

Catherine of Siena 29 April
Reformer and Spiritual Teacher, 1380 — Memorial

Today we honour Catherine Benincasa, who was a reformer and spiritual teacher in fourteenth century Italy.

Born at Siena in the year 1347, she devoted herself to prayer and meditation from a very early age. Her family opposed and harassed her, until her steadfast purpose wore them down and they let her become a postulant in the order of Dominican nuns. For several years she underwent a series of terrible visions and at times felt utterly abandoned by the Lord. This lonely struggle ended at nineteen, when she experienced a vision of the Saviour, with Mary and all the heavenly host, in which Christ espoused her to himself. Catherine became a nurse, caring for patients whom other nurses hated to treat, people with leprosy and cancer. In time she gathered a mixed group of disciples, and together with them she went on extensive tours to preach the gospel.

Soon afterwards she began another mission — this time, to heal a schism which had split the Church between two rival Popes, one at Rome and the other at the French city of Avignon. She went to Rome and publicly fasted, attending the eucharist every day in order to pray for the unity of the Church. The strain of this last campaign proved too much for her and, felled by a stroke, she died on this date in 1380, at the age of thirty-three.

See Readings, page 530.

Sentence

To you I lift up my eyes, to you enthroned in the heavens,
until you show us your mercy. Cf. *Psalms* 123.1, 4b

Collect

Everlasting God,
you kindled such holy love
in the heart of your servant Catherine
that she devoted her life to the poor and the sick
and to the peace and unity of your Church.
Grant us strength to meditate
upon the passion of your Son,
that we may work in the image of his compassion
until we rejoice in the revelation of his glory;
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

1 John 1.5 — 2.2 Psalm 36.5-10

Refrain In your light, O God, we see light.

Luke 12.22-24, 29-32

Prayer over the Gifts

Loving Father,
who taught your servant Catherine
to pray for the healing of your Church,
keep all malice far from this table,
that we may share the bread of sincerity and truth
and drink from the river of your delights;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Preface of a Saint

Prayer after Communion

Eternal God,
who poured the light of your love
into the heart and mind of your servant Catherine,
may this wondrous mystery give us strength
to cast away all selfish love and hesitation,
that we may gladly embrace the wounded
and bring freedom to those who suffer oppression.
We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord.