

St. Catherine of Siena



1347-1380

Feast Day:
April 29

Catherine was born in Siena, Italy, the second youngest of 25 children. From her youth, Catherine joyfully dedicated herself to prayer and devotion.

At the age of 18, Catherine began living in constant prayer as a hermit. During this time she attracted many followers who wanted to imitate her way of life.

After three years in seclusion, Catherine and her followers began to minister to the poor, especially those suffering from the Bubonic Plague, which took millions of lives in Europe at this time. The disease was so terrible that healthy people would not care for or even touch the victims, leaving the dead unburied in homes and in the streets out of fear that they too would become sick. Answering Jesus' command to bury the dead, Catherine would tend to the needs of the Plague victims, prepare them for death, and see that they were buried, often burying them herself.

Catherine believed passionately in the goal of the Crusades, and spoke out urging men to fight to free the Holy Land. She sent many letters to royalty, nobles, religious, and even the pope, on many different topics. She was illiterate, so she dictated them. She gained a reputation for wisdom, holiness, and ability to settle disputes.

Catherine played an especially important role during a turbulent time in Church history. From 1309-77 Roman Catholic Popes had been living in France, and multiple men were claiming to be pope. Catherine's devotion to the Pope of Rome never wavered, and she convinced him to bring the papacy back to Rome.

She received many visions, and was even given stigmata, or the wounds of Christ. In 1380, Catherine died of a stroke at the age of 33. She was canonized in 1461 by Pope Pius II, and given the title Doctor of the Church in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.