

CELEBRATION OF THE SIXTH CENTENARY OF ST CATHERINE OF SIENA

Richness of humanity perfected by grace

In the afternoon of 30 April the Holy Father presided over a solemn eucharistic concelebration in St Peter's Basilica on the occasion of the VI centenary of the death of St Catherine of Siena. John Paul II delivered the following homily

1. An innumerable host of "wise virgins", like those praised by the Gospel parable we have listened to, have waited, in Christian centuries, for the Bridegroom with their lamps well filled with oil, to take part with him in the feast of grace on earth, and glory in Heaven. Among them, there shines forth before our eyes today the great and dear St Catherine of Siena, a splendid flower of Italy, a sparkling gem of the Dominican Order, a star of peerless beauty in the firmament of the Church, whom we are honouring here on the sixth centenary of her death, which took place on a Sunday morning, about the third hour, on 29 April 1380, while the feast of St Peter Martyr, whom she loved so much, was being celebrated.

Happy to be able to give you an initial sign of my deep participation in the celebration on the centenary, I cordially greet you all, dear Brothers and Sisters, who, to commemorate the glorious date in a worthy way, are gathered in this Vatican Basilica, where there seems to hover the ardent spirit of the great Saint of Siena. I greet particularly the Master General of the Friars Preachers, Father Vincent de Cousseongie, and Archbishop Mario Ismaele Castellano of Siena, the principal organizers of this celebration. I greet the members of the Dominican Third Order and of the Ecumenical Association of the "Cateriniani", participants in the International Congress of Studies about Catherine, and all of you, dear pilgrims, who have travelled along so many roads of Italy and Europe to gather at this centre of the Catholic world, on such a beautiful and significant feast day.

Her rich humanity

2. Today we look to St Catherine in the first place to admire in her what immediately struck those who approached her: the extraordinary richness of humanity, not dimmed in any way, but on the contrary increased and perfected by grace, which made of her almost a living image of that true and wholesome Christian "humanism", the fundamental law of which is formulated by Catherine's confessor and teacher, St Thomas Aquinas, in the well-known aphorism: "grace does not suppress, but presupposes and perfects nature" (*Summa Theol.*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2). The man of complete dimensions is the one who is fulfilled in Christ's grace.

When in my ministry I insist on calling the attention of all to the dignity and values of man, which must be defended, respected and served today, I am speaking above all of this nature that came from the hands of the Creator and was renewed in the Blood of Christ the Redeemer: a nature that is good in itself, and therefore curable in its infirmities and perfectible in its gifts, called to receive that "additional" element which makes it a participant in divine nature and "eternal life". When this supernatural element is grafted onto man and can act with all its power in

him, we have the miracle of the "new creature", who in his transcendent loftiness does not cancel all that is purely human but makes it richer, fuller, more firm.

In this way our Saint, in her nature as a woman generously endowed with imagination, intuition, sensitiveness, will power and industry, with capability and power of communication, with readiness for the giving of herself and for service is transfigured, but not impoverished, in the light of Christ who calls her to be his bride and to identify herself mystically with him in the depth of "interior knowledge" as well as to commit herself in charitable, social and even political action, in the midst of the great and the ordinary, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant. And she, almost illiterate, becomes cap-

able of making herself heard, and read and taken into consideration by princes of cities and kingdoms, popes and prelates of the Church, monks and theologians, by many of whom she is even venerated as "teacher" and "mother".

She is a marvellous woman, who in that second half of the 14th century shows in herself what a human creature, and—*I stress*—a woman, the daughter of humble dyers, was made capable of when she can listen to the voice of the one Pastor and Teacher, and nourish herself at the table of the divine Bridegroom, to whom, as a "wise virgin" she has generously consecrated her life.

We have here a masterpiece of grace renewing and raising the creature to the perfection of holiness which is also the full realization of the fundamental values of humanity

Letters reveal "the wise virgin"

3. Catherine's secret in responding so docilely, faithfully and fruitfully to the call of her divine Bridegroom, can be grasped from her own explanations and applications of the parable of the "wise virgins", which she gives several times in letters to her disciples. In particular, in the one sent to a young niece who wishes to be a "bride of Christ", she makes a little synthesis of spiritual life, which applies especially to those consecrated to God in the religious state but gives directions and guidance for everyone.

"If you want to be a real bride of Christ—the Saint writes—you must have the lamp, oil and light".

"Do you know what is meant by this, my dear?"

Here is the symbolism of the lamp: "By the lamp is meant the heart, which must be like a lamp. You see very well that a lamp is wide above, and below it is narrow, and our heart is made in the same way, meaning that we must always have it wide above, by means of holy thoughts, holy images and continual prayer, with our memory always tuned to remembering the beneficent deeds of God and principally that of the Blood by which we have been redeemed.

"I also said to you that the lamp is narrow below: so is our heart, meaning that it must be narrow as regards these earthly things, not desiring them or loving them in a dis-

orderly way, nor craving them in greater quantity than what God wishes to give us, but we must thank him always, adorning how sweetly he provides for us so that we never lack anything."

(Letter 25)

In the lamp we need oil. The lamp would not be enough if there were not oil inside it. And by oil is meant that sweet little virtue of deep humility. Those five foolish virgins, priding themselves only and vainly on the integrity and virginity of the body, lost the virginity of the soul, because they did not bring with them the oil of humility. (ib)

"Finally it is necessary that the lamp should be lit and that the flame should burn: otherwise it would not be enough to let us see. This flame is the light of holy faith. I say the living faith because the saints say that faith without works is dead." (ib., cf. Letters 79, 360)

In her life Catherine really nourished with great humility the lamp of her heart, and kept burning the light of faith, the fire of charity, the zeal of good works carried out for love of God, also in hours of tribulation and passion, when her soul reached its greatest conformation to the Crucified Christ, until one day the Lord celebrated the mystical wedding with her in the little cell where she lived, resplendent with that divine presence (cf. *Life* nos 114-115).

If modern man, and especially Christians, were to succeed in rediscovering the marvels that can be known and enjoyed in the "interior cell" say more in the heart of Christ! Then, indeed, man would find himself again, the reasons for his dignity, the foundation of his every value, the height of his eternal vocation!

Communion with others

4. But Christian spirituality is not exhausted in an intimate circle, nor is it directed to individualistic and egocentric isolation. The elevation of the person takes place in the symphony of the community. Catherine, although she guards for herself the cell of her house and her heart, lives from her youth in communion with so many other sons of God, in whom she feels the mystery of the Church vibrating with the friars of St Dominic, whom she joins in spirit even when the bell calls them all together, at night, for matins; with the Dominican women tertiary of Siena, among whom she is admitted for the exercise of works of charity and the community practice of prayer; with her disciples, who are increasing, forming around her a cénacle of fervent Christians, who accept her exhortations to the spiritual life and the incentives to renewal and reform that she addresses to everyone in Christ's name and it can be said, with the whole "Mystical Body of the Church" (cf. *Dialogue*, c. 166) with which and for which Catherine prays, works, suffers, offers herself and finally dies.

Her great sensitiveness to the problems of the Church of her time is thus transformed into communion with *Christus patiens* and with the *Ecclesia patiens*. This communion is at the origin even of her exterior activity, which, at a certain moment, the Saint is driven to carry out first with charitable action and with the lay apostolate in her city, and very soon on a far wider plane, with social, political and ecclesial commitment.

In any case Catherine draws from that interior source courage for action and that inexhaustible hope that sustains her even in the most difficult hours, even when everything seems lost, and enables her to influence others, even at the highest ecclesiastical levels, with the power of her faith and the fascination of her person completely offered to the cause of the Church.

At a meeting of Cardinals in the presence of Urban VI, according to the account of Blessed Raymond, Catherine "showed that Divine Providence is always present, especially when the Church is suffering; and she did so with such ardour that the Pontiff exclaimed at the end: 'What has the Vicar of Jesus Christ to fear, even if the whole world were to oppose him? Christ is more powerful than the world, and it is not possible that He will abandon his Church!'" (ib. n. 334).

Victim of expiation

5. That was an exceptionally serious moment for the Church and for the Apostolic See. The demon of division had penetrated the Christian people. There were disputes and quarrels everywhere. In Rome



Death of St Catherine (from "Legenda maior" of Raymond of Capua, Siena 1324).

ST CATHERINE OF SIENA



itself, there were people who were plotting against the Pope, even threatening him with death. The people were in an uproar.

Catherine, who constantly encouraged pious and faithful, felt, however, that the time had come for a supreme offering of herself, as a victim of expiation and reconciliation together with Christ. So she prayed to the Lord: "For the honour of your name and for your holy Church, I will willingly drink the cup of passion and death, as I have always desired to do; you are my witness, from the time when, by your grace, I began to love you with all my mind and with all my heart" (*Life*, n. 346).

From that moment she fell into a rapid decline. Every morning of that Lent of 1380, "she went to the church of St Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, where, after hearing Mass, she remained for a long time in prayer, she did not come home until Vespers", exhausted. The next day, early in the morning, "starting from the street called *Via del Papa* (today *Via di S. Chiara*), where she lived between the *Minerva* and *Campo dei Fiori*, she set out briskly for St Peter's, a walk that would have tired even a healthy person" (*Life*, n. 348 cf. *Letter* 573).

But at the end of April she could no longer get up. Then she gathered her spiritual family round her bed. In her long farewell, she declared to those disciples of hers: "I put my life, my death and everything in the hands of my eternal Bridegroom... If it pleases him that I should die, rest assured, beloved sons that I have given my life for the holy Church, and this I believe through an exceptional grace granted me by the Lord" (*Life*, n. 365).

Shortly afterwards she died. She was only 33 years old: a beautiful youth offered to the Lord by the "wise virgin" who had reached the end of her waiting and her service.

We are gathered here, six hundred years after that morning (ib., n. 348) to commemorate that death and above all to celebrate that supreme offering of her life for the Church.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, it is consoling that you have come in such large numbers to glorify and invoke the Saint on this happy anniversary.

Tribute of praise

It is right that the humble Vicar of Christ, like so many of his predecessors, should inspire you, precede you and guide you in paying a tribute of praise and thanks to the Saint who loved the Church so much, and laboured and suffered so much for her unity and for her renewal. And I have done so most willingly.

Now let me present to you a final memory, which is intended as a message, an exhortation, an invitation to hope, a stimulus to action; I am taking it from the words that Catherine addressed to her disciple Stefano Maconi and to all her companions in working and suffering for the Church: "If you are what you must be, you will set fire to the whole of Italy..." (*Letter* 368); and I add: to the whole Church, to the whole world. Humanity needs this "fire" today, too, in fact more, perhaps, than in the past. May the word and the example of Catherine arouse in so many generous souls the desire to be burning flames which, like her, are consumed to give brothers the light of faith and the warmth of love which "never ends" (1 Cor. 13:8).

The priesthood: the living power of the Church

By Gino Concetti, OFM

The celebration of the world day of vocations was for the whole ecclesial community a moment of reflection on individual vocation and in particular on the situation of vocations of candidates to the priesthood. The faithful have thus been able to learn that the crisis of priestly vocations is reversing its trend. There are signs of revival even in ecclesial communities of the Western areas where it had been feared most acutely. They remain declines here and there, it is true, in these communities. On the whole, however, it must be recognized that the downward trend has ended. Now there is an upward trend, a trend towards increase. In other communities, such as in what is called the Third World, and even in Latin America, the number of candidates to the priesthood is increasing. The same can be said of the communities in the so-called area of real Socialism. Vocations continue to develop, in spite of the difficult situation in which the Church is forced to live.

It is surprising, therefore, to meet with certain comments, not at all documented by actual data, which exaggerate the crisis as if we were in the presence of an ecclesial community on its last legs. No Candidates to the priesthood continue to provide the Church with ministers of God, the successors of the apostles, priests their co-workers, and deacons. Certainly — in view of the enormous need of evangelization — the number is not proportionate to the actual requirements of the world's population.

But today the Gospel can be proclaimed everywhere, also making use of modern media. Priests can — as in fact they do — guarantee the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, for which the ordained minister is required, with the system of mobility. And then we should not rely only on human forces. The Spirit of Christ will never let his people lack ministers. He will be able to raise them up even from stones. Believers have the duty of docility and listening.

It has been written and repeated in the last few decades almost *ad nauseam*, that one of the causes of the shortage of priestly vocations is to be sought in

celibacy. Many people, it is alleged, do not follow the way of the hierarchical priesthood, and others do not persevere in the way undertaken, because they are unable to observe chastity. That there is in the Church a percentage of persons who do not keep their priestly commitment, is a well-known fact. In certain periods, as in the one that followed the Council, it even took on considerable proportions. Unfaithfulness is part of human nature and, unfortunately, it involves also those who ought to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Not without reason did Jesus pray especially to the Father for his disciples not only that they might be united, but also that they might remain faithful to him and persevere up to the end.

The main cause of the shortage of vocations is not celibacy. Only those who wish to ignore evangelical teaching and the history of the Church continue to concentrate on this argument. The statistics of the non-Catholic ecclesial communities that envisage a married clergy, are no more comforting than those of the Catholic Church. The problem, therefore, calls for further study. The drop in the number of priests as compared with the prewar period — just to have a term of comparison — is due to a multiplicity of causes that can be summed up in the rampant phenomenon of laicism and secularism. The reactions that have been manifested, however, and which tend to be manifested, seem to prove that the Church is emerging strengthened and renewed also in this respect.

Since people continue to bring up the subject of celibacy, it is useful to sum up the doctrine and discipline of the Church. Right from her origins, that is, from her foundation which goes back to Christ and the apostles, the Church has considered celibacy for priests as a gift of the Spirit and an evangelical value. The priesthood was conferred preferably on unmarried persons. In the West the model of the unmarried priest prevailed in the East but to initial models remain. The Synod of Bishops in 1971 confirmed the discipline of celibacy, but studied its meaning more deeply in the light of the Gospel. The legalistic concept

(the celibacy of priests is not merely ecclesiastical law) was considered decidedly outdated. Celibacy must be considered in the context of the message of the Beatitudes and of the whole Gospel. The disciple called for the kingdom and to follow Christ to be his priest in the strict (not common) sense, also receives the gift of conforming to Christ the virgin. Virginity or celibacy, therefore, is an essential part of the status of the New Testament priest. Because of the fact that he, listening and responding to the call, sets out to follow Christ the priest and pastor, he knows that he is conforming to Christ in the fullness of the reality of his values.

This evangelical radically does not exclude the legitimacy of the model of priesthood of the Eastern Church, which also goes back to the origins. If it is unquestionable — as the Eastern Fathers themselves recognized at the Synod of bishops and as Paul VI's encyclical *Sacerdotium caelibatibus* affirms — that the state of consecrated virginity is superior to the married state because it permits, objectively speaking, a greater conformity to Christ the virgin and a greater availability of service for his Kingdom. The reintroduction of the married model in the Latin Church was not judged opportune by the synod of bishops, also for theological reasons.

It is interesting to note the growing awareness of celibacy as an evangelical value. Characteristic, in this connection, is the document of the Dutch synod, held in the Vatican at the beginning of the year. In the official final document, the term used is not the "law" of celibacy, but the "rule". The difference is not a negligible one. In fact in the tradition of the Church the word expresses something fundamental. Analogically, it could be equated with what the constitution expresses in a modern community. It is, therefore, in this context, in the evangelical context, that celibacy must be considered. To consider it outside this context, presents the risk of not understanding it and of depriving it of its sacred content of dedication, conformation and sign.

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF EPISCOPAL ORDINATION

Holy Father's Letter to Cardinal Satowaki

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the episcopal ordination of the Archbishop of Nagasaki Cardinal Joseph Asajiro Satowaki, the Holy Father sent him the following autograph letter of good wishes.

To Our Esteemed Brother
Cardinal Joseph Asajiro Satowaki
Archbishop of Nagasaki

Since we know, our esteemed Brother, that in a few days you will be twenty-five years a bishop, and as we are thinking of this happy occasion, we are pleased to write you this congratulatory letter and with it to put to record the friendly sentiments we have towards you. We also wish to assure you that even now, at least in our thoughts we are sharing in this forthcoming celebration and in your joy.

This is why, when this opportunity presents itself, we should praise the good God with much prayer in common for his great goodness to you for so many years. Indeed a long time ago after you had completed your theological studies here in Rome, he allowed you to be ordained a priest for ever in the city of Rome. Then after you had returned to your native land, instructed in sound doctrine, you began to fill a number of posts, even

of great responsibility, in the archdiocese of Nagasaki. For some time you discharged in a very praiseworthy manner the office of Apostolic Administrator of the Island of Formosa at a very difficult time. After this you were providentially ordained a bishop and when the Church of Kagoshima was raised to the rank of a diocese in 1955 you became its first bishop. For thirteen years you carried out your pastoral duties in that diocese with success as the faithful and the priests, who during that time doubled in number, and the beneficial social and educational work started and extended by your efforts bear witness. Finally distinguished for your qualities and merits, your special flair for missionary work and your administrative ability, since you seemed the most fitting of all to govern the important archdiocese of Nagasaki, you became its father and pastor at the end of the year 1968 and since that time you are still working with the same eagerness for the salvation of the faithful entrusted to your care.

Meanwhile it has not escaped our notice that on account of your office of President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, you have also been given the honour of being their

leader in the direction of pastoral matters according to the apostolic mandate, in carrying out the decrees of the Second Vatican Council and in preserving unshaken fidelity to the Apostolic See. In this matter you have given an outstanding and praiseworthy example. But since it is not necessary for us here to commend the many other things with which we know your entire work has been adorned, we earnestly exhort you to continue this in such a way that also in the future by working as much as possible for the betterment of this section of the holy flock you will fulfil the expectations of the Church.

As we show you the same affection with which we recently appointed you to the College of Cardinals, nothing else remains for us to do but to confirm with the Apostolic Blessing which we lovingly impart to you, to your relatives, our esteemed brother and to all who will be sharing in the joy of this jubilee, our good wishes and renewed congratulations.

From the Vatican, on the twelfth day of April, in the year 1980, the second of our pontificate.

JOANNES PAULUS PP. II