

Holy Thursday

Letter of Saint Catherine of Siena

Lazzarino da Pisa, a learned Franciscan friar, and a popular preacher and lecturer, first made Catherine's acquaintance shortly after she had begun to minister in the neighborhoods of Siena. He had in fact been vilifying her and her followers in public and had come to visit her only to trap her in her speech and gather further ammunition for his campaign.

Concluding from their conversation that though she was a good woman she certainly did not deserve the reputation she enjoyed in the city, he left promising to return. Fearing to look disrespectful, he asked for her prayers as he departed.

The next day he was mysteriously overwhelmed by tears as he prepared his usual lecture. Returning to Catherine, he begged to be received as her disciple.

*After some protest concerning his superior knowledge, she advised him to begin to follow Christ and Francis "in nakedness and humility." His life was never the same again. [Suzanne Noffke OP, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, vol II, p 91]*

This is what Catherine wrote to him in 1375:

In the name of Christ crucified!

Very loved, dearest father and brother and son in Christ Jesus,

I Caterina, useless servant, am writing to you recalling that sweet word of Christ: "With desire have I desired to celebrate the Pasch with you before I die."

As divine grace grants me (for I by myself am not; only God is the one who is) and as God has wounded my soul, I dare to say in regard to this desire what Christ said: "With desire I desire to have us celebrate the Pasch before we die."

What David says in the Psalter will be our sweet holy Pasch: "Taste and see." It does not seem we can see God unless we first celebrate this holy Pasch, the Pasch of tasting God. I mean tasting God in love, in his boundless love, charity, knowing and tasting that God's goodness wants nothing but our good, as said Paul, that man so in

love: "God is our holiness and justice and all our rest," and "God's will wants nothing but that we be made holy."

Oh boundless love and charity! You showed this blazing desire and ran like one drunk and blind to the disgrace of the cross.

Just as a blind person does not see, nor a drunk who is really saturated with wine, so Christ like a blind person, like one drunk on saving us, lost himself. Neither our foolishness nor our ingratitude nor our selfish love for ourselves held him back.

Oh sweetest love, Jesus! You let yourself be blinded by love; love did not let you see our sins; you lost all awareness of them, gentle Lord!