



## *We're on a Role & Model Saint Catherine of Siena Shows Us the Way*

Few would argue that we live in challenging times. The global onslaught of economic challenge continues to beleaguer us. Many are faced with the chilling residue of terror and violence and natural disasters – of disease and destruction – which seem to increasingly crowd their way onto the front pages and the news headlines.

Each day another story seems to emerge that paints a gloomy landscape and drives many of our neighbors and friends, and even ourselves, to despair. However, if we want to be true to our faith, we need to resist the temptation to be disheartened. Sacred Scripture warns us against hardness of heart and the damage it can engender, *“they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. You did not so learn Christ!”* (Ephesians 4:19-20). We are instead called to practice the Christian virtue of hope and to always be ready to give an account for the hope that is within us.

Fortunately, Our Lord provides for us in many ways in times of trouble, particularly in His saints. It is often said, “the saints show us Christ.” A good role model for us in times such as these is one of the great Doctors of the Church, Saint Catherine of Siena.

Saint Catherine knew tough times indeed! She was born on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1347, which in that year was also Palm Sunday. Her twin sister died at birth. Catherine was the 24<sup>th</sup> of 25 children, yet from what we know only eight of these children survived early childhood. By the time Catherine was of school age, Siena, the city of her birth, had already lost 80,000 people to the Black Death which was sweeping Europe at the time.

Young Catherine could have been depressed, fearful and sullen yet she was known in her neighborhood as “everybody's joy.” She was so joyful and merry that relatives often “borrowed”

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*The loveliest masterpiece  
of the heart of God  
is the heart of a Mother.*

*—Therese of Lisieux*



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her for a time because she shared her joyfulness and love so abundantly. She was a natural leader among her young friends and cousins, and she was captivated by the Dominicans. She so loved to watch the Dominicans walking about in the parish area that she often walked with her brother around the church. One day as she was walking she noticed a bright light above the church. There she saw a vision of Jesus Christ, seated on a throne, clothed in priestly garments and wearing the papal tiara. Smiling upon Catherine, He blessed her in the manner of a priest. She then looked away from the vision and burst into tears. At that early age, she knew that her path in life was set.

Catherine continued to be a light to all but in her teens she had her bout with worldliness – attending festivals and dancing. But, the death in August of 1362, of Saint Bonaventure brought her to tears and cemented her decision to enter the Dominican order.

Catherine's commitments to peaceful conflict resolution and the proper training of religious novices were profound, and her spiritual contemplations perceptive and erudite. But never did any of her other activities deter her from her fundamental mission, her care of the poor, and the sick. She gave all she had in time and energy.

She was not content to just offer material help but often tended to the sickest and most neglected, including lepers. Though her family was very generous, even they were amazed -and often concerned – that she was so unfailingly generous with anything she had. Catherine, however, cheerfully explained that everything belonged to God and that she was there to help share every blessing. Many stories also abound with how often Catherine, praying for her patients as she

administered to them, was able to intercede with God to cure those thought incurable. As with many saints, Catherine was tormented through much of her life by demonic forces. She had terrifying visions and many temptations for much of her life. Yet she resisted all these temptations, and joyfully went about the Lord's work. Her faith sustained her and her commitment to that faith strengthened her for a life of giving -and sharing. What a fine model for each of us as we negotiate the minefield of modernity and all its challenges.

## *Getting Back to Roots*



In the original spirit of Mother's Day and with the example of our heavenly Mother in mind, here are some suggestions for getting back to the roots of this holiday:

- ✿ Call your mom just to say "I love you," even if you talk to her or see her on a regular basis.
- ✿ If your mom has passed away, honor her by fixing one of her favorite recipes or telling a favorite story about her.
- ✿ Give the gift of time. Rather than waiting for Mother's Day as the day to start planting flowers in her garden, suggest that, as her gift, you will help her plant flowers in her garden together. Make it a tradition that you both look forward to and cherish.
- ✿ Don't forget the other 364 days a year.

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