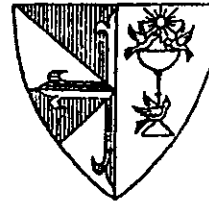


DEVOTION  
TO  
ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

*The Five Wednesdays*



*Translated from the French by the*

DOMINICAN NUNS  
CORPUS CHRISTI MONASTERY  
MENLO PARK, CALIFORNIA

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## INTRODUCTION

This practice has as its object the honoring of the Stigmata of St. Catherine of Siena, preparing by Holy Communion to celebrate the commemoration of it which is made on April first in the Order of St. Dominic.<sup>1</sup> It will be very efficacious to sanctify each of these Wednesdays by meditating on the principal privileges bestowed upon this illustrious virgin.

It was at Pisa, in the Church of St. Christina, that God endowed Catherine with the wonderful grace of the stigmata, one Sunday while she was in contemplation before a crucifix. The memory of it was preserved in that Church by the following inscription engraved upon the columns of the altar before which the saint received this signal favor.

On a marble plaque affixed to the wall, to the left of the altar, can be read:

"Here God honored His servant Catherine with the sign of our Redemption."

Haec Catharina tuis manibus,

Quis stigmata fixit?

Quis pedibus dure signa

Cruenta crucis?

"Me meus hic Christus proprio

"Signavit honore

"Ornavitque suis quam bene vulneribus."

Sacra accepit stimata,

Hoc in Sacello,

A.D. M.CCC.L XXV.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Pius V has granted indulgences to those who perform this pious practice.

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Vulnera cum rubeant Christi

Foedata cruore,

Vulnera sic rutilant

Qua, Catherina tua?

"Illa rubent merito: cadens

"Inflixerat hostis:

"Istaque pellucet; aurea

"Pinxit amor."

Mortem obiit

M. CCC LXXX.

(Who imprinted the bloody signs of the cruel cross upon thy hands and feet, Catherine?

"It was my Christ Himself who honored me here with His own sign and adorned me with His blessed wounds."

She received the Stigmata at this altar in the year of our Lord, 1375.

Why are the wounds of Christ red and covered with blackening blood, while yours are shining, Catherine?

"His are red, for the enemy inflicted them; mine are shining, since love painted them in gold."

She died in the year of Our Lord, 1380.)

In 1565 Cardinal Nicolini had the crucifix of the Church of St. Christina of Pisa brought to Siena amid great pomp and ceremony. The whole city participated in this joyous solemnity. Today the Church of St. Catherine's crucifix in Fontebranda is one of the glories of Siena and one of the numerous souvenirs which that city preserves of its holy daughter.

Herein contained are some pious reflections upon the graces and privileges which the seraphic virgin received from her Divine Spouse, suitable for meditation on each of the five Wednesdays, preparatory to the feast of the impression of the stigmata. They may also be used as a novena of preparation preceding her feast of April 30. St. Catherine is considered the special patroness of the Third Order of St. Dominic. Too much homage cannot be rendered to obtain her powerful intercession.

## *Meditations for the five Wednesdays on the privileges bestowed upon St. Catherine of Siena*

*First Wednesday*

### MORNING MEDITATION

#### *The Humility of St. Catherine*

(Jesus invests her with a mystical robe.)

Doubtless this shining robe, drawn from the Sacred Heart, symbolizes particularly the very ardent charity with which Our Lord filled the heart of His Spouse; but may we not also see in this mystical garment the mantle of humility with which the Saint was constantly garbed? What, after all, is the destruction of the former man and the putting on of the new, but Christian humility built upon the ruins of human pride? How admirable Catherine was in the exercise of this virtue! From childhood, she seeks out, in her father's house, the most menial occupations and joyfully takes the lowest place. Later, when the brilliance of her works would seem to expose her to the attacks of pride, we find her constantly penetrated with the sense of her littleness and unworthiness. All her words indicate the most profound knowledge of herself. Never does contempt wound her, nor praise dazzle her. All the miracles she performs begin with a protestation of her powerlessness, an admission of her confusion at the sight of her miseries. Before dispelling demons, she declares that she herself experiences their attacks and temptations; she places herself below them and all creatures, recognizing that, without divine grace, she would be as bad as the spirit of darkness. An

angel of purity, she is given as daughter to St. Mary Magdalen and, speaking of this relationship, she rejoices that a sinner has been confided to a Saint who once had sinned, so that the latter may be more compassionate towards her. In the favors which she receives from heaven, she sees only the gifts of God, and in herself she ever recognizes the nothingness of the creature. That is the mark of true humility, which does not consist, as some imagine, in denying or failing to recognize graces received, but rather in distinguishing them from what belongs to self, which can only produce misery and sin. Thus we see St. Catherine, in her examples and teaching, constantly basing the whole edifice of the spiritual life on this single foundation, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, a twofold light whose inevitable fruit is humility; for humility is truth, and the soul is not in perfect humility except when it is in perfect truth.

But this virtue, drawn thus from its real source, which is truth, does not stop with showing us what we are, or rather what we are not, according to those words of Our Lord to St. Catherine: "Do you know, my daughter, who I am and who you are? I am He who is; you are she who is not." It rejoices that others should recognize the fact too; it causes us to accept and cherish our own abject condition as our portion, our only right, our sole possession. That is humility of heart without which humility of mind would be only an illusion. It is the result moreover, like the latter, of the knowledge and love of truth. Indeed, if we are deserving of contempt, is it not just and good that we be held in contempt? And if we have some little knowledge of the greatness and perfection of God, shall we not find our title to glory in exalting Him by our own self-abasement? For God takes possession in us of all that we lose, and the more deeply we bury ourselves in the abyss of humility, the more we empty ourselves, the more He increases in our souls, the more He fills them.

## PRAYER

Humble virgin, Catherine, help me to divest myself of this cloak of pride which envelopes me entirely, and ask your Divine Spouse to give me the sacred robe of humility, which alone can cover my miseries and sins and render me endurable in His sight. Detach me from the esteem of mankind; teach me rather to enjoy their abandonment and contempt, and to seek as witness and reward for my works only the eye of God alone. Doubtless, at the end of my life I shall not be able to exclaim as you did, in the supreme brightness of eternity: "No, never vainglory; always the glory of God." I admit and confess that often, on the contrary, the venom of self-love has poisoned my best actions; but at least, may this avowal and my confusion obtain for me the grace to follow from afar in your footsteps and to work, without relaxing my efforts, to restore to God by my self-abasement what I have so often deprived Him of by my pride. Finally, inspired by your example, O Catherine, may I not enter with more courage than in the past, upon this way of humility which will lead me closer to God in proportion as it leads me away from myself? Amen.

## EVENING MEDITATION

*St. Catherine's Spirit of Renunciation*

(She receives the gift of the Will of Jesus instead of her own.)

God condescends so much toward the truly humble soul, and the soul loses itself to such an extent in Him, that she no longer has, so to speak, any other will but His. This is what God deigned to show in a sensible manner to Catherine one day when, after Holy Communion, she received in an ecstasy this wonderful transformation of her will into that of Jesus. Blessed Raymond, her confessor, after having related this vision, adds that this divine promise was

admirably accomplished, and that all those who knew Catherine could bear witness to the fact. She was always satisfied with everything, and nothing that occurred could trouble her. This was certainly a great prodigy of grace on the part of the loving mercy of God towards our Saint, but it was also on Catherine's part, an admirable effect of self-renunciation. In this rapture wherein love lifts her up to God, she descends beneath herself by voluntarily giving up her own liberty. Her gratitude for the grace which transports her finds no other response than the sacrifice of the most intimate possession of her soul, namely, her will. She asks to be delivered from it and only to live henceforth by the impulse of God's Will. What a heroic prayer! How pleasing it must have been to Him, Who said: **My meat is to do the Will of My Father.** This is, in fact, the true touchstone of virtue, the triumph of grace over nature, the victory of God over man; it is the price and the blessedness of Heaven, where the elect, absorbed in God, find in the accomplishment of the Divine Will their supreme reward. The abuse of free will has destroyed the harmony of creation and caused evil to enter the world; it is by the free submission of man's will to the Will of God that order is re-established and the Creator recovers His rights over His creature. This principle is applicable to the smallest as well as to the greatest things; it should not merely be a theory of our faith; its consequences must be extended into all the details of our lives. Love which does not feed upon it is a delusion, and piety which does not make it the basis of its conduct is false. In vain do we believe that we are doing much work for God, in vain are we intoxicated by heavenly consolations: if the Will of God, manifested by the orders of those who represent Him for us or by the trials of life, finds us rebellious and grumbling, let us be convinced that we have not yet made one step in the direction of Christian perfection and that we have not even laid the foundation of the edifice of our sanctity.

## PRAYER

O Catherine! How I envy your good fortune, seeing you despoiled of your own will and receiving that of Jesus Himself. Take mine today and present it to your divine Spouse, that He may transform it into His. For too long a time have I known no other rule than my own will, which is often so unjust and so perverse, and always so vacillating. It is indeed time that I submit it and deliver it over to God's good pleasure. I sacrifice today my tastes, my dislikes, my desires and my works to the divine good pleasure. May it be whatever He pleases in all things. I wish, Blessed Mother Catherine, to recall unceasingly with you that submission to the Will of God is the key which opens the gate of heaven, and no longer to see anything in the events of life, happy or otherwise, but the manifestation of that holy Will, convinced that all that happens to others or to myself proceeds from God and from the great love He has for His creatures. Amen.

*Second Wednesday*

## MORNING MEDITATION

*St. Catherine's Love for the Heart of Jesus*

(Jesus exchanges His own Heart for hers.)

The grace which Catherine received in the exchange of her heart for that of her divine Master allowed her to say with even more truth, if possible, than did St. Bernard: "I have found the Heart of my King, my Brother, my most sweet Beloved, Jesus. What can I desire in heaven or seek on earth?" Thus had she found all in finding the Heart of her Well-Beloved. This Heart was to her a living source of love, of light, of graces and of truth. Was not the life of this seraphic virgin, in fact, like a bright and burning flame? Was not her soul adorned

with the rarest gifts and all her conduct directed by the spirit of God Who is Truth itself? We often find expressed in a sublime manner in her doctrine the lights that she received on the love of the Heart of Jesus for us, and she is pleased to repeat to us how the secret of the Heart has been revealed to us through the bleeding wound in the side of our divine Master. "The Passion of our Lord being ended," she tells us, "could not suffice to manifest to us His Infinite Love; therefore He desired that His side should be opened to us, as if to reveal to us how much His Will and desire even surpassed the sufferings endured." "All that Christ did for us," she says further, "was done through the love of His Heart." Let us respond to Him, then, by the love of our own hearts.

Let us renounce all self-pity and self-love; let us enter, as did Catherine, into the wounds of Jesus crucified, in which is found true and perfect security. That is the sweet source where the Spouse fills the vessel of her heart. The heart is truly a lamp, and it should be a lamp which is narrow at the base and wide at the top; desire and love should be narrow for the world and wide at its summit; that is to say that the heart should expand in Jesus crucified, loving and fearing Him with true and holy zeal. Then we shall fill this lamp at the side of Jesus crucified; the open side will permit us to perceive the secret of the Heart which does all for us, gives all to us out of love. Therein is also found true and perfect humility, which is the oil to nourish the fire and the light in the heart of the spouse of Jesus Christ.

#### PRAYER

O Catherine, heroic lover of the Heart of Jesus, look today upon my poor soul, with the heart that Jesus bestowed on you. Here is mine; take it; I submit it to you, that you may give it to Jesus. Take pity on its weaknesses, its attachment to creatures,

its coldness towards your heavenly Spouse. Let fall upon it a spark from that furnace of love which consumed your life, from that love, strong as death, which grows amid obstacles and feeds upon immolation. May I love Jesus with ardor, tenderness, especially with generosity, vigor and might. Let my love be translated into action, devotion, sacrifice. Let it not stop at sentiment, but may it produce virtues, strong, energetic virtues like yours. May it make of my heart, if not a spouse in the embrace of Heaven, as you were, at least, and with you, above all, a victim unceasingly offered and immolated to the Heart of Jesus. Amen.

## EVENING MEDITATION

### *St. Catherine's Love of Neighbor*

(Jesus invites her sweetly to drink at the wound in His side.)<sup>a</sup>

Love of God and love of neighbor are two similar commandments which Catherine never separated. She uses an admirable comparison to show how fraternal love should be the same as love of God. "When one fills a vessel at a spring," says the Saint, "if one withdraws it from the spring to drink, the vessel is soon empty; but if one drinks while holding the vessel at the spring, it does not empty, but is always full. It is the same with the spiritual and temporal love of neighbor; one must drink of it at the sacred wound of the side of Jesus, without withdrawing it towards oneself."<sup>b</sup>

Thus St. Catherine's charity drawn from the very Heart of the Saviour, poured itself forth incessantly on all that surrounded her. Her life was nothing but a continual spending of herself for the good of others. It was for the salvation of souls that she worked, prayed, suffered, wore herself out without respite;

it was for souls, in a word, that she lived, and even her death was one more sacrifice of that unlimited devotion which impelled her to offer herself as a victim for the triumph of the Church in its affliction.

When a soul, having given itself to God, does not give itself to others, it does not walk rapidly on the road of perfection, on that broad, joyous, fragrant path, which St. Catherine tells us is characteristic of the Religion of our blessed Father St. Dominic. But when the soul has broken the bonds of that egoism

<sup>a</sup> This favor was accorded to the Saint as a reward for the heroic act of charity she performed in the case of the leper, Andrea, whom she attended with inexpressible tenderness, in spite of all her insults, and to whose repulsive sore she placed her lips to punish herself for a movement of repugnance she had experienced.

<sup>a</sup> *Dialogue of St. Catherine* chap. LXIV.

which holds her captive within the narrow circle of her own interests; when she is liberated from the tyranny of that self, of which one often makes a little center towards which all must, apparently, converge, then it is that she takes flight and draws near to God.

Let us, therefore, never fear to lose anything in the sacrifices—even of spiritual goods—which charity demands of us. The example of St. Catherine gives us admirable lessons in this respect. We find in her life written by Blessed Raymond of Capua a very simple expression, but one which is very powerful, if we reflect upon it a little. It is that Catherine deprived herself of Holy Communion when she was detained by some work of mercy which needed to be fulfilled. Now, to anyone who has any knowledge of our Saint, of her seraphic love of Jesus, her burning desire for the Holy Eucharist, which was her life, this single trait is a magnificent proof of her incomparable devotion to her neighbor, her forgetfulness of self, her generosity in sacrificing even the

purest, most heavenly joys for the good of souls, for it was always with a view towards the souls of others that Catherine ministered to their bodies. How often, in contrast, an egoistic, narrow and unenlightened piety is astonished and complains when charity requires the giving up of some favorite devotion, some practice which satisfies one, some consolation which one seeks! As for us, let us learn to understand and imitate our illustrious protectress, and if it is not given to all of us to attain such heights of heroism in practical devotedness, at least let the disposition of our soul be such that we may be always ready, in the measure of our weakness and the means at our disposal, to serve the designs of Providence for the needs of our neighbor, sacrificing to him without regret not only our goods, but our time, our comfort, our pleasures, our consolations—even spiritual, convinced that He who promised that a cup of water given in His name would not go unrewarded will indeed reward us a hundred-fold for what we have done unto Him in the person of our fellowman.

#### PRAYER

O Catherine, whose heart seemed to be as great as the world which it embraced in the ardor of its charity, expand my heart, I beseech you. Like you, I belong to the Order of St. Dominic; like you, I should be animated with a burning zeal for souls redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ, the excellence and beauty of which you so well realized. Teach me to go out of myself, to forget myself constantly, to count as nothing the efforts and sacrifices demanded by charity, to fly without delay wherever it points out to me suffering to be assuaged, unhappiness to console, and, especially a soul to be won for Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Third Wednesday*

## MORNING MEDITATION

*Catherine's Devotion to the Holy Eucharist*

(Jesus gives her Communion with His own Hand.)

Catherine burned with the ardor of a seraph for the adorable Eucharist; her Communions were almost daily and each time that she approached the Holy Table, her soul was favored by some miraculous vision or long ecstasy. She was in the habit of expressing her desire to receive Our Lord to her confessor in these words of touching simplicity: "Father, I'm very hungry." And Our Lord, on His side, deigned to manifest how His love corresponded to that of His beloved daughter, and gave a sign of the eagerness with which He came to her by very often permitting the Sacred Host to tremble and fly to Catherine's mouth and heart, as a bee hastens towards the calyx of a flower. Once she received Holy Communion from the hands of the Saviour Himself, who could not resist, so to speak, the fervor of her desires.

Catherine ardently desired Jesus Christ because she knew Him profoundly. She had received from this knowledge a marvellous fullness of light; one senses from the supernatural illumination which shines through her writings that she was as if plunged into the ocean of truth which is God Himself.

How few are the souls today who, as our Saint expresses it, open the eye of their intelligence to this celestial light! How few really study Jesus Christ, come to know Him and to understand that He is all in all things! Even devout souls do not possess this intimate, loving knowledge of Him. They do not penetrate the secret of the Incarnation, consummated in the Eucharist, of that Incarnation which

has established between Him and us a closer union than that which exists between the body and the soul, making of Him our property, our possession and our all.

**All things are thine, says St. Paul, thou art Christ's and Christ is God's.** Yes, all things belong to Jesus Christ, all things were made for Him, in the order of nature, of grace and of glory. He was yesterday, He is today, He will be tomorrow. He is the beginning, the center and the end of all. When this knowledge of Jesus Christ begins to illumine a soul, a new day dawns for her completely; she acquires an outlook of which she had been quite unaware, and consolations which she had never known; the horizon of grace stretches out before her, and her life begins to be transformed in God.

If we know Jesus Christ, we shall love Him, we shall desire Him; for who would not love the infinitely lovable, who would not desire the sum of all good? Now the Divine Eucharist gives us Jesus Himself, Jesus hidden, but Jesus substantially present under the veils; Jesus with all the mysteries, all the merits and benefactions of His mortal life, of which the treasures of grace are rendered eternal by this Sacrament; Jesus, in the splendor of His Divinity and the charm of His holy humanity; Jesus in the most prodigious act of His self-abasement and His love. Let us therefore love and desire this precious Sacrament in a measureless degree. It is the joy of our exile, the most exquisite pledge of our love and our union with Jesus Christ, and a sort of pouring forth upon earth of the beatitude of heaven. Let us ask St. Catherine to enkindle in our hearts that celestial flame which consumed her own.

## PRAYER

O Catherine, admirable lover of the Eucharist, lend me your heart that I may adore, love, receive the Most Blessed Sacrament. Enable me to understand what the Bread of Heaven is to us, so that



hungering for Jesus Christ who gives Himself therein, I may cry with you in the ardor of holy desire: "I am hungry! Oh, indeed, I am hungry!" Obtain for me purity of heart and fervor in the reception of Holy Communion. Alas! My poor soul is so often cold and dumb before this miracle of love. Warm it with the sacred fire which inflamed your own, and may it consume, in mine, every earthly sentiment. Amen.

## EVENING MEDITATION

### *On the Life Which Catherine Drew From Holy Communion*

(Jesus preserves her life by means of the Eucharistic Bread alone.)

The union of Jesus with His faithful spouse was not limited to the fleeting moments of Holy Communion; this union was constant and manifested by prodigies. St. Catherine drew so much life from Communion that she often dispensed with any other nourishment. Her transformation into Our Lord was so real, that it pleased this good Master, one day, to reveal it sensibly to Blessed Raymond of Capua, her confessor, who relates the episode himself. One day, when some doubt crossed his mind in regard to a vision that Catherine was relating to him, suddenly, he no longer perceived the face of the virgin, but that of Jesus Himself, under the severe and virile features of a man who indignantly reproached him for his incredulity.

Such favors are undoubtedly miracles to which we cannot aspire, but it is really true in every soul who communicates worthily that the life of Our Lord is communicated to her; that is the effect proper to the Sacrament. Indeed, communicating is not, as would too often seem to be believed, receiving Jesus Christ in order to enjoy His real Presence for a quarter of an hour, savouring the sweetness of this

possession; communicating is being incorporated into the life of Jesus. And when the Sacred Species are consumed within us, this life remains in us and becomes increasingly ours as we communicate more often and with greater love. This Sacrament does not bestow spiritual life, in the proper sense of the term, since that life is given to us by Baptism and restored by Penance; but it does preserve, nourish and increase it in our souls as food does for the body. In effect, it is not sustenance which produces life in us, but without it we should die. And just as food becomes our own substance, we become one thing with Jesus Christ. This life of Jesus enters our being in an ineffable way, and the words of St. Paul are, for a faithful soul, as true as they are ravishing: **I live now not I, but Christ liveth in me.** Jesus Christ becomes the principle of our being and the motivator of all our actions. We think with His Mind; we love with His Heart; we act in Him; in short we live His life. That is Eucharistic Communion; that is its proper effect, its essential fruit. Jesus does not dwell in us as He does in the ciborium where He abides, but to which He is not united; His sacramental presence in our hearts is something a thousand times more intimate and blessed. If the sacred Host is removed from the sacred vessel, nothing remains therein; but when It is consumed in our hearts, the union with Jesus remains; His life courses through us as the sap of a tree nourishes all the branches, or, in the figure used by St. Catherine of Siena, as a seal impressed upon wax leaves in it its image, its form, its imprint.

When one is well penetrated with this practical faith, one understands without difficulty how unimportant it is whether or not we taste those sensible delights in Holy Communion, for which we are always so avid. They are only accessories. We should not be concerned over whether Jesus permits us to feel His presence or not; rather does our treasure and our happiness lie in receiving His life, increas-

ing it constantly within us, incorporating ourselves in Him. And this wondrous effect the Sacrament produces of itself, every time that we communicate, not necessarily with delight and consolations, but with faith and confidence, and often all the more really and abundantly insofar as its action is more silent and concealed.

## PRAYER

O Catherine, I do not ask to be able, like you, to live on the Bread of the altar alone, nor to be sensibly transformed into the person of Jesus Christ; but that which I desire and beseech you to obtain for me, is that I may not, by my negligence and lukewarmness, oppose obstacles to that divine union which is the fruit of Eucharistic Communion. Grant that approaching this adorable Sacrament with faith and love, I may have my life lost, immersed and transformed in that of Jesus. May I become a stranger to myself, having no other interests but His, no other will but His. May that be my aspiration and my reward in Holy Communion and, detached from sensible consolations, may I seek therein Jesus alone. May I value His presence above all the delights of sentiment, and may the happiness of possessing and pleasing Him be my supreme consolation. Amen.

*Fourth Wednesday*

## MORNING MEDITATION

*Catherine's Patience and Joy in Contradictions and Sufferings*

(She receives from the hand of Jesus the crown of thorns.)

God had chosen St. Catherine to be unceasingly in the state of a victim before Him; therefore He sent great sufferings to her and gave her admirable patience and meekness with which to endure them. Our Lord said to her one day these words which really sum up her whole life, so docile was she in practicing the lesson. "My daughter, take for bitter that which is sweet, and for sweet that which is bitter." That is a sublime teaching and one which God alone could give. All perfection is there; hence it is that Catherine attained it in so high a degree. Admirably faithful to this divine principle, she preferred a crown of thorns to a crown of gold and fervently placed it on her head. Her life maintained the heroic choice; never once did she draw back from the consequences of this supreme act of love. Her existence was a slow and painful martyrdom, but her soul remained calm and strong in the face of every trial and pain. The demons besieged her with temptations and ill-treatment; men heaped calumny, threats and insults upon her; even her parents persecuted her unmercifully. Her body was a victim, as it were, unceasingly immolated by suffering, and her soul was delivered over, for a certain time, to cruel anguish. To so many crosses she added, moreover, beside her prodigious mortifications, the service of the sick, long journeys and the enduring of great weariness for the good of the Holy Church. Yet, never an action or a word on her part contradicted

that imperturbable meekness, that peace and interior joy which radiated even from her countenance. Thus the chapter of her Biography which Blessed Raymond of Capua devotes to recounting and praising her practice of patience sums up, as he himself declares, her whole life. This chapter might well be entitled "The Passion of Catherine," for all manner of sufferings and humiliations are found therein. Yes, she truly followed the example of Jesus, taking "for sweet that which was bitter, and for bitter that which was sweet." Living the life of Jesus, she shared His pains, she bore in union with Him the weight of the offenses of men, and like Him, she burned and was consumed by ardor for their salvation. This thirst of charity was for her a veritable martyrdom which she called the cross of holy desire.

Much is said of the marvels in the life of our saint; and the extraordinary aspect of her existence is what most strikes the imagination of the majority of people. It even appears that, because of the remarkable favors which are related concerning her, her life is rather more admirable than imitable. It is therefore forgotten that, together with the marvellous graces accorded to Catherine can be found examples of heroic virtue, and that, if God did great things for her, within the proportions that distinguish a creature from the Creator, Catherine did great things for God. Were we only to consider this lesson of patience and meekness which stands out in every page of her history we should have matter for a whole lifetime of the practice of sanctity. She herself impresses us with the importance of these two virtues which accompanied all her actions: "Patience," she says, "is the marrow of charity, as impatience is the marrow of pride." And did not the Saviour say: **Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land?**

Let us, therefore, apply ourselves to possessing our souls in patience, as the Apostle says; only at this price shall we accomplish the work of God; for

God confides the interests of His glory and the salvation of souls only to meek and peaceable hearts; and only those who have been able to overcome themselves will be capable of vanquishing evil in others by good. Let us ask our holy protectress to invest us with these powerful weapons by means of which, in the weakness of her sex and age, she was able to triumph over the enemies of the Church and restore peace to its heart.

#### PRAYER

O sweet virgin Catherine, grant me a share of that ineffable meekness, of that angelic patience of which you have left us such fair examples. May I, like you, in imitation of the divine Lamb whose infinite gentleness you constantly delighted to recall, may I be enabled to endure all things in the peace of silence and of divine love. Like you, may I respond to contempt with a secret joy and a sincere admission of my nothingness; may I respond to calumny and insult by devotedness and acts of kindness. Grant that, recognizing the thorns of the Saviour's crown in the daily crosses of life and the trials of virtue, I may embrace them, as you did, with love and perseverance, so that I may also hope to share with you that other crown of immortal glory which your Spouse promised you and which you now enjoy in heaven. Amen.

## EVENING MEDITATION

*Catherine's Love for the Cross*

(Jesus imprints upon her His sacred stigmata.)

Catherine had unceasingly before her soul's eyes the Passion of Jesus Christ. In her letters she speaks constantly of the Lamb immolated out of love and of His blood shed for the world. She takes hold of this thought as of an irresistible weapon to arouse the zeal of the pastors of the Church, to inflame their charity, and to strengthen their resolve to overcome all the obstacles opposed to what God demands of them. She drew from this same source that ardent love of suffering which is one of the most striking features of her life. From her earliest childhood, she gave herself up to the most rigorous penitential austerities, and her little cell, according to Blessed Raymond of Capua, saw the renewal of the ancient prodigies of the Thebaide. If, later, she became miraculously by stigmatization the living image of her Crucified Spouse, the fact was that she had long imitated that divine model and strove, as the Apostle advises, to make up "in herself for what was wanting to the Passion of Jesus Christ." It is characteristic of love, in fact, to seek to resemble the object loved, and one of the first effects of grace in a soul captivated by the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ is to impress upon her a profound contempt for her own body and a holy desire to make it participate in the sufferings of the Redemption. Hence it is that bodily mortification is of the very essence of Christianity, and there is no saint canonized by the Church who did not excel in the practice of exterior penance. Our Lord Himself said one day to St. Catherine: "You cannot offer to me the water without the vase, and the empty vase would be of no use to me." That is to say that the water of suffering must be offered to Him in the vase of our body, and that if our body does not receive suffering, it will be to Him as a useless vase.

It is in this spirit that St. Agnes, virgin and martyr, said at the moment of her martyrdom, to Jesus Christ: "They are writing Thee upon my body."

But the love which urges suffering is also that which renders it sweet. St. Catherine tells us that "it was not difficult, but agreeable for her to suffer out of love of her Jesus, and that to whatever extent He might have been pleased to cause her to suffer." This agrees with the testimony of all the saints and of the martyrs among them, all of whom, following the example of the apostles, esteemed themselves happy to be found worthy to suffer for Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore, enter courageously upon a career of mortification, and let us be convinced that it will be all the less difficult as we walk in it with more generosity; let us embrace lovingly the cross of Jesus Christ, and far from seeking to avoid it, as we have so often done, let us clasp it, once and for all, to our hearts. It will seem less hard as we come to love it more; as the author of the Imitation says, when we truly desire to carry it, it will rather carry us.

## PRAYER

O Catherine, generous spouse of Jesus crucified, you who made of your virginal flesh a living victim unceasingly immolated by the love of penance on the altar of the cross, rectify my softness and sensuality; correct my cowardice and immortification. If I cannot attain to your heroic love of suffering, at least may I follow from afar in your footsteps and imitate you within the limitations of my weakness. Teach me to understand that the cross is the royal road of love, the nuptial couch of the Spouse of souls, and that, in order to be truly united to Jesus Christ, one must kiss the crown of thorns and fasten one's heart to His wounds. Amen.

*Fifth Wednesday*

## MORNING MEDITATION

*The Extraordinary Mission Which Catherine  
Received From Our Lord*

(He espouses her solemnly.)

Catherine aspired unceasingly for more intimate and intense union with her Beloved. She had asked God several times to give her so deep a faith that nothing might henceforth separate her from the Spouse of her heart, and He had replied to her: "I shall espouse thee in faith." It is this promise which Our Lord accomplished faithfully one day, while Catherine, withdrawing into her cell, tried to atone by the ardor of her prayers, for the follies and crimes committed by people of the world at the approach of Lent. The divine espousals of Jesus with Catherine were solemnly celebrated in the presence of Mary and several saints; a miraculous ring remained on the finger of the happy bride as a token of this precious favor. From that moment, the life of the humble virgin was quite changed; she was no longer a timid child hidden in solitude and concerned only with daily increasing in virtue; she was to become, in spite of the weakness of her age and sex, an apostle and a doctor. Shortly afterwards, in fact, her divine Spouse revealed to her that He had chosen her to save many souls, to work for the reform of the Church and to confound the proud men of the world; and Catherine, in spite of her tears and her sorrow, accepted this amazing task, the accomplishment of which was truly a prodigy. Perhaps there is nothing more astonishing, as a matter of fact, in the lives of the saints than this important active mission entrusted to a young girl of the common people, without any other power but that of grace, without any other asset but her virtue. She over-

comes violent hatreds, reconciles mortal enemies; she pacifies and leads back into submission to the Pope the proud, vindictive Republic of Florence, which had risen against the Holy See; she instructs and reprimands kings and nations; she abolishes the abuses and scandals by which princes of the Church dishonored their ministry; she directs the actions of two great Popes; she works ardently for the cessation of the great Western Schism, and finally dies, a victim of her zeal, offering her life in sacrifice for the Holy Church.

To this glory in active works Catherine also adds that of her teaching. The doctrine of this young virgin has been declared by the Church an infused knowledge, wholly divine, respected and consulted as emanating directly from Heaven. She, indeed, rises to the sublimest heights and, in language burning with charity, reveals to us the highest secrets of God.

What cannot grace accomplish in a soul that abandons herself to it! Do we still dare to say that we are capable of nothing in the service of God and to excuse our cowardice on the grounds of our powerlessness? Doubtless, God will not perform in us such prodigies, nor shall we be called upon to fulfill such a mission; but in a certain measure, we all have a task to accomplish and are called upon to place one stone in the edifice of God's glory. Let us not look upon our weakness, but let us count on the help of Him who calls us; let us say with St. Paul, **I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.**

## PRAYER

O Catherine, illustrious daughter of the Holy Church of Jesus Christ, give me something of the sentiments toward Her which animated your heart. She continues to suffer today and Her enemies are infuriated against Her. Today Her supreme chief is still outraged; and as in former days She has some

ungrateful children who betray and render Her desolate. Pray for Her as you prayed in the days of Her ancient sorrows, when by your tears and the ardor of your holy desires, you warded off the blows which menaced Her and allayed the extreme evils which afflicted Her. Give also to my poor prayers a little of the holy energy, the untiring perseverance, the admirable fervor of your own, and give to those who defend the kingdom of God the grace to be firm in faith and courageous in the struggle. May they be unshakable columns on which Truth may depend. Amen.

## EVENING MEDITATION

### *Catherine's Zeal and Devotion in the Accomplishment of This Mission*

(She agrees to live for the good of the Church and the salvation of souls.)

Catherine understood perfectly the sacrifice which her Spouse was asking of her in calling her forth from her solitude, to consecrate herself to the service of her neighbor. She wept for a long time, the legend tells us, for her soul, all absorbed in heavenly things and entirely dedicated to the contemplation of her Beloved upon whom she had fixed all the desires of her heart, had an extreme distaste for the things of earth and human affairs. But the thought of doing the will of Him whom she loved solely, and of procuring His Glory, made her overcome her repugnance and that timidity which is so natural to her age and sex, when faced with this task which might well have frightened a strong man. She complains, but she accepts; she weeps, but she consents, replying, like the Virgin Mary and the Lord Jesus Himself: "My God, Thy Will be done!"

Catherine was so faithful to this acceptance of the designs of God upon her that she sacrificed to them the consolations of her solitude and, in order to accomplish them more faithfully, she even consented to delaying the happiness of her eternal union with her Spouse in the bliss of heaven. The legend relates that she died one day of love and desire for the possession of her God. She herself asserts that this death was quite real and that she was only recalled to life upon consenting to endure it further for the salvation of many souls and the good of Holy Church. Every time that Catherine recalled the great felicity which she had enjoyed, she burst into tears, but, generously and devotedly, she loved even more the souls who were costing her so dearly and who would one day be her crown and her joy. The long toilsome journeys, the most difficult undertakings, inconveniences and dangers of all sorts, could never reduce the ardor of her zeal. When one thinks of the troublous times during which Catherine was, as it were, summoned to guard the Holy Church like an angel of peace and love, of the scandals among the ministers of the altar which she must work to reform, of the strife and divisions of all kinds which she attempted to appease; of the schism which she tried to stifle in its beginnings and whose development she indeed impeded more than once by the influence of her sanctity and her counsel — one is astonished and realizes that so many labors could only be the result of unreserved self-abnegation and unlimited devotion. She repeats unceasingly in her letters to the princes of the Church, to the Queen of Naples and to the nobles of Italy, that "we must extinguish within ourselves all self-love and be prepared to suffer lovingly for the sweet Spouse of Christ." This maxim of heroic charity was truly the rule of all her conduct, and when one considers her, ceaselessly occupied with the ills and needs of her time, one is easily convinced that she lived much more in the Church than in herself.

How rare are souls thus intensely steeped in the zeal of divine charity and love for Holy Church! How much egoism there is in all our actions! How much cowardice in the face of sacrifices! Let us ask St. Catherine to confirm our languishing courage by contact with the powerful energy of her own, so that we may, not defend the Church as she did, but at least console Her by our fidelity in Her service.

PRAYER

O Catherine, I rejoice today at the glory with which you are now clothed in heaven. You have at last obtained that crown which your charity for souls had prevented from sooner encircling your brow. You enjoy the eternal embrace of the divine Spouse, whose Will was dearer to you than any rewards. Henceforth you possess irrevocably that peace of eternity which you so generously exchanged for the trouble and turmoil of the world in the hard labors of exile. Oh, how well you are recompensed for all your sacrifices! How fair is your place in that Church triumphant, whose struggles and sufferings here below you shared with so much love and devotion! O virgin blessed, pray for Her new children; pray for me, who am the most unworthy. If while on earth you loved souls so much, you prayed so much, worked and suffered so much for them, what must you not do now that your charity is plunged into the very heart of God Himself! Therefore, I cast myself trustingly into your arms, I count upon your motherly aid to protect, defend and sustain me in the battles of the Lord and to enable me to walk in your footsteps in labors for the glory of God and the conquest of souls. Amen.