

My Irish Pilgrimage

By Louise O'Day

With tremendous excitement and anticipation I arranged a three week visit to Ireland, from Melbourne, Australia. I planned a holiday that would include a silent retreat at Mercy International Centre. Time in silence, with a focus on centering prayer would, I believe, offer me an opportunity to enrich my faith and my pastoral care service. Immersing myself in Catherine McAuley's life story and home, I considered a huge privilege.

Travelling through this glorious country on my own from Dublin to counties Mayo, Limerick, Kerry and Waterford and returning to Dublin, I entrusted my faith in the Holy Spirit before my time officially began with Mercy.



As I drove through lush, rolling hills, I delighted in viewing colourful villages adorned with flowers, and historical landmarks- many being remnants of churches and castles telling stories of a troubled history. Then, winding my way through the Great Atlantic Way, I was in awe as I steered the small buzzing hire car (a manual) up and down intimidating cliff faces which led to still lakes, sparkling inlets and picturesque seaside villages. Unexpectedly, I came across many wonders including sandy beaches shared by those enjoying horse rides and families welcoming the summer delights on offer.

Throughout my travels, the rosary beads I had purchased at Knock Shrine swayed from my rear vision mirror offering me comfort and safety, along with much needed courage and self-belief.



Sign posts guided and empowered me as I journeyed towards my destination. They came in the form of incredibly warm and welcoming hosts (via Airbnb); informative and entertaining conversations with locals; lively and moving folk music heard in the pubs; and wonderful opportunities made available through great weather and sometimes by just being in the right place at the right time.

One “God-incident” was realized at my last B&B, when divine intervention led to my staying with a Pastoral Carer in Tramore, Waterford. We were both astounded at the coincidence! Our meeting led to our enjoying conversation and wine till the early hours and a friendship that will endure beyond my days in Ireland.

After a fortnight of driving, I safely returned to Dublin to attend the retreat at Mercy International Centre. Back in Australia I had become aware of Catherine’s incredible legacy – her vision, devotion and service that has paved the way for Mercy throughout the world. Now, in the presence of her achievements, I welcomed time shared in solitude and stillness – resting in God’s grace. I embraced centering prayer and enriching my relationship with God. Gentle moments spent with Him after enduring a hectic travel schedule seemed apt.



At Catherine's House, I was reminded of her fierce independence and resilience. Catherine endured many struggles as she determinedly made her vision come to fruition. I understand the seeds of her self-belief were based on her trust and love of God.

In my own circumstances, I feel it has been my trust and relationship with God that made my dream of travelling to Ireland eventuate. It has been a trip that has brought me great joy and personal enrichment. I have deepened my connection with patients and colleagues and found greater meaning in life.

I have been inspired by Catherine McAuley's spirit.

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