

Lives of Saints

St Catherine of Siena

1347 – 1380
Feastday: 29th April



"Merit consists in the virtue of love alone, flavored with the light of true discretion, without which the soul is worth nothing."

**St Catherine
of Siena**

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C H R I S T I A N Æ

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I came from a big family. I was in fact the 23rd child of Jacopo and Lapa Benincasa. as a child I was intelligent, cheerful and intensely religious. In fact, from my earliest childhood I began to see visions and to practise extreme austerities. At the age of seven I consecrated my virginity to Christ.

In my youth, my mum kept encouraging me to improve my appearance in order to attract a husband. I cut my hair in protest against this, which greatly disappointed my mother. In the end, my father ordered that I be left in peace, and I was given a room of my own for prayer and meditation.

I entered the Dominican Third Order at 18 and spent the next three years in seclusion, prayer and austerity. I then began to tend the sick, especially those afflicted with the most repulsive diseases, to serve the poor, and to labour for the conversion of sinners. Gradually a group of followers gathered around me - men and women, priests and religious. My letters, written mostly for the spiritual instruction and encouragement of my followers, began to take more and more notice of public affairs. In the meantime, opposition and slander resulted from my mixing fearlessly with the world and from speaking with the sincerity and authority of one completely committed to Christ. I was finally cleared of all charges at the Dominican General Chapter of 1374. My public influence reached great heights, and I even left a deep impression on the pope. I worked tirelessly for the crusade against the Turks and for peace between Florence and the Pope.

In 1378, the Great Schism broke. I spent the last two years of my life in Rome, in prayer and pleading on behalf of the cause of Urban VI and the unity of the Church. I offered myself as a victim for the Church in its agony. In 1370 I was named doctor of the Church. My spiritual testament may be found in The Dialogue.