

April 29

# St. Catherine of Siena

1347–1380 • Italy

Six-year-old Catherine and her older brother were walking on the road to their home. Without warning, the young Catherine froze and gazed up at the sky. Her brother grabbed her hand, and Catherine burst into tears. Moments before, the glorified Jesus had appeared to her in a vision, along with many saints. When her brother took her hand, the beautiful vision had disappeared! This vision of Jesus forever changed Catherine's life, and only a year later, she promised Jesus that she would give her life completely to Him.

When Catherine turned sixteen, her mother wished her to marry. But Catherine knew that she could love no man but Jesus. She refused to marry and cut her beautiful, long, golden hair. Her parents were angry at first, but when they realized that Catherine was determined to dedicate her life to God, they allowed her to join the order of Dominican tertiaries. Catherine lived in a tiny room in her house, prayed, offered sacrifices, and did penances. She only left her small room to go to Mass.

Jesus appeared to the nineteen-year-old Catherine on the day before Ash Wednesday. He gave her a ring, which she described as her wedding ring to Jesus. It was invisible to everyone but her. Jesus told Catherine that her time alone was over and that she was now ready to serve others. And that is what she did. She nursed the sick in the hospitals and fed the poor in their homes. During a terrible plague not only did she take care of the sick, but she buried the dead with her own hands.

One day, when Catherine was praying in a church, rays shot forth from the crucifix and pierced her hands, feet, and side. She fainted, and, when she regained consciousness, she saw that she had received the stigmata, which means that her body now bore the five wounds of Christ. The stigmata were invisible during her life but became visible after her death.

Because of her wisdom, Catherine was an adviser for two popes. For many years, the popes had lived in Avignon, France, instead of Rome. This caused much turmoil in the Church. Catherine convinced Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome. Gregory's successor, Urban VI, asked Catherine to move to Rome and act as his adviser. Only two years later, Catherine died a holy death at the age of thirty-three. St. Catherine of Siena, show me how to deepen my love for Jesus!

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