

November 25

FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT CATHERINE, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

192.1 First Point

Converted to the faith in her early youth, Saint Catherine found a solid way to preserve her faith in the reading of the holy books, and she devoted herself to this practice in a way that she mastered them perfectly. As a result, when some persons wanted to dissuade her from practicing the religion she had embraced, none of them ever succeeded. She was even so strong in her faith that, after she was arrested by order of the emperor, and he saw how she spoke with such energy concerning her religion, he assembled the philosophers and the most learned people in Alexandria to refute her. But all they got out of the arguments they had with her was the embarrassment of being overcome by a young woman.

See how important it is for you to know Holy Scripture well, since Saint Paul assures us that whoever ignores it will be ignored,⁸⁹⁷ and that this knowledge makes a person strong in the faith and in the practice of good. For, as the same Saint Paul says, This is what teaches salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, what is inspired by God and useful for instruction, reproof, correction, and for training in piety and justice, so that the man of God may be perfect and well equipped for all sorts of good work.⁸⁹⁸

This was the benefit Saint Catherine drew from reading Holy Scripture, and it is important for you to obtain the same benefit from the same source, for you are commissioned by God to instruct, reprove, correct, and lead to piety the children who are entrusted to you. Read Scripture frequently, then, and let this holy reading fill you so fully with the Spirit of God that it will enable you to do all these things with ease.

192.2 Second Point

Once she had filled herself with the spirit of Christianity and had been well grounded in the faith, Saint Catherine withdrew entirely from the world to devote herself in a very special way to prayer. She spent much time at this, applying her mind and heart to the meditation of the holy truths which she had learned in the divine books, and training herself in their practice. She looked upon the poor, whom she frequently served, as Jesus Christ himself.

What an admirable thing it is, and of what great help to those who wish to live in piety and in the practice of virtue, to meditate often on the holy and exalted maxims contained in Holy Scripture! They are far above all that the human mind can conceive by itself. Holy Scripture enlightens the mind with that divine light⁸⁹⁹ which Saint John says enlightens everyone who comes into this world.⁹⁰⁰ Because, according to Saint Paul, the precepts of the Lord are in Scripture,⁹⁰¹ meditation on them animates us to practice them.

Following Saint Catherine's example, make use of this means to sanctify yourself. Often meditate on the words of Holy Scripture to encourage yourself to do what is right and to be guided according to the spirit of your state. For the word of God contained in Scripture has that effect, according to Saint Paul, because it is living and effective, and penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword. It enters, continues the same Apostle, and penetrates even to the most hidden depths of soul and spirit.⁹⁰² Make use of it, then, for this purpose, since it procures such great benefits.

192.3 Third Point

This saint was accused of being a Christian before the Emperor Maximian, who was then at Alexandria. Seeing that he had not been able to engage her by argument to change her religion and to take up the cult of the false gods, the Emperor wanted to try gentleness and promises to win her over and to bring her to do what he desired. But as he found that all the means he used were futile and incapable of moving the heart of this saint whose constancy was unbreakable, he had her cruelly scourged, put her in prison for twelve days, and gave her almost nothing to eat. He then had her put on wheels which should have broken her body down to bits, but, since by the help of grace she suffered no harm from all these tortures, the emperor had her head cut off.

Seclusion, prayer, and reading Holy Scripture usually serve, as they did for Saint Catherine, to prepare us to suffer with courage all that God wills us to suffer. When we have prepared ourselves by these three means, it often happens that we become, as it were, insensible to sufferings, because we accept them as sent by God and as a means of uniting ourselves closely to him and possessing him. Like this saint, you will be contented and comforted by God in your sufferings if you prepare yourself for them as she did.

Catherine (4th century?), according to the legend written about her, was beheaded after an unsuccessful attempt to kill her on a spiked wheel (hence the catherine wheel) during the reign of the Emperor Maxentius (306 - 312). (In the third point of this meditation De La Salle places her martyrdom during the reign of the Emperor Maximian.) The story of her refuting 50 philosophers has led to her becoming the patron of Christian philosophers and venerated as one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. She was popular among the Crusaders, who did much to spread devotion to her. She is included in the Litany of the Saints. Saint Gertrude (1256 - 1301) saw her on a throne in heaven. Saint Joan of Arc (1412 - 1431) heard her voice.

897 1 Cor 14:38

898 2 Tim 3:15-17

899 1 Cor 2:14

900 Jn 1:9

901 2 Tim 3:16

902 Heb 4:12