

Saint Catherine of Siena is one of the Patron Saints of Europe.

[The others are: - SS Cyril & Methodius (Feb. 14), S. Benedict (July 11), S. Bridget of Sweden (July 23) and S. Teresa Benedicta (August 9).]

Catherine was born into a large family in Siena in 1347. When she was 16, she refused to marry the widower of a sister who had died, and from then on gave herself more and more to a life of prayer and service. She became a member of the Third Order of S. Dominic. and lived a life of isolated silence at home. At the age of 21 had an experience which she described as a *Mystic Marriage with Jesus*. He told her to become more involved in the world.

In 1374 she began to travel, involving herself in the affairs of Italian city states and of the Church. At this time the popes had been living in Avignon in southern France since 1309. Catherine travelled to Avignon and helped to persuade the then pope, Gregory XI, to return to Rome in 1377. But on his death rival popes were elected, producing *The Great Schism*, which divided the Church and the states of Europe. Catherine moved to Rome in support of Pope Urban VI. She met and wrote to leaders of the Church and of the nations, seeking to bring about the unity of the Church. Catherine's involvement in the affairs of the world did not lead her to abandon her life of prayer and theological reflection. She had a great devotion to Jesus, and in one passage she tells that he spoke to her of love in these words: "You must love others with the same pure love with which I love you. But you cannot do this for me because I love you without being loved by you ... you cannot repay me. But you must give this love to other people, loving them without being loved by them. You must love them without any concern for your spiritual or material profit, but only for the glory and praise of my name, because I love them."

In the last months of her life she offered herself as a sacrifice for the good of the Church.

She died in Rome on this day in 1380, and was canonized in 1461.

In 1970 Pope Paul VI declared Saint Catherine and Saint Teresa of Avila Doctors of the Church – not only the first women, but the first lay people to be granted this title. In 1999 Pope John Paul II added Saint Catherine to the group of Patron Saints of Europe.