

Catherine

A Newsletter to Promote the Cause for Canonization
of Servant of God Catherine de Hueck Doherty

Issue Number 10 — Fall 2005



20th Anniversary of Catherine's Falling Asleep in the Lord

■ From the Postulator's Desk

Dear Friends of Catherine,

It took a long time for the theme of this issue of the newsletter to come together in my heart. But I think it will be very meaningful for you. The following realization came to me in prayer in the poustinia: I bet not many people have ever read the eye-witness account of Catherine's death by the two community members who were actually with her that night. As you will read in their accounts, they were indeed very blessed and privileged to be the ones chosen by our Lord and our Lady of Combermere to be there. I need not say any more.

I'm sure you know, dear reader, that most of the time we simply called Catherine "B," and that is how our two sisters, Alma Coffman and Carol Ann Giske, refer to her. Alma is a nurse, Carol Ann is not. What I present here are excerpts from their accounts, written later the same day Catherine died, December 14, 1985, as well as at other later times. As the account begins, they are speaking about December 13-14.

Alma: Carol Ann Giske and I were with B from the 11 P.M. to 7 A.M.

"Death is one of my favorite subjects. One day, one moment, I shall wake up and I shall realize that I lived in a splendor the like of which I never understood. And I shall understand that which my heart yearned for all my life: I shall understand love." — Catherine



shift. I was the "sleeper." That means the one who slept in a sleeping bag in the closet on the floor, ready at a moment's notice to give help with B to the one who stayed awake during the night.

About 12 midnight B was on her left side. As she became restless we turned her on her right side. She rested more quietly, although her respirations continued to be labored. During the

night I encouraged Carol Ann to tell B that Father Eddie loved her and was waiting for her. B never talked during the night. Sometimes her respirations turned to groans. We turned her; it seemed quite uncomfortable for her to be turned – to move her arms and legs.

Carol Ann: When I came at 11:00 B's breathing was rather labored – more than the day before. She half-opened her eyes a few times during the night. She also made attempts to move her arm. Her breathing slowed down and she seemed to sleep for about an hour. I noticed when we turned her she seemed so stiff. I had a hard time positioning her, and asked Alma to do it at 4:00.

While preparing to turn her at 4:00 to her right side she reached up as she usually did to embrace me – to feel my warmth, as Archbishop Raya says. As she reached up, I moved down to embrace her. She would not have had the strength to hug me, but there we were, her arm across my back. So I hugged her, told her I

loved her and our Lady loved her, and all the saints and angels loved her.

Sometime — I guess between 12 and 2:00 — while her breathing was so heavy, I really sensed “here is a soul fighting to leave its

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body.” Until recently B seemed to be fighting to stay, but no more. I prayed for mercy, prayed it would not have to be that often long dragged out process of dying. I prayed the Glorious Mysteries and half of the Joyful Mysteries.

Fr. Paul Bechard came in about 4:30 and stayed for a while, quietly praying; he blessed us all. He asked me how she was. Alma had lain down. I pointed out B’s breathing. I asked if he had seen her yesterday. I didn’t say what I thought. I really didn’t expect her to die yet, since she had that restful period. What did I know! I couldn’t tell Fr. Paul how she was. He left shortly before 5:00, I think.

Alma got up every two hours and was up for half the time at least. I was glad to be on with Alma and she with me. I mention it because the harmony between us was one of love and peace. So there was no tension in the atmosphere. Alma stayed at B’s side while I cleaned the cabin after the 4:00 A.M. turning. I had just finished when Fr. Paul came in.

Alma: I slept in the closet a few times between turnings earlier in the night. Father Paul came in. But when I got up at 4:A.M. to give her her medicines, I wasn’t tired. But at 5:10 A.M. I decided to lie down

and relax. I wasn’t sleepy. I started to pray for each member of the MH family by name when I heard Carol Ann say, in an urgent voice, “Alma!” Instantly I was on my feet and out of the closet and beside B’s bed.

She had her eyes closed and she was having a mild seizure. Her hands and arms were extended and trembling.

Carol Ann: She was breathing heavily as earlier in the night. It was about 5:20 when she gave a sudden loud gasp and stopped breathing. I called Alma. She came immediately to B’s side. B’s face was rigid, although she hadn’t moved.

Alma asked me to ring Fr. Brière’s bell, call Marian Heiberger and ask her and Jean Fox to come.

Alma: As the seizures stopped, B’s respirations also stopped. She had a few very irregular breaths. Father Brière came in just as she gave the last big breath. After that there were several very shallow respirations; then that was all. We did get out the suction machine, but we never used it, or the oxygen. It was all over so quick. And there was a deep sense of peace.

I said to Carol Ann, “This is a great moment!” There B lay – no struggle, no pain. She was free at last. It was 5:30 A.M. Father Brière gives her Last Communion and blessing. At some point Father Brière takes her in his arms and kneels beside the bed.

Marian Heiberger comes in, and

then Elizabeth Bassarear, Jean Fox, Mary Davis, Jim Guinan. Father Brière asked me to lead the rosary. I started with the Apostles’ Creed, but got mixed up with it and went on to the Hail Marys. Father Brière starts the prayers for the dead. Father Bob Pelton arrives as does B’s son George and members of the MH family. There is a reverent coming and going. Sandra Wood from the R.A. sobs. Angela Redmond sings a solo, “Regina” in English – beautiful! Jean Fox says, “Catherine of Combermere, pray for us.” The applicants come. Then around 6:25 Father Brière has Mass.

(Alma and Carol Ann recorded the following a few days later, on December 19)

Alma: Do you remember I said, “Carol Ann, this is one of the most important moments of our life.”? Is that what I said?

Carol Ann: Well, I think it is. I remember that you came over and put your arm around my shoulder like you sometimes did when we



Alma Coffman

were working together, and you said, “Carol Ann, this is one of the most important moments in our lives.” We knew it was really important.

Alma: You know it was really a privilege. We both had just worked together in the herb garden, and you had just taken first promises on the 8th. I had taken first promises in '81. So this made me four years into promises. So we both were young in the apostolate. But here we were with this great privilege of being with the foundress when she died. And it wasn't a privilege that anyone could ask for. And I had been praying for everyone by name. It wasn't something that I could have orchestrated or known, but just the guiding of the Spirit. It was like we were standing there for the whole MH family, both the present ones and those who would ever wear the pax-caritas cross. It was just a beautiful moment.

It was a scary moment, too, in some ways. But there was a tremendous peace there, but also to decide what did we need to do.



Carol Ann Gieske

Was this really the moment of B's death or was this just a seizure, which she had had before? Would this be something that when she came out of it she was going to need oxygen? Was she going to need suctioning? You know, so we

“At one of the wakes Father Wild said, ‘What happened is, Jesus came and kissed her and took her home.’ And to me that so describes how B did die, because she gave a big gasp. It was a gasp.... It was like the Lord came and kissed her and took her home.”

were intent on getting the things ready; but at the same time we were attentive to her at the moment of her death, so it had a lot of mixed emotions with it. Also, what was coming from B was peace.

Carol Ann: It was interesting. At one of the wakes Father Wild said, “What happened is, Jesus came and kissed her and took her home.” And to me that so describes how B did die, because she gave a big gasp. It was a gasp. She had been breathing a labored breathing. I'm not a nurse, and haven't seen – she's only the second person that I saw die. So I'm not actually up on exactly what happened. But I thought that B died at that point. So I called Alma; I called you right away. It was like the Lord came and kissed her and took her home. It happened very quickly.

Now people want to know or ask, “Did you smell any flowers? Did you see anything unusual like lights? Did you hear any bells ringing?” I did not. But maybe Alma has something to add.

Alma: It was a very ordinary death in the sense that you had a person who was breathing in a dying rhythm, but there was a deep

sense of peace. I would say that B's spirit quietly left her body. Very, very quietly. There was no thrashing, really no struggle, at the moment of her death. Her breathing just went into what I would call a dying rhythm – a few big

breaths, a few short breaths, a big breath, a short breath, a lessening of intervals between the breaths, and then, at last no breath.

And you know what I see as the biggest miracle of B's life and death? It's not anything that happened, but the fact that we have vocations to Madonna House and that we can persevere in them. That, to me, is the biggest sign of B's holiness, is that all of us have been called to this vocation.

Alma: We buried Catherine Doherty yesterday, December 18, Wednesday. I buried my foundress. I buried the only living person I'd ever met who had a vision of God and how to live the gospel big enough for me to leave everything and to follow what she lived and saw. Prior to my first contact with Madonna House, I had been nurtured and loved deeply and beautifully by many people. But never did I meet God in such a profound vision that I needed to leave family, friends, homeland, church, all my possessions, and follow after that which my heart longed for; and that is God in the Absolute; to preach the gospel with my life without compromise, according to the spirit of Madonna House. ■

Testimonies and Favours Received

So faithful and fervent daughter of the Church whose memory will remain forever as a blessing of God for the redemption of the world by fraternity and charity.

— Telegram from the (then) Apostolic Pro-Nuntio of Canada, Archbishop Angelo Palmas, on the occasion of Catherine's death.

Perhaps it was necessary that Catherine should pass from time into eternity so that with more clarity and a more definitive way we might penetrate the mystery of her almost unfathomable personality. Because, it seems, that it is only death that perpetuates the real being of a person and sets forth the essential value of a person's life.

For me, after Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa of Avila, no other woman has impressed me so much as Catherine de Hueck Doherty. Humble, with affectation, firm without arrogance, she was able to combine a deep sense of femininity with her definitive vocation to sanctity and thus become a perfect Christian without ever negating her womanliness. As I see it, it will be a long time before the real depth of her spirituality is unveiled to us in its real splendor.

As a prospector often has to explore the depths of the earth, so will we have to go into the depths of her spirit to discover the wonderful treasures still hidden from our eyes.

— Don Nivaldo Monte, Archbishop of Natal, Brazil

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I hereby attest under oath that I was cured instantaneously of a long-standing ailment when the personal icon of Catherine Doherty was applied to my leg four weeks ago and her intercession implored. The ailment has not recurred. In gratitude for this blessing received from Almighty God through Catherine, I remain, sincerely in Christ Our Lord,

— GAN, Edinboro, PA, U.S.A.

In December, 1986, my husband was in the hospital, dying of cancer. I had always prayed for his conversion, and his reconciliation with the children. I remember praying to Catherine on December 14, hoping to receive a special grace, since this was her first anniversary in heaven. The priest prayed over him and the pardon was done with the children and me there. No one could miss the peace that had set into this man. He died on December 20. Thank you, Catherine, for interceding for us near the Lord.

— CR, Kirkland Lake, ON, Canada

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If you believe you have received favours through Catherine's intercession, we would be pleased to hear from you. Please write to the Postulator at the address found on the last page. ■

Cry the
GOSPEL
with your
life

Catherine Doherty

*Prayer Asking for
Favours Through the
Intercession of
Servant of God
Catherine Doherty*

All loving Father, through your beloved Son, Jesus, we have been taught to ask for what we need. And through his spouse, our Mother the Church, we have been instructed to pray for one another, and to ask the intercession of your servants, who have fallen asleep in Christ. Therefore, through the intercession of your servant, Catherine Doherty, we ask (*here mention your petition.*)

We ask this for your honour and glory, and in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son Our Lord. Amen.

*Imprimatur: † J. R. Windle, Bishop of Pembroke,
May 1, 1993. For private use.*

Death is a Bridge

Catherine's reflections on the death of her husband, Fr. Eddie Doherty, May 6, 1975, and July 28, 1976.

All of us realize that death is a bridge. It seems that all the psychiatrists and psychologists are telling us that we fear death. This is why we are filling ourselves with pills and this, that and the other thing. Death and pain are the two things we want to eschew. And yet, in the person of Father Eddie, man realizes that death is a bridge, a most wonderful bridge that you have to cross in order to find, not only peace and love, but God himself.

There is nothing to be afraid of. Rather than fear, death brings out a fantastic feeling of expectation that is like a man or woman waiting for their date. So we Christians should wait for our date — the immense, fantastic, incredible, explosive, joyful, peaceful encounter with God. For it is a date. For this we have been born — that we should be one with the Lord.

Death is a bridge that you begin to walk when you are very small that ends in the arms of God. It is so very, very simple. This bridge is, in a sense, the essence of the Good News. He came to give us life everlasting. He died so that we could say, "Death, where is your sting?" He conquered death for us. Do we believe that?

We have to face the ultimate essence of our fear. We have to enter the realm of faith. I happened to enter into it last year. Eddie died on May 4, and my very favorite brother, Serge, died on May 20th. Now, what is death? I think I shocked a lot of people in our Russian chapel by dancing

Let us drop the fear of death, because in that fear, hidden like a sort of fungus, are a thousand other fears that would disappear if we stopped being afraid of death. I don't know if that makes any impression on you, but I really mean it. Death, my friends, is fun!

around Eddie's coffin. How was I able to dance? Because God in his infinite mercy has given me faith.

Suppose that your husband, your best friend, your wife, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, died. If you really loved that person with a true love, shouldn't you be delighted? Shouldn't you be excited? Wouldn't you be sort of dancing in your heart that he or she is going to see God? Can you imagine — the one you loved is seeing God face to face!

Why don't we enter into the wonderful theological virtue of hope and say to ourselves: "God is so merciful. Why do I go around fearing death? I am filled with the hope of the hereafter, of seeing God, of being with him. Don't let me be afraid of death. Let me welcome it like St. Francis welcomed 'Sister Death.'" Welcome her with open arms. Because, as I stretch out my hand towards Sister Death, I meet the wounded hands of Christ. I am embraced by him, and he kisses me with the kiss of his mouth, as it says in the Canticle of Canticles. I think that is what is going to happen when I die: suddenly he will kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.

Let us drop the fear of death, because in that fear, hidden like a sort of fungus, are a thousand other fears that would disappear if we stopped being afraid of

death. I don't know if that makes any impression on you, but I really mean it. Death, my friends, is fun!

Death is a bridge over which we have to pass, but it is so nice to prepare oneself to walk over a bridge. Even though there are lots of precipices, lots of surging waters beneath the bridge, faith will take us across, love will give us the strength to help someone else across, and hope will make a song out of life.

So let us be in peace, in joy, in gladness that Father Doherty has passed over the bridge, and that he and the High Priest, the real Priest, Christ, have now met. So let us praise the Lord! Come on, let us sing an Alleluia! ■



Catherine Doherty with Archbishop Raya at Fr. Eddie Doherty's coffin

Excerpts from various homilies at services after Catherine's death

Today, this morning, all the loneliness of all the people she had ever met, her own loneliness, all the sinfulness, all the hurt, everything was pushed away, and today Jesus kissed her without anything in between. That's what happened today. Who can imagine what that is, the explosion of his hidden presence! For all those years Jesus veiled himself from her, in us, in the poor, hiding himself, and her seeking him. But today, the veil was removed, and Jesus kissed her with the kiss of his mouth. That's what happened today

— Fr. Bob Wild

In her mind, in her understanding of God's call, it is that element of personal transformation, of making a community of love, that is the work of Madonna House, and the means by which the vocation of the apostolate will be accomplished. Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it only remains a single grain. And as we see, Catherine has fallen to the earth and died over and over and over again in her life, and has brought forth a rich harvest. And again this moment in which she again falls to the earth and dies hold in it a promise for a rich harvest, not only for us but for the whole world.

— Fr. Bob Sharkey

Let us rejoice then tonight. We have seen what so many

prophets and kings yearned to see. How many Benedictines would have loved to know St. Benedict? How many tens of thousands of Franciscans would have given anything if they could have just met Francis once? And yet, God has selected us to know and to live with, these precious years, our foundress and our mother. So tonight we look to the heart of the Trinity where B is dancing and laughing and singing as she promised she would with her golden slippers. And we on earth celebrate too, by pointing not to B, but pointing to Jesus Christ who leads each one of us to the heart of the Father, the fullness of love of the Spirit, and always in the heart of Mary, the Mother of God.

— Fr. Jim Duffy

But as Catherine became littler and littler, weaker, more helpless, the glory of her life became brighter. She had asked the Lord what she could give, what she could give in love to him, what she could give in praise of him, what she could give to feed the hungry, to heal the sick, what she could give for the Church, what she could give for priests and Sisters, what she could give for Madonna House, what she could give for the thousands of people who wrote to her or knew of her. And he said to her, "Your life." And she said, "Well, I sing and sing because I give you such a small thing." But she couldn't have known, really, that it was going to be poured out for the last eighteen months, drop by drop.

My brothers and sisters, if we can see the beauty and the glory of this death, we can see the Lord whom Catherine loved so much and who loved her so much. Because truly, no matter how unusual were all the circumstances surrounding her death – not everyone has a community like Madonna House to care for them when they're old; not everyone has the incredible physique and genetic inheritance and the grace and so forth to live what Catherine lived; not everyone can be so surrounded by prayer and holiness – nevertheless, her death was very ordinary. There are thousands of old people at home or in nursing homes who die in this slow, passing way. Catherine became a poor woman. Obviously, not an ordinary one: here we all are. But she became a poor



Catherine Doherty's Funeral Mass
at Holy Canadian Martyrs Church in Combermere

woman. And in that total abandonment of herself to Jesus Christ, we see his compassion and his presence to every single person who lives and who breathes.

For years, people have been saying, “What will happen when Catherine dies?” I think the thing we never thought of really clearly – some perhaps did – was, well, when Catherine dies, she’s going to see Jesus Christ; she’s going to be in the arms of the Lord; she’s going to live in the heart of the Blessed Trinity. Will she grow less? No. Now is the time for her to grow great. What will happen when Catherine dies? The seed that she allowed the Lord to make of her has been planted to deep in the earth of this world and in the light of eternity that it will continue to grow and send out roots and send up branches, and it will stretch across the face of the earth. And the words that she has spoken will be read as long as men and women read English, or read any other language, for that matter. And the family that God has taken from her flesh, from her spirit, will become – if only our friends pray for us, and if only we do the little things exceedingly well for the love of God – will become a unity of faith and love that will be a bright star in the sky for as long as the Lord wants it to shine.

May we give glory to him who has loved us so much by giving us so great, so holy, so joyful, so wise, and so childlike a woman. Thank you. Thank you, Catherine. Thank you, Blessed Mother of God, Our Lady of Combermere. Thank you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. May you be praised in Catherine and in all of us her children, now and always and forever and ever.

— Fr. Bob Pelton ■

The Habit and the Slippers

It was said that when Catherine knew she was dying, she exacted a promise from the members of the Community at Madonna House that when her body was placed in the coffin, it was to be attired in her Third Order Franciscan Habit (yes, she was one of us!) and her dancing slippers were to be put on her feet. The reason for this Habit was obvious, but “Why the dancing slippers, B?” “Because when I get there, I’m going to spend eternity dancing with the Holy and Blessed Trinity.”

When Catherine died a few days later, her body was placed in a coffin which was handmade from a few planks sawn from a great, white pine felled on the grounds of Madonna House; and yes, she was attired in her Third Order Habit and her dancing slippers!

— Brother Cuthbert, T.O.S.,
Sturgeon Falls, ON ■

“Jesus was born for us, was crucified and died for us. And he resurrected! This is the source of my faith, deep and unmoveable, that makes the waiting easy. I have faced death, and know her to be a friend who someday will take me by the hand and lead me to the heart of the Father. I know her to be beautiful because she really isn’t death, but life renewed, life exploding, life lived in the Trinity.”

— Catherine Doherty

The Little Mandate

Catherine Doherty considered the words of “The Little Mandate” to be the very heart and essence of her vocation:

Arise—go! Sell all you possess. Give it directly, personally to the poor. Take up My cross (their cross) and follow Me, going to the poor, being poor, being one with them, one with Me.

Little—be always little! Simple, poor, childlike.

Preach the Gospel with your life—*without compromise!* Listen to the Spirit. He will lead you.

Do little things exceedingly well for love of Me.

Love, love, love, never counting the cost.

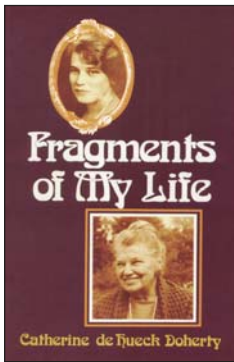
Go into the marketplace and stay with Me. Pray, fast, pray always, fast.

Be hidden. Be a light to your neighbour’s feet. Go without fear into the depth of men’s hearts. I shall be with you.

Pray always. *I will be your rest.*

■ Catherine in print and media

Catherine Doherty's life was the subject of many books, and she herself was a prolific speaker and writer with dozens of published works. We hope to introduce you to some of these popular and important works, considered by many to be modern spiritual classics.



206 pages
\$12.95 U.S.
\$16.25 Canadian

Fragments of My Life

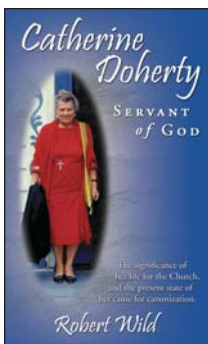
A Memoir

by Catherine Doherty

A journey into Catherine's life, disclosing the mysteries of world events that shaped her life; the mysteries of her leadership; the mysteries of her marriage; and, most of all, the mysteries of God's love.

Catherine tells in her own words how she was born to wealth in pre-revolutionary Russia, raised among Arab children and pashas in Egypt, French students in Paris, and Russian peasants and aristocrats on her family estate. She shares how she dodged bullets as a nurse during World War I, barely survived the Russian Revolution, encountered poverty as a refugee and returned from her rags to riches in North America. Then finally, how she gave everything away to serve the poor.

These and other titles by Catherine Doherty can be ordered directly from Madonna House Publications by calling toll free: 1-888-703-7110, or on the Internet at: www.madonnahouse.org/publications

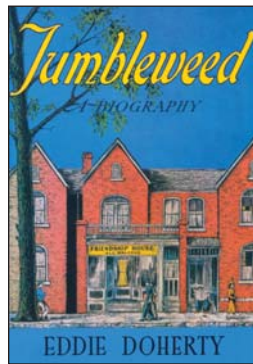


Catherine Doherty: Servant of God

For the 20th anniversary of Catherine's death, Fr. Robert Wild (the postulator for her cause) has prepared this new book on the significance of her life for the Church and the present state of her cause for canonization, incorporating material from past cause newsletters.

There is no charge for the book, but donations will go to the aid of her cause. To order, write to:

Postulator, Madonna House
2888 Dafoe Rd, Combermere ON K0J 1L0



203 pages
\$12.95 U.S.
\$16.25 Canadian

Tumbleweed

A Biography of Catherine Doherty

by Eddie Doherty

A revealing look at the motivations behind this amazing woman—as seen through the eyes of her husband, Eddie Doherty.

This is Catherine Doherty's adventure-packed life story—the story of “God's own tumbleweed, blowing through the world, wherever the breath of the Holy Spirit may send her.”

Eddie vividly portrays Catherine's early life in Russia, her harrowing escape to freedom during the Revolution, her life as a refugee in North America, and finally her call to live the gospel in the lay apostolate and her founding of Friendship House, precursor to Madonna House.

More information about Catherine Doherty and the progress of her Cause—as well as printable copies of this and previous newsletters—can be found on the Internet at:

www.catherinedoherty.org

How to Contact Us

If you believe you have received favours through Catherine's intercession, we would be pleased to hear from you. We are also in need of financial donations to help cover the expenses of her Cause. If you would like to contact us, please write to us at:

Postulator for the Cause
Madonna House Apostolate
2888 Dafoe Rd
Combermere ON K0J 1L0
Canada

Fax: (613) 756-3832

E-mail: cause@catherinedoherty.org

If you didn't receive this newsletter in your mail, but you would like to, please write to us with your address. There is no charge, but donations are accepted and appreciated.

- Yes, I would like to receive future newsletters about Catherine's cause. (Please send in English or French)
- Please send me cards of Catherine's official intercessory prayer. Quantity: ___ English ___ French ___ Spanish
- Please also send me a catalogue of Catherine's published books and talks.

Name: _____

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