

APRIL 29

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

1347-1380

Before the end of her thirty-three years of life, this illiterate Sienese had attained a fame and reputation in the secular and ecclesial worlds that would never have been her choice nor her wish. What a paradox!

Catherine's birth in Siena on March 25, 1347 brought the number of children in the Benincasa household to twenty-five. Even in this number, she shone for her childlike love of God, and above all her joy, thus earning the name Euphrosyne. Her first vision at the age of six, Christ as Head of the Church, can be said to have matured the child into a young adult, capable of making a choice of belonging completely and forever to Him. Henceforth she yearned for solitude and prayer.

This kind of life, however, went counter to the hopes the family (especially her mother, Lapa) had for this youngest daughter. The consequent humiliations by her family became an added part of the life of voluntary penance and prayer Catherine had adopted for herself in the solitude of her room.

Catherine's mystical espousals in faith to Christ during the carnival of 1366 was a turning point in her life. As Christ told her, she was henceforth to have "two wings to fly to heaven, love of God and love of neighbor." From that time on, Catherine, the Dominican tertiary, was a familiar sight on the streets of Siena, visiting the poor and the sick in their homes and in hospitals; and going beyond Siena, she was in the public eye as peacemaker in family disputes, in feuds between cities, and between cities and the Papacy. The Papacy and the condition of the Church were her prime concern; there was nothing she would not do for peace and a restoration of papal authority and influence. In fact, on her deathbed she declared: "The sole cause of my death is the zeal which consumes me for the Holy Church."

Catherine's personal influence was evident in the great crowds that followed her, and in the many letters she wrote to people from all walks of life. During her last few years she dictated the colloquies of her soul and God, called by her "The Book," and known to all others as "The Dialogues." Part of the cost Catherine had to pay for her response to God's Will as His messenger was criticism, accusations of ambition and hypocrisy, and attempts on her life. The impact these happenings might have had on her emotions was fleeting - she had confidence in her mission - she trusted God. To a would-be assassin she could say: "Do to me whatever God allows you to do."

The friends and followers of Catherine were never unaware that this woman, extraordinary in so many ways, was very human in her concern for her family and friends. They all experienced her capacity for laughter and witnessed her gaiety and charm even in the midst of suffering.

Catherine's lifelong sufferings were intensified as she lay on her deathbed, a victim for the Church. She died on April 29, 1380 in Rome, not far from the Vatican. She was buried in Santa Maria sopra Minerva where her body still rests under the main altar. Pius II canonized Catherine in 1461; in 1939 Pius XII named her Co-Patroness of Italy; in 1970 Paul VI declared her a Doctor of the Church.

AUGUST 8

**SAINT DOMINIC DE GUZMAN
1170-1221**

Dominic de Guzman, born in 1170 in Caleruega, Spain, of Felix de Guzman and Jane de Aza, died in 1221 in Bologna, Italy, having fulfilled a long life in the fifty year span.

Prepared by his university studies in Palencia, Dominic found life as a canon regular in the Cathedral house of Osma an ideal environment. Asked to be part of the bishop's retinue on a trip to the north to arrange the marriage of the king's son, Dominic faced the havoc and suffering caused by the Albigensian heretics and the barbarian Cumans. The sight of the poor people, innocent victims de-Christianized, appealed to the compassion and zeal of Dominic and his bishop, Diego.

Their request to Pope Innocent III to become missionaries in that land led to their assignment to an already existing preaching team. Diego and Dominic entered heart and soul into the work of the team, preaching by word and example as counseled by the Pope. Dominic's evaluation of the alarming situation in the territory of the Albigensians led him to conclude that there was a dire need for a group of educated, zealous preachers who would enlighten their hearers by their words and edify by their deeds. Thus was conceived the Order of Preachers. The permission Dominic received from the local bishop, Bishop Fulk of Toulouse, was expanded when he received papal authorization from Honorius III on December 22, 1216 in a bull calling his followers to be "champions of the faith and true lights of the world." The remaining five years of Dominic's life were spent in tireless dedication to the firm and solid establishment of the Order and to its spread.

Dominic the man was someone you would never forget once you had met him. Whether the encounter was on one of his journeys or in attendance at one of his sermons, Dominic radiated Christ. His early followers said of him that "he spoke to God or of God." And these followers themselves learned the lesson well. Bishop Fulk spoke of the "grace and fervor" of the sermons of the first Dominicans. All who knew Dominic spoke of the joy evident in his very presence, a joy like a "halo of friendship" surrounding him. A man of deep faith and compassion, only the thought of the poor or of sinners could to any degree lessen his joy. "My God, my Mercy, what will become of sinners?" he would pray over and over again.

The story of Dominic's life, brief as it is, is incomplete without reference to his "charism for women," as Vicaire identifies the understanding, support, and friendship given to them. The foundation of the monastery of nuns at Prouille in 1206 and his sustained efforts for their welfare. Sister Cecilia of San Sixto, friend of Dominic, who preserved for the Order a description of the Founder and stories about him. Diana d' Andalo of Bologna, who it was said understood him, his vision, his hopes --these are honored memories in the Order.

Dominic was an evangelizer, a man of the Word. To contemplate the Truth, Jesus, the Word of God and to Share this Truth with his brothers and sisters--this was his life, the heart of the Order, imbedded in the life and apostolate of each of his followers up to today.

Dominic de Guzman died August 6, 1221, and was canonized July 1234 by Pope Gregory IX. His feast is celebrated August 8.

JULY 22
SAINT MARY MAGDALEN
PATRONESS OF THE ORDER

Through the centuries, Mary of Magdala has been erroneously identified with at least three women in the New Testament. Modern Scripture studies, however, have given her an identity that has become generally accepted.

Magdala, Mary's place of residence, was a small village between Capernaum and Tiberias, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was probably during Jesus' Galilean ministry tour that Mary met the famous Preacher. Regardless of what her conversion may have cost her, she became one of the generous, loyal followers of the Christ.

When Mary Magdalen first appears in the Gospel accounts, it is as a practical woman, capable of, 'taking care of things.' Luke includes her (8:2-3) in the group of women "who used their own resources to help Jesus and His disciples," as they traveled "through towns and villages preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God."

All the disciples point to Mary Magdalen as one of the women who witnessed the death and burial of Jesus: she was unwavering in her fidelity to Him to the end. John adds that the Magdalen was at the foot of the cross with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, when the dying Christ bequeathed to humankind the precious gift of His mother.

After keeping the Sabbath, it was Mary Magdalen who led the group that decided to complete the burial of their Master with the accustomed anointing. Mary's reaction to the empty tomb, and to the person she thought was the gardener is well known, even in art. By the command of Jesus, this faithful woman became the bearer of the Good News of the Resurrection: "Go, tell my brethren..."

Surely the Magdalen was one of the women who with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, joined the apostles and disciples in constant prayer in the Cenacle, awaiting "the fulfillment of (His) Father's presence."

Since Mary Magdalen has been a popular saint throughout the history of the church, Dominican devotion to her is understandable. Over and above this fact, this loyal friend of Jesus must have had a strong influence on Dominic, himself a loyal friend of Christ. The Magdalen's active-contemplative life, her all-absorbing love for Jesus, her call to announce the Good News to "his disciples and to Peter" (Mk. 10:7) -- for Dominic this was the portrait of the true preacher, an incentive for his followers.

SEPTEMBER 18

SAINT JOHN MACIAS

1585-1645

Juan Macias, born in Ribera, Spain, of a noble but impoverished family, was left an orphan at the age of four and was brought up by his uncle. Juan's task of tending sheep in an environment of peace and silence strengthened and encouraged his prayerfulness. The presence of his patron, John the Evangelist, became as common to him as the visit of a dear friend. It was St. John who brought him the message that God had planned for him "in distant lands." Through events and people, God led Juan finally to Lima, Peru.

After herding cattle for two years in the outskirts of Lima, Juan, yearning for closer union with God, applied for admission as a lay brother in the Dominican monastery, La Magdalena. Here he received the habit on January 2, 1622 and the following year he professed his vows.

For the next twenty-two years, Brother Juan Macias served principally as porter of La Magdalena, where he became God's friend to the hundreds who daily appeared at the monastery gate for help.

Juan's donkey was his chief instrument to carry necessities to poor families or to pick up supplies for the needy, many of them the "new poor" toward whom Juan showed an innate sensitivity. Aware of the spiritual destitution of many of the poor as well as their material needs, Juan sought opportunities to teach them catechism.

Juan's charity was not restricted to any group of people; rich or poor--all had access to the saintly porter of La Magdalena. In fact, the non-poor received some very practical advice from this poor friar as they talked to him about their business plans, always receiving advice based on Gospel values.

By his integration of the active-contemplative life, friar Juan is one more challenge to Dominicans of all times. His was a life of good works nourished by prayer. The natives of Lima and his Dominican brethren knew of his great devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, who it was said taught him how to pray the rosary.

Juan radiated God's presence; there was something lovable and appealing about him. When he died peacefully on September 16, 1645, six years after the death of his friend Martin de Porres, Juan's monastery and the city of Lima were as though orphaned. His favors, however, continued to bless his confreres and his friends. Paul VI canonized Juan on September 28, 1975. His relics are in the church of St. Dominic in Lima.

AUGUST 23

SAINT ROSE OF LIMA

1586-1617

Rose, the first saint of the Americas, was born in Lima, Peru, in April 1586 and baptized Isabel de Flores. Her attractive beauty, even as a baby, reminded people of a rose, causing her to be called by that name. In time, hearing Mary say to her, "Henceforth you shall be called Rose of St. Mary," and Jesus refer to her as "Rose of my heart," was a verification of the mystical fullness the name meant for her in eternity. Yahweh's words to Isaiah were confirmed for Rose: "I have called you by name."

This "call" came to her early, from her childhood on, when Jesus, whom she met in prayer, became the object of her love. To prove this love there was nothing she would not do, hence her life of mortification and penance, always under direction of her confessor. Part of her suffering must have been witnessing the economic situation of her family. The de Flores family, part of Spain's lower nobility, was forced into reduced circumstances by the failure of the father's investments. To help support the family Rose took in needlework, one of her skills, and also began raising flowers for the market. At the age of twenty-one, she was finally able to fulfill a long-standing wish when she became a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic, thus imitating her saint friend, Catherine of Siena.

Reading lives of Rose, one finds a seeming emphasis on her excessive penances and her extraordinary way of life. These facts have to be seen in the context of the times in which she lived. While people of the modern era may not understand them, for Rose they were ways to unite with the sufferings of Christ for the conversion of sinners and the needs of society. John Paul II has referred on occasion to the unique forms of penance modern life faces. But, whether in the seventeenth century or the twenty-first, there is only one way to experience suffering, and it is in faith and love. That was Rose's way.

Rose of Lima was not a "sorry saint." She was always sweet and charming in her manner. In many ways she gave expression to her humanness. As a kind of relaxation she composed short poems, singing them as she played on her guitar, seated in her favorite "hermitage corner" of the garden. One of her special delights was the visit of her friend, Martin de Porres, her wise counselor.

Rose was a mystic, possessing the grace of living in the Presence of God, even in the midst of her external occupations and her conversations. And yet to those who came to talk of prayer, she simply advised spiritual reading and meditation. To others, she recommended the rosary as a way to integrate prayer and meditation.

It is no wonder that when Rose died August 26, 1617 at the age of thirty-one, all Lima was in sorrow. They chose her patroness of their country. Clement X canonized her in 1671.

January 28

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

1225-1274

For a man who would have preferred to die as a simple, obscure friar, the death of Thomas of Aquino on March 7, 1274 marked the beginning of a fame and reputation that would transcend the boundaries of his native Italy and the confines of his Order, the Order of Preachers.

Thomas was the youngest son of noble parents, born in a castle-fortress of Rocca Secca, near Aquino in southern Italy. At the age of five he was sent to the Benedictine Monastery of Monte Casino where he began an education that was to continue until he received the highest degree awarded by the University of Paris.

His decision at the age of eighteen to enter the newly founded mendicant Order of Preachers generated such opposition in the family that his brothers resorted to kidnapping the young aspirant. After his escape, Thomas was taken to the Dominican friary in Cologne, where the new Dominican studied under Albert the Great. This experience marked the introduction to his subsequent life of student, professor, and author.

The writings of Thomas have preserved for us the fruits of his magnificent intellect. Whether in writing or in preaching, his gift of adaptability to his audience in his approach and vocabulary, won their acceptance. The purity, simplicity, and logic in his philosophical and theological works as well as in his defense of the rights of religious orders to teach in universities, speak to the educated. Preaching as a simple friar to the ordinary folk, he shared the basic truths of the Word of God in words that came from his heart. His aim ever was to instruct, not impress. As for his Office for the Feast of Corpus Christi, its beauty and clarity reflect the poet in the saint.

To the brethren with whom he lived, this famous scholar was another humble friar who never spoke an unkind word. His confreres knew his compassion for the sick, his availability at the request of anyone.

Above all, Thomas was a man of prayer; it was the atmosphere in which he lived. His love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and in the Mass was so ardent that he was often in ecstasy. His life --what he did and why he did it --received the commendation of Christ Himself: "You have written well of Me, Thomas, what reward will you have?" "None other than Yourself, O Lord."

During his illness, as he had been during his life, Thomas was patient, grateful, faithful, and prayerful. Finally on March 7, 1274, at the age of forty-nine, he peacefully died in the Cistercian monastery at Fossa Nova where he was buried. Thomas was canonized on July 18, 1323 at Avignon. Only in 1368 were his remains finally brought back to his Dominican brethren in Toulouse. Thomas has been named Patron of Schools.

JANUARY 18

SAINT MARGARET OF HUNGARY

1242-1271

Margaret was born in Hungary in a period of history when the Christian lands of Europe were exposed to the rampages of the fierce Mongols. Her father, Bela IV, fearing an invasion of his country by these barbarians, vowed to God's service the child whose birth the palace was anticipating. To fulfill his vow the King brought this child, when she was three years old, to a Dominican monastery where she joined a group of young girls.

Margaret was an apt and precocious pupil. Her tutor in life, learning, and prayer was the novice mistress who taught her about the love of Christ and His Passion, a devotion which led Margaret to value vicarious suffering.

In 1254 when she made her solemn profession into the hands of the Master General Humbert, Margaret was, as it were, ratifying the vow made by her father before her birth. Life in the cloister, however, did not prevent Margaret from being aware of the many needs of the Church and of her country, and for these needs she offered many prayers and penances. This princess-turned-nun was accustomed to offer all the menial tasks she had to do, such as scrubbing floors, carrying loads of firewood and pails of water as ways of partaking in the Passion of Christ.

Although Margaret's prayer life was marked by ecstasies and levitations, it was her extraordinary faith and devotion, evident in her daily living, that challenge us. It is no surprise to learn that this follower of Dominic had a special love for Dominican liturgy, Office, and Mass, which were rich sources for her private prayer.

Like Dominic, Margaret was a joyous person. Her peace-filled joy made her a welcome visitor to the infirmary of the monastery, especially in her night visits to the sick. To the poor also who came seeking alms at the monastery gate she was the same loving cheerful person.

Margaret died in the year 1271. Many miracles occurred during and after her life through her intercession. Pius XII canonized Margaret in 1943.

APRIL 5

SAINT VINCENT FERRER

1350-1419

Our brother Dominican, Vincent, was born in Valencia, Spain in 1350. He entered the Order of Preachers at the age of eighteen and was ordained priest in 1379 by Pope Clement VII. He was a brilliant student, knew the bible by heart, and became proficient in the Hebrew and Arabic languages. The young friar received his Master of Theology degree from the University of Lerida, and taught there for a few years. Vincent was famous as a teacher and preacher. His sermons were always passionate expressions of his faith, causing his hearers to feel their own sinfulness and need for repentance.

The unfortunate experience of the Western Schism (1378-1417), the conditions in the world at that time in society, in the Church, and in the Dominican Order, were influential in the way that Vincent's life evolved. Each of the two popes had loyal followers, each group convinced of the legitimacy of their choice. The death of Clement VII, for whose cause Vincent had worked, failed to end the schism. A successor was chosen, a man on whom Vincent placed high expectations to terminate the schism. It proved to be a false hope.

By this time, Vincent had decided that the way to heal the rupture in the Church was by a universal conversion to living the life of the Gospel. During serious illness in 1398 he underwent a religious experience that bade him "go forth and preach." This initiated his unique preaching mission, the beginning of a "new career," at the age of forty-nine.

As an itinerant preacher, Vincent went on foot from town to town, traversing all of Europe in fifteen years. Wherever he went, he encountered laxity, indifference, carelessness. Preaching, exhorting, persuading, he reminded his hearers that God's call was imminent, whether it was the call of death with its judgment, or the final judgment. All who heard him were aroused, many even leaving all to follow him. The group known as "The Company of Vincent" counted thousands -men, women, Christians, Jews, Moors, rich, poor -all sincere penitents. Never did the company experience a scandal or immorality.

The man behind this "super image" was very human. He loved Jesus tenderly and humbly, asking Him one time: "Is it possible, my Lord, that you have suffered so much for me?" and receiving the reply: "Yes, more than this." Vincent was very fond of children, gathering them around himself wherever he went, telling them stories of Jesus and Mary.

While on a preaching mission in Brittany, Vincent died on April 5, 1419, as the Passion was being read to him. He was in his seventieth year. Two years before his death the Western Schism had ended. Vincent Ferrer was canonized by Calixtus III in 1455. The process of canonization bore witness to the effectiveness of his preaching, the many conversions, the miracles, the truth and sincerity of this Dominican friar.

NOVEMBER 3

SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES

1579-1639

Lima, Peru, from the middle of the sixteenth century to the latter part of the seventeenth was blessed by the presence of three Dominicans, subsequently canonized for their lives of prayer and charity. Each one in a significant way left a lasting mark on the city.

Martin de Porres, one of these three, was born in Lima, Peru on December 9, 1579, of Juan de Porres, a noble Spanish gentleman, and Anna Velasquez, a beautiful dark-complexioned freed slave, whose color Martin inherited. To help the poor and the sick for whom Martin always showed great compassion, he tried to learn everything he could that was known about medicine at the time. In his works for his suffering brothers and sisters, Martin was led purely by love of God--the center of his life, his strength.

As a young man Martin wanted to dedicate himself to God in religious life to secure the blessing of obedience on his works of mercy. When he applied to the Dominican monastery of Holy Rosary, in his humility his choice was to be a lay affiliate. The prior, however, suggested that at least he become a member of the secular Third Order. Nine years later, once again because of the invitation of the superiors of the monastery, Martin became a vowed brother of the Order of Preachers.

In the monastery Martin was called upon to assume a variety of roles, serving at different times as barber, tailor, sacristan, and infirmarian. In each of these occupations it was his gentle manner and winning smile that convinced all that Martin was precious in God's sight.

Martin the "social worker" shared his compassion with the hundreds who appeared daily at the priory gates, providing for all their needs with supplies that never seemed to be lacking. A deep concern for children led him to found an orphanage, and with equal concern he provided dwellings for the wandering homeless and refugees.

Reflecting on the activities of Martin, one is lost in amazement on consideration of the spiritual life of this humble brother, his life of prayer, his communion with God, his life in community with his brethren. From the intimacy of prayer he went forth to serve his neighbor, never losing the sense of God's presence.

One of Martin's extraordinary charisms was that of bilocation. Stories of his appearances to help those in need miles away, and even through locked doors in his own monastery, fill pages of his life. His gift of prophecy also never failed to surprise his hearers, nor to move them; and yet this was the man who found delight in his friendship with Juan Macias walking on Sundays and holidays to a farm belonging to the Dominicans, spending time in prayer and conversation; and this was the friar who visited Rose of Lima, praying with her and encouraging her.

Martin's sixtieth year was to be his last. He faced his illness in complete trust in God, dying in great pain but in peace on November 3, 1639. Martin de Porres and Juan Macias were beatified the same day, October 29, 1837. John XXIII canonized Martin on May 6, 1962.