

### Life

St. Catherine of Genoa was born in Genoa, Italy in 1447 to a noble family. Her father died when she was young, her mother was devout, and her two elder sisters became nuns. At the age of 13 she also intended to become a nun, but was rejected because she was too young. When she was 16 years old, she was married to a nobleman, who was violent-tempered and a gambler, and Catherine's marriage was not a happy one. She tried to numb herself by enjoying a worldly life, but she failed to find serenity, with only emptiness and bitterness in her heart. The turning point of Catherine's life occurred in 1473. One day, feeling melancholy, she visited the convent where her sister was a nun, and her sister suggested that she went to confession. When she knelt down in the confessional, a divine light pierced her soul, making her realize vividly her own sins and God's love simultaneously. She said she "received a wound in my heart from God's immense love". She almost fainted and could not continue with the confession. Since then, she had a deep understanding of sin and the love of God, so she changed completely and was no longer attached to the world. A few days later, she made a thorough confession, and began a long period of purification of her life, repented over her sins and did penance often. She wrote two spiritual books: "Treatise on Purgatory" and "Spiritual Dialogue Between The Soul and the Body". She also turned her love and gratitude to God into service to others, started to take care of patients in a hospital, where she later became the manager and treasurer. Her faith and love moved many and even her husband was converted, and went to the hospital to help her. She was worn out with labours of both body and soul. Her whole person was consumed by the divine flames of love in her heart. She died in 1510 at the age of 63.

### Reflection

In the general audience on January 12, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of St. Catherine of Genoa: "From her conversion until her death there were no extraordinary events, but two elements characterize her entire life: on the one hand her mystical experience, that is, the profound union with God, which she felt as spousal union, and on the other, assistance to the sick, the organization of the hospital and service to her neighbour, especially the neediest and the most forsaken." He pointed out St. Catherine's viewpoint of purgatory was that it was not an exterior space but rather "An interior fire ... God is so pure and holy that a soul stand by sin cannot be in the presence of the divine majesty". When the souls in purgatory know how far they are from the goodness and beauty of God due to their own faults, a blazing flame burns in their hearts. This pain is felt in the process of purification of our soul. The Pope introduced the thoughts of the saint into our lives today, he said, "We too feel how distant we are, how full we are of so many things that we cannot see God. The soul is aware of the immense love and perfect justice of God and consequently suffers for having failed to respond in a correct and perfect way to this love; and love for God itself becomes a flame, love itself cleanses it from the residue of sin." Let's ponder the teachings of St. Catherine, pray for the Lord's love to ignite the fire in our hearts, purify our sins, so that we can get closer to Him.

### Prayer

According to Catechism of the Catholic Church, "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect... From the beginning, the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God. The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead". (#1030-1032)

Let us pray for the souls in purgatory and do penance, so that relying on God's compassion, they would be purified sooner and be rid of the pains of purgatory.

May we learn from St. Catherine, be contrite for our sins,  
and turn the love of God into service to others.

We especially pray for the souls in purgatory. St. Catherine of Genoa, pray for us.