

Saint Catherine of Siena,

You were strong and fearless before those who held military, political and Church power. May God grant me the courage, like you, to speak truth to those in power.

When those in authority failed in their responsibilities to their people, you challenged them, writing and speaking with confidence, honesty and faith. May I be brave, like you, and use my education to speak up for those deprived of their rights. May I be open to God's wisdom.

Amen.

A thought to take away

Catherine used her intelligence, wisdom and insight for the service of the Church, and to support the many people who came to her for help. In other words, what Catherine could do, she did. What could you do?

An action to complete

Make an honest list of all your gifts, talents and strengths. Plan how you could use these for others.

*Saint Catherine of Siena
Pray for us*



The quotation on the front page is from St Catherine, as quoted by the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, in his sermon at the Royal Wedding, 29 April 2011

Feast Day
29 April

Birthplace
Siena, Italy

Born
1347

Died
29 April 1380

Canonised
1461

Patron saint of
Italy, Europe, nurses and fire-fighters. She was also one of the first women to be made a Doctor of the Church, due to the wisdom and influence of her theological writings



*Be who God
meant you to
be and you will
set the world
on fire.*

”

Catherine used all her gifts and talents for the service of all God's people. In this way, she grew to "fullness of life in Christ". She was a spiritual writer, theologian and a woman of deep prayer. She also had an active ministry to those living in poverty and with sickness. While her outlook was universal, her service was to each individual.

What about me?

- Do I choose who to help, or do I see the face of Christ in all?
- If I don't know Christ, I will never recognise his face in others; so, do I work at getting to know Christ?
- Do I pray?

The life of St Catherine of Siena

Catherine was born in Siena in 1347, into a very large family. From an early age, she had a close relationship with God. When she was 16 her parents wanted her to marry the widower of her older sister, but Catherine was determined to give her life to God and refused.

After some opposition, Catherine became a Dominican tertiary, a lay person who does not take religious vows, but follows the example of the religious order. She remained in her own home, devoted to prayer and silence. At the age of 19, Catherine had an intense, personal experience of the presence of Jesus, which she called a "Mystical Marriage"; he told her to leave her solitude and work for those in need. This relationship remained the strength and inspiration of her life.

From 1370, Catherine began writing letters, first to friends and acquaintances, then to people of influence and power, in the Church and in civil society.

Today, these letters remain a source of inspiration.

Catherine lived at a time when society was changing and there was conflict in the leadership of the Church. This did not seem to be a situation where a young woman could make any contribution, but Catherine was determined to respond to what God was asking of her.

Catherine's wisdom and learning, combined with her personality and holiness, attracted followers. In 1374, she began traveling and preaching, advising popes and kings to work for peace and for renewal in the Church. Pope Gregory XVI listened to her advice and returned the papal administration to Rome from Avignon, where the papal court had been since Pope Clement V had refused to move to Rome in 1309.

Catherine died on 29 April 1380. Politically and spiritually, she is a woman of our time, reminding those in power that their responsibility is to serve the common good. Rooted in Christ, she became one of the first female Doctors of the Church.

When Catherine felt something needed to be said or done, she did not hesitate to take action, speaking for those who could not speak for themselves. She is an example for our time.

CAFOD's work for peace in Colombia

Our Colombian partner, CINEP (The Centre for Investigation and Popular Culture), works with young people who want to bring about peace. CINEP supports the Conscientious Objectors' Collective Action group, which helps young people who feel forced to join the army and illegal armed groups such as the guerrillas and paramilitaries.



Like St Catherine, Natalia, 17, believes in peace, and, like the saint, is doing something about it. Rather than writing letters, she uses her skills as a dancer to campaign for peace.

"I like the way the objectors' collective links art to peace. The idea is to do social and political advocacy through direct campaigns action. It's not just about making art, or dance, or the theatre, it's more than a hobby, it's a way of expressing your feelings. It helps me express my political opinions with respect to the militarisation of young people.

"It means I can do what I enjoy and also achieve change. It helps get our voices heard."

Although military service in Colombia only applies to men, Natalia, like St Catherine, knows that women are also affected by the war, and she believes that young people have an important part to play. She says, "If we all get involved, we can find a way to reconciliation. If we as young people don't get involved in our rights, then we will never create change. If we don't learn to think and take actions from a young age, we will grow up to be another silent generation."

Natalia would like to become a teacher so she can encourage her students to "stand up for their rights by giving them tools to adopt their own opinions".



Natalia rehearsing for a performance

"We need a change in people's hearts and minds."

» Find out more by visiting cafod.org.uk/Colombia