



Name:

# St. Catherine of Siena

Caterina Benincasa was born on March 25, 1347, in Siena. Catherine was among the last of at least twenty-four children. She had a twin sister, Giovana, who died at birth. Her father, Giacomo di Benincasa, was a tanner (cloth dyer), and her mother, Lapa Piagenti, the daughter of a local poet, were both middle-class citizens. As a child, Catherine made an impression with her holiness almost from the time she could toddle. She had her first vision by the age of six, and it is said that, by the age of seven, Catherine had promised her virginity to God.

Her sacrifices were perhaps more extreme than those of any other known saint. She lived for months at a time on nothing but the Blessed Sacrament. She regularly scourged herself for love of Jesus and slept as little as a half hour every other night. Though she prayed for a normal life, her life was destined to be extraordinary, an example of a life devoted entirely to Jesus.

Catherine's parents envisioned a more normal life for their daughter. At the age of 12, they wanted her to marry, and even made her the house slave for years because of her refusal. Catherine took this opportunity to see Jesus in every member of her family, serving them each with unruffled devotion. Eventually she won over her parents. At the age of 16, they allowed her to become a Dominican Tertiary, meaning that she continued to live in her own home, while belonging to a Dominican community of women.

Catherine would have been content to serve God in sacrifice and prayer, but His will was that she would bring about change in the Catholic Church. She embraced her mission with all of the energy she brought to her prayer. It seemed no one could meet her without falling under the spell of her personal holiness. Priest and bishop would revile her from a distance, then, upon meeting her face to face, fall upon their knees, begging forgiveness and the permission to become her followers.

St. Catherine's body of letters is a telling window into her person. Most of her letters were dictated to her more learned disciples, though St. Catherine herself had miraculously learned to write and read. Her frank, yet respectful letters to the Pope Gregory XI, caused him to forsake his exile in Avignon, and return to Rome on January 17, 1377. Her learned correspondence caused her to be named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1970.

Among St. Catherine's many ecstasies and visions, was her mystical marriage to Jesus in 1366. He gave her a wedding ring during the vision that she wore invisibly for the rest of her life. Catherine also received the stigmata in 1365, though the marks were invisible to all until her death. She died on April 29, 1380, which is her Feast Day, at the age of thirty-three, like her beloved Spouse, Jesus. St. Catherine was canonized in 1461 by Pope Pius II.

#### Assignment

1. Do some research on St. Catherine of Siena. You can do this online, use books or magazine articles. Tell us something about her that was not mentioned in the article above.

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2. What does it mean to be a Doctor of the Church?

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3. Be prepared to share next Wednesday.