

Catherine of Siena: love, truth, and perseverance.



The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena

[Giovanni di Paolo \(Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia\)](#) Italian

Today the church remembers Catherine of Siena, teacher of the faith.

Catherine was born in 1347. From a young age she felt a call to the religious life, and in spite of familial opposition, she became a Dominican tertiary at the age of 18.

Her life was devoted to the care of the sick and the poor, but she was also sought out as an adviser in political as well as spiritual matters. For Catherine, the spiritual and the material were intertwined.



This week I have been reading the Dialogue Catherine wrote on the spiritual life: a book which came out of her own ecstatic spiritual encounters with God.

The book is filled with layers of vivid description, with biblical references and metaphors woven around each other.

At its heart is the vision Catherine gives of Christ – the Truth – as the bridge between human beings and the Father.

Catherine describes the means, or steps, of getting to the bride, and the things that hold us back.

The language, and the process described, is intense. The Way requires patience, perseverance, and above all else discernment.

Catherine is clear that the spiritual life is one that is based in knowledge of oneself, including of one's own weaknesses, and of God, who in contrast is perfect.

If that comparison brings us down, it's important to note that the book is also infused with love.

God, who is perfect love, and created us out of love, delights in us when we draw close, and when we pay attention to God's call on our lives.

That call is expressed in love for God which must of necessity be expressed in a love for our neighbour.

For Catherine the spiritual life leads into the active life which in turn becomes a prayer to God. This life can be led on a grand or small scale, because the active life is nothing, if it is not rooted in love of God and neighbour, and in humility.

At a time when our active lives are curtailed there is some comfort in this: that our desire for our neighbours to flourish and to draw closer to God, is more important than the amount we are able to give, or how many hours we spend in prayer.

Each kindness – each prayerful action – is a delight to God.

These principles of love, truth, and perseverance, will also be vital as we reshape the world we live in on the other side of this pandemic.

The Dialogue contains many scriptural references: but the one that has resonated most with me this week has been the well-known passage from 1 Corinthians:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.



Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.  
Love never ends.

Let us pray:

God of compassion,  
who gave your servant Catherine of Siena  
a wondrous love of the passion of Christ:  
grant that your people may be united to him in his majesty  
and rejoice for ever in the revelation of his glory;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.