

# Catherine

Issue 17 • Summer 2009

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

## Catherine and Father John Callahan



■ From the Postulator's  
Desk of Fr. Bob Wild

My last few newsletters have been entitled "Catherine and Thomas Merton," "Catherine and Dorothy Day," "Catherine and Jean Vanier." But who is Father John Callahan? It is for the many who do not know who he was, or know very little about him, that I make him the subject of this newsletter. He was the first priest to join Madonna House, and was given the wisdom and courage to accept being Catherine's spiritual director during the most momentous years of her spiritual life. Fr. Don Guglielmi wrote his doctoral dissertation on Catherine, and it is from this document that, with his gracious permission, I share with you the following account of our beloved "Father Cal", as we always called him.

Father John Callahan was a priest from the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y. and chaplain at Mercy High School. He hosted a weekly Radio Rosary program and visited Combermere for the first time in the summer of 1950. After hearing his series of talks on the Virgin Mary, Catherine was very favorably

impressed, and the following year asked him to be her spiritual director. Their early relationship took place by means of letters through 1953, since



Catherine with Fr. Cal at Madonna House c. 1981

Father Callahan came to Madonna House permanently in that year to serve as the chaplain of the apostolate. There are also some letters from 1955, when Catherine was away giving lectures on racial justice and the

lay apostolate.

During 1952-53, Catherine was moving toward greater spiritual maturity, and her letters to Father Callahan during this period reflected this. Often these letters contained spiritual poetry which was sometimes prophetic in nature and frequently referred to her vocation as spiritual mother to priests. Father Callahan was the priest who directed Catherine through this more advanced stage of her interior life. His spiritual direction was practical, concrete and succinct. He was aware that because Catherine was a founder and spiritual mother, he was guiding her as she in turn directed the souls of others who came to Madonna House, and as she directed the whole Madonna House Apostolate.

Catherine had a wealth of experience to draw from in terms of her apostolic and spiritual life, in addition to her knowledge of human nature. The quality of her life up to this point – her consistent practice of charity – indicates a growth in union with God. Father Callahan guided and instructed her but Catherine was already well on her way to becoming a spiritual guide in her own right.

## The De Montfort Consecration

Father Callahan had an intensely Marian spirituality and introduced Catherine and the Madonna House apostolate to the Total Consecration of St. Louis de Montfort to Jesus through the Blessed Virgin Mary. On February 2, 1951, she and Eddie made their consecration under Father Callahan's guidance. Catherine attributed a phenomenal growth in Madonna House, in her interior life and her role as a spiritual mother, to the Marian consecration. In her diary for December 3, 1953, she wrote: "Madonna House was a new beginning, and yet it seemed no beginning at all – because no one believed but myself that it was to be anything at all but a nice place for me and Eddie to live off our writings.

### 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.*

"Then Mary's slavery – a growth overnight – phenomenal. Staff workers arrival. Growth in Summer School, of everything physical, inward, outward like roses in

*"Madonna House is Our Lady's House, her House of love, her novitiate of Love."*

June. Then the change inward Father Cal wants me to write about, and of which I can say so little. The discovery of a whole new horizon within myself. The life betwixt and between. Sights, sounds, gifts. Vows of poverty, obedience for life. Secrets of the heavenly King. A new life – and light, blinding, clear, on the apostolate, the truths of God; and love of Him and Mary that any minute seems to grow so big it must burn me up, annihilating me! But it never does, or did."

The Marian consecration produced many other positive signs. These can be summarized as follows: First, it gave Madonna House its distinctive Marian spirit – hence the name of the apostolate, Madonna House. Fr. Callahan wrote in his notebook: "Madonna House is Our Lady's House, her House of love, Her novitiate of Love." Second, it led to Father Callahan becoming Catherine's spiritual director and eventually chaplain of Madonna House. Third, more people began coming to Madonna House seeking spiritual guidance. Fourth, Catherine's interior life and spiritual maternity grew in intensity. Fifth, from Father Callahan's perspective, Our Lady herself began to form Catherine's spiritual motherhood through his direction.

Almost immediately Catherine, in one of her long letters of 1951,

sought Father Callahan's advice about the life of prayer: "Give me some pointers on inner recollection, how to go about it? There is a strange bend in me lately. My soul seems lit-

erally to pull me into silence. I cannot express how it comes about nor the strangeness of that feeling. Nor the urgency of it. It is as if the day were very hot, and all of me longed for the cool waters of the river, just to get into it and stay there, quietly cooling off. Thus my soul seems to desire urgently the cool rivers of God's presence. But the calls of duty, of work, of distractions are His too, and yet something tells me that somehow, in some fashion, the two can be reconciled. How I don't know."

Catherine was growing in the life of recollection and, in the same letter, described her experience of prayer, explained its effects, and why she discerned that this was genuine: "Another thing bothers me. I almost hesitate to speak of it because I am such a Martha; yet lately there has been in my prayers a strange change. The presence of God is almost palpable, at times overwhelming me with a shaft of great light, almost too strong to bear, leaving me sort of numb, and making me walk for a while afterwards as in a dream.

"The one thing that assuages my fears and doubt, is the sense of great peace, and growing desire to utterly live in Jesus through Mary. That surely cannot come from the devil."

Again, in the same letter, Catherine marveled at how many oppo-

Fr. Cal, in his notebook

sites and conflicting elements can exist concomitantly in one person's spiritual life. "It is impossibly strange, this spiritual life. In it so many things that should be strangers to one another, come together – peace and shame, prayer, light and darkness, joy and gladness and such an overwhelming and constant sorrow for past sins and imperfection that continue and sharpen that sorrow without seemingly decreasing themselves. No wonder that God has given us guides to lead us along the way. One can so easily get lost and utterly discouraged."

She also sought advice about her intense desire for poverty and detachment from created things "I am as poor as can be. I do not know of any attachments I may have, but God must surely want me to examine myself again and again on this, since He seems to lead me along these lines when I pray before His face. On the other hand, it also all seems of one piece – the new hunger, or surge of desire for mortifications and of this stripping of myself, detaching myself more and more from all creatures and things."

### Martha Meets Mary

Father Callahan, in his letters, offered Catherine sound advice about recollection and its relationship to action. This had been an issue in Cath-

erine's spiritual direction for many years, and under Father Callahan's guidance it was finally resolved. Father Callahan's advice addressed each of Catherine's concerns and his counsel was practical and succinct.

### Recollection

He wrote: "On recollection, it is like this to me. Recollection means re-collecting, as it were, all our forces and faculties, a calling-back of my mind and memory and imagina-



Eddie, Catherine and Father Callahan c. 1964

tion, and will, from all distractions and exterior concerns, to focus them completely on Almighty God, or the Guest in my soul. It ties in with what the writers call 'the practice of the presence of God,' and of course presumes a process of detachment from external affairs, a recollection of forces and faculties to withdraw into myself, and there adore and glorify and thank and talk to my Lord. Somehow it may be likened to a flame that is always burning; but if I place a blowpipe behind it, it focuses into a point that will melt glass and iron. It is concentrated like a seraph's gaze, trans-

fixed into one point, God and love of Him. So, I call back, re-collect all my faculties to center them on Him alone."

### Reconciling Recollection and Action

Father Callahan wrote to her that "we carry our cell with us, into which we can withdraw in silence and recollection whenever the opportunity presents itself; and which will grow with practice. Certainly sil-

lence and solitude are part and parcel of the spiritual life. And if we can't withdraw from the world around entirely, we can periodically withdraw into ourselves, and be refreshed like that cool dip into the founts of our Savior."

Catherine will later identify this interior

condition of silence, detachment, and attentiveness to God as the "poustinia of the heart."

### The Change in Catherine's Prayer

He advised Catherine not to fight this palpability of God's presence but to "let it come, sometimes God so rewards us, and strengthens us to help us meet difficulties to come; if it is from the devil, he generally shows his hand by being too clever or going too far, and we are warned."

## Poverty and Detachment

“Poverty is in fact good, but Jesus especially blessed poverty of spirit and the non-demanding acceptance of our state. I still think the greatest detachment is from that of our own will.”

As Catherine’s prayer life intensified, she was also naturally and painfully aware of the enormity of her sins. She described it for Father Callahan in this way: “Suddenly, as if a curtain was rent, a fog lifted. I saw all my life pass before me with a clarity that was painful in the extreme, for it was as a dazzling light shone on all my sins. I saw them in a true perspective, against Our Lord’s Passion, saw the havoc they played with Him, the pain they inflicted on Him, and the utter desolation they brought our Lady. When I say I ‘saw,’ it was just that – nothing visionary, extraordinary, just saw, a clear cut picture of it all with my mental or spiritual eyes.

“Now nothing like that has ever happened to me in all my life. I was frightened too. The justice of God became a bit

clearer and the weight of it too heavy for me to bear, and the fear grew.”

Catherine experienced a moment of truth or illumination that

signaled a point of deeper conversion: “Then came a darkness the like of which I have not known in my life, and the devil became suddenly a reality. My soul hung for a split second on the brink of despair, and

*Give me some pointers on inner recollection, how to go about it? There is a strange bend in me lately. My soul seems literally to pull me into silence. I cannot express how it comes about nor the strangeness of that feeling. Nor the urgency of it. It is as if the day were very hot, and all of me longed for the cool waters of the river, just to get into it and stay there, quietly cooling off. Thus my soul seems to desire urgently the cool rivers of God’s presence.*

Catherine, writing to Fr. Cal for advice in 1951

I cried out, ‘Mary, Mary, help me!’ And it all vanished, and a great peace came. But with it came a resolution too, of going to confession and then start all over again once more.”

In 1952 Catherine described her view of harshness in spiritual direction. Unfortunately, we do not have Father Callahan’s response on this subject. Catherine was of the mind that “severity” is useful in dealing with souls

that are emotional, uncertain, vacillating, and pusillanimous. “Modern men and women are so far removed from the spiritual that when they be-

gin seriously to climb the ascent of truth, there is need for severity tempered with charity. In fact, at times that severity is charity, but the art of the science of direction lies in knowing when to apply what and how. If

I were a director, I would judge my penitents by the promptitude, the joyousness and the literalness of their obedience to my direction. But I also agree that the directors must examine their consciences constantly because when all is said and done, the direction of souls is bought at the price of the director’s surrender to God.”

## Fruit of the Marian Consecration: Detachment

The De Montfort consecration implied absolute totality of oneself to Jesus through Mary. “There is nothing whatsoever not included in this perfect consecration,” writes Stefano De Fiore. “We become divested of everything, for our career, plans, possessions, spiritual goods – even glory – is freely made holy, that is, subject to the overriding will of Jesus. De Montfort insists that we pour out ourselves totally, completely.”

One may see this effort in Catherine to surrender herself totally to God through Mary by stripping herself of all created things, even her own will. To this end she prepared to take



Father Callahan on Holy Thursday, 1958

a private vow of poverty in light of her Marian Consecration, which she regarded as “the outward sign of my inward giving of myself in a special manner to Him whom my heart has loved so long.” Catherine went on to explain more fully to Father Callahan what this private vow meant to her:

“I have asked His Mother this morning to take me into Her special novitiate and teach me there the full meaning of those deep simple words you wrote – IN THOUGHT, IN WORD, IN DEED. There is so much hidden in them that as yet I know not, and that She alone can teach me.

“There is first detachment from all creatures, which means LOVING THEM ONLY IN GOD, and being ready to relinquish them – their presence, consolation, love and friendship - always at His command. This leads me gently into holy indifference, that has nothing to do with a natural indifference that would be offensive to Him and hence to His creatures.”

### Childlike Obedience

Catherine wrote to Father Callahan like a child expressing her need for his guidance during this period. The obedience Catherine offered to Father Callahan was grounded in the De Montfort Marian Consecration, with the concept of holy slavery. He wrote: “This involved a slavery of love and free choice, the kind chosen by one who consecrates herself to God

through Mary, and this is the most perfect way for us human beings to give ourselves to God, our Creator.”

### Priestly Power and Authority

Another theological aspect of Catherine’s obedience was her keen understanding of Father Callahan’s



Father Callahan c. 1955

priestly power and authority as “another Christ.” Christ was directing her soul through Father Callahan, and therefore she owed him the same obedience she owed to Christ: “Out of this strange retreat has definitely come a clearer, forceful awareness *of you*. It is as if God has put on you a klieg-light of immense power. My way to Him is quite clear – via his priest John, to His Mother, and then to Him. Such are the directions, the compass of my way to Him, as if this whole retreat was just undertaken to pin-point this one concept. It deals with obedience, total surrender, absolute dedication.”

### Victim Soul for Priests

Catherine had read in spiritual treatises such as Auman’s *The Theology of Christian Perfection* that it was possible to offer oneself as a victim soul: “The soul that offers itself as a victim must be a soul that is well schooled in suffering and has a veritable thirst for suffering. Under these

conditions the director could permit a soul to make this act of offering itself as a victim and thus, if God accepts, be converted in its life into a faithful reproduction of the divine martyr of Calvary.”

The evidence suggests that Catherine had charity to a high degree for many years and was well schooled in suffering. She expressed the willingness to offer herself for priests in a letter to Father

Callahan dated July

8, 1953: “I am beginning to get a glimpse of what the word ‘holocaust’ implies. Pray for me, please, pray for me. At times it seems that I won’t be able to carry on, to endure, to live this way. All of me craves rest, sleep, and I know that is danger, and the danger is close, close, close. I hold on to the names of Jesus and Mary, but it is the most dangerous danger that ever came here yet. Because I am alone in the sense that I am without *you*. The attack will be all out. I sense it. It is permitted for priestly souls. Oh, pray for me, pray for me. It will come soon like a tornado. Pray for me.”

In his letters to Catherine Father Callahan was succinct and prudent.

He had received all her letters and replied: "Continue as you have, in love, trust, obedience, and acceptance of His holy will. Do not look at your thoughts. This is important. Remember, for you, the state of life and its duties are to be your yardstick and criterion. Continue to write all as it comes to you. I shall read it and pray over it. So be of good heart."

## Spiritual Poetry

The years 1952-1953 marked a turning point in Catherine's relationship with God. She began writing spiritual poetry that described her relationship with Father Callahan, as spiritual master and disciple, frequently with Jesus speaking in the first person. In a poem entitled *Refrain of Pain*, she wrote: "I am a jealous God, and you are all my own. John knows that he is I to lead you. I charge him to guard thee well, and teach thee the keys to what I want of thee – utter surrender. He knows the locks, he knows the keys, he knows the pain that goes into fitting lock and key. Tell him for me to be mercy-full by being mercy-less with thee, in leading thee to me with giant strides in the paths of love and pain, to show the face of my Mother that your Russian heart will reflect so well when it is utterly crucified like that land where you came from and which she loves so well. Now rest upon my breast, Mary's Catherine, and drift and drift like a leaf in the wind of my own love."

Father Robert Pelton wrote of Father Callahan: "His principal work amongst us was to be Catherine's spiritual director and thus take the responsibility before God of her sanctification, which would mean, of course, the sanctification of the whole family. He asked of her every kind of detachment possible, total surrender

ally the benefits were extraordinary. He cut through her doubts, confusions and temptations in a masterly way and brought peace and assurance back to her heart. He was not only a good spiritual director for her, he was truly her father in the spirit and he led her with the assured hand of the master."



Fr. Callahan c. 1962

to God's will, total trust and obedience to his direction. He was convinced that God wanted her to be a great saint and he directed her accordingly.

To conclude – and now, this is Father Bob Wild speaking. I would like here to pay my own tribute to Father John Callahan. As I come to know ever more deeply the profound depth and holiness of Catherine, and the greatness of her soul and mission, I am in ever increasing awe of what the Lord asked of Fr. John, and what great spiritual courage and trust in God he must have had to faithfully fulfill such a service. Fr. John will never

be known for his writings – he never wrote very much – or his life, which was very hidden. His great work of art was in faithfully guiding Catherine for 40 some years, and playing an enormous role in the life of one of

*My way to Him is quite clear – via his priest John, to His Mother, and then to Him. Such are the directions, the compass of my way to Him...*

Catherine

"For instance, he gave her little or no praise. That was a terrible detachment for Catherine's passionate, outgoing and loving nature. Spiritu-

ally the benefits were extraordinary. He cut through her doubts, confusions and temptations in a masterly way and brought peace and assurance back to her heart. He was not only a good spiritual director for her, he was truly her father in the spirit and he led her with the assured hand of the master."

# Testimonies & Favours Received

## Testimonies

*Fr. Paul Hanley Furfey was Catherine's spiritual director during the Friendship House period.*

March 9, 1986

Dear Sandy,

There is so much to talk about! The death of the Baroness gives us all food for thought. The Baroness was a great woman. There can be no dispute about that. She was also controversial in a number of respects. I can't discuss such points because I was her spiritual director for a number of years and that fact binds me to a certain confidentiality.

But there are a number of perfectly public features in her life that are therefore open to discussion. One fact is that she wrote a lot about the spiritual life. That book on prayer that you so kindly sent me is a magnificent proof of this. There are few contemporary writers on the spiritual life who have been as productive as she.

Another public fact is her leadership. I know you and Mary Kay and others who were influenced by her. You are such marvelous people that you constitute a living monument to the Baroness' great power of leadership!

Of course you all felt the loss of Catherine very deeply. It was a blow to all of you. However, you knew that the Baroness was happy in heaven, and that fact had to make you happy. So it was a mixed event – joy and sorrow!

September 22, 1983

Dear Mrs. Doherty,

Just a word of greeting from Rome. This morning I met with Pope John Paul privately for fifteen minutes. Your last visit to Rome was mentioned. He sees a sign of hope for the Church in "movements" and religious newness like the Madonna House Apostolate. Archbishop Donat Chaisson

## Favor received

On October 7, 2008, my daughter underwent "same day surgery" for a D&C. At that time they perforated her uterus necessitating abdominal surgery to repair her uterus and remove her ovaries. It was not healing correctly, so when it became unbearable she went back to her gynecologist's office (about 6 weeks after initial surgery) and was told she must have more surgery to correct the problem.

This was when I prayed reverently for Catherine Doherty's intercessory help for my daughter. And, exactly nine days later, my daughter was told by another doctor that she would not need surgery because "her body healed itself." Needless to say, I am very grateful for this miracle. DDH, New Jersey

## A Special Cause of Joy

Every few years the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints puts out a new index concerning the status of causes that are in process. On page 22 of the recent edition we read: "Catha-

rina De Hueck Doherty, Christifidelis Laica (Nizhny-Novgorod 15 Aug. 1896 - Combermere 14 Dec. 1985. Pembroken – Nihil Obstat ex parte S. Sedis 15 Dec. 1985). Prot.: 2637." Catherine's cause is now known at all levels of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

## 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.

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

## ■ Catherine in print and media

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

# New Books!!



## Comrades Stumbling Along

*The Friendship of Catherine Doherty and Dorothy Day as Revealed in Their Letters*

Robert Wild, Ed.

Alba House has published a number of our books in the past, and they again do us the kindness of publishing *Comrades Stumbling Along*. This is the first time this correspondence is being published, and it reveals the close association of the two pioneers in the lay apostolate in North America.

161 pages • ISBN 978-0-8189-1286-3 • Paperback • \$14.95

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## Catherine de Hueck Doherty

### *Essential Writings*

Selected with an introduction by David Meconi, S.J.

Orbis Press has been putting out a series called *Modern Spiritual Masters* that includes such writers as St. Thérèse, Caryl Houselander, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, G.K. Chesterton, and many others. Now Catherine – *Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Essential Writings* – joins their esteemed company. Through the editorial efforts of Fr. David Meconi, S.J., to whom we are very grateful, a book of excerpts from her writings has been added to the series. A short biography and insightful introductions to each section by the editor will contribute significantly toward making Catherine more widely known.

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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](http://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, RR 2  
Combermere ON K0J 1L0  
Canada

E-mail: [cause@catherinedoherty.org](mailto: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 me cards of Catherine's official intercessory prayer. Quantity: \_\_\_ English \_\_\_ French \_\_\_ Spanish
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