

Storms and Teacups: An Acrostic on the Leadership of Catherine McAuley

That Catherine cared about her companions deeply is almost axiomatic, but when one reads her own words to them, it is doubly clear that she felt, and displayed, great affection and concern for the well-being of each one. Her letters to them are invariably solicitous and intimate in tone. Listen to the insights she offers here into the character of the recipient of the letter, as well as to the extent of her own nurturing and concern. It is honest and forthright, yet full of kindness. It is the depth of winter, and Catherine has heard that Frances Warde has been ill: My ever Dear Sister Mary Francis I have been very uneasy about you since I heard how you have been affected, though I am aware that there may not be any serious cause, for Sister Teresa White had the same kind of attack. Yet, I know you are not sufficiently cautious, and this is what I fear most. Rest with God In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for Thou alone, O Lord, makest me dwell in safety." Psalm 4:8 Kitty's Chronicle, Volume 7/No. 5 – May 2024 17 | P a g e Now let me entreat you not to be going through the new convent, or out in the garden even the mildest day during this month without careful wrapping up. Have your shawl crossed on your chest and your feet very warm. I am sorry I did not look at the flannel you are wearing, is it very good? I could send some if you have it not. Again, I entreat you to be prudently cautious. (p.151)

Catherine's nurturing capacity, the ability to treat with great patience and gentleness and understanding in order to promote health and wholeness of mind, body and spirit, shines out from these simple, homely words of one woman to another, an older mentor to a young friend, cautioning common sense and moderation. Perhaps the "mothering" metaphor she frequently employs as a mark of care and affection does not appeal to modern ears, but there can be little doubting the sincerity of the care behind it, and it is perhaps noteworthy in this context to remember that Frances Warde's own mother had died when Frances was an infant. One of the most touching expressions of Catherine's care occurs in a request made to Elizabeth Moore, to prepare a room for an ailing Sister being sent to Kingstown for the sea air: Will you, my Dear...give her all the care you can for a little time? She is so gentle it will be no difficult matter to please her. A little broiled meat, or whatever she tells you she can take, not to get up till breakfast time. Except you have Mass and that she feels able. Not to go out except she likes to try a short walk. Great tenderness of all things...(p.93) To be a nurturer in the manner of Catherine seems to be a delicate balance between giving direction and allowing the ailing person her freedom, between following prescriptions and letting the other person's effort and self-determination assert itself, between recognising need and dependency and encouraging the other's quest for healing and life. And the overriding "rule"? The quality that is valued above all by Catherine in respect of those in need? Tenderness. To lead with tenderness, to live with tenderness.

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