Wednesday of Holy Week

CONTROL

"In beholding the excesses of others, we should direct our thoughts to our own excesses, by which we offend others. This consideration of our own faults will lead us to excuse those of others. For a person who piously considers that he also has something which others must bear patiently in him will be easily disposed to bear patiently injuries he receives from others." - Pope Saint Gregory the Great

ST CATHERINE OF SIENA

St. Catherine once struggled with the deadly sin of wrath especially in the sense of control. She was a very strong willed person and at first could be controlling. Her desire to get people to follow God was so great that she would sometimes use control as a way to get them to accept God. She eventually came to see that she could only invite and convince but never control people into following God's will. She learned to respect the gift of free will as God does. In 1376, Catherine worked to repair a breach between Pope Gregory XI and a league of northern Italian cities led by Florence. Turmoil in Rome and conflict with the emperor had forced the popes to retreat to Avignon in southern France. Catherine shared the popular Italian desire to restore the papacy to Rome. Pope Gregory XI was willing to make the move, but his powerful French advisers resisted.

Catherine conducted a campaign of letters to all sides and offered to mediate directly. She wrote Pope Gregory XI six times, exhorting him to return to Rome. The pope said that Catherine addressed him with an "intolerably dictatorial tone, a little sweetened with expressions of her perfect Christian deference." Eventually, Catherine went to Avignon on a peacemaking mission. The pope had made a secret vow to move back to Rome, and this vow was revealed to Catherine. When she met the pope at Avignon, she reminded him of his vow. "Keep the promise you have made," she urged, to his great surprise. Not long after this encounter, Gregory XI returned the papacy to Rome. Catherine had respected Pope Gregory XI's desire to return to Rome and rather than controlling him had encouraged his free will.

The deadly sin of wrath expresses itself in the ways we seek to control others. We control in order to protect ourselves since if we are in control then someone else cannot hurt us. However, control always leads to pain because of how it violates free will. Our hearts desire to have freedom to choose because God gave us that gift. It is necessary for us to surrender to the truth that we all have free will. We can only use our free will and never force another to use their will in a certain way. How have you sought to control others to protect yourself?

For your prayer

St. Catherine would have prayed with Matthew 26:14-25. Use your imagination as you slowly read Matthew 26:14-25. Please reflect on how Jesus never sought to control others even when he knew they would betray him. Reflect on how you have violated the free will of others by seeking to control them and betrayed their gift of free will. Ask Jesus to grant you the grace to focus on your faults and free will.