

St Catherine and importance of spiritual maternity

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ST. CATHERINE of SIENA: SPIRITUAL COUNSELLOR, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

VATICAN CITY, 24 NOV 2010 (VIS) -

During his general audience, held this morning in the Paul VI Hall in the presence of 7,000 faithful, Benedict XVI focused his catechesis on St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), declared a Doctor of the Church by Paul VI and co-patroness of Europe by John Paul II.

At the age of sixteen she became a Dominican Tertiary, dedicating herself to prayer, penance and works of charity, especially towards the sick. "As fame of her sanctity spread", the Pope explained, "she became intensely active in the spiritual counselling of many categories of peoples: nobles, politicians, artists, common people, consecrated persons, ecclesiastics, and even Pope Gregory XI who at that time resided in Avignon and whom Catherine energetically and effectively encouraged to return to Rome. She also travelled widely to promote interior reform of the Church and peace among States". She expounded her doctrine in three works: the "Treatise on Divine Providence", her "Letters" and a collection of "Prayers".

Catherine was also a great mystic. Particularly famous are her visions of her exchanging hearts with Christ, and of the Virgin presenting her the Baby Jesus Who gives her a ring. "The living centre of Catherine's religiosity and of all authentic spirituality", the Holy Father explained, "is Christocentrism. For her, Christ was as a bridegroom with whom she maintained a relationship of intimacy, communion and fidelity. ... Like the saint of Siena, all believers feel the need to conform themselves to the sentiments of Christ's Heart, in order to love God and neighbour as Christ Himself loves. And, indeed, we can all allow our hearts to be transformed and learn to love like Christ through familiarity with Him, nourished by prayer, meditation upon the Word of God and the Sacraments, especially ... Holy Communion".

"Around her strong and genuine personality an authentic spiritual family came into being of

people attracted by the moral authority of this young woman. ... Many placed themselves at her service, considering it a privilege to be spiritually guided by Catherine. They called her 'mother' because, as spiritual children, from her they drew nourishment for the spirit. Today too the Church receives great benefit from the spiritual maternity of many consecrated and lay women, who nurture the idea of God in people's souls, strengthen their faith and orient Christian life towards ever higher peaks".

Another characteristic of Catherine's spirituality is associated with her "gift of tears, expression of a delicate and profound sensitivity capable of emotion and tenderness", said the Holy Father. "Many saints have had the gift of tears, renewing the emotion of Jesus Himself Who did not hold back or hide His tears before the grave of his friend Lazarus and the pain of Martha and Mary, or the sight of Jerusalem during His last days on earth. For Catherine, the tears of the saints mix with the Blood of Christ", said the Pope.

Finally he recalled how Catherine of Siena, "though aware of the human failings of the clergy, always had the greatest reverence for them, because through the Sacraments and the Word they dispense the salvific power of the Blood of Christ. The saint invited holy ministers, even the Pope whom which called 'sweet Christ on earth', to remain faithful to their responsibilities, moved always and only by her profound and constant love for the Church". From her, Benedict XVI concluded, "we learn the most sublime science: that of knowing and loving Jesus Christ and His Church".