

Sister Catherine Joy RIP - Funeral Homily

One beautifully simple and helpful way of praying is known as *lectio divina* – or as I like to think of it, reading God’s word with the heart. It involves reading a passage of scripture through, perhaps a few times, and when a word or phrase catches your attention, the reading stops, and you allow that word or phrase to lead you into an encounter with God’s loving heart.

This way of praying tends to be associated with the kinds of monks and nuns that live enclosed lives, but it is also very well suited to busy, apostolic, lives, because having alighted on a word or phrase in this way, we can carry it with us through the day.

For me, today, as we say a fond, hope-filled and grateful *adieu* to Sister Catherine, that phrase comes in the second line of our first reading: *Continue with your journey*.

If you can recall, these are the words God speaks to Moses at a time when the people of Israel had come to a halt on their pilgrimage to the promised land. It’s as if they had become stuck in a rut, complacent, or perhaps their initial enthusiasm had waned. They were unsure what lay ahead of them and so they were resting on their laurels, bedding down, suspending hope. But God had other plans, plans that involved

pressing onwards, to an as yet, unknown future by an untested route.

Think how many times Catherine has faced this kind of situation. The young woman who was part of a loving family in the beautiful kingdom of Kerry (Listowel), felt the tug of God's invitation to follow the path first trod by Saint Emilie. At that time, entering into religious life required physical distancing from her family, but her story confirms that they never left her heart. I can say with absolute confidence that Catherine drew enormous strength from her family, she also derived great pride with each successive generation.

But having felt God's invitation she responded with characteristic enthusiasm and determination, crossing the sea on her maiden voyage. Her first stop was Liverpool, a city that she took to her heart, where she fulfilled the first step as a postulant. This required another journey (1962), across another sea, to Marseilles, another great port city, for a longer period of formation and study. Once she had made her first profession (1964) she returned to Liverpool. Another journey began when she trained as a nurse (Monsall, Manchester), after which came the important step of making a lifetime commitment to religious life (1972).

Catherine embraced each stage of the journey with renewed enthusiasm, and with each mission she left

her mark, not only in practical ways, but in the hearts of those she met along the way. Her CV is impressive: nurse, parish pastoral worker, school chaplain, school governor, Liturgy Commission member, project manager at both Liverpool and Bowdon, to name just some of the contexts to which she brought her own energy. But in each one of these contexts Catherine operated the same way, she befriended people, invited them (some might say cajoled) to develop their own skills and talents. These included developing the musical talents of youngsters at Winsford, joining the sewing team at Liverpool Cathedral, befriending a rabbi, getting discounts off traders, inviting the Prince of Peace community to live alongside the sisters in Liverpool, preparing children for the sacraments, running the parish card and gift stall in Warrington, recruiting staff to provide respectful care to the sisters in Liverpool and then in Bowdon, the list goes on...

Every step of Catherine's journey has born fruit in the kingdom of God. Her smile, her warmth, her insight, her tenacity, and her creativity have been given in service to God with all her love, heart, soul and strength.

This includes the final, most challenging, journey of all. The journey of vulnerability, pain and separation. It is a journey when Catherine had to place her trust in these

other words from our opening reading where God assures that he:

*...has blessed her in all she has done;
has watched over her journeying;
and been with her all these years*

The final journey that began three years ago with her diagnosis. With characteristic determination, she has lived those years, putting everything and everyone in order. Catherine always understood that no one in this life can regard themselves as indispensable. This is a hard lesson for any of us to learn, it is even harder to say adieu to someone we have come to regard as indispensable in our own lives.

There are a lot of us here today who are having to face up to this reality. This is why I for one will continue to thank God for the blessing that came to us from the Kingdom of Kerry as we commend her on the ultimate journey to another, still more wonderful and joyful kingdom. A journey we all hope to complete, confident of God's infinite mercy and love.

Fr Peter Montgomery

