

Walking the Streets of Twitter

Sr Cathy Edge is a Scottish Sister of Mercy living in Manchester. While many are doing a digital fast from social media this Lent, she explains why that won't be her.



he founder of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine McAuley, said: "The streets will be our cloister". When founded in 1831, Catherine was adamant she did not

want to establish another order of nuns who were hidden behind high convent walls. Instead she wanted the sisters to be able to go out into the streets of Dublin, and wherever foundations called them, to serve where the people needed them. Because they went out to people in need, the early Sisters of Mercy became known as the 'Walking Nuns'.

Twitter or social media in general is the modern equivalent of the streets of Catherine's Dublin. Those streets the sisters walked were not always nice places to be, being places of poverty, deprivation and disease. But the sisters stepped out. Many see social media as an unfriendly or unsafe place to be and while this can be true, that is why I am here. Just like any street, it can also be a wonderful, friendly and inspirational place to be. And again, that is why I am here. Do I get it right all the time? No, far from it. But, like the other #NunsofTwitter and #BruvsofTwitter, I try.

In *The Guardian* February 11, 2021 Sirin Kale wrote. "I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that social media is a very bad place, a sick place, and it would be better for all of us if we just switched it off.

"... And then I take a turn on the promenade of religious Twitter, and I think: maybe things will work out after all. Until the great unplugging, you'll find me on religious Twitter. Pull up a pew – it's safe here."

Social media reflects our world, with all facets of society. I have 'met' some wonderful people here. Strangers become friends, even though we have never met in person. Over time I have met some on video calls, and one of the greatest joys is when that in-person meeting happens.

I can see people inviting others to join them in prayer or for reflection and retreat opportunities on Twitter. I also see people requesting or offering prayers and support. For some, social media is where they experience Church.

Catherine McAuley was a prolific letter writer. She used this powerful tool to communicate with her sisters in other convents, and motivate others to support the sisters' ministry. Would Catherine be on Twitter if she were alive today? I do not doubt that the answer would be 'yes'. She would have loved the instant aspect of social media and how she could use it to reach out, interact and touch people across the world. In 1837, Catherine ended a letter to Sr Teresa White: "Write me a few lines as soon as you can". To Anna Maria Hartnett in 1837: "Write to me soon a poetical letter no matter how long – the more nonsense the better". I can use social media to foster relationships that can support encourage, inspire, console and offer frivolity, helping to make it a safe and pleasant place to be.

Hospitality was central to Catherine's

Catherine McAuley would say: This is the way we would do it - one person at a time: one answering of the figurative doorbell, one opening of the figurative door, one embrace of the stranger, one welcoming of the other, one sharing of our bread and milk - one person at a time."

My prayer is that we see the hidden presence of Christ in everyone we meet on Twitter. And sow seeds of hope by answering the figurative door one tweet at a time.



On February 24 Sr Catherine Wybourne, @DigitalNun died. She has been on Twitter since 2009 and was an inspiration to me and many others by her sharing and humour. She will be greatly missed. If you are not already here, why not join me in the on-

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spirituality of God's Mercy, as seen in Jesus' life and ministry. She encouraged the sisters to see God in everyone they met and welcome all. Pelagius (354-418), a British monk of Celtic origin, said a Christian is someone 'whose door is closed to no one'.

I love the Island of Iona. A 'thin place', where the distinction between heaven and this world is less, and it is easy to encounter the sacred. 'The Iona Abbey Worship Book' includes the following ancient Rune of Hospitality that sums up Catherine's theology of hospitality beautifully:

We saw a stranger yesterday,
We put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place,
And with the sacred name of the
Triune God, he blessed us and our house,
our cattle and our dear ones.
As the lark says in her song,
Often, often, often goes Christ in the
stranger's guise.

And Mary Sullivan, a biographer of Catherine, tells us: "If we wish to sow the seeds of real hope in our world, I think

line streets of Twitter and together we can sow seeds of hope. And if you are already here, then please do come and say hello. ■



Sr Cathy is a Sister of Mercy, originally from Irvine in Galloway Diocese who now lives in Salford Diocese. She is a funeral arranger who in her spare time has special interests in digital media, baking and knitting. You can find her on twitter @KnittingNun