



St Catherine of Siena

Feast Day: April 29th

St. Catherine of Siena was born during the outbreak of the plague in Siena, Italy on March 25, 1347. She was the 25th child born to her mother, although half of her brothers and sisters did not survive childhood. At the age of 16, Catherine's sister, Bonaventura, died, leaving her husband as a widower. Catherine's parents proposed that he marry Catherine as a replacement, but Catherine opposed this.

Her parents attempted to resist her attempts to avoid marriage, but they were unsuccessful. Her fasting and her devotion to her family, convinced them to relent and allow her to live as she pleased. Despite Catherine's religious nature, she did not choose to enter a convent. Instead she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic, which allowed her to associate with a religious society while living at home. Fellow Dominican sisters taught St. Catherine how to read. Meanwhile, she lived quietly, isolated within her family home.

Something changed her when she was 21. She described an experience she referred to as her "mystical marriage to Christ." Such mystical experiences change people, and St. Catherine was no exception. In her vision, she was told to reenter public life and to help the poor and sick. She immediately rejoined her family and went into public to help people in need.

She often visited hospitals and homes where the poor and sick were found. Her activities quickly attracted followers who helped her in her mission to serve the poor and sick.

St. Catherine was drawn further into the world as she worked, and eventually she began to travel, calling for reform of the Church and for people to confess and to love God totally. She became involved in politics, and was key in working to keep city states loyal to the Pope.

From 1375 onwards, St. Catherine began dictating letters to scribes. She petitioned for peace and was instrumental in persuading the Pope in Avignon to return to Rome. She became involved in the fractured politics of her time, but was instrumental in restoring the Papacy to Rome and in brokering peace deals during a time of factional conflict and war between the Italian city states.

She also established a monastery for women in 1377 outside of Siena. She is credited with composing over 400 letters, her Dialogue, which is her definitive work, and her prayers. These works were so influential that St. Catherine would later be declared a Doctor of the Church. She is one of the most influential and popular saints in the Church.

By 1380, the 33-year-old mystic had become ill, possibly because of her habit of extreme fasting. In January of 1380, her illness accelerated her inability to eat and drink. Within weeks, she was unable to use her legs. She died on April 29, following a stroke just a week prior. St. Catherine's feast day is April 29. She is the patroness against fire, illness, the United States, Italy, miscarriages, people ridiculed for their faith, sexual temptation, and nurses.

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