

### **Catherine of Siena, model for confirmands and patroness of professional women**

She died in 1380 at the age of 33 on this day, April 29. We remember her as “forerunner of those women of later centuries who were to find their fulfillment not in marriage or the convent but in a professional career of service” (Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Festivals and Commemorations*, Augsburg, 1980, p. 172). Twenty-third and last child of a devout Christian family in Siena, she had her first of many mystical visions of Christ while still only six years old. At age sixteen, she persuaded her parents to allow her to devote herself to prayer in a special room in their home, and for the next three years left it only to receive communion in church. Talk about serious self-isolation! Jesus was preparing her for her ministry: in 1367 during prayer, she received the stigmata after committing herself to Jesus’ command to carry her love for him to the world. A year later when she emerged from her self-isolation, she began ministering to the sick in hospitals and their homes, gathered a group of friends who all called her “mother,” continued in rigorous fasting and cheerful conversation, and began giving outspoken advice to politicians and popes alike. In 1378 she moved with her “faith family” to Rome, where she dictated a book of spiritual basics, *Dialogue or A Treatise on Divine Providence*, used still today as a source of comfort and guidance. With Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Episcopalians, and many other Christians, Lutherans remember Catherine of Siena on the day of her death, April 29. We celebrate her Christ-centred mystical spirituality, we seek to model ourselves on her devotion to her ideals, her transparent approach to the powerful, and her loving service of the sick, the poor, and the unfortunate. The intense and on-going pain that accompanied the stigmata for her may lie behind these words of comfort she received from the Lord and passed on in her book:

“Dearest daughter, the willing desire to bear every pain and fatigue, even unto death, for the salvation of souls is very pleasing to me. The more the soul endures, the more she shows that she loves me; loving me, she comes to know more of my truth, and the more she knows, the more pain and grief she feels at the offenses committed against me....I have already told you that with the increase of love, grief and pain increase....Remember that the love of divine charity is in the soul so closely joined with perfect patience, that neither can leave the soul without the other. Therefore, if the soul choose to love me, she should choose to endure pains for me in whatever way or circumstance I may send them to her. Patience cannot be proved in any other way than by suffering, and patience is one with love. Therefore bear yourselves with courage....”

A good thought for us as we prepare to celebrate baptism and confirmation on Jubilate Sunday this week!

Let us pray. Lord God, you have surrounded us with so great a cloud of witnesses. Grant that we, encouraged by the example of your servant Catherine of Siena, may persevere in the course that is set before us, to be living signs of the Gospel, and at last, with all the saints, to share in your eternal joy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen