

Chapter V

Blest are the single-hearted; they shall see God.

This seeing of God in the sixth beatitude is God revealing himself in every situation like the light shining in the darkness which the darkness cannot overcome. It flows from an attentive listening to the Word spoken interiorly and demands an asceticism of the heart. It brings about the oneness of all desires into a single desire: to serve God and to love nothing apart from him. It brings with it the peace of the seventh beatitude: *Blest too are the peacemakers they shall be called sons and daughters of God.* Peace is the result of singleness of heart and the more contemplative virtues of trust and purity of heart. For faith and trust are keys to peace and freedom of spirit. It also releases in us in times of conflict and persecution the power to surrender to the will of God. As we grow in the quiet presence of God, we radiate peace.

It is not surprising that this beatitude of purity of heart should illuminate all the others we have considered. For its light penetrates them with that inherent simplicity by which Catherine saw God revealing himself not only in prayer but especially in the faces of all who looked to her for healing, for counsel, for comfort, encouragement or for that wisdom which is "Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God." (I Cor. 1, 24). When she was asked what qualifications a young woman should possess to become a Sister of Mercy, she brought together in one luminous statement a whole theology of a vocation in Mercy. She said very simply: "Union with God and love of the poor."

This growth in union with God, as she testifies in her letters and retreat instructions, is the very source through which the Divine Mercy and Compassion become efficacious. So we find in her admonitions to the Sisters an insistence for cultivating an asceticism of the heart.

She says: "The life and teaching of Jesus Christ should be a book open before us—and as a seal whose image we are to impress on our hearts."

"Why did God call us? To unite us to Himself—the very spirit of Jesus animating our every thought and action."

"No occupation should draw our mind from God. Our whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer."

"How can we teach love of God if our hearts are cold?"

For her this union with God was not only to be a private practice but should flow from a union in charity that bonded the Sisters in the community of Mercy. It should be a community in which respect and acceptance of each person's gifts and limitations were essential: "This mutual love Our Saviour desires, should be so perfect as to resemble in some manner the love and union that subsists between Himself and His heavenly Father." On her beautiful chapter on *Union and Charity* she made it clear that such a spirit not only nourished each individual life, but was the very source of compassion in relation to those whom the Sisters served.

Sister Mary Daly, RSM, in her remarkable essay, published in *The Mast Journal*, Fall, 1992, and entitled, *Catherine McAuley's Original Rule and Her Understanding of the Order of Mercy*, appropriately remarks

that in her awareness of the Sisters' need for guidance in the attainment of these ideals Catherine left us in her Original Rule the chapters on *The Perfection of our Ordinary Actions* and *Of the Employment of Time* following those on ministry. These were succeeded by chapters dealing with the interior virtues and religious exercises and devotions proper to our growth in Christ and concluded with the chapters on the vows.

In this regard she showed herself well aware that this interior spirituality required constant discipline of heart and mind if it were to bear fruit in the works of Mercy.

We see Catherine, then, as a woman of prayer before all else. She was nurtured on the Word of God in her early years as Mrs. Callaghan opened to her the riches of the Scriptures found in her Protestant Bible at a time when the Bible was a closed book for women religious and the Catholic laity. From her dialogue with Mrs. Callaghan, especially when nursing her in her last illness, Catherine learned the art of prayer. By the time she came to Baggot Street her associates and later her novices saw her clearly as a woman centered in God. She had the ability to withdraw herself from the pressures of her stewardship. She insisted that fervor could be sustained by frequent acts of love of God, the source of which she often found in her beloved *The Jesus Psalter*.

From this deep personal union came the grace of the beatitude of peace and with it her joy and confidence in God. All of her contemporaries speak of her as possessing a serenity that flowed from her quiet surrender into what she called, "the arms of thy most loving providence." From her own experience she could well say: "Those that arrive at perfect union with God will feel such peace of soul, nothing can disturb it." Or: "Infinite is the love God bears such souls who repose in His protection."

In all her ministrations of the poor, in all that was asked of her in the establishing of the Institute, in the formation of her Sisters in a spirituality singularly both contemplative and apostolic, she did repose peacefully in his protection, knowing the intensity and power of his love.

As we come to the end of our reflection, we seek to identify that quality of the mind and heart of Catherine McAuley that best reveals the secret of her sanctity and the cause of her joy. We find it in the complete simplicity of her openness to God, that grace of the Beatitude of the Poor in Spirit by which all that touched her life was transfigured and became a blessing.

However, it is only in the Scripture in the following words taken from the Book of Sirach that we can fully signify all that she has come to mean and to be for the Church, for the world, and for us, her daughters, privileged to be impelled by her spirit and to become bearers of her vision wherever we are:

"...Suddenly this riverlet of mine
became a river,
then this stream of mine, a sea
Thus do I send my teachings forth
shining like the dawn,
to become known afar off.
Thus do I pour out instruction like prophecy
and bestow it on generations to come."
(Sirach: 24, 29--31)