

WHO IS CATHERINE?

Who is Catherine?

youngest child,
large family, twin,
twin died in infancy,
room of her own,
isolation, mystical experience.

Refused marriage,
mystical marriage,
father liked having JC as son-in-law,
years of solitude,
excessive fasting.

Dominican lay woman,
supported by mantellate,
unnamed women companions,
named male companions and contacts,
gathered people around her.

Lived through two plagues,
nursed in the second one,
accompanied Nicholas to execution.

Driven, energetic,
depended on others.

Illiterate,
dictated much wisdom,
the Dialogue,
prayers
and strong letters
to the pope,
political leaders,
and friends.

And then she died.

IS THIS CATHERINE?

Y-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-S

and **NO**



I am like *this* part of her,
some of us are like *that* part.

That fasting is weird,
how bizarre is her searching for suffering,
what courage to nurse the sick,
to accompany Nicholas.
Was she affected by the death of her twin?

I can't be like all of that.
The bits I like I see in myself.

We need her energy today.
She did extraordinary things,
strange, courageous, creative,
outrageous, compassionate, determined.
These alone did not describe her sanctity.

We do not copy these parts of Catherine
important though they are.

IS THIS CATHERINE?

Y-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-S

and **NO**.

The question - maybe it is not 'Who is Catherine?'

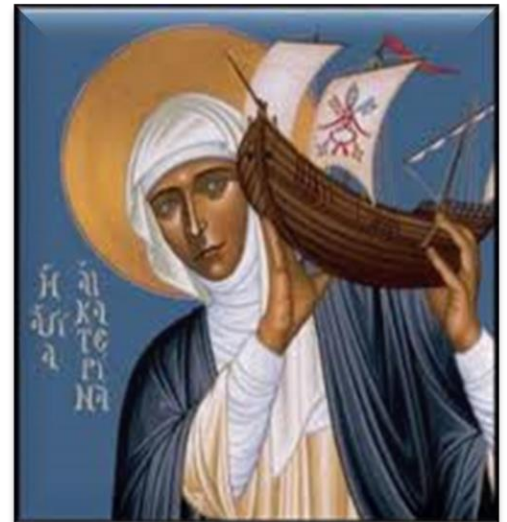
Why is Catherine?

In a mystical experience
Catherine knows she is abundantly and gratuitously loved by God.
God, who does not need her love,
directs her love to herself and others.
by bearing with their shortcomings
by carrying them before God in compassion.

God filled her with compassion, justice, passion, hunger for truth,
a spark which quickly spread to the needy,
the mistaken, the politically fractious,

The fire, God's love
sustained her in being
energised her to be passionate
to embrace peace and justice and truth.

“ If you are who God means you to be you will set the world on fire.”



Catherine knew that at the heart of her being was God
whose love sustained her,
who encouraged her to start being brave about everything.
Catherine was truly led by the Spirit,
Her focus was always in response to where the Spirit led her.

Because she was free she was not confined.

Catherine had two homes
an actual cell, a place of quiet and refuge
and a spiritual home
which she carried with her.
the cell of self-knowledge
where she found knowledge of God's goodness.

Catherine was involved in many,
seemingly random, activities
but she knew that all was linked.
'All the way to heaven is heaven
for he said I am the Way.'

She knew that heaven is neither an abstraction
nor a physical place in the clouds
but a personal relationship with God.

Catherine never confined God.
She was always searching for images
to express her relationship with the Trinity,
fish in the sea, bridge,
table, food and waiter
Images still rich today.

Is this Catherine?

YES

And so, even today,
perhaps I can find Catherine
in myself and in those around me.



As I look within and around me I see
Deep prayer
compassion for the poor, the sick and the imprisoned,
commitment to peace-making,
passion for the unity of the Church,
living the Gospel,
fearless commitment to speaking the truth,
single-minded, focussed attention to the work of the Spirit.



Strong sense of purpose,
an openness and joy which draws others
to share their stories and know they are heard.
metaphors expressed in art, music, language.

We do not live in Catherine's time
or in Catherine's way.
Though there are similarities
these are our times
and our ways.



We live in a time
of urgency,
Earth crying out for our care
Viruses reminding us of our littleness
consumerism stripping the poor of what little they have,
and a time of creativity,
beauty, sensitivity, risk, courage
and compassion.
A time for us to walk in the spirit of Catherine,
being brave,
setting the world on fire.
Embraced by God as the sea in the fish and the fish in the sea.

May we become who we are meant to be.
Not imitating Catherine
or comparing ourselves with her.
In our cell of self-knowledge
in this time and in this place
we still live.

“I could well have supplied each of you with all your needs, both spiritual and material. But I wanted to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me.”

(Margaret Butler 2020. Thank you to all our Sisters and unnamed sources.)