



How is Catherine Being Perceived?

■ Latest News

The Bishop of Pembroke, Most Rev. Richard W. Smith, has appointed the members of his diocesan tribunal, and members of the historical commission that will now begin to examine Catherine's life and writings. This is a major step in the process of the cause. ■



Catherine Doherty, standing on the front porch of Madonna House.

"I'm not too keen about writing my autobiography. But perhaps I should write it. No one can write about my life as I can!"

— Catherine Doherty

■ From the Postulator's Desk

I am frequently asked, "How is Catherine being perceived?" Of course, it all depends on who is doing the perceiving. A guest came here once and just sat in the car until someone came out to see who he was. He said he had read Poustinia but was overwhelmed by the number of buildings before him. "What did you expect?" he was asked. "An old woman sitting under a tree," he said.

Before I narrow down the perceiving audience, let me quote a relevant passage from 1 Corinthians, 2:11,15. We do well to keep it in mind as we survey some perceptions of Catherine: "Who knows a man's innermost self, but the man's own spirit within him. Similarly, no one knows what lies at the depths of God, but the Spirit of God... The spiritual man can appraise everything though he himself can be appraised by no one."

Part of my responsibility as postulator is to try and acquire, for the Church's discernment, as comprehensive a picture of Catherine as possible. Of course, only God knows who Catherine really is. After God, Catherine herself probably

knew who she was better than anyone else. Not as completely as God, but "who knows a man's innermost self, but the man's own spirit within him." We may not know everything about ourselves, but each of us has a profound understanding of himself or herself, and of the work of God in us. Thus, Catherine's own personal diaries and spiritual journals are absolutely essential for knowing who she was. She was guided by the Holy Spirit in this interior evaluation.

We're fortunate to have hundreds of pages of Catherine's own reflections on how she understood herself—her struggles, the graces she received, her failures and sins. Catherine was very honest and ruthless in her self-scrutiny. If anything, she magnified her faults and minimized her virtues.

We also have thousands of her letters which contain an enormous amount of self-revelation. They are not all profoundly self-revelatory; but in her correspondence, especially with community members, spiritual directors, close friends, and priests, we have a great deal of personal insight.

The people in the community

who knew her personally, who lived with her for 10, 20, 30 years or more, are invaluable, irreplaceable, unique sources of insight about Catherine's personality. Neither are these "of one piece." Everyone has his or her own perceptions. (I'm making a special effort right now to interview more of these people.) They knew her in a way that even her own family, her own relatives, did not know her.

And then there are people who only met her on one occasion, or intermittently over the years. Still, such sporadic meetings have some value. I encourage all who have ever met her, however briefly, to give their testimony, limited as it may be. Sometimes, in a chance or occasional meeting with a person, a new window is opened upon that person's character, something is revealed that may be quite unique, and that has not come to light at any other time. I have received some very important insights from people who only met her on one occasion.

In order, then, to narrow the



Catherine dressed in her Russian costume for the Chautauqua lecture circuit, 1920s

"It was clear from the rich emotional life that was Catherine's that things psychological were at play in her, and that the spiritual and psychological dovetailed and overlapped as they do in each of us to create depths of humanity which are truly mysterious."

field of perception for this article, I have decided to concentrate only on the perceptions of people *outside the Madonna House community*. Over the years, many of you, our friends, have received, verbally or in our publications, many of our reflections about Catherine. So I thought I'd share with you here how Catherine is being perceived by—you might say—the *Church at large*. Some of these people have met her on occasion; the majority only knew her through her writings and her reputation.

Madonna House has associate bishops, priests and deacons. While some have met her, not all have. In any case, because they are more involved in the wider Church, their perceptions of Catherine are more influenced by the worldwide ecclesial atmosphere than perhaps those of Madonna House would be.

Our Associates

The doctrinal dissertation of our associate priest, Fr. Don Guglielmi, is the most important theological study that has been done about Catherine. (It was the topic of newsletter #6.) The main thrust of this work presents Catherine as a spiritual mother, which is a theme that occurs frequently in the comments of others.

He shows, especially through her correspondence, that she was, in the truest sense of the word, a spiritual mother according to the ancient tradition of the Church. She was someone who was taught by God himself,

and therefore was able to guide others along the way of holiness.

Another of our associate priests, Fr. Ray Roden, did a paper on Catherine for his psychology course. It has some psychological insights about her and about how she viewed the world of psychology. He writes: "It was clear from the rich emotional life that was Catherine's that things psychological were at play in her, and that the spiritual and psychological dovetailed and overlapped as they do in each of us to create depths of humanity which are truly mysterious. She herself respected the discipline of psychology and did a good deal of reading in that field."

Fr. Ray says that she was one of the most profound influences in his life, and that she helped him understand the limits of psychology, and to see the depths of God that are beyond psychology. From a psychological point of view, then, people are finding in her writings treasures to mine.

Another of our associates, Pierre-Andre Fournier, was made a bishop last year. As an associate he knew Catherine quite well, and his testimony is indicative of many priests. He says, "She was always happy to see us. She quit what she was doing and came toward me when I entered a room where she was. On her invitation the members of Madonna House stood up when we priests came to the table to eat. Inspired by the teaching of the Church, she saw the presence of Christ, High Priest, Head of the Church, in us, despite

our frailties. This great example has helped me not only to live my life as a priest with great confidence and joy, but also to give support to other priests. I remember her constantly saying to us, a 'priest is Christ'. I myself welcomed in the rectory where I had been pastor for 12 years, many priests who had different types of problems. I have never regretted it. When a group of priests or deacons invite me for spiritual talks, whatever are my occupations, I never refuse."

Another of our associates, Deacon Joe Newman, knew Catherine in Harlem as a young man. She was his spiritual mother. He writes: "The B was like a Catherine of Sienna in taking not only priests but bishops to task on the cause of Catholic social principles. Catherine's life would testify to the reality of Christ's love in the world and the possibility of Christians loving God and neighbor to a heroic degree. In a very vivid dream a few nights ago [1993] B had me cradled in her arms as lovingly as a mother embraces her son. This is how Catherine embraces all her sons and daughters."

Various Studies

Fr. Ray Gawronski, S.J., a long time friend of Madonna House, wrote one of the earliest studies of Catherine (1989) for his licentiate at the Collegio S. Roberto Bellarmino in Rome. It was entitled *The Spiritual Mission of Catherine de Hueck Doherty*. He also sees Catherine's life and teach-

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ing as a guide in the spiritual journey. Here is his description of the purpose of this study. Note that he appreciates how open Catherine was to the work of the Holy Spirit wherever and however he manifested himself: "Perhaps largely because she herself was a Catholic Russian, her spiritual writings are less exclusive than they might otherwise have been. Thus, the accent with which she writes is certainly Russian. Her style, her memories, are all part of what the West would call 'the Russian soul.' Yet, if St. Sergius and St. Seraphim figure in her visions, we also find St. Therese of Lisieux's 'little ball' of God, St. Thomas Aquinas and the Spanish Carmelites. Catherine lived long enough to encounter the Asian turn of Western youth, and she was always open to the Native Americans.

"This paper is an attempt at outlining the spiritual journey as she presented it. We shall begin with a detailed examination of her critique of the world in which she found herself. Not surprisingly, this as well finds its source in a Russian book, titled *Urodivoi*, in which she speaks prophetically as a fool for Christ. Seeing a problem suggests both that one knows what a normal situation is and that one has some idea of where the solution of the difficulty may lie. Understanding Catherine's critique of modern life implicitly reveals her own values.

"The second half of the paper is given to a study of the solution to the problems of the world as she



Catherine as an immigrant waitress in Chicago, February 1943

sees it. Finally, there is a capstone glimpse into the spiritual peaks which open before one who has walked the way she describes."

Suzanne Scorsone is a very close friend of Madonna House. Presently she works as Director of Communications for the Archdiocese of Toronto. Years ago she did a very perceptive study about Catherine's time in Toronto and the breakup there. It's an extremely insightful presentation of some aspects of Catherine's character.

"Liminality" is a concept common in sociological studies. *Limina* is the Latin word for "boundaries." I suppose a modern word for it would be "marginal," and "liminal people" would be the marginalized, those who live on the fringes of "normal society." The following comment is indicative of the liminal aspect of Catherine's character as described by Suzanne:

"Virtually from the time of her birth she stood between being both of and not of so many things. She was both and neither Orthodox and Catholic, married and unmar-

continued on page 6...

O Jesus — Catherine's innermost prayers

■ From Catherine's Writings

When we are alone at prayer, speaking to God as sincerely as we can, we are both most honest about ourselves and most open to light about ourselves from the Lord. So it was with Catherine. If people are afraid her faults and failings will be swept under the rug in her process of canonization, they only need read her own prayers. The following are excerpts from the book O Jesus, published after her death. She never, of course, prayed these prayers with an eye to others reading them. They were between her and her God.

Jesus Beloved, let me see! I am blind to my faults, blind to my sins, blind to the fact that I antagonize all people except those who themselves are saints and put up with me as a cross! I love you. Alone I can do nothing. Let me strive under your guidance to get rid of my imperfections, no matter the cost. I am lonely because I deserve it. O Jesus, when I catch a glimpse of myself, I weep in horror at the picture. Help me, Beloved, to realize that you are all, I, nothing! Then will my pride be broken and in humility I will begin. Break my pride. Break it, O Jesus, even if it kills me. For with it I cannot have you and I want you above all.

— April 7, 1935

Another year gone into the chasm of eternity! What have I done with it, my Lord and my God? Today at Mass, you vouchsafed to me a glimpse of my nothingness, my utter inadequacy, my hopelessness in your service.

How can you, my Lord, have patience with such as I? I know your patience and mercy are infinite. But look at my vanity, self-love, indulgence of all kinds! Look at the graces you showered on me, and look at the lack of cooperation on my part.

Look at my unworthiness; look at your kindness, Jesus, Son of Man, my Lord and my God. Forgive me and accept my thanks for allowing me another chance. I know my weakness. I know that without you



Catherine lecturing on the back porch of Madonna House, Combermere, in the early 1950s

I am nothing. Help me! Alone I cannot make one step. Let me see myself as I am.

Make me realize these graces that you have allowed. Give me tolerance, understanding, humility, patience! Above all, inflame my heart with an unquenchable love for you. Make me an alert servant, not a sloppy, tired, lazy one as I have been until now. Do not allow me, sweet Lord, to take unto myself any pride about my achievements; make me humbly realize that I am only an instrument. You know it is all for your glory.

Make me more charitable, more gentle, more understanding with people. Give me humility—then I shall be able to serve you as I must. Cure my laziness. Give me strength and determination for sacrifices and mortifications. Make me patient, controlling all irritability, anger, impatience.

Help me, O Master. Look not at the unworthiness of your servant but only on her desire to serve you. Enkindle that desire until, as a flame, it consumes me entirely! Bless all the things I do in your name. Give me understanding of what I should do and what I should run away from. Give me your love! In temporal things, give me my daily bread, and the rest as you will. Your will be done, not mine.

— December 31, 1933

The night was dark. I lay awake. Does anyone understand the horror of dark nights, when all is quiet as if it were dead? I faced the past and shuddered; the future and shrank. Seventeen long years of pain and suffering, seventeen years of hell, and nobody knows! Indeed, I am a failure in all things—in married life, in motherhood, in any work for

humanity.

Lord, as I think of all these failures, I wonder if by any chance it would be possible to find anyone who has made a bigger mess of life than I. I am sure not! Jesus, Master of all things, how do you stand such as I?

Oh, I am not complaining about my fate. How could I? For all that has come to me is well-deserved because I am such a sinner. My sins are always with me and before me, as are the graces I have lost. I often think of these graces. Are they lying there, crying, because I haven't made use of them? Or have they been picked up by chance? Who will know the end of this mystery? Death alone will solve it.

— April 25, 1937

O Jesus, how shall I thank you for your graces, for your kindness, for the wonder of it all—that I should be chosen to have even a little part in your work! Help me to understand a little of your truth. Help me to conform my will to yours. Help me to be humble. Help me to throw self-glorification absolutely away, remembering always: God delights to choose the most vile instruments for his glorification. O Jesus, help me, forgive me and bless me.

— June 13, 1934

Dear Jesus, may I dissolve myself in your will. May I hide myself in you, leaving to you all the things in my life. O Jesus, I love you. Teach me how to love you more, evermore, until, incapable of carrying the burden of longing, I might at last be freed.

O Jesus, help me to be a saint,

for the other meaning of a saint is a lover of God. Jesus, make me that—a lover of God, a servant of love. Teach me never to hesitate in service to you, never to spare myself the mortification of interrupted peace, of eternal contact with people. Teach me how to overcome likes and dislikes—in you. Teach me to submit my life to you. Teach me to lose myself in you.

— June 20, 1934

Dear Jesus, today I've had a rest. I did not mean to miss Mass. I just overslept. Forgive me, dear Mary, Mother of God, for it is one of your feast days and I meant with all my heart to go. The spirit was willing, the flesh weak. — July 2, 1934 ■

Prayer for Favours through the intercession of 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.

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...continued from page 3

ried, a mother and non-maternal, at least in categories that Torontonians could recognize, Russian and several other nationalities, aristocratic and bourgeoisie, rich and poor, intelligentsia and not university educated, radical and conservative, in emphatic obedience to and in specific issue-related conflict with the structures of the Church, lay living under a paradigm of the religious, accepting of the marginal and judgmental of the non-marginal.”

These aspects of her personal history added to Catherine’s experience—and teaching—of being a pilgrim, a wayfarer in this world, where we have no permanent home.

It was in Suzanne’s study that I first came across the description of Catherine’s way of thinking as “iconographic.” By this she meant that Catherine thinks more in images, rather than in linear, logical processes. This is an important insight for those investigating Catherine’s teachings, especially when they will be asking the question, “Is this opinion in keeping with the faith?” Catherine’s faith insights will be more in pictures or symbols, than in the terms of manual theology.

I also have Suzanne to thank for the following insight. Canonization is not exclusively the recognition of sanctity, since there are without doubt numerous saints in the presence of God whose names are utterly unknown on earth. It is rather a formal recognition, providential-

ly inspired, to make known certain persons as examples for Christians. Canonized saints are raised up by the Holy Spirit because he wants some people to fulfill a certain mission in the Church.

The Little Flower is a good example. She was put under obedience to write her life, *The Story of a Soul*. If she had never been told to do that, she would be one of the thousands of contemplatives who are very holy whom we have never heard about and probably never will. Since Catherine’s cause seems to be progressing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we believe that there is something about her life and teaching that the Lord wants the whole Church to know about.

Sometimes people say that Madonna House is pushing Catherine’s cause. Just for the record, the first person to propose that a cause should be considered was the Archbishop of Edmonton, Most Rev. Joseph McNeil. This is what he wrote to us: “Most certainly I think that Catherine’s life merits opening a cause. In fact, I urged Fr. Peter Nearing [a priest of Madonna House] almost immediately following her death to pass on the word to Combermere that the process should be initiated as soon as possible in order that much contemporary testimony be obtained.”

I think it is significant that this movement towards a cause first came from an archbishop, even before Madonna House considered it. Coming out of the heart of an arch-



Catherine, circa 1940

bishop, the inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit, for it comes out of the heart of the Church.

I have another dissertation in my files entitled *A Study of the Writings of Catherine Doherty as a Useful Presentation on Eastern Spirituality and its Implications for Western Christians*. The author’s topic is one of the common themes in the perception of Catherine by the wider Church: she is a bridge between the East and the West. Having blended in her own spirit the East and the West, she can serve as an icon of the unity all Christians shared for a thousand years. I’ll quote one paragraph to give you a taste of his thought:

“There are many ways in which the West can learn from the East and the writings of Catherine de Hueck Doherty are a useful bridge. This paper will attempt to show some of the ways her writings reflect the Russian and Orthodox heritage that she knew from her childhood and youth, and has carried with her

Saints are raised up by the Holy Spirit to fulfill a certain mission in the Church... Since Catherine’s cause seems to be progressing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we believe that there is something that the Lord wants the whole Church to know about.

throughout her life in North America. Her writings have been prompted by a desire to bring some of the benefits of Eastern spirituality to the West.”

In 1982—therefore even before her death—I received one of the earliest studies about Catherine, *The Ages of the Spiritual Life of Catherine de Hueck Doherty*, by a Belgian, Leon Mathy.

One of the great classics on the various stages of growth and development in the Christian life is *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, by Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. He describes what he calls the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive phases of our Christian growth.

Similarly, Mathy found, in the writings of the Orthodox writer, Paul Evdokimov, a description of the spiritual journey of the soul. Mathy then went to Catherine’s writings and traced her own understanding of these phases by comparing them with Evdokimov’s.

When I myself consider writing about Catherine’s spiritual doctrine, showing the stages of her own spiritual life would be one of the most valuable approaches I could take. It would be relatively easy to do, since we have a profound and detailed description of these stages from her diaries. They reveal very clearly how she passed through the “ages” of the spiritual life.

Catherine didn’t start out in the seventh heaven. One of the reasons I trust her is that she plodded through the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways. For years she made daily meditations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the Stations of the Cross. She agonized through the practice of the virtues and persevered through the deepening ways of prayer. She finally arrived at a very advanced stage of

“In the balance of who was for her, who against her, I would judge Catherine hands down winner, not because she did not have strong opponents or personal defects but because her opponents could not hold a candle to her humanity.”

her life with Christ. She travelled through these stages, patiently, perseveringly, and with great desire.

Today, in our “instant society,” the temptation is to jump over the early stages and get into the “unitive way” as quickly as possible. But Mathy shows that Catherine, by her patient, step by step journey, is someone who can help us with our prolonged and often tedious journey to God. Her life is a very instructive presentation of how to progress through the different stages of the spiritual life.

Fr. Robert Taft is a professor at the Oriental Institute in Rome. I don’t know if he’s ever been to Madonna House or met Catherine; but he knows all about us and Catherine. When Lorene Hanley Duquin’s book, *They Called Her the Baroness*, was published, he wrote a splendid testimony about Catherine:

“A woman of extraordinary presence and energy, the Baroness was bigger than life and quintessentially Russian—open, vivacious, loving, romantic, sentimental, compassionate, melancholy, somewhat chaotic, heroic in suffering, magnanimous and forgiving. Like any person attempting to do good in this world, Catherine needed more than her share of the latter virtue. That is forgiveness. Some thought her a humble and heroic saint, others an ill-tempered, authoritarian, manipulative charlatan. In the balance of who was for her, who against her, I would judge the Baroness hands down winner, not because she did not have strong opponents or per-

sonal defects but because her opponents could not hold a candle to her humanity. And whether or not she had the heroic virtue required for canonization is for the Church to decide; but surely she had *heroic humanity* which is good enough for me.”

When Catherine was interviewing Bertrand Russell, he propositioned her. She said to him, “Have you looked in the mirror lately?” (He wasn’t very good looking!) Fr. Taft said that that comment alone would canonize her.

Fr. Robert Wild

Postulator for the Cause ■

The Little Mandate

Words which Catherine Doherty received from Christ, and which guided her life:

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.

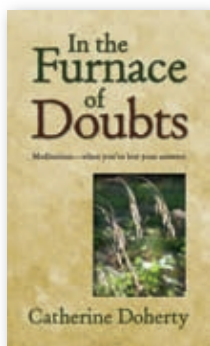
Love, love, love, never counting the cost.

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 Doherty in print and media



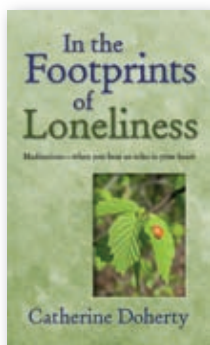
In the Furnace of Doubts

■ Meditations—when you've lost your answers

Doubts are part of the journey of faith. When you're affronted by doubts, when you can't get a handle on the answers that make you feel secure, you are walking in the company of the saints. Nonetheless, it isn't easy doubting. It isn't easy being in the furnace. It's painful. It's scary. It's confusing. It's lonely. But you are not alone. Catherine Doherty knew many of the fears, doubts and anxieties of this life. God often took away her answers when she thought she had him figured out.

Catherine lived through the major cataclysms of our time—here she shares meditations written in her pousinia and in the hustle of her life dedicated to the poor. Doubts assailed her inner life at every turn. Out of these experiences over many years came this book—which she fervently hoped would offer consolation to those who have reached the furnace of doubts in their walks of faith.

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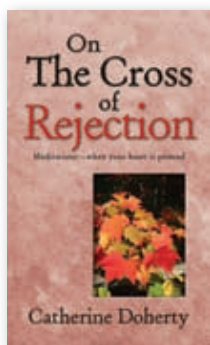
In the Footprints of Loneliness

■ Meditations—when you hear an echo in your heart

Loneliness is a part of the journey of faith. When loneliness comes upon you, you want to go and hide in some corner—self-pity carries you like a big, huge wave on a beach all full of stones. You see that beach in your mind and you think you are going to be broken up on the rocks... but in the depths of every heart there is a garden enclosed.

This garden is Gethsemane, and the enclosure is a meeting place for the Beloved, God. If you enter into this garden, you will hear the incredible sounds that Jesus heard: the heartbeats of God. God put loneliness in your heart so that you would hunger for him, and learn that unity with him brings unity with all. Catherine Doherty shares meditations flowing from the times of loneliness she herself experienced.

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On the Cross of Rejection

■ Meditations—when your heart is pierced

Rejection is a part of the journey of faith. To be rejected by friends hurts—being rejected by family even more so. This rejection is a mystery that encompasses you when you choose to follow Jesus Christ. Like him, you will experience that strange feeling of rejection by God himself, when you too cry out, "Father, Father, why have you forsaken me?"

But as Catherine Doherty explains in this collection of meditations, if you want to follow Jesus, you must walk with him to a place where you will face the ultimate rejection: Christ occupied one side of the cross—you must be crucified on the other side. From its height, you will get a first glimpse of the land of love. For here, Love himself sets out on the supreme road of suffering. You will know that you must not blame anyone, and what is more, you must both bless them and pray for them, for maybe they knew not what they did.

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Postulator for the Cause
Madonna House Apostolate
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Canada

Fax: (613) 756-3832

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