April 29, 2022

Good Morning All,

1. Today's Readings: Memorial of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church | USCCB

2. The RE Corner with Jan Heithaus: St. Catherine of Siena is one of the most well-known and revered saints in the Church. She was the 25th child born to her parents, although many siblings did not survive to adulthood. She is credited with composing over 400 letters, her Dialogue, which is her definitive work, and her prayers. These works are so influential that St. Catherine would later be declared a Doctor of the Church.

3. Quotes of the Day:

~"He will provide the way and the means, such as you could never have imagined."

~"Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind."

~"Be brave, don't be afraid of your weakness, because in Christ crucified, you can do everything."

~"To the servant of God...every place is the right place, and every time is the right time."

***St. Catherine of Siena, Pray for Us!***
***St. Joseph, Pray for Us!***

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# St. Catherine of Siena

Caterina di Jacopo di Benincasa was born on 25 March 1347 (shortly before the Black Death ravaged Europe) in Siena, Republic of Siena (today Italy), to Lapa Piagenti, the daughter of a local poet, and Jacopo di Benincasa, a cloth dyer who ran his enterprise with the help of his sons. The house where Catherine grew up still exists. Lapa was about forty years old when she gave premature birth to twin daughters Catherine and Giovanna. She had already borne 22 children, but half of them had died. Giovanna was handed over to a wet-nurse and died soon after. Catherine was nursed by her mother and developed into a healthy child. She was two years old when Lapa had her 25th child, another daughter named Giovanna. As a child Catherine was so merry that the family gave her the pet name of "Euphrosyne", which is Greek for "joy" and the name of Euphrosyne of Alexandria.

Catherine is said by her confessor and biographer Raymond of Capua O.P.'s *Life* to have had her first vision of Christ when she was five or six years old: she and a brother were on the way home from visiting a married sister when she is said to have experienced a vision of Christ seated in glory with the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John. Raymond continues that at age seven, Catherine vowed to give her whole life to God.

When Catherine was sixteen, her older sister Bonaventura died in childbirth; already anguished by this, Catherine soon learned that her parents wanted her to marry Bonaventura's widower. She was absolutely opposed and started a strict fast. She had learned this from Bonaventura, whose husband had been far from considerate, but his wife had changed his attitude by refusing to eat until he showed better manners. Besides fasting, Catherine further disappointed her mother by cutting off her long hair as a protest against being overly encouraged to improve her appearance to attract a husband.

Statuette by Neroccio di Bartolomeo de' Landi, (1475)

Catherine would later advise Raymond of Capua to do during times of trouble what she did now as a teenager: "Build a cell inside your mind, from which you can never flee." In this inner cell she made her father into a representation of Christ, her mother into the Blessed Virgin Mary, and her brothers into the apostles. Serving them humbly became an opportunity for spiritual growth. Catherine resisted the accepted course of marriage and motherhood on the one hand, or a nun's veil on the other. She chose to live an active and prayerful life outside a convent's walls following the model of the Dominicans. Eventually her father gave up and permitted her to live as she pleased.

A vision of Saint Dominic gave strength to Catherine, but her wish to join his Order was no comfort to Lapa, who took her daughter with her to the baths in Bagno Vignoni to improve her health. Catherine fell seriously ill with a violent rash, fever and pain, which conveniently made her mother accept her wish to join the "Mantellate", the local association of devout laywomen. The Mantellate taught Catherine how to read, and she lived in almost total silence and solitude in the family home.

Her custom of giving away clothing and food without asking anyone's permission cost her family significantly, but she requested nothing for herself. By staying in their midst, she could live out her rejection of them more strongly. She did not want their food, referring to the table laid for her in Heaven with her real family.

Giovanni di Paolo, *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena*

According to Raymond of Capua, at the age of twenty-one (c. 1368), Catherine experienced what she described in her letters as a "Mystical Marriage" with Jesus, later a popular subject in art as the *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*.

As social and political tensions mounted in Siena, Catherine found herself drawn to intervene in wider politics. She made her first journey to Florence in 1374, probably to be interviewed by the Dominican authorities at the General Chapter held in Florence in May 1374, though this is disputed (if she was interviewed, then the absence of later evidence suggests she was deemed sufficiently orthodox). It seems that at this time she acquired Raymond of Capua as her confessor and spiritual director.

After this visit, she began travelling with her followers throughout northern and central Italy advocating reform of the clergy and advising people that repentance and renewal could be done through "the total love for God." In Pisa, in 1375, she used what influence she had to sway that city and Lucca away from alliance with the anti-papal league whose force was gaining momentum and strength. She also lent her enthusiasm towards promoting the launch of a new crusade. It was in Pisa in 1375 that, according to Raymond of Capua's biography, she received the stigmata (visible, at Catherine's request, only to herself).

Physical travel was not the only way in which Catherine made her views known. From 1375 onwards, she began dictating letters to scribes. These letters were intended to reach men and women of her circle, increasingly widening her audience to include figures in authority as she begged for peace between the republics and principalities of Italy and for the return of the Papacy from Avignon to Rome. She carried on a long correspondence with Pope Gregory XI, asking him to reform the clergy and the administration of the Papal States.

Towards the end of 1375, she returned to Siena, to assist a young political prisoner, Niccolò di Tuldo, at his execution. In June 1376 Catherine went to Avignon as ambassador of the Republic of Florence to make peace with the Papal States (on 31 March 1376 Gregory XI had placed Florence under interdict). She was unsuccessful and was disowned by the Florentine leaders, who sent ambassadors to negotiate on their own terms as soon as Catherine's work had paved the way for them. Catherine sent an appropriately scorching letter back to Florence in response. While in Avignon, Catherine also tried to convince Pope Gregory XI, the last Avignon Pope, to return to Rome. Gregory did indeed return his administration to Rome in January 1377; to what extent this was due to Catherine's influence is a topic of much modern debate.

Catherine returned to Siena and spent the early months of 1377 founding a women's monastery of strict observance outside the city in the old fortress of Belcaro. She spent the rest of 1377 at Rocca d'Orcia, about twenty miles from Siena, on a local mission of peace-making and preaching. During this period, in autumn 1377, she had the experience which led to the writing of her *Dialogue* and learned to write, although she still seems to have chiefly relied upon her secretaries for her correspondence.

Late in 1377 or early in 1378 Catherine again travelled to Florence, at the order of Gregory XI, to seek peace between Florence and Rome. Following Gregory's death in March 1378 riots, the revolts of the Ciompi, broke out in Florence on 18 June, and in the ensuing violence she was nearly assassinated. Eventually, in July 1378, peace was agreed between Florence and Rome; Catherine returned quietly to Florence.

In late November 1378, with the outbreak of the Western Schism, the new Pope, Urban VI, summoned her to Rome. She stayed at Pope Urban VI's court and tried to convince nobles and cardinals of his legitimacy, both meeting with individuals at court and writing letters to persuade others.

For many years she had accustomed herself to a rigorous abstinence. She received the Holy Eucharist almost daily. This extreme fasting appeared unhealthy in the eyes of the clergy and her own sisterhood. Her confessor, Raymond, ordered her to eat properly. But Catherine claimed that she was unable to, describing her

inability to eat as an *infermità* (illness). From the beginning of 1380, Catherine could neither eat nor swallow water. On 26 February she lost the use of her legs.

Catherine died in Rome, on 29 April 1380, at the age of thirty-three, having eight days earlier suffered a massive stroke which paralyzed her from the waist down. Her last words were, "Father, into Your Hands I commend my soul and my spirit."

## Sources of her Life

Leaf from an anonymous French translation of the Legenda Major by Raymond of Capua showing the vision of the mystic wedding of Catherine and Christ. (Bruges Public Library, MS 767)

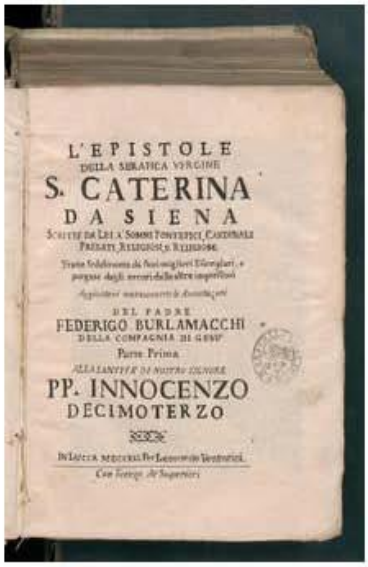
There is some internal evidence of Catherine's personality, teaching and work in her nearly four hundred letters, her *Dialogue*, and her prayers.

Much detail about her life has also, however, been drawn from the various sources written shortly after her death in order to promote her cult and canonization. Though much of this material is heavily hagiographic, it has been an important source for historians seeking to reconstruct Catherine's life. Various sources are particularly important, especially the works of Raymond of Capua, who was Catherine's spiritual director and close friend from 1374 until her death, and himself became Master General of the Order in 1380. Raymond wrote what is known as the *Legenda Major*, his *Life of Catherine*, which was completed in 1395, fifteen years after Catherine's death.

Another important work written after Catherine's death was *Libellus de Supplemento* (*Little Supplement Book*), written between 1412 and 1418 by Tommaso d'Antonio Nacci da Siena (commonly called Thomas of Siena, or Tommaso Caffarini); the work is an expansion of Raymond's *Legenda Major* making heavy use of the notes of Catherine's first confessor, Tommaso della Fonte (notes that do not survive anywhere else). Caffarini later published a more compact account of Catherine's life, entitled the *Legenda Minor*.

From 1411 onwards, Caffarini also coordinated the compiling of the *Processus* of Venice, the set of documents submitted as part of the process of canonization of Catherine, which provides testimony from nearly all of Catherine's disciples. There is also an anonymous piece entitled "Miracoli della Beata Caterina" (*Miracle of Blessed Catherine*), written by an anonymous Florentine. A few other relevant pieces survive.

**Works**


L'EPISTOLE
DELLA SERAFICA VERGINE
S. CATERINA
DA SIENA
DEL PADRE
FEDERIGO BURLAMACCHI
DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESU'
Parte Prima
PP. INNOCENZO
DECIMOTERZO

*L'epistole della serafica vergine s. Caterina da Siena* (1721)

Three genres of work by Catherine survive:

- Her major treatise is *The Dialogue of Divine Providence*. This had probably begun in October 1377 and was certainly finished by November 1378. Contemporaries of Catherine are united in asserting that much of the book was dictated while Catherine was in ecstasy, though it also seems possible that Catherine herself may then have re-edited many passages in the book. It is a dialogue between a soul who "rises up" to God and God himself.

- Catherine's letters are considered one of the great works of early Tuscan literature. Many of these were dictated, although she herself learned to write in 1377; 382 have survived. In her letters to the Pope, she often addressed him affectionately simply as *Babbo* ("Daddy"), instead of the formal form of address "Your Holiness". Other correspondents include her various confessors, among them Raymond of Capua, the kings of France and Hungary, the infamous mercenary John Hawkwood, the Queen of Naples, members of the Visconti family of Milan, and numerous religious figures. Approximately one third of her letters are to women.

- Twenty-six prayers of Catherine of Siena also survive, mostly composed in the last eighteen months of her life.

The University of Alcalá conserves a unique handwritten Spanish manuscript, while other available texts are printed copies collected by the National Library of France.

**Theology**

Catherine's theology can be described as mystical and was employed towards practical ends for her own spiritual life or those of others. She used the language of medieval scholastic philosophy to elaborate her experiential mysticism. Interested mainly with achieving an incorporeal union with God, Catherine practiced extreme fasting and asceticism, eventually to the extent of living solely off the Eucharist every day. For Catherine, this practice was the means to fully realize her love of Christ in her mystical experience, with a large proportion of her ecstatic visions relating to the consumption or rejection of food during her life. She viewed Christ as a "bridge" between the soul and God and transmitted that idea, along with her other teachings, in her book The Dialogue. The Dialogue is highly systematic and explanatory in its presentation of her mystical ideas; however, these ideas themselves are not so much based on reason or logic as they are based in her ecstatic mystical experience.

In one of her letters, she sent to her confessor, Raymund of Capua, she recorded this revelation from her conversation with Christ, in which he said: *"Do you know what you are to Me, and what I am to you, my daughter? I am He who is, you are she who is not"*. This mystical concept of God as the wellspring of being is seen in the works and ideas of Aquinas and can be seen as a simplistic rendering of apotheosis and a more rudimentary form of the doctrine of divine simplicity. She describes God in her work, '*the Dialogues*', as a *"sea, in which we are the fish"*, the point being that the relationship between God and man should not be seen as man contending against the Divine and vice versa, but as God being the endless being that supports all things.

**Veneration**

Sarcophagus of Catherine beneath the High Altar of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome

She was buried in the (Roman) cemetery of Santa Maria sopra Minerva which lies near the Pantheon. After miracles were reported to take place at her grave, Raymond moved her inside the Basilica of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, where she lies to this day.

The Chapel of Saint Catherine, Basilica of San Domenico in Siena

Her head, however, was parted from her body and inserted in a gilt bust of bronze. This bust was later taken to Siena and carried through that city in a procession to the Dominican church. Behind the bust walked Lapa, Catherine's mother, who lived until she was 89 years old. By then she had seen the end of the wealth and the happiness of her family and followed most of her children and several of her grandchildren to the grave. She helped Raymond of Capua write his biography of her daughter, and said, "I think God has laid my soul athwart in my body, so that it can't get out." The incorrupt head and thumb were entombed in the Basilica of San Domenico at Siena, where they remain.

Pope Pius II, himself from Siena, canonized Catherine on 29 June 1461.

On 4 October 1970, Pope Paul VI named Catherine a Doctor of the Church; this title was almost simultaneously given to Teresa of Ávila (27 September 1970), making them the first women to receive this honour.

Initially however, her feast day was not included in the General Roman Calendar. When it was added in 1597, it was put on the day of her death, 29 April; however, because this conflicted with the feast of Saint Peter of Verona which also fell on 29 April, Catherine's feast day was moved in 1628 to the new date of 30 April. In

the 1969 revision of the calendar, it was decided to leave the celebration of the feast of St Peter of Verona to local calendars, because he was not as well known worldwide, and Catherine's feast was restored to 29 April.

Catherine is remembered in the Church of England with a Lesser Festival on 29 April.

**Patronage**

In his decree of 13 April 1866, Pope Pius IX declared Catherine of Siena to be a co-patroness of Rome. On 18 June 1939 Pope Pius XII named her a joint patron saint of Italy along with Saint Francis of Assisi.

On 1 October 1999, Pope John Paul II made her one of Europe's patron saints, along with Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and Saint Bridget of Sweden. She is also the patroness of the historically Catholic American woman's fraternity, Theta Phi Alpha.

**Severed head**

The people of Siena wished to have Catherine's body. A story is told of a miracle whereby they were partially successful: knowing that they could not smuggle her whole body out of Rome, they decided to take only her head which they placed in a bag. When stopped by the Roman guards, they prayed to Catherine to help them, confident that she would rather have her body (or at least part thereof) in Siena. When they opened the bag to show the guards, it appeared no longer to hold her head but to be full of rose petals.

**Legacy**

Catherine ranks high among the mystics and spiritual writers of the Church. She remains a greatly respected figure for her spiritual writings, and political boldness to "speak truth to power"—it being exceptional for a woman, in her time period, to have had such influence in politics and on world history.

*Source: catholic.org*