

One

Today is the feast of St. Catherine of Siena. She is a doctor of the Church which means that what she has to teach us is universally beneficial.

Catherine was born on March 15, 1347, in Siena, Italy. At 16, moved by a vision of St. Dominic, Catherine became a Third Order Dominican. As a layperson, she lived a life of prayer and penance and cared for the physical and spiritual needs of the people around her.

Her main work was to give spiritual direction and counsel to all categories of people: nobles and politicians, ordinary people and artists, priests and religious, bishops, and even Pope Gregory XI. They all called her, “Mamma” because she cared for them all as her spiritual children.

Her confessor, St. Raymond of Capua wrote her biography. I also really like the biography of Catherine of Siena by Sigrid Undset because it weaves together Raymond’s work with Catherine’s own letters. You can find the spiritual teaching of Catherine in a work dictated to her by Christ called the Dialogue of Divine Providence.

In 1970 Pope Paul VI made her a doctor of the Church.

Catherine experienced her first vision of Christ at the age of six, dedicating herself to him immediately. Like Charles de Foucauld would later write, “As soon as I knew God was real, I had to live for him alone.”

Two

Exchange of Hearts

Once when in fervent prayer, Catherine said to the Lord, “Create in me a clean heart O God: Change my Cold – Stony Heart, full of Temptation; and lacking in Love. Jesus - Give me a new heart.”

Jesus then appeared to Catherine, He opened her left side, took her heart, and went away. This vision was so impactful that she truly felt that her heart had been removed, and she told this to her confessor – St. Raymond of Capua. Naturally, he explained it was impossible to live without a heart. She responded, “Nothing is impossible to God.”

Not long after, Jesus reappeared to Catherine, this time holding out to her His Sacred Heart in his hand. Like before, he opened her left side, and this time, placed his own heart inside, saying, **“I took your heart that you offered to me. Now, you see, I am giving you mine, so that you can go on living with it forever.”**

Make every Mass an exchange of hearts.

In the Mass the priest invites us to, “Lift up your heart,” and we respond, “We lift them up to the Lord.” Give your heart to Jesus when the bread and wine are placed on the altar. Then receive the heart of Jesus in Communion.

Three

The Unlimited Cask of Wine

In 14th-century Italy, the water was unsafe to drink. Instead, they drank a kind of weak wine. One year there was a grape blight that caused a shortage of wine and the poor were in real danger of dying of thirst. Catherine’s family was down to one barrel, which normally lasted two to

three weeks. But Catherine made it known that anyone could come to their home and receive as much as they needed because she knew Jesus would provide.

Two weeks, three weeks, a month went by with the whole family drinking the wine from one last barrel, plus serving all the poor people of the district, yet the cask showed no signs of giving out. While no one could account for this, Catherine knew. So, she began to give out the wine more generously to everyone in need. But even then the cask showed no signs of drying up or the wine of losing its flavor. So a second month went by, and a third came, and still there was as much wine as ever.

Finally, the new grape harvest came and it was time to empty the cask so that it could be filled with new wine. Then a marvelous thing happened: the one last barrel from which the wine had been flowing abundantly the day before *was opened*, and it was found to be as dry as if it had not contained a drop of wine for months.

The barrel that would not run dry taught Catherine to place all her trust in Divine Providencem, the main theme of her life.

As Jesus would later say to St Faustyna, “My daughter, I assure you of a permanent income on which you will live. Your duty will be to trust completely in My goodness, and My duty will be to give you all you need. I am making Myself dependent upon your trust: if your trust is great, then My generosity will be without limit.” 548

Four

Humility and Providence

One day Jesus said to Catherine, “Do you know who you are and who I am? If you know these two things, you will be blessed and the Enemy will never deceive you. I am He who is; and you are she who is not.”

Our problem is that we forget God is God and we are not. Then we try to rely on ourselves alone. But it doesn't work. We are not wise enough or big enough to know all things or control all things. This misplaced self-reliance results in all kinds of self-destructive things: arrogance, anxiety, worry, anger, envy, the need to control everything and everyone - all which results in our being completely overwhelmed and the desperate need to escape into work, entertainment, alcohol, drugs, porn etc.

The only way out is to surrender to Divine Providence. To say to Jesus, “My life is out of control and unmanageable. So, I am giving my life totally to you. Please take control of my life.”

Then what do we do? Let God be God and you be you. Go to bed early and get up early and begin each new day with mental prayer because God is God and you need him.

Think and make plans and do what is in your power and don't procrastinate. Everything that is beyond your power, entrust to God.

Say, “Sacred Heart of Jesus I surrender this to you, take care of everything.” Then don't worry.

Every time you worry you take it out of the hands of Jesus back into your own. Everything that is beyond your scope of responsibility, beyond your power to control, refuse to think about or get involved in. It's just a source of temptation.

Five

I hate sickness.

We should trust God and surrender to him. Still, I hate sickness. I was supposed to go to Utah where my daughter Grace lives to go hiking with her, our favorite adventure. The day I was to fly out I awoke with a raging fever. Not wanting to give it to her, I postponed. Good thing I did. I got worse through the day and night.

I hate and rebel against sickness because it reveals the naked truth that we are powerless to control what happens.

To those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them Catherine of Siena said, “Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind.”

God our Father is Almighty. That means that nothing can happen unless God wills it directly or allows it. Though God is never the author of evil, humans are. Yet God allows evil to respect our freedom and because He is so all good and powerful to bring about an even greater good out of a moral evil. Therefore, no matter what happens, no matter how painful or perplexing an experience is, with God as our Father, we will be okay because God works all things for good for those who love him.

This perspective allows us to view our trials, hardships, and losses not as random misfortunes but as part of the way that God is guiding all things in our lives for the greatest good.

With God as our Father, no matter what happens, He will make it the best!