Spirituality of Catherine McAuley

By David Adams-Jones
Spirituality of Catherine McAuley

- Spirituality of Catherine McAuley is woven through three sections
- Section One: What is Spirituality and its relationship in Catherine McAuley life.
- Section Two: How Catherine Lived out her Christian Discipleship.
- Section Three: Linking her gratitude for the Mercy of God to her practice.
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- Section One: Catherine McAuley’s life in relation to the Old Testament. (40 minutes.)
- Section Two: Identifying with the life of Jesus - How Catherine Lived out her Life. (40 minutes.)
- Section Three: Catherine’s Gratitude for the Mercy of God. (40 minutes.)
- The series of workshops will be shared over three RE staff meetings.
Outcomes: Participants will gain:

- An understanding of the term Spirituality.
- A knowledge and understanding of how Catherine McAuley’s spirituality permeated through her trust in the God’s Providence and her commitment to imitate the life of Jesus Christ during her earthly presence.
- An understanding of Catherine’s conviction and heartfelt gratitude for the Mercy of God.
Spirituality of Catherine McAuley

- A Snapshot of her life.
- Catherine McAuley lived from 1778 - 1841
- In 1827 Catherine opened her first house in serving the poor that was the heart of the Christian Bible.
- In 1831 Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy Order in Dublin Ireland.
- This was to become one of the biggest religious congregations founded in the English speaking world.

(Rouleau rsm 2003)
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- Catherine’s Life in Reference to her Trust in God the Father’s providence.
- Dublin was one of the biggest cities in Europe and to be Catholic in Dublin was to be poor.
- Little tolerance for Catholicism, lack of education and the Church did not seem to hold a title.
- From an early age, Catherine focused on the needs of the poor and destitute. Her father in his compassion not only set an example that would not only lead Catherine on her journey but Dublin was environment that strengthen her faith in God.
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- Defining Spirituality in Reference to Catherine’s life.
  - Spirituality is about what we do with our lives, what keeps us going, it is the fire within us, our craving, our desire and how we channel this fire in our everyday lives. (Rolheiser 1999:11)

- Religious people name this eros as God’s Spirit or The Mystery of God at work in our lives.

- Spirituality is a wellspring of our sense of meaning and our will to live. (Mystery). (Liddy 2002:14)
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- God’s Love and Mercy for Us.
- Through her shared experience with her father and commitment to prayer through the Bible Catherine developed a solid understanding of God’s own love towards His people.
- Ps 103:13 “as tenderly as a father treats his children, so Yahweh treats those who revere him: (Holy Bible: New International version p736)
- Isaiah 49: 15 Read verse. Discuss God’s commitment to never forget his children- this captures the depth of God’s love and mercy.
- Catherine never forgot the poor and the destitute as God never forgot his children.
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- A Biblical Perspective (Old Testament).
- The Old Testament is a reflection on the nature of God.
- A Caring God: an inviting God who takes the initiative.
- A saving God who brought Israel up from Egypt. (Jer.2:6)
A Biblical Perspective

A Compassionate God:

An insight of a compassionate God is provided by the prophet Hosea. (Read Hosea 3:1-3:4)

Hosea helped us to see that God’s love was a love based on generosity and forgiveness.

Amos helped us to see that the test of a compassionate society was in the way we treated the poor. (Am 9:1)

In small groups make links to what we know about Catherine McAuley’s life in relation to the Old Testament. Read Article Let Loose the Charism of Mercy by Anne Hannon rsm
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- Catherine’s explicit Faith / Trust in God was drawn from biblical readings such as when Yahweh had revealed himself as a God of the oppressed, a God of the needy, a powerful God of Compassion.
- Example: Catherine’s work to provide a house that included schoolrooms and dormitories for the poor in order to guide people to happiness is what Yahweh who gave dialogue that lead his people to happiness.
Catherine built Baggot Street House of Mercy in a fashionable quarter of Dublin to bring to the door steps of the wealthy consciousness of the lives of the suffering and the poor. Bolster (1982)
Samples of Catherine McAuley’s Spirituality.

Her concern for the poor which she had learnt from her father. Every Sunday James McAuley gathered the poor into their home.

Her belief system reinforced from readings of the Bible.

Her strong faith in times of despair when her parents died and living in places where being Catholic was challenged.

The way she expressed her values and the choices she made in ordinary living in caring for the poor, the destitute and sick was not only by the building of Baggot House but in providing a service for the needy.

At all times Catherine maintained a balance in the early years between her corporal works and her desire to respond to the needs of the poor and destitute.
Do not be concerned for your life, what you are to eat, or for your body, what you are to wear. Life is more important than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they do not sow, they do not reap: they have neither cellar nor barn-yet God feeds them. How much more important you are than the birds. Luke 12:22-30

Catherine’s confidence in her faithful provider continued to be a source of serenity and hope throughout her life.

Her conviction to provide for the needy became the foundation of Catherine McAuley’s spirituality.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Mercy Embodied in the Life & Ministry of Jesus

- Catherine’s spirituality is accentuated in the words of and imitation of Christ.

- The aim of Catherine’s work was to lead her sisters in a way that imitated Jesus in charity, humility, meekness and simplicity. Hannon (2003)
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Mercy Embodied in the Life & Ministry of Jesus

- There are many accounts in Christian scriptures which illustrate the depth of compassion that Jesus had for those in need. So too, for Catherine. There are many accounts documented, in her many letters in which she wrote, in her prayers and in her actions.

- Catherine had a clear insight in the devotion to the Passion of Christ.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- The Outcast
- Many women during Catherine’s time suffered psychological and emotional abuse, were trapped in degrading and violent relationships which in turn eroded self-esteem. (Sullivan 2007)
- Catherine and her sisters in their work restored their dignity and gave women hope by reaching out to those who were outcast in society.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Serving the Poor and Sick
- Read these two readings. Discussion

- Luke (13, 10-17) A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath

- Personal Reflection: How would you treat the poor or sick? Do I try and understand the causes to their poverty and suffering?
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Restoring Dignity
- Catherine restores dignity to women who in turn take up their vocation to religious life.
- Catherine insisted that the Sisters imitate Christ’s love be humble of heart and show dignity to every one of the human family.
- As the works of Mercy expanded so did Catherine’s determination to provide beyond the poor.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Combining the Physical needs with the Spiritual

- One of Catherine’s primary concerns was that she was always worried for the poor, for women and for the sick and dying whilst also concerned for people’s spiritual well being.

- Catherine saw the physical and spiritual needs as inseparable. She saw the face of Jesus in everyone.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

Catherine’s spirituality was drawn from three aspects of devotion

1. Devotion to Jesus through Prayer.

2. Devotion to Jesus through the Eucharist.

3. Devotion to the Sacred Heart.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Devotion to Jesus through the Eucharist

- Ever since her early childhood days, Catherine knew that the source of her conviction was through the Eucharist.

- Catherine wrote – *Jesus Christ really present in the most Holy Eucharist shall be the constant object of their affection and devotion*..... Rouleau (2003:3)
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Devotion of the Sacred Heart

- Jesus is to Catherine, “the fount of every grace, and object of our most tender love.”

- Catherine believed that Jesus was a refuge from the dangers and temptations of human imperfection within their own hearts.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

Summary

The Imitation of Christ

Imitation in the religious sense or in the mystical tradition of the Church has a different meaning to the modern day term that is referred to as being fake.

In reference to Catherine McAuley, mystical tradition is based on a view of reality in which creation mirrors its Creator, Catherine as the human person was an image of God.
Section Two: Identifying with Jesus

- Prayer of Catherine: - Morning Offering

“O compassionate Jesus, look on me today with tenderness and give me the grace to walk on the path of mercy marked out for those who follow you. May all that I do today reflect your merciful love.”

Amen

Sullivan rsm 2003
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- Catherine viewed herself as one who received everything from His divine bounty.
- Hence, Catherine felt obliged to be a channel of Mercy towards others.
- In every sense, Catherine had a deep heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God, and shared her own experience of God’s Mercy with others.
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- As Catherine threw her heart open to God, the Father and her hands out to the poor, she joyfully spread the good news of God’s steadfast love for his people.
- Over time Catherine developed a strong desire or compelling energy to guide people towards being compassionate and to the redemptive love of God.
- This became the principle reason why they were called Sisters of Mercy – It was to serve God in person.
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- In being Merciful, Catherine McAuley was a courageous person.
- Catherine and her companions dressed in fashion and gained admittance to the prestigious Kildare Society to learn about their schools and the Sir Patrick Dunn’s Hospital.
- She sent her Sisters into the streets to where people needed them in a time when religious women were secluded.
- She risked irritation of the wealthy by bringing the poor into their midst.
- She decentralized in a time of centralization trends.
- She started a religious order so that her work would continue.
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- Biblical Understanding of Mercy
- Mercy was a word affectionately used by Catherine McAuley.
- She often was quoted as saying “The Mercy of God comes to our assistance and renders practical His love in our regard.”
- Sisters of Mercy should be the kindest people in the world. Hannon rsm (2003)
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- Gratitude for the Gifts of God’s Mercy. – Is Catherine’s hallmark.
- One of the richest aspects of Catherine’s life, was her act of true merciful love.
- Underlining merciful love is a virtue of gratitude.
- Gratitude actively reaches out to the other, regardless of personal feelings or desires. It’s the condition for any kind of spiritual life or Christian love. This was Catherine’s hallmark. Wheeler rsm (1991)
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- Gratitude –The Foundation of Hospitality
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan Luke (10:33) Read and discuss the parable.
- The story of the Good Samaritan reaches beyond the bounds of race and prejudice.
- Catherine in her life, reached out to other human beings regardless of who they were, she created equality between people and restore dignity to all.
- Establishment of Schools –Outreaching to the Middle Class
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God

- Summary
  - Catherine saw herself before God as one who received everything from his divine bounty. She felt gratitude.
  - Catherine channelled Mercy towards others.
  - God is forever merciful and so was Catherine.
  - Her vision of Mercy embraced justice.
  - Catherine maintained an unshakeable optimism based on her infinite goodness, mercy and the power of God.
Section Three: Heartfelt Gratitude for the Mercy of God – Mercy Magnificat

Sweet Mercy-soothing, patient, kind- softens the high and raises the fallen mind: Knows with just rein and even hand to guide between false fear and arbitrary pride. Not easily provoked, she soon forgives: feels love for all, and by a look, relieves. Soft peace she brings wherever she arrives, removes out anguish and reforms our lives: Make the rough paths of peevish nature even and opens in each heart a little heaven. The Mercy Magnificat 2003
CONCLUSION

- Catherine’s faith in God is likened to a child who has faith in her father.
- By imitating Christ’s love, Catherine became an image of God. She penetrated the heart of poverty and was truly a Jesus person.
- Catherine saw herself before God as one who received everything from His divine bounty. For this she gave heartfelt gratitude.
Conclusion

- Catherine’s legacy now spreads across many continents
- Catherine’s spirituality enabled her to break through the heart of misery.
- Her courageous concern for the spiritual and physical welfare of the poor, the sick, and the ignorant enabled many to follow her.
- Catherine connected the rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the educated and skilled to the uninstructed and the influential to those of no consequence. This is how she lived out her discipleship.
Conclusion

- Catherine’s spirituality was always evident as she lived according to the knowledge that God was always present and that her mission was part of God’s plan for her purpose on earth.

- Catherine’s spirituality as Hall (2000:18) refers to Jesus’ life is very similar. A life as people who both loved, worked for humanity as liberators, as both who wanted to change from within a society that was volatile. Catherine integrated her desires through her values and actions. This energy and connectedness was her spirituality.
References


References

References: Websites


References: Articles


