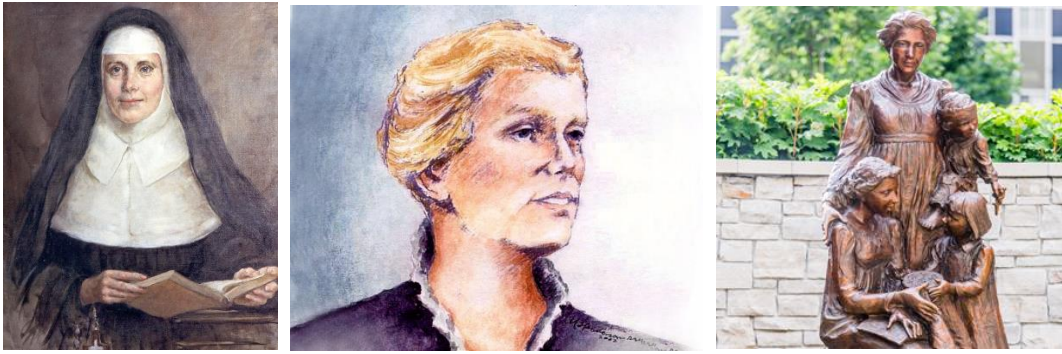


Catherine McAuley

Blue House Colour



Catherine McAuley was born in Dublin, Ireland, on the 29th of September, 1778 to James and Elinor Conway McAuley. Catherine's early childhood was, unlike some other influential figures of the Catholic Church, very loving, with both her father and mother raising her and her two siblings comfortably. However, when her father James died in 1783, when Catherine was approximately 5 years old, leaving her mother widowed and unemployed. Elinor Conway McAuley continued to raise her three children, but during 1789, she died, leaving Catherine the house and her possessions. At only 11 years of age, Catherine learned the valuable and purifying lessons of poverty and dependence on others for survival.

Through her hard work, Catherine worked her way out of poverty, coming to manage a household and care for Catherine and William Callaghan, an elderly and wealthy protestant couple in 1803, and, when they passed away in 1822 and 1819 respectively, the couple left almost all of their material wealth to her. This was a turning point in Catherine's life, and a true test of her character. At this point at her life, Catherine could have retired and lived comfortably for the rest of her life. However, Catherine decided to use this money to fulfil her lifelong dream of making a home for poor or homeless girls in Baggot Street, Dublin. This house, named the House of Mercy, opened on September 24, 1827, and Catherine, along with help from other nuns and volunteer women.

These women participated in many fields of charity under such as the name of God, and in many respects could be considered a religious organisation, however, never gained this title. Many of these Sisters were harshly criticised by members of the clergy. Despite discrimination and complete lack of acknowledgement, Catherine continued lead the sisters, investing all of her entire inheritance in the group, to the point of selling the Callaghan's house to pay expenses.

As Catherine started to realise the stability and lasting impact of the works of these sisters, she, along with sisters Anna Maria Doyle, and Elizabeth Harley, on September 8, 1830, formed the Sisters of Mercy, now an international and established religious organisation, reaching all corners of the globe.

Catherine continued to work into old age, continuing to expand the newly formed Sisters of Mercy, but eventually her health started to fail. Because of all the great works performed by these Sisters of Mercy, public attitude slowly changed, and Pope Gregory XVI officially confirmed the Sisters of Mercy as an order of the Catholic Church on June 6, 1841, but Catherine only received the letter, in Latin, three months later.

On November 11, 1841, Catherine died, at the original house of Mercy on Baggot Street.

As it can be seen from the works of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley truly made a positive impact on the Catholic Church, and the world today, by changing or influencing the clergy's attitude to women and proving her gender to be strong, intelligent and capable of teaching children. Finally, her work, the Foundation of the Sisters of Mercy created a lasting force for good in the world.

Through her many years of service, Catherine not once stopped to attend to her own life, caring only for the lives of the girls under her care. She received little thanks from the clergy at the time, and the majority of her actions were recognised only after her death. Catherine knew, however, that she should continue to serve the girls under her care - the benefit that her actions made to the lives of these girls was enough to sustain her, and she knew that she would be rewarded after the term of her mortal life. The quote that best exemplifies this selflessness and devotion to her work, written in her personal instructions and directions to the Sisters of Mercy, is: "It is for God we serve the poor, and not for thanks." This quote displays outstanding Christian values of selflessness and faith, that Catherine knew that she would not need thanks in this life, instead devoting her entire life to the service of the poor, not for glory or personal benefit, but purely out of her love for God and for the girls she taught.