

Catherine implored God for Church reform

Holy Father's Letter for 25th anniversary of St Catherine's receiving title 'doctor of the Church'

For the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of St Catherine of Siena as a doctor of the Church, the Holy Father sent the following Italian-language Letter, dated 1 October, to Archbishop Gaetano Bonicelli of Siena, Italy. Here is a translation.



To my Venerable Brother Archbishop Gaetano Bonicelli of Siena, Italy

On the completion of the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of St Catherine of Siena as a doctor of the universal Church, you considered it opportune to organize programmes in this Archdiocese to make the figure of the saint better known, a saint who, in the society of her time, was able to testify to the faith with apostolic enthusiasm as an incomparable teacher of life and doctrine.

As is well known, Catherine is the author of a body of solid theological reflections on the perennial truths contained in Revelation; and it is especially acknowledged that from her loving contemplation, from her living experience of Christ, she was able to draw the singular light of truth, a clarity of speech and an impassioned liveliness in explaining her high mystical ideas.

It was thus with praiseworthy pastoral sensitivity that you, Your Excellency, took the idea from this anniversary to study with even greater depth and appreciation the lines of thought of the Siennese saint. Of Catherine, the Supreme Pontiff Pius II said that "all her talking had as its subject virtue, religion, piety, disdain for the things of the

world, love of God and of one's neighbour, the heavenly "homeland" (Bull *Misericordia Domini*, 29 June 1461). Her way of "speaking" overflows, in turn, into her writings, usually dictated for her friends in a form of dialogue, in which Catherine reveals her continuous conversation with God.

Her language is rich in biblical words and figures. Her vision of the Trinitarian God — powerful, wise and merciful — is reflected on man, as if in a mirror, and Catherine never tires of expressing theology and anthropology together. She speaks of a mystery, which is at the same time the light of the divine essence and an act of communion with the human spirit.

Catherine, the authentic disciple of St Dominic, feels that she is, like him, "a soul tormented by a great desire for the honour of God and the health of souls" (cf. *Dialogue*, c. 1). She realizes that she is a limited creature, but called to go beyond herself with infinite desire, with humble courage and with a strong will.

Therefore, in the light and comfort of mercy, in which God is rich, Catherine can address the Eternal Father, imploring his mercy for herself, for the reform of the Holy Church, for the whole world, especially for the peace of Christians (cf. *Dialogue*, c. 1).

Mercy is one of the basic themes of Catherine's thought, inspired by the example of Jesus and his word. Jesus Christ made mercy one of the main subjects of his preaching, motivated by the



St Catherine of Siena writing a letter, by Domenico Passignano, 17th cent.

desire to manifest the presence of God, who is Father, love, mercy.

Inflamed by the same zeal as St Paul, Catherine can only preach Christ and Christ crucified (cf. 1 Cor 2:2), in whose blood she feels she is his bride and in whose blood she writes, as mother and sister, her *Epistolarium*. The Letters of the saint reach the whole world known to her. Recipients of her writings are popes, kings, *condottieri*, priests, religious, craftsmen, the marginalized, prisoners and public sinners. Catherine's heart embraces all the faithful who form "the universal body of the Christian religion" and all the ministers of

Christ, who form "the mystical body of the Holy Church".

Almost a "mystic of politics", with her letters Catherine urges the governors of Italy and of other European countries to act as Christians, in consonance both with the truth of God and with the necessity of acting according to justice. It is only in this way that welfare and peace can be brought about, under the impulse of charity, with the respect for freedom that is God's great gift to man.

The categorical maxim of St Catherine for those in charge of public affairs is famous: "Whoever does not cast his eye towards the city of his soul... will never have it over the present city of which he has been made lord" (*Letter* 338, to Andrea Cavalcabuo, Senator in Siena). Therefore, in the politician's spirituality is the basis and distinguishing mark of the dignity of his exercise of power over a community, which for him is merely a "city" that is temporarily "lent" by God.

For peace within the family Catherine says to spouses: "May your conversation always be with those who fear and love God in truth... And the one is to give light to the other, searching for the teaching of Christ crucified and of the life of the saints" (*Letter* 190, to Francesco di Pipino, tailor of Florence, and to Agnesa, his wife).

This year, when the international community has dedicated extensive reflection to the advancement of women, I am pleased to recall the greatness and dignity of this woman, Catherine, in which the magnificent and well-known efforts for the good of the Church found their motive and strength both in her union with Christ and in her freedom of initiative, so well founded and established by her faith in God. Her personal experience of communion with Christ continues to draw our attention to the role of women, called to work with their charisma in the field of social advancement and the common good.

During this period of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, may St Catherine assist us with her intercession, she to whom "no one came close", Pius II recalls, "without becoming more learned and more holy". May she, who was the intrepid and firm champion of Rome as the see of Peter's successor, intercede again for "the Church of Rome, which is the principality of our faith" (*Letter* 347, to Count Alberico da Balbano).

May the saint intercede for the peace and prosperity of Italy, her homeland, and of Europe, which she called to unity in the obedience of faith. May she intercede for the city of Siena, so that the truth of Christ and the light of his Gospel may guide the minds and moral decisions of all her fellow citizens. May Catherine intercede so that the clergy may work with zeal and give witness of a holy life in their sacred ministry. May she obtain from God a promising re flourishing of generous consecrated lives!

With these wishes, I sincerely impart to you, Venerable Brother, and to all the faithful of this Archdiocese my Apostolic Blessing, as a token of abundant heavenly favours.

From the Vatican, 1 October 1995.

Joannes Paulus II

NINTH SYNOD COUNCIL MEETS

Holy Father to receive proposals on consecrated life

The Ninth Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops held its third meeting on 10-12 October in the offices of the General Secretariat.

Chaired by Cardinal Jan P. Schotte, C.I.C.M., General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, the following took part: Cardinal Joseph Louis Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, USA; Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, Belgium; Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, Archbishop of Milan, Italy; Cardinal Joachim Meisner, Archbishop of Cologne, Germany; Cardinal Paulos Tzadua, Archbishop of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo, Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Vatican City; Archbishop Orlando E. Quevedo, O.M.I. of Nueva Segovia, the Philippines; Archbishop Luciano Mendes de Almeida, S.J. of Mariana, Brazil; Archbishop Stanislaw Nowak of Częstochowa, Poland; Archbishop Oscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradaga, S.D.B. of Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Archbishop Armando Trindade of Lahore, Pakistan; and Bishop Kevin Dowling, C.S.S.R. of Rustenburg, South Africa.

Several experts of the Ordinary Assembly also took part.

Mons. Fortunato Frezza, Mons. John A. Abruzzese, Mons. Jesús Catalá Ibáñez and Fr Étienne Brocard assisted on behalf of the General Secretariat of the Synod.

The following were prevented from taking part in the work by urgent pastoral or personal commitments: Cardinal Edward Bado Clancy, Archbishop of Sydney, Australia; His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, Patriarch of Jerusalem for Latins, Jerusalem, Old City; Archbishop Gabriel Gonsum Ganaka of Jos, Nigeria.

The members of the Council continued their examination of the Synod *Propositiones* on the consecrated life, in order to offer the Holy Father suggestions for the draft of his Post-Synodal Exhortation, the publication of which is eagerly awaited by the participants of the Ninth Assembly

and by all religious. The work was carried out in five sessions.

On Tuesday, 10 October, Cardinal Jan P. Schotte, C.I.C.M., General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, explained the office's work since the second meeting last June.

From this report it is evident that the Secretariat's activity is making progress in the preparation of five Synods (Tenth Ordinary Assembly, Special Assemblies for Lebanon, America, Asia and Oceania) and with the implementation of the four Synods that have already been celebrated (the Netherlands Synod, the Extraordinary Assembly of 1985, the Special Assembly for Africa and the Ninth Ordinary Assembly).

The second part of the session was dedicated to an in-depth reflection on the *Propositiones* and on the suggestions that are in an advanced stage of preparation and will be offered to the Holy Father for the post-synodal document on the consecrated life.

The second session, on the afternoon of 10 October, was devoted to private study by individual Council members, with a view to reaching a more satisfactory knowledge of the subject to be addressed at subsequent sessions.

On the second day, Wednesday, 11 October, two sessions took place, with the work of two language groups (Italian and English), aimed at encouraging individual sharing on these same topics, for collaboration with the Holy Father at this particular moment in the post-synodal activities.

The final session, which took place on the morning of 12 October, was devoted to collating the results of the work of the two language groups.

When the session was over, the date for the fourth meeting was set for 25-27 June 1996.

At the end of the morning the Holy Father received the Council at a working audience for common reflection.