

Readings for April 29th – Catherine of Siena

Psalm 36 *Dixit injustus*

1 There is a voice of rebellion deep in the heart of the wicked; *
there is no fear of God before his eyes.

2 He flatters himself in his own eyes *
that his hateful sin will not be found out.

3 The words of his mouth are wicked and deceitful; *
he has left off acting wisely and doing good.

4 He thinks up wickedness upon his bed and has set himself in no good way; *
he does not abhor that which is evil.

5 Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, *
and your faithfulness to the clouds.

6 Your righteousness is like the strong mountains,
your justice like the great deep; *
you save both man and beast, O Lord.

7 How priceless is your love, O God! *
your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.

8 They feast upon the abundance of your house; *
you give them drink from the river of your delights.

9 For with you is the well of life, *
and in your light we see light.

10 Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you, *
and your favor to those who are true of heart.

11 Let not the foot of the proud come near me, *
nor the hand of the wicked push me aside.

12 See how they are fallen, those who work wickedness! *
they are cast down and shall not be able to rise.

1 John 1:5-2:2

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

²⁻¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Luke 12:22-31

²² He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁶If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. ³⁰For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

CATHERINE OF SIENA - REFORMER AND SPIRITUAL TEACHER (29 APR 1380)

Catherine Benincasa, born in 1347, was the youngest (one of my sources says the 23rd) of twenty-five children of a wealthy dyer of Siena (or Siena). At the age of six, she had a vision of Christ in glory, surrounded by His saints. From that time on, she spent most of her time in prayer and meditation, over the opposition of her parents, who wanted her to be more like the average girl of her social class. Eventually they gave in, and at the age of sixteen she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic (First Order = friars, Second Order = nuns, Third Order = laypersons), where she became a nurse, caring for patients with leprosy and advanced cancer whom other nurses disliked to treat.

She began to acquire a reputation as a person of insight and sound judgement, and many persons from all walks of life sought her spiritual advice, both in person and by letter. (We have a book containing about four hundred letters from her to bishops, kings, scholars, merchants, and obscure peasants.) She persuaded many priests who were living in luxury to give away their goods and to live simply.

In her day, the popes, officially Bishops of Rome, had been living for about seventy years, not at Rome but at Avignon in France, where they were under the political control of the King of France (the Avignon Papacy, sometimes called the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy, began when Philip the Fair, King of France, captured Rome and the Pope in 1303). Catherine visited Avignon in 1376 and told Pope Gregory XI that he had no business to live away from Rome. He heeded her advice, and moved to Rome. She then acted as his ambassador to Florence, and was able to reconcile a quarrel between the Pope and the leaders of that city. She then retired to Siena, where she wrote a book called the *Dialog*, an



account of her visions and other spiritual experiences, with advice on cultivating a life of prayer.

After Gregory's death in 1378, the Cardinals, mostly French, elected an Italian Pope, Urban VI, who on attaining office turned out to be arrogant and abrasive and tyrannical, and perhaps to have other faults as well. The Cardinals met again elsewhere, declared that the first election had been under duress from the Roman mob and therefore invalid, and elected a new Pope, Clement VII, who established his residence at Avignon. Catherine worked tirelessly, both to persuade Urban to mend his ways (her letters to him are respectful but severe and uncompromising -- as one historian has said, she perfected the art of kissing the Pope's feet while simultaneously twisting his arm), and to persuade others that the peace and unity of the Church required the recognition of Urban as lawful Pope. Despite her efforts, the Papal Schism continued until 1417. It greatly weakened the prestige of the Bishops of Rome, and thus helped to pave the way for the Protestant Reformation a century later.

Catherine is known (1) as a mystic, a contemplative who devoted herself to prayer, (2) as a humanitarian, a nurse who undertook to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the sick; (3) as an activist, a renewer of Church and society, who took a strong stand on the issues affecting society in her day, and who never hesitated (in the old Quaker phrase) "to speak truth to power"; (4) as an adviser and counselor, with a wide range of interests, who always made time for troubled and uncertain persons who told her their problems -- large and trivial, religious and secular.