



APRIL 29
SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA, VIRGIN AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
1 John 1:5–2:2
Psalm 102:1–2, 3–4, 8–9, 13–14, 17–18a,
Matthew 11:25–30

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The image — and the adorable mystery — of the Blood has been with us since Ash Wednesday. On that first day of the Lenten fast, what did Pope Saint Clement I say to us in the second reading at Vigils? “Let us fix our thoughts on the Blood of Christ; and reflect how precious that Blood is in God’s eyes” (*Letter to the Corinthians*). We began the Paschal journey with our eyes fixed on the Blood of Christ, just as Joshua’s envoys in Jericho fixed their eyes on the scarlet cord suspended in the window of the harlot Rahab. The scarlet cord was the pledge of their salvation (cf. Jos 2:21).

On Good Friday what did Saint John Chrysostom ask us? “Do you wish to know the power of Christ’s Blood? See where it began to flow, from what spring it flowed down from the cross, from the Master’s side. . . . As a woman feeds her child with her own blood and milk, so too Christ continually feeds those whom he has begotten with his own Blood” (*Catechesis* 3:13–19). The Church responded with the very words of Saint John given us in today’s first reading: “The Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, purifies us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7).

And what does the Church make us sing daily in the hymn at Vespers during Paschaltide?

Upon the Altar of the Cross
His Body hath redeemed our loss;
And tasting of his roseate Blood,
Our life is hid with him in God (*Ad coenam Agni*).

One must be very careful to respect the patterns and repetitions of the liturgy by which the Church teaches us. We are to honour and preserve what has been handed on, lest elements that are arbitrary and subjective come to dilute the strong wine of tradition and so deprive us of the sober drunkenness of the saints! If you were to underline in red all the references to the Blood of Christ in the liturgy of Lent and Paschaltide, you would be astonished. The Blood of Christ courses like a torrent through the liturgy of these days. It is “the river whose streams make glad the city of God” (Ps 45:4).

It is evident, I think, that today’s feast of Saint Catherine of Siena is a further invitation, a pressing exhortation, to fix our gaze on the Blood of the Lamb, to adore that Precious Blood, to yield every impurity and sin of ours to the torrent that gushes from Christ’s pierced side, and to drink of the Chalice of Salvation. Saint Catherine is one of the great blazing mystics of the Blood. One could also speak of Julian of Norwich and, again, of Blessed Marie of the Incarnation. The Blood of Christ is sprinkled over every page of Catherine’s writings. The Blood of Christ opens and seals her correspondence. The Blood of Christ is on her lips and in her heart.

For Catherine, that Blood is a Divine Fire. It is the remedy for every ill: medicine for a Church in crisis, purity for a priesthood fallen into the filth of the world, strength for the weak, hope for the despondent, healing for the sick. For Catherine, the Blood of Christ is the power by which lives are changed, by which sinners become saints, by which monasteries are reformed.

The Blood of the Lamb is given us in the sacraments. In the Sacrament of Penance, the Blood of Christ is applied to the wounds of the soul. You heard it in the first reading: “The Blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn 1:7). The Blood of Christ bathes the soul, cleansing of it of every trace of sin and making it resplendent in the eyes of the Father.

In the Most Holy Eucharist, the Blood of Christ is given us as the fountain of immortality, the antidote for every poison of body, mind, and soul, an infusion of divine joy in this valley of tears. This was the experience of Saint Catherine and, because it was her experience, it became her teaching. Even more, it became the cry of her heart to all who would listen.

The Precious Blood of Christ is among those heavenly mysteries “hidden from the wise and understanding and revealed to infants” (Mt 11:25). The mystery of the Blood is revealed to those who taste it with the palate of the soul, to those who approach the holy Chalice with the fear of God and with faith.

One’s dying words are not improvised. They are the expression of a lifetime. Saint Catherine, having lived immersed in Blood of Christ, died with the Blood of Christ on her lips. On the January 30th before her death, she prayed for the Church, the Bride of Christ: “O Eternal God, accept the sacrifice of my life within this Mystic Body of holy Church. I have nothing to give but what you have given me. Take my heart, then, and

squeeze it out over this Bride's face." For His Heart's Blood, she gave her heart's blood and, like her Bridegroom and Lord, she gave it for the Church.

Her last recorded prayer, uttered three months later, is this:

Lord,
you are calling me to come to you,
and I am coming to you —
not with any merits of my own
but only with your mercy.
I am begging you for this mercy
in virtue of your Son's most sweet Blood.
Blood!
Blood!
Father,
into your hands I surrender my soul
and my spirit.

It was April 29th, 1380. Catherine was thirty-three years old. Her identification with the Blood of the Paschal Lamb was complete. And the Church was singing:

At this High Feast the Lamb hath made,
In shining robes of white arrayed,
The passage of the Red Sea o'er,
To Christ our Prince we sing once more.