

He was kind and he supported the work at the House of Mercy. Head given permission for the chapel to be used for public celebration of Mass and any money collected to be given to the works of mercy.

“I see you have acquired some new pieces of furniture since I was last here”, Archbishop Murray re-marked as he threw his eye around his small parlour. “Your Grace doesn’t miss much” Catherine thought to herself as she proceeded to explain that the furniture had come from Coolock House before it was sold.” I didn’t keep very much really, just a few pieces I thought would be useful. The more we could sell the better for the House of Mercy. Each day the demands are greater, more hungry families to feed, more homeless on the streets of Dublin and of course there are more associates joining every week, and so it all takes money.”

“I understand the difficult task you have undertaken, Miss McAuley and the Church is deeply grateful to you and your wonderful associates for listening to the cry of the poor in the city but I’m puzzled by the way the whole project emerged.” “I don’t quite understand what you mean, Your Grace,” Catherine was puzzled too. The Archbishop proceeded to explain. “Well that’s the reason for this visit to you today. People are talking and wondering about the whole development of the House of Mercy.” “Who would be wondering, You’re Grace?” Catherine enquired in her usual gentle manner. “Some people within the Church and other supporters of Miss Aikenheads Sisters of Charity. They feel rivalry growing between both your efforts.” “Well there is no need for any concern. What we are about is simply Gods Spirit giving her the courage she needed.

We are just an ordinary group of women, each of us different, some young, some not so young, who have two things in common. We love God and we are deeply concerned about the poor, the sick and those who are uneducated.”

Archbishop Murray smiled and nodded his head in agreement. “Yes indeed Miss McCauley that is very evident but can’t you see what is happening? You have actually founded a convent without knowing it.

You ladies live like a community of nuns sharing what you have with each other. You come together for daily mass and gather to pray many times in the day. I have noticed recently how simply you all dress and now you have begun to call one another Sister. Miss McCauley, something is happening here!”

Catherine’s heart was racing. For a brief moment she was gripped by fear but then she remembered the prayer she had prayed only a short while before. ‘Dear Jesus Strengthen Me.’ She trusted her friend Jesus and believed He was with her at that moment. ‘I realise all of these things are true Your Grace but I never intended founding a Convent. I know nothing about nuns. We just want to live together and

support one another in our concern for the poor, sick and the uneducated. We believe that because we pray together our work is blessed by God.'

Archbishop Murray sat forward in his chair and indicated to Catherine that she did the same. Then in the gentlest of a whisper he enquired, 'Have you considered what the future holds for you and your group of young ladies? If anything should happen to you, what happens to them and what about this wonderful work of Mercy? If you want this work to continue we must give it stability. I realise that you never considered becoming a nun, that this was never in your plan but it looks very much like it is in God's plan.'

Catherine was completely taken by surprise. She was stunned. Her God was daring her once again and as in the past she responded. 'I must carefully consider all you have said, Your Grace. What God has planned for us and for this House of Mercy is what matters. I will put all of this before my associates and we will trust in God and our Blessed mother.'

'Your response has pleased me greatly' the Archbishop replied, breathing a deep sigh of relief which he made no effort to conceal. Catherine McAuley was, he thought to himself, a darling, daring woman of faith. Catherine stood up gracefully from her chair to answer the tap on the parlour door. Elizabeth Harley, one of the latest young ladies to arrive in Baggot Street stood outside carrying a tray with a pot of tea and some hot freshly baked scones. 'Ah, Sister Elizabeth dear, just what both the Archbishop and I need at this moment- a good cup of tea.'

Convent of mercy

The first Sisters of Mercy Chapter 16

Catherine prayed that God would take from her heart all painful anxiety as she prepared to meet with her associates. When she told them about the feelings of Archbishop Murray and his concern for the future, they all agreed that if this is what God wanted they would say “Yes”. All they wanted to do was love God and love the poor. That seemed to be what God was asking of them and now if they had to go a step further and become nuns they would do that too. The Archbishop agreed that they would continue going out to visit the poor, unlike the other nuns in the city. Catherine was delighted with this, and with her little group of beautiful young women so full of joy. This joy was a real gift from God.

Catherine knew nothing about religious life so if a new order was to begin she would have to learn about it. Archbishop Murray helped in making arrangements for Catherine, Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley to go to the Presentation Convent in George’s Hill, Dublin. There they would learn the ways of religious life and about the commitment they hoped to make at the end of their noviciate.

Our Lady’s birthday, 1830 Catherine, now fifty two years of age, left Baggot Street and her beloved House of Mercy to spend the next fifteen months as a novice in training. Her heart was torn in two. The last thing she wanted was to leave her little orphans behind. What would she do without her poor friends, nieces and nephews, not to mention her dear associates? She knew the work would continue, but she was sad at the thought of leaving so much behind. Of course she had Anna Maria and Elizabeth with her and they would all support each other. Catherine knew that these months would be special where God was concerned. She realised that their friendship and love would grow. She realised that during the months ahead, no matter how difficult it would be, God would give her the strength and courage for whatever the future would bring. She trusted as in times past and was confident that her God and Our blessed Lady would be there.

On December 12th, 1831, in the little chapel in George’s Hill, Dublin, Catherine and her two young friends having survived what was a very difficult fifteen months committed themselves to live their lives dedicated to God. They pronounced their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and their commitment to work for the poor, sick and uneducated. Catherine’s heart was racing as Archbishop Murray spoke words of encouragement from the altar. This time it was not with fear but with excitement and a great joy. There was a new song in her heart, a song which now said “My God, I Am Yours for Time and Eternity”.

Something wonderful took place on that cold December day of 1831 which was to bring the fire and warmth of God’s love into their lives of millions all over the world. The congregation of Our Lady of Mercy was born. Catherine McCauley, daughter of Elinor and James and heiress of Coolock House, was generous and daring enough to allow it all to happen.

Shortly after the ceremony and celebrations the carriage arrived to take the first three Sisters of Mercy back to the house of Mercy which would from then on be known as

the Convent of Mercy. There was excitement in the air the length and breadth of Baggot Street. The ladies couldn't wait to greet their Sisters and see how they looked in their habits.

As the door closed behind the home comers a delicious smell of freshly baked griddle cake wafted its way through the big house announcing the prospects of a good tea in honour of the great occasion. This was indeed "The Day the Lord Has Made, and if ever there was a "hooley" in the kitchen of the convent on Baggot Street, this was the day. If Ned the fiddler Kelly hadn't passed away, he would surely not have missed a visit to his kind and faithful old friend, Miss Catherine, who from that day on would be affectionately known as Mother Mary Catherine, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

Cholera in Dublin

Chapter 17

Archbishop Murray officially declared the convent of mercy opened and appointed mother Catherine as the first superior. Sisters Mary Ann and Mary Elisabeth, as Anna Maria Doyle and Elizabeth Harley were now called, and the other associates, who were ready to begin their preparation to become sisters of mercy, were on big happy family. Mother Catherine had an extraordinary influence on her sisters. She radiated God's love in everything she said and did and had a wonderful way of uniting her little flock. Her personality was magnetic, drawing young and old alike to her. People who met her for the first time were touched by this gentle giant of a sister of mercy who had a marvellous sense of humour.

Her deep blue eyes told her story. They spoke of the joy that was in her because of what God was doing in her life. They also spoke of the pain she felt for those who had nothing and of her own helplessness in not being able to do more. She could relate to everybody from the pompous landlords who strutted the streets around Merrion Sq. to the humble poor who constantly sought help at the convent door. No one could know this woman without loving her and being influenced by everything she did.

As the weeks and months sped on many young girls who had learned about the new order of "Walking Nuns," as they were called, expressed their desire to join. Mother Catherine explained to them how the life could bring them great joy and happiness but it wouldn't be without its difficulties. "If you put your whole trust in God, He will see that you want for nothing," were the words of advice she so often gave to the young girls and to her Sisters also. Some were excited by the challenge to work for God among the poor on the streets and in the hovels of Dublin city. Soon seven young women, including Mother Catherine's niece Mary, were ready to make their commitment as Sisters of Mercy. They quickly realised where their dear Mother found her strength. Jesus was the centre of her life. Everything she did was for Him, everything she said was from Him. Jesus was her power and she believed that this power could transform everything.

The works in the Convent of Mercy continued to bring new life into the lives of little orphan girls and to the lives of the so many who attended school every day. These little ones were taught to read and write, but most important of all, they were taught about Jesus. They saw Jesus at work loving them through the sisters who cooked for them and who kept them neat and tidy. They met Jesus in the sisters who tucked them into bed and often dried their little tears before kissing them goodnight.

The year 1832 was a real testing time for mother Catherine and her community of faithful friends. Sister Mary Elisabeth Harley, her close friend and companion in George's Hill, took ill and died suddenly. Another young sister, Sister Ann O'Grady also died. Mother Catherine was terribly upset, she was heart-broken for these two wonderful committed young women. They were a huge loss to everyone but to her in particular. Death stalked the whole population of Dublin in that year. Cholera, a most deadly disease, swept over the entire city. Thousands of men, women and children fell desperately ill.

The Sisters were asked to take charge of one of the many temporary hospitals set up by the state. They gladly responded and took control of the Townsend Street centre which unfortunately was close enough to Baggot Street. Conditions in the hospital were horrific. There was hardly a doctor, or nurse to be seen most times,

medicines were just not available and many poor patients lay dying in agony on the floor. The Sisters were the only consolation these poor people had. Day after day and night after night, they held the hands of dying mothers, fathers, and young children bringing them the only comfort they possessed, the gentle love of Jesus. Hour by hour, they crawled on hands and knees soothing the sobs of little ones dying on the cold, damp floors of that awful Townsend Street hospital.

Nothing seemed too much for these courageous women of mercy and most of them were only young girls. Often they had hardly enough sleep to keep them going and their food was very meagre. But they had a spirit within which fired them with love. Mother Catherine was so pleased with her little community, but confronting her was the fear that some might catch the dreaded disease. She again had to put her trust in God that all painful anxiety be taken from her heart. The epidemic lasted many months and the death rate was huge. While none of the Sisters died during the epidemic itself, and that indeed was a miracle, many suffered bad health as a result, which caused a number of them to die very young in life, including Mother Catherine's niece, dear Sister Mary Teresa. Mary and her aunt Kitty had always been the best of friends and her death caused Mother Catherine great sorrow. She missed her desperately and only a few really knew how extremely lonely she was.

Never a Dull Moment

CHAPTER 18

“Whatever are we going to do mother dear? Things have never been so bad for us.” Sister Frances Warde looked over Mother Catherine’s shoulder as she flicked through the pages of the account books. “That is true, Sister Frances, cash is very scarce but I’ve just had a wonderful inspiration!” Mother Catherine glanced over her shoulder and smiled wryly at her friend. Sister Frances pulled out a chair for herself. “I had better sit down for this one,” she thought, as she indicated to Mother Catherine to proceed with the plan.

“Let’s have a Fair, a Bazaar or whatever you like to call it. Let’s write to all the wealthy people we know and ask them to donate things we could sell.” “You mean wealthy people who live around this area,” Sister Frances inquired a hint of excitement in her voice. “Yes, but also the people who live elsewhere, and who know about our work here. I’m going to write to the Duchess of Kent and ask her for a donation.” Mother Catherine announced. “You’re what?” Sister Francis gulped with amazement. “You mean the real Duchess, Her Royal Highness.” “That’s the lady,” Mother Catherine smiled at her friend, her blue eyes dancing with glee “That surely is daring of you, Mother dear.” “I suppose it is,” Mother Catherine replied, a touch of excitement in her voice too. “Let’s get to work then and if we can make a success of this, perhaps we can do this every year.”

Sure enough the plan worked. People were generous in their donations and the Duchess, together with her daughter, the future Queen Victoria made contributions of their own handwork. This was of course a great attraction, and encouraged many of Dublin’s fashionable “well to do” ladies to come and buy some fancy needlework. It was a grand affair and a nice little amount of Money was made. Not enough of course, but it was a help and it was decided that the Bazaar should become a yearly event. Mother Catherine was pleased. She had trusted, and god had provided.

One of the greatest joys in Mother Catherine’s life was spending time with the little orphans. She herself understood well the terrible pain of having no Daddy. So in some way she knew the awful loneliness that the little ones, who had neither Mammy nor Daddy, were going through. Often at night after a difficult day of sitting with a grieving widow, or perhaps having walked the streets seeking out the sick, she would help tuck the wee darlings into bed, having said their prayers with them. Then it was story time! They loved that part of the day. Mother Catherine was the best story teller of all the sisters, especially when she told the Jesus stories. She had to know Him very well to be able to tell the stories like she told them. That was the general feeling. But the biggest treat of all was that she was never in a hurry to blow out the candle and rush away to bed. No she had all the time in the world and it was great. She would sit on the side of a tiny little bed and play Mammy to the little mites cuddled up two at the top and often two at the bottom because that was all the space they had.

On occasions when a sister would come looking for Mother Catherine, It wasn’t unusual to find “high jinks” in the dormitory. A “hooley” would often be in progress and dear Mother in the middle of the floor, dancing her feet off surrounded by dozens of tiny bare feet flogging the floor boards with her. The party

brought to a sudden halt by the sister, would then end up in a crying session as the splinters from the floor were carefully extracted from the tiny dancing feet. All in all the hooley was usually worth the pain! Mother Catherine could never deprive the children of their fun. They had little enough to enjoy, or laugh about. One day when one very devout Sister spoke to her about the “hooleys” and how they were breaking the rule of silence in the dormitory, she very gently reminded her that rules were indeed important, but “If we pull the strings too tightly they will break”. The good and holy Sister remembered Mother quoting that on another occasion and thought to herself that perhaps she was right. She always seemed to know the right thing to say, even at the most difficult times.

Why was this so? Well it was very simple. She was filled with the power of God’s Spirit. Since the day of her Confirmation, so long ago, Mother Catherine knew she was filled with every grace and gift she needed for life. She knew that no matter what the difficulty might be, God would provide. All she had to do was lift her heart in prayer. Prayer to her was like a plant. If neglected, it dies, if nourished it blossoms and produces fruit. Mother Catherine was the most beautiful of all plants. She was more than a plant, she was a garden of plants, pouring out the sweetest fragrance of God’s Mercy into the lives of all who came in contact with her.

Mother Catherine's Response

Chapter 19

“I deserve to be canonised after this day”, Bridie Bolger, one of the many young girls who had found refuge with the sisters from her abusive employer, struggled down the stone steps which led to the kitchen, having answered the doorbell for about the twentieth time. “Does nobody else in this city do anything’ for them poor souls. Everyone thinks the nuns grow the money on trees in the garden.” Sr. Mary Ann standing at the kitchen door smiled to herself as she heard Bridie grumble her way to the bottom step. “What’s up, Bridie?” “Me bristles is up, that’s what’s up! I’d bet me last copper, if I had one, that’s the same fella at the door again for a bit. ‘I met a couple of “walking nuns” by the canal’, says he, ‘and they told me to ring the bell for a bit to eat’.” It’s the same lad, I’m sure. He had an ould hat on him this mornin’, but I’d know them eyes anywhere.”

“Well Bridie, you had better give him his bit again. You know what Mother Catherine would say,” Sister Mary Ann gave her a reassuring pat on the arm. “Oh! Don’t I know well what she’d say. Didn’t I hear it saying it meself many’s the time.” “Better to feed a hundred impostors than one Poor hungry soul be turned away”. “ah sure I suppose she’s right isn’t she?” Bridie Bolger threw her eyes to heaven and carried on mumbling her way to the kitchen.

News of the wonderful “walking nuns” in Dublin soon found its way to other parts of the country. Since the church in Rome was looking favourably on new congregation of the sisters of mercy great interest was shown by bishops and priests in many countries. What these women had done for the sick and the poor in Dublin they wanted them to do throughout the country. While mother Catherine was pleased the work should spread, she was concerned about the health of her young sisters many of whom were not very strong. It was suggested that a convent by the sea would be a good idea. So in 1835 a property in Kingstown, later to be known as Dunlaoghaire just south of city was purchased and it served as a rest home for the sisters who were feeling the effects of the ever increasing hard work.

The following year in 1836 mother Catherine responded to a request to send sisters to Tullamore Co. Offaly. Sister Mary Ann the very first associate to move into the house of mercy back in 1829, was appointed superior. Soon after, a little group headed off to Charleville, while another foundation was made in Carlow. A month in July of that same year, 1836, a convent was opened in Cork.

Mother Catherine was knee deep into new foundations. Travel was very difficult on everyone. Sitting for long hours in rickety old carriages was wearisome. Sailing on a canal barge, as they did to Tullamore or by steamboat to Cork, was most tiresome and having to sleep on mattresses on the deck all the way to Cork was a killer. But somehow this hardship brought a great bond of unity among these Sisters of Mercy. Their Foundress, now almost sixty years old, still had the heart of a child and was as playful and witty as ever. “Hurrah for foundations, they make the old young and the young merry” she would often remind herself and others who might think at times she was getting a bit too old for the travelling.

Mother Catherine placed such trust in her young sisters. When a new foundation was made she herself would stay for a number of weeks to get things settled, and then with confidence in god and in the courage of the sister she would appoint one of them as superior and return to Baggot Street. There was always loneliness in her as she returned to greet her community at home.

The next few years brought much sickness and deaths among the sisters. During mother Catherine's lifetime she had many crosses to bear, death was never far around the corner and losing her beautiful young sisters of mercy caused her great heartbreak. So often she was to be found in tears sitting in the chapel, or kneeling in front of the large crucifix, which her old friend Fr. Armstrong had given her when the House of Mercy opened. She was never afraid, or ashamed to cry, to be human, just as she never she afraid to express her joy in song or dance or verse. She was forever putting pen to paper to commemorate an event or a special occasion.

Requests for more foundations continued to come in. Despite the loss of so many Sisters, others came to take their place. Despite the loss of so many Sisters, others came to take their place. God was surely sending labourers to take care of the harvest. Limerick was the next foundation, followed by Galway, then Wexford. There was even a request from as far away as Bermondsey in London. Mother Catherine and the Sisters responded so generously in every way that they were able to recognise a need whatever it might be, and adapt to any situation. Sometimes they ran into great difficulties. People in the country were every bit as poor as in the city. Money was very often a huge problem. At times there was no money, no food, and in some case no hope. But somehow God always provided. Mother Catherine believed and so often said Prayer can do more good than all the money in the Bank of Ireland. And she was right.

While many of the problems encountered in the various place concerned the wretched conditions of the sick and the poor, it was often the clergy who made life more difficult for the Sisters. Sometimes promises that were made were broken and on few occasions the accommodation provided for them was not at all healthy. But difficulties like these did not stand in the way of the works of mercy being carried out. The love of Jesus was brought into the hearts and homes of countless poor, sick people, where ever these Sisters found a convent.

Birr, Mother Catherine's foundation in Ireland was probably most difficult of all. It was December 1840 and the bitter winter it was. Snow lay thick on the ground when the little group set out on the hazardous journey. Birr was a town that suffered division due to a dispute among the clergy and it was felt that the Sisters of Mercy could help to heal the wounds. Sure enough, by the time Mother Catherine returned to Dublin the problems were on the way to being solved and peace was restored to a once troubled town.

In June of the next year, 1841, the number of the Sisters had increased to 142 and the Church in Rome had finally decided to approve of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. This was wonderful news for everyone. Mother Catherine was especially very happy. Deep in her heart she knew that her work was almost done. There was no more call ton respond to, and that was Birmingham, England. The boat journey itself to Liverpool was more than she was able for but again this was God's work and Mother Catherine trusted as in times past. There was much more to be done

and she knew that it would be done. These young women of Mercy would continue the great work that had begun, if it was God's work. If it wasn't, then, as she had reminded her Sisters not too long before, it would all fall apart.

From Time To Eternity.

Chapter 20

“Quickly everyone, leave the dishes”, Teresa Byrne, Mother Catherine’s young cousin, now called Sister Camillus, rushed into the kitchen. The after lunch tidy up was in progress. “Sr. Teresa Carton has just received a letter from Birmingham and we’re all gathering in the community room to read it.” There was a general feeling of excitement. Mother’s letters were always full of news. The house just wasn’t the same without her. The Sisters missed her laughter about the pace, her gentle words of advice, but above all they missed the warmth of her kindly presence.

Everyone seated, you could hear a pin drop. The excitement felt was short lived as the letter was read. It indicated that Mother Catherine was not at all well. She requested that Sr. Teresa, who was the infirmarian, make a space for her in the infirmary and asked her not to move out, but to stay with her. This did not sound good. No one spoke. They just looked at one another, each with the same fearful thoughts. There was disbelief on every face, tears welling in every eye. Could it be true? Was Mother really so sick?

Sad to say this was all true. On September 21st. Mother Catherine returned from Birmingham. She climbed the steps of her beautiful dream house for the very last time and was all but carried to the infirmary, where a bed had been prepared for her. Her sisters were now shocked by her appearance and now they believed that their dear mother and friend was seriously ill. It was evident that time was running out. Mother Catherine's was dying from tuberculosis. In the weeks that followed her condition grew weaker. She lost all her energy and had no appetite, even for the tasty little pieces the sisters cooked to tempt her. Day and night she was unable to sleep with the racking cough. By early November the sisters were keeping a constant vigil by her bedside. They were aware by this time that their dear friend and foundress was suffering the most horrific pain due to an abscess on her lung and an ulcer on her lower back. Sr. Teresa Carton who kept the night vigil was the only one who saw or was allowed to dress this awful ulcer which was as big as the palm of her hand and oozing with infection.

Mother Catherine knew that her time was quickly ticking away. All through her life she was calm and dignified. In her last days she remained the same. She knew she had nothing to fear. She had said “Yes” to God and had dared to be what she was called to be. Sister Mary de Pazzi who was taking responsibility for everything since Mother Catherine was so sick, decided it was time to let the other communities know that there was little time left.

On Thursday November 11th in the early hours of the morning the bed was moved into the centre of the room to give more air as her breathing had become more difficult. Around 8am mass was celebrated in the infirmary. For special celebrations the Sisters always wore white cloaks and on this occasion Mother Catherine asked if they would wear them she knew that this was a very particular celebration. She was on her journey home. News of her serious condition brought some close friends and relatives to say “farewell” including Frances, her sister-in-law and brother James who had always remained close although he never approved of his beautiful sister Kitty’s

way of life. Many of the priest friends who supported the sisters also came to pray and to say “goodbye”

As the day went on each sister came one by one and for the last time spoke to their beloved friend and mother. Their hearts were breaking. They wanted her suffering to end, yet they didn't want to let her go one Mother Catherine had a little word of comfort. To her cousin, Sr. Camillus Byrne, who spent her whole lifetime with her she said “kiss me, my child, and then go away, but don't cry.” Sr. Camillus was indeed like her child, and now they must part. To her community her words were of peace and unity. Despite all her own pain Mother Catherine felt and understood the loneliness and fears that they were feeling. She wanted them to know how much at peace she was, “I am very happy, I am afraid,” she assured them more than once.

Later in the day the doctor arrived. Catherine greeted him. “Well doctor, the scene looks like it's drawing to a close.” Dr. Stokes nodded gently at his patient, wishing and longing to be able to relieve her pain and discomfort. There was nothing anyone could do. By 5 o'clock it was obvious that the journey was nearing its end. The sisters, including those who travelled long journeys from the other convents, continued to sit quietly praying Mothers favourite prayers, which she joined in with for as long as she could. She asked for a lighted candle to be placed in her hand, which indicated to the sisters that toward that she knew her time was very close. Towards 7 o'clock she was still aware of all that was going on and again assured her community that they need not fear for her as fears had vanished. In the midst of this she was concerned not for herself but for others and reminded Sister Teresa to have a comfortable cup of tea for the Sisters before they left.

At ten minutes to eight, clutching her rosary and crucifix, and surrounded by her little community of faithful friends, Catherine Elizabeth McCauley, in the sixty fourth year of her life, took the final step out of time to eternity, into the presence of her God. The scene had finally drawn to a close with profound peace and quiet dignity.

Catherine McAuley was laid to rest in the earth, like the poor as she had requested, in the garden of the Convent of Mercy, Baggot Street on the 15th. November 1841. this garden is “Truly and unto all ages, Holy Ground.”

Today the spirit of this beautiful “Woman of Mercy” lives on in the lives of the thousands of Sisters of Mercy all over the world, who continue the work that began in the heart of a young Dublin girl who loved God, the poor, and was daring enough to be different.

She was beautiful, she was daring and she was rich. Catherine Elizabeth McAuley was an heiress with a difference. Unlike most young women in her position, it never occurred to her that she should travel the world, visiting exotic places. Instead, she travelled the backlanes and alleyways of nineteenth century Dublin city. She sought out the poor, the sick, the homeless and those who had lost all hope of ever rising out their dreadful miserable conditions. This gentle woman of mercy had a plan to change all this. God had a plan too.