April 28, 2019 – Easter 2 (C)
The Feast of St. Catherine of Siena

Tomorrow the church celebrates the Feast of Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth-century mystic and spiritual writer.

Caterina Benincasa was born in Siena, Italy, in 1347 and experienced her first religious vision when she was only 6 years old. *Holy Women, Holy Men* describes how, as she was walking along the road one day, Catherine looked up and “beheld our Lord seated in glory with St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John” and in her vision “the Savior smiled on her and blessed her.”

Despite her family’s objections, at the age of 16 she joined the Third Order of the Dominicans and spent her early life serving the poor and converting sinners, according to *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church: A User Friendly Reference for Episcopalians*, edited by Don S. Armentrout and Robert Boak Slocum.

Catherine worked courageously to help the ill during the black plague and visited prisoners condemned to death. She also arbitrated feuds and attempted to help restore the schism in the church at that time between the popes in Rome and Avignon by writing letters to political leaders and traveling to plead for unification in person.

*Holy Women, Holy Men* explains that, in Siena, opinion about Catherine was sharply divided as to whether she was a saint or a fanatic (p. 350), but she eventually won the full support from the Dominican Mother House.

In 1377-1378 Catherine wrote her famous, mystical *Dialogue*, which she dictated to her secretaries while in an ecstatic state. Here is one of its better-known passages:

“You are rewarded not according to time or work, but according to the measure of your love. Many are placed in their childhood to work in the vineyard; some enter later in life, and others in old age; sometimes these latter labor with such fire of love, seeing the shortness of the time, that they rejoin those who entered in their childhood, because they have advanced but slowly. By love of obedience, then, does the soul receive her merit, filling the vessel of her heart.”

Catherine died in Rome on April 29, 1380, at the age of 33, and became a saint in 1461, canonized by Pope Pius II.

**Collect for Catherine of Siena**

Everlasting God, you so kindled the flame of holy love in the heart of blessed Catherine of Siena, as she meditated on the passion of your Son our Savior, that she devoted her life to the poor and the sick, and to the peace and unity of the Church: Grant that we also may share in the mystery of Christ’s death, and rejoice in the revelation of his glory; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.