

Bull of Pius II

FOR THE CANONIZATION OF SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

[p396:] Pius, bishop, Servant of the Servants of God, to all the faithful of Christ, health, and apostolic benediction.¹

The mercies of the Lord, which we so abundantly experienced in our days, cannot be described by mortal lips; the blessings of God surpass human language, and though man were capable of expressing himself by all his members, never could he worthily celebrate his great Creator; we were formed from nothing; we sprung from nothingness into existence; not only have we being as the stones, plants, and animals, but we have been endowed with reason and have become capable of divine things: we have been created not merely similar to the angels, but also in image of the omnipotent and invisible God; we have been crowned with glory and honor, and have received power over all his works. And yet, if we set aside the pride of Lucifer and his followers, man alone, among all creatures, has proven ungrateful and rebellious towards God. All inanimate creation celebrates the divine Goodness in its being, and never transgresses his commandments; everything irrational obeys the laws of nature and fulfills the end for which it was created. The earth opens to the plough, and receives the seed which it returns with usury: faithful to the orders of man either civilized or savage, it always renders service to him, the stone that is taken from it for building, yields without resistance to the iron or the [p397:] fire that works it; the trees that protect the field with their shady foliage bear fruit and when withered, they afford fuel, or support houses and their roofy coverings. How useful are the plants by their leaves, roots, flowers, seed or the juice that is extracted from them? How serviceable the rivers, lakes and seas, which are furrowed by the track of myriads of vessels uniting by commercial intercourses the very “ends of the earth.” God is praised by the inhabitants of the land, the water, the air, each order glorifying him by submissively obeying the instincts of its respective nature. The elements, the stars and the planets obey his high command!—mark, how the sun performs his annual circuit without exceeding the boundaries of zodiac; the gentle moon shining with mild reflected light, never fails to perform her destined functions; while the orbs that revolve throughout the universal sky never wander, but undeviatingly pursue their established course. All things material in heaven and on earth bless the Lord, and praise him by steadily fulfilling laws and remain within their prescribed limits obedient to Deity their great first Cause.

Man alone, ungrateful, disobedient and rebellious man, has imitated the sin of the fallen angel. Lucifer, who proud in the very light of heaven, aimed at becoming like his Creator, and was precipitated into the infernal abyss for indulging his guilty thought: man formed from the dust of the earth, on whose surface he was placed as lord, forgot his weakness and lowly origin, and also aimed at exaltation, by “eating the forbidden fruit;” he determined to become, by knowing good and evil, equal to God, and in consequence was driven away from the terrestrial paradise and condemned to countless afflictions. [p398:] Heaven’s gate was closed against him; a subject of the tyrant death, the vengeance that ensued proved how deeply he had offended God, and how remote during the ages previous to the deluge were his sons from the fulfillment of God’s holy will. All flesh was destroyed by the waters from heaven, except the virtuous Noah, and those who like him entered the ark. Even children were not exempt from malice; they also became wicked, and fell into manifold crimes. The tower of Babel was an impious enterprise against the God of punishment, but the division of tongues arrested it, and from that moment arose wars, rapine, disorder, confusion, conflagration, carnage, adultery, incest, perjury, the worship of idols and all the ills that pride and luxury produce. Until the time of Abraham, the faithful observers of the divine law were very rare; but that holy patriarch gave singular example of the sincerity of his faith, in obeying God, even so far as unhesitatingly to immolate his own dear son. All the nations of the earth were blessed in his

¹ Pope Pius II (1405-1464), born Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini (Latin: Aeneas Silvius Bartholomeus) was Pope from 1458 to his death in 1464. He was born at Corsignano in the Sienese territory of a noble but decayed family. The text is excerpted from *Life of St. Catherine of Sienna* [sic] by Blessed Raymond of Capua, her confessor. E. Cartier. Translated from the French by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, Philadelphia. (Philadelphia: Peter F. Cunningham, 1860), pp. 396-409.

race. Not only were the prophets of the divine law to descend from him, but Christ the Savior designed to be born from him according to the flesh, *when* to redeem mankind, he, the equal of his Father by his divine nature, determined to “annihilate himself,” to be clothed with our infirmities, to endure the most cruel torments, and accept on the Cross a death, not ordinary, but violent, ignominious, horrible and above the endurance of mere human strength. By dying he destroyed our death and restored us to life; he conquered hell, delivered the just, and victorious over death and the demon, opened triumphantly the long closed portals of heaven. When ascending to his Father, he showed us the way to follow, and left us in his [p399:] Gospel, in Baptism and the other Sacraments, the means of rising from our falls, and obtaining salvation.

And yet, so many benefits have not captivated our hearts! Our malice and our evil inclinations have not been destroyed; the hearts of man, while destitute of gratitude has not yet deserted vice. The more we have been favored with graces, the more we have shown ourselves ungrateful and inclined to evil. For how do we love and honor the great God?—how observe his laws? Who obeys the Gospel? Where is there any dread of the decisions of the Church, submission towards superiors, and charity in regard to inferiors? Where is equality, where are piety, justice, reverence, and morality among men? How many say in their hearts, there is no God? Some draw up formulas of impious dogmas, and forge blasphemies; others, slaves of voluptuousness, think merely on the means of gratifying their passions, others ambition the riches which they do not possess; others again thirst for the blood of their fellows. Innocence is rare and almost always in danger. What avail the bonds of family, what *laws* human, or divine?—force and fraud govern on all occasions and it is with good reason, that the devil is called the prince of the world, for he actually governs the greater portion of the earth. Does not the false religion of Mahomet govern the East, with the great states of Africa? His followers blaspheme Christ in the kingdom of Granada, in Spain, and in many of the provinces of Greece. The Jewish nation scattered throughout the wide world, is the enemy of the Gospel and of the laws of Christianity. Idolaters abound in the East as in the North, Christendom is reduced to a corner of Europe; for although we are assured that there are many Christians spread throughout Asia and Libya, [p400:] yet their faith is not sincere, they live remote from the Holy See and in the midst of infidels and heretics; they commit evil deeds, and are infected with errors. And are not European Christians merely nominal? The religion of a vast number is uncertain and false; their conduct is the proof. How many of them perform works worthy of the Christian? “*By their fruits you shall know them,*” said the Savior (Mt 7: 16). If we live as Christ ordains, we are genuine Christians (Jn 8:10). The Apostle John says, “*men are the children of him whose works they perform*” (Jn 8:44). If we keep the commandments of God, we are the sons of God; if we perform the works of the devil, we belong to him, for the Lord has said of such, “*you have the devil for your father;*”—terrible, but just saying. Everyone is the son and subject of him whose commandments he keeps. How many are there among Christians that do not swerve from the divine law, and how numerous are they who follow the suggestions of Satan? Let each one interrogate his conscious and repass his life in spirit, and he will discern how remote he is from accomplishing the obligations of a real Christian. Ah!—how great and incomparable are the bounty and mercy of God which bears with us, and does not cut us off from life, because he expects our conversion and return to him, that he may pardon our heavy guilt.

But in every age, there have been men agreeable to God by their sanctity. Though clothed with our common mortality, they have overcome the flesh and have led a heavenly life on earth. By their merits and intercession the world is preserved, the destroying fire which menaces it is arrested, God’s anger and vengeance [p401:] kindled against it are suspended. We doubt not that at this very hour, there are some souls who appease God, and rendered the King of heaven propitious and favorable. Among those who have calmed Almighty God and merited his clemency, the city of Siena, one of the glories of Tuscany, reckoned Bernardin.² Descended from a noble family, he renounced the world in his youth and entered the Order of St. Francis. He found there religious who lived very far from their Rule and the examples of their holy Father; he rebuked them with energy, and as he was unable to bring them all back into the right path, he separated those who desired to practice the Rule in its primitive fervor, and with them, he visited the existing monasteries, constructed new ones and introduced into them the most sage reformation. He ran over Italy, destroying vice and inciting to virtue. He was admired for his abstinence, his angelic purity, his winning gravity, the charms of his discourse, and the depth of his teachings; and being a sincere lover of poverty, and an enemy of riches and pleasures, the liveliest joy ever shone on his countenance, and the most profound peace reigned within his soul. Innocence rendered him happy and no stain sullied or troubled his conscience. He abolished a great many scandals in Italy and performed many miracles, so that during his life-time he was regarded as a saint, was venerated everywhere, and the people collected in crowds to pay him honor. He terminated his career at Aquilea, and in the very year of the jubilee in which the whole Christian world visits Rome to be purified from defects, Nicholas V, our predecessor, placed him in the number of the holy confessors of Christ

² St. Bernardino of Siena, OFM, sometimes referred to as St. Bernardine, lived from 1380 – 1444. St. Catherine of Siena died in 1380.

Before Bernardin, our fathers had seen in the same [p402:] city of Siena, the virgin Catherine, not less exalted in merit and not less agreeable to God. Her prayers offered to the divine majesty have been, are still, and always will be useful to mankind; for if the crimes of the wicked and their blasphemies draw down upon us the wrath of God, the works and supplications of the saints preserve us from them. Catherine led an angelic life on earth; she has been in heaven for twenty-four years; unnumbered miracles have manifested her glory and nevertheless the Church militant has not yet inscribed her among the faithful virgins for Christ. The Roman Pontiffs, our predecessors have not decreed it. Urban VI and after him Innocent VII and Gregory XII, who had a particular knowledge of her deserts, designed rendering her this honor, but they were prevented by schism, troubles and the wars which agitated their pontificates. God without doubt permitted it, because in the midst of those tempests, what was proclaimed in one obedience would have been despised in the other. This affair was consequently deferred until our time, and the canonization of that virgin, our countrywoman, has been reserved to us. The sanctity of the virgin of Siena shall be proclaimed by a native of Siena, occupying the throne of Peter; and we admit that in this we experience a sensible consolation. Who does not like, when he may do so with justice, to celebrate his own country, his own city, or his own family? We take pleasure in lauding the illustrious of all nations, but with how much greater eagerness do we sound the trumpet of fame when there is question of our fellow citizens! We should have contemplated with joy, the sublime virtues, the genius, the greatness of soul, the all-powerful strength and fortitude of the blessed Catherine: but we admire them more because [p403:] she like ourselves first saw the light in the city of Siena. We anticipate more favors through her intercession and in her merits than if she had been born in Africa, or in the Indies. Why should not the bonds that link us to the saints, procure us some advantage?

However this consideration shall never prompt us to deviate from truth. The love of family or of country does not dispense with proofs, informations and formalities customary on such occasions, and notwithstanding our pleasure at the circumstance that Catherine is a native of Siena, we have neglected nothing. Petitions have been addressed to us not only from Siena, but from many lands. Our dear son in the Lord, Frederic, Emperor of the Romans, and our own beloved Son, Paschal, Doge of Venice, have entreated us to permit the homage of this virgin in their respective states, because the people entertain a great devotion to her, and relate numerous wonders concerning her. When we ourselves were repairing to Mantua, we sojourned a long time in Siena and there, in public consistory her virtues and her miracles were laid before us, and we were supplicated to decree to her the honors of the saints of Jesus Christ. We did not grant it immediately, but in conformity with ancient usage, we designated three of our brethren, cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, a bishop, a priest and a deacon, to examine regularly the life and actions of Catherine, with the miracles that she performed during her life and after her death, and to pursue the whole process necessary to her Canonization and then lay before us a faithful narration in secret consistory. More than a year after, when we came back from Mantua to Rome, the commissaries whom we had designated after having discussed the [p404:] business studied the ancient procedures made at Venice and elsewhere, examined the witnesses anew, and noting every particular with great care, presented an authentic relation of them to the cardinals and to us alone. They were afterwards repeated by an advocate, in public consistory. Finally, in the presence of all the bishops whom we had convoked at the court of Rome, and the cardinals who assist us, the appointed commissaries, by the organ of our venerable brother, William, Bishop of Porto (a Frenchman by birth), who presided over them, exposed anew all that they had learned and all that appeared to them to be authentic. We have summed up, from their very extensive and well-made depositions the following facts, all perfectly valid, clearly proved and certified.

Catherine was born in Siena of persons in a middling condition. She consecrated herself to God at the age when she could scarcely have had any knowledge of him. At six years of age, so as to serve him better, she sought solitude and went with the intention of concealing herself in a wild cavern, but she did not remain there, for the Holy Spirit brought her home to her parents. At seven years of age, she consecrated her virginity to our Lord who appeared to her on his throne of majesty, and she saw the secrets of the heavenly court, which human tongue can never utter. She renounced from that moment all worldly pleasures, gave herself entirely to meditation and afflicted her delicate frame with vigils, fasts and disciplines. Her companions attracted by her discourse and example, imitated her conduct. When she was of suitable age to select a state of life, she refused to marry, though urged by her parents, but cut off her hair and despised the consequent injuries and persecutions. Many [p405:] petitions and endeavors were requisite before she could obtain the habit of St. Dominic, worn by the Sisters of Penance. She fulfilled the office of servant in the house of her parents and desired nothing so much as to appear little and contemptible in the eyes of all. With her father's permission she gave abundant alms: she carefully nursed the sick, and surmounted the temptations of Satan and the continual combats of hell with the buckler of patience and the arms of faith; she comforted, by all possible methods, prisoners and the oppressed. She was never heard to utter a word that was not pious or holy; all her conversations had for their objects morality, religion, piety, contempt of the world, love of God and of neighbor, with the desire of the better country. No one approached her without leaving her with their minds and hearts more informed and better. Her knowledge came down to her from heaven; hence

she could teach without having had masters. When professors of the Sacred Writings, and illustrious bishops, proposed to her the most difficult questions in theology, she answered them with so much wisdom and satisfied them so fully that they became gentle as lambs, after having shown themselves to her at first as menacing wolves and lions. Some of them, captivated by the all divine wisdom of that youthful maiden, distributed their possessions to the poor of Jesus Christ, and embraced the Cross by leading a perfect life.

Catherine's abstinence was surprising, and her austerity prodigious. She rejected the use of wine, of meat and every kind of seasoning. She finished by depriving herself of vegetables, and took no other bread, than that heavenly Bread with which the true Christian is nourished at the Sacrament of the Altar. It sometimes happened [p406:] that she fasted from Ash Wednesday till the Ascension, having taken no other food than the Blessed Eucharist. For eight years, she sustained life with a little juice of herbs which she could not even retain in her stomach; she went to her repasts as to a punishment, but she flew on the wings of love to the Holy Communion, receiving it almost daily, as a celestial banquet.

She wore a hair cloth under her garments; and used neither mattress nor pillow. Her bed was composed of boards, and on them she took but a few moments of repose. She rarely slept more than two hours during the night; the remainder of the time was consecrated to pious vigils, prayer, and to works of mercy; she tore her body with rude disciplines; she suffered a constant and violent headache, and was tried by fever and by various other maladies. She was often obliged to contend against the demons, who persecuted her in every way; she said with the Apostles: *cum infirmor, tunc potens sum* [When I am weak, then I am strong] (2 Cor 12:10). In all her trials, she never became dejected and never neglected her ordinary works of charity. She assisted the unfortunate and the oppressed, converted sinners, and attracted them to penance by the mildness of her discourse; she gave counsel with joy, and indicated to each one what he should do and what he should avoid – she calmed disputants, appeased a great number of violent hatreds and terminated many bloody enmities; to reconcile the Florentines and the Church, she did not hesitate to pass the Apennines and the Alps, to be near to Gregory XI, our predecessor, at Avignon, and she told him of the vow that he had taken of returning to Rome; the vow having been taken secretly, God alone could have made her acquainted with it.

She was endowed with the spirit of prophesy, [p407:] announcing future events, and revealing the most hidden things; she was ravished in ecstasy, and remained suspended in air. When she enjoyed these heavenly contemplations, she became so absorbed that she was insensible to blows and wounds; and she fell into this state, almost always after receiving Holy Communion.

Catherine's name was held in great veneration among the people; from every side they brought the sick and those possessed by the devil, and many were healed. She commanded sickness and fever in the name of Jesus Christ, and drove Satan from the obsessed. In consequence, two Roman Pontiffs, Gregory XI and Urban VI, esteemed her so highly that they charged her with several negotiations, and granted her a great number of spiritual favors. She terminated her career at the age of thirty three, and slept at Rome, in the peace of God. Her happiness and her triumph in heaven were revealed by marvelous visions to persons who had been particularly attached to her, especially her confessor, Raymond of Capua, Doctor of Theology, and General of the Order of Preaching Friars. He was at Gênes, the night in which Catherine died, and whilst at the Matin hour, he was praying before an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she appeared to him all resplendent with light, and addressed him with consoling words. Her body, exposed a certain time, was buried at Rome, in the Church of Minerva, amid the testimonies of respect and devotion of an enthusiastic multitude. Many sick persons, by touching her, obtained their cure from God; others recovered their health by means of the objects which had been in contact with her precious remains. When Catherine had ascended to heaven, she listened graciously to the prayers that were addressed to her, and she caused [p408:] them to be heard by her spouse and savior Jesus Christ. Many, on hearing of her powerful influence in heaven, had recourse to her intercession, and experienced its salutary effects. Therefore at Venice, where St. Catherine had never been, and in other places, great honors were tendered to her.

When our Venerable brother, the Bishop of Porto, had exposed those things and many others, in the assembly of cardinals and prelates, and had affirmed that they were certain and evident, the cardinals and prelates present, were invited to give their decision. All unanimously declared the holy virgin worthy of *heaven* and of the *honors of earth*, and there was not a person present who did not give his opinion that the canonization should be proceeded with directly.

Having attentively listened to all these things, we command that in the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, a lofty and decorated tribune should be erected, from which today, in presence of the people and the clergy, after having pronounced a discourse on the life and miracles of Catherine, after having celebrated Mass and fulfilled all the accustomed ceremonies, we would proceed in these terms to the canonization of the "Blessed" Catherine: "To the honor

of the omnipotent and eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and the extension of the Christian religion, and in virtue of the authority of Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, and of that which has been conferred on us, we declare, on the opinion of our brethren, that Catherine of Siena, virgin of illustrious and ineffaceable memory, whose body reposes at Rome in the Church of the Preaching Friars, called la Minerva, has been already [p409:] received and crowned with glory in the heavenly Jerusalem, amid the choirs of virgins, in the rank which her virtue merited, aided by divine grace. We determine and decree that she be honored as a saint, in public and private, and we ordain that her name be inscribed in the catalogue of the virgins who are venerated by the Roman Church; we wish that her festival be celebrated annually by the whole Church, on the first Sunday of May, and that honors be paid to her which is customary to render to other virgins. To all such as may visit her tomb, on the day of her fest, we grant in perpetuity, an Indulgence of seven years and seven times forty days, on conforming to the obligations and usages of the Church.

“Let no one allow himself to change anything in this declaration, nor in whatever it contains, relates, ordains and settles; let no one attack it with temerity; should anyone thus render himself guilty, let him know that he exposes himself to the indignation of Almighty God, and of the holy apostles Peter and Paul. Given at Rome, at St. Peter’s, in the year of the Incarnation, 1461, the 19th of June, and the third year of our pontificate.”