

Returning to Baggot Street

Away back in the 1980's, American musician John Denver wrote a song entitled "Some Days Are Diamonds (Some Days Are Stones)". For 33 members of the Circle of Mercy (Northern Province), Wednesday 12th June 2024 was, without any shadow of doubt, a diamond – precious, multi-faceted and brilliant.

From the minute we arrived from our various starting points – Downpatrick, Laurencetown, Newry, Rochfortbridge and Warrenpoint – and were greeted on the pavement by the smiling figure of Sr. Margaret Daly, we knew we were in for a special experience.

We weren't wrong. Much-appreciated cups of tea and warm scones restored our energies as we embarked upon a day in which every part of us – body and soul, heart, mind and spirit – would be nourished, refreshed and renewed.

The first element of our day, Sr. Margaret's presentation on **Catherine McAuley and Leadership**, was captivating. We were spellbound by Sr. Margaret's ability to make Catherine come alive for us again in that house, her house, and be reminded of her unwavering faith, her resilience, her patience, her sense of fun, her anxiety too and, above all, her ability to empower others and give them the confidence and courage to undertake responsibilities they didn't themselves feel capable of carrying. Sr. Margaret's brilliantly seamless interweaving of Catherine's personal story with her writings and the events of her time prepared us beautifully for the next item on our timetable – a tour of the house or a visit to the Heritage Centre and the Garden.

Both were wonderful. To see Catherine's letters, the habit she wore and the Rosary beads she fingered – all 15 decades; to hear Sr. Aine Barrins tell the stories of Catherine's ring and her Deeds Box, and then see those very items "in the flesh", what an experience! Only one of many in the Heritage Centre. And then the beauty and serenity of the garden, that sacred space. Heavenly.

There are simply no words to convey the power and emotional impact of touring Catherine's house. Inspirational, humbling, an incredible privilege, they hardly begin to describe the experience. To spend time in the room where Catherine died is to be in a place of blessedness and sacred silence. When words fail, we find meaning in silence.

The last 45 minutes of our day were given over to the Circle of Mercy Plenary Meeting, the annual coming-together of members from all our circles, to reflect on the year just ending and look forward to the coming year. The Circle of Mercy aims “to live and promote the Mercy charism ...and continue the charism of Catherine McAuley into the future.” Where better to be inspired and motivated than in the House of Mercy, the home of Venerable Catherine, who encourages us to “be as shining lamps, giving light to all around us”.

Our visit to Baggot Street was everything we could have wished for, and more. We thank most sincerely Sr. Margaret Daly and the staff of MIA. They gave us an unforgettable day, a day of experiences that will energise and inspire us, a day of emotional moments and precious memories. A diamond.