

Sisters of Mercy

Catherine McAuley (1778-1841) was born in Ireland during a time of catastrophic poverty to wealthy, Catholic parents. Catherine's father died when she was only five years old. When her mother died, fifteen years later, Catherine and her brother went to live with their wealthy family relations, William and Catherine Callaghan. Catherine served as their companion, and managed their household affairs for twenty years. During that time, she educated the household servants as well as the poor in the neighborhood.

After the death of William Callaghan in 1821, Catherine inherited the Callaghan's sizeable estate. The Callaghans had no children of their own, and they were moved by Catherine's charitable heart and knew that she would use everything she received to help others. Catherine used her inheritance to buy a large house so that she and other merciful women could live there and help care for and educate women and children in need. She felt that the only way to effect change for the future of the poor in Ireland was to help educate the next generation.



Catherine's intention was never to start a religious community, rather she envisioned a lay corps of Catholic social workers. She was asked by the archbishop what she wished to name her house, and she called it "Sisters of Mercy". They were given uniforms so that they could go out and minister to the sick and poor. The church of the time was not supportive of the Sisters of Mercy continuing on as independent women. They feared that the organization would lack structure and continuity if the women could constantly come and go as they pleased. They encouraged Catherine to instead form a religious community, so Catherine and two of her cofounders began their postulancy, and in 1831, at the age of 53, Catherine professed her final vows.

The Sisters of Mercy community grew quickly. Catherine lived only ten years after the community was officially formed, but in that time period she established ten foundations throughout Ireland and England and had set the groundwork for several more. Today there are Sisters of Mercy communities throughout Europe, the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand.

Prayer Activity: Journaling

Here are some thoughts about journaling from *The Ignatian Adventure*, by Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Ignatius advises that we reflect on our experience of prayer (*SE 77*). Keeping a journal is most helpful during a retreat. This exercise can be challenging because we are trying to put into words our encounter with God, who is Holy Mystery. Although it is challenging, trying to articulate such sublime experiences can help us discern how God is meeting us or leading us in our prayer...The journal is for your eyes only. When the retreat concludes, the journal becomes a rich spiritual treasure to which you can return months or even years after the retreat.

The purpose of journaling is not to replay your time of prayer minute by minute. Instead, after your prayer period concludes, consider the following:

- What were the significant interior movements (that is, feelings, reactions, intuitions, desires, emotions, thoughts, or insights)?
- What was the prevailing mood of my prayer: peace, agitation, excitement, boredom, confusion, calm?
- Was my prayer more about the head or the heart, or about both?
- What word, phrase, image, or memory meant most to me during prayer?
- Is there some unfinished business that I think God is calling me to return to during another time of prayer?
- Is there something happening in my life that is becoming part of my prayer? Do I feel moved to do something concrete in my life?
- Am I making the necessary preparations for my prayer? Is there anything I am doing or not doing that is getting in the way of my listening to God?

The review of prayer is not homework; do not feel bound to answer each of these questions every time you journal. Instead, consider journaling as another way of praying, of going deeper to sift through the graces. Write in a style that is comfortable for you. In your journaling, feel free to write directly to God the Father or to Jesus, as if you were writing a letter or an e-mail.

Excerpt from ***The Ignatian Adventure*** by Kevin O'Brien, SJ.