



BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND & WALES

Fact Sheet: St Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church

Biography

- She was born in 1347, the 24th of 25 children of a wool dyer in northern Italy.
- Catherine had her first vision of Christ when she was age five or six saying that Jesus smiled at her and blessed her.
- She became a lay member of the Dominican Order in the Roman Catholic Church when she was 16.
- St. Catherine was one of the most brilliant theological minds of her day and persuaded the Pope to go back to Rome from Avignon, in 1377.
- Her letters, and a treatise called 'The Dialogue' are considered to be among some of the most brilliant writings in the history of the Catholic Church.
- Friendships were integral to her life and ministry. She accomplished so much not on her own but, by God's grace, at the centre of a network of men, women, lay and ordained, representatives of various different walks of life in the world and states of life in the Church.
- She died in 1380 at the age of 33 having received the stigmata in 1375. The stigmata are the visible marks, wounds or sensations of pain in places on the human body that correspond to the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ; e.g. in the hands and feet. In the history of the Church some holy men and women have experienced the stigmata, though these are few in number.
- Her body was found incorrupt in 1430.
- 29th April is the day that the Catholic Church traditionally observes her feast day. This year the day falls in Easter week when the Church celebrates the Resurrection of Christ.
- Pope Paul VI gave her the title of Doctor of the Church in 1970 along with Saint Teresa of Ávila making them the first women to receive this honour. In 1999, Pope John Paul II made her one of Europe's patron saints.

Writings and Spirituality

- She wrote 'The Dialogue', or 'Treatise on Divine Providence', a collection of nearly four hundred letters and a series of 'Prayers'.
- 'The Dialogue' covers the whole spiritual life of man in the form of a series of colloquies between the Eternal Father and the human soul (represented by Catherine herself).
- A smaller work in dialogue form, the 'Treatise on Consummate Perfection', is also ascribed to her.
- Catherine's life of prayer gave her the strength to live out the message of the Gospel by caring for the sick, accompanying condemned prisoners to their execution, above all helping people to recognise their value in the eyes of God.

- She was also occupied with the renewal of the Church and of the Dominican Order in the service of the Church and the world.
- All her immense activity flowed from her deep, prayerful union with God.
- She wrote: 'If you are what you should be, you will set the world ablaze,' and, talking to God, she said, 'You make the heart big – not stingy – so big it has room in its loving charity for everyone.' Also: 'Preach the truth as if we had a million voices, for it is silence that kills the world.'

Cardinal Cormac Murphy–O'Connor (England and Wales)

- His Eminence, Cardinal Cormac Murphy–O'Connor (England and Wales), was assigned the titular church of the Basilica of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome when he was created a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 2001. The Basilica houses the tomb of the St. Catherine of Siena.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit written by St Catherine

Holy Spirit, come into my heart; draw it to Thee by Thy power,

O my God, and grant me charity with filial fear.

Preserve me, O ineffable Love, from every evil thought;

warm me, inflame me with Thy dear love, and every pain will seem light to me.

My Father, my sweet Lord, help me in all my actions.

Jesus, love, Jesus, love.

Amen.

Links

Dominican Sisters of the English Province of St Catherine of Siena: www.stone-dominicans.org.uk

Dominican Sisters of St Joseph: www.dominicansrs.co.uk

Dominican Friars of England and Scotland: <http://english.op.org>

For information about other Dominican communities see: www.corew.org