

## *St. Catherine of Siena*

*Born in Siena March 25, 1347; died in Rome, April 29, 1380*

An interesting account of the life of St. Catherine of Siena can be found online. It is quite an inspiring read.

Wikipedia (free encyclopedia online) describes Catherine in the following words:



“Saint Catherine of Siena was a tertiary of the Dominican Order, and a Scholastic philosopher and theologian. She also worked to bring the papacy of Gregory XI back to Rome from its displacement in France, and to establish peace among the Italian city-states. Since 18 June 1866 she is one of the two patron saints of Italy, together with St. Francis of Assisi. [On 3 October 1970 she was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, and on 1 October 1999 Pope John Paul II named her as a one of the six patron saints of Europe, together with Benedict of Nursia, Saints Cyril and Methodius, Bridget of Sweden and Edith Stein.]

### *Invitation to Prayer*

Leader: Today in prayer we celebrate St. Catherine of Siena. She was one of the great women of the Church. Born the twenty-third child into a family of twenty-five, Catherine was gifted by God with human gifts, with mystical

raptures and spiritual powers. In her short life of thirty-three years Catherine ministered to the victims of the Black Plague and devoted herself to a life of prayer and penance. Catherine experienced mystic nuptials and challenged a weak and confused Pope. In her life Catherine searched for God’s wisdom in accepting the challenges of the fourteenth century Church. Recognizing God’s presence here with us we pray to understand better God’s gifts to each one of us so that we use them for the needs of the twenty-first century Church.

*Opening Song:* “Woman” on CD, Woman’s Song of God (can be borrowed from Sr. Maryann Bremke)

According to the album jacket, this song is associated with *Mechtild of Magdeburg*. “These extraordinary words of Mechtild reveal how she experienced the profound intimacy of God’s love in her natural womanly desires and longings.”

Lyrics: Woman, Woman!

When will you soar on the wings of your longing, to the heights where I await your love?  
And if you meet me with all your desire, I will touch you with my presence divine.  
And you shall delight in body and in soul in my love.

Woman, Woman!

Come now to me in your sighings, in your heart’s desire — for I am the One you seek.  
Since I am in you and you are in me, we are one and forever shall remain.  
And you shall delight in body and in soul in my love.

Woman, Woman, Woman!

### *Quotations for Consideration*

Below are several random quotes uttered or penned by various famous women. Sit with them and listen to see if one or more of them resonates within you.

“For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.”  
— Virginia Woolf

“Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim.”

— Nora Ephron

“I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will.”

— Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

“In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman.”

— Margaret Thatcher

“After all, Ginger Rogers did everything that Fred Astaire did. She just did it backwards and in high heels.”

— Ann Richards

“Womanhood is a wonderful thing. In womankind we find the mothers of the race. There is no man so great, nor none sunk so low, but once he lay a helpless, innocent babe in a woman's arms and was dependent on her love and care for his existence. It is woman who rocks the cradle of the world and holds the first affections of mankind. She possesses a power beyond that of a king on his throne. ...Womanhood stands for all that is pure and clean and noble. She who does not make the world better for having lived in it has failed to be all that a woman should be.”

— Mabel Hale, *Beautiful Girlhood: A Timeless Guide for Christian Adolescence*

“There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises at every attempt to intimidate me.”

— Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

“Nobody around here had ever seen a lady beekeeper till her. She liked to tell everybody that women made the best beekeepers, 'cause they have a special ability built into them to love creatures that sting. It comes from years of loving children and husbands.”

— Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

“Any woman who chooses to behave like a full human being should be warned that the armies of the status quo will treat her as something of a dirty joke ... She will need her sisterhood.”

— Gloria Steinem

“I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.”

— Amelia Earhart

“So avoid using the word ‘very’ because it’s lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don’t use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys - to woo women - and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do. It also won’t do in your essays.”

— N.H. Kleinbaum, Dead Poets Society

“We are women, and my plea is *let me be a woman, holy through and through, asking for nothing but what God wants to give me, receiving with both hands and with all my heart whatever that is.*”

— Elisabeth Elliot

“We're connected, as women. It's like a spider web. If one part of that web vibrates, if there's trouble, we all know it, but most of the time we're just too scared, or selfish, or insecure to help. But if we don't help each other, who will?”

— Sarah Addison Allen, *The Peach Keeper*

**Sharing:** Take time to exchange insights about which quote(s) impacted or touched you.

**Response:** *Women's Gifts*, adapted from Eleanor McNichol, SSJ as it appeared in Woman's Song II pp. 87-88.

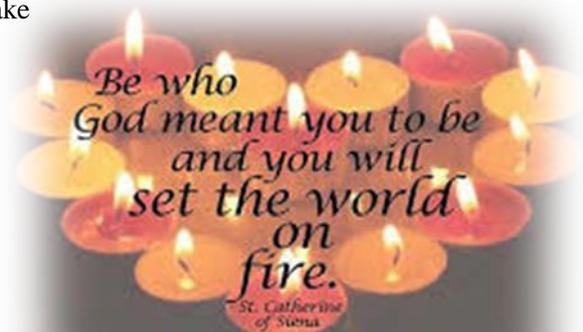
Leader: Our God is a gifting God who fills our days with abundant blessings.

Aware that our use of and response to God's gifts vary according to the times and circumstances of our lives, let us pray for a deeper realization of the truth that “*all is gift.*”

All: Gifting God, in whose image and likeness we are made, we take time to reverence your gifts in us.

Reader 1: God of our longing ... God of our hearts, we met through the tears of our neighbor today — tears which lapped at the door of our hearts; tears which set free your gifts to us ... love, compassion, touch, encounter.

All: The gift we have received we give as gift.



Reader 2: God of our longing ... God of our hearts. Our neighbor unmasked a lie today — a lie which said that we have little, and that *our little* is surely not enough.  
All: The gift we have received we give as gift.

Reader 3: God of our longing ... God of our hearts, we spent *our little* on another today. A painful glance ... a receptive heart — our neighbors unearthed your gifts to us ... love, compassion, touch, encounter.  
All: God of our longing ... God of our hearts, the gifts we have received we give as gift.

Reader 4: Luke 21:1-4  
“When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, *I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those other have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.*”

All: Gifting God, in whose image and likeness all other are made, we quietly reverence your gifts to them.  
All: Gifting God, open the eyes of our hearts to see that “all is gift.” May we give, receive, encourage and celebrate the many expressions of women’s gifts which we experience throughout life.

Leader: *Litany of Gifts*  
Gifting God, in whose image and likeness we are made, we acknowledge and celebrate the many ways women have spent their gifts throughout the ages.  
We celebrate women’s gifts, those given and received...

All: Gifting God, we delight in your Presence within us

Leader: We call forth women’s gifts still waiting to be set free...

All: Gifting God, we lift to you all women who reflect your image

Leader: We give thanks for the gifted women who preceded us...

All: Gifting God, let your Peace on them be everlasting

Leader: We bless those gifts in the women present among us...

All: Gifting God, our souls awaken to you, the Holy One.

### *Summary Prayer:*

Compassionate God, you gifted Catherine, a woman of the 14<sup>th</sup> century world, with courage and a deep loving faith in you. She was able to challenge the Church leaders of her day for the sake of truth, unity and peace. Bless us, the women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, and help us to meet the challenges of our time. Give us the spirit of Jesus to be true lovers and women of deep faith in you. Help us to recognize and reverence the giftedness of one another for the health and well-being of our Community and our Church.

### *Closing Song: “How Wonderful Is My Soul” by Mechtild of Magdeburg*

(CD can be borrowed from Maryann Bremke.)

(Someone in the group might put meaningful gestures to these lyrics.)

How wonderful is my soul  
Which you my God have created  
Nothing can truly show its beauty  
Nothing can truly set me free.  
Except your love flowing through my being  
Speaking to me of things unknown  
And in your love flowing through my being  
My Soul awakens to you Holy One  
And the joy of this awakening just cannot be described

Nothing can truly tell its wonder  
Nothing can ever give such peace  
Except your love flowing through my being  
Speaking to me of things unknown  
And in your love flowing through my being  
My soul awakens to you, Holy One  
Holy One, Holy One, Holy One