



Catherine of Genoa
1447 – 1510

Renovare Devotional Classic

Waiting Upon God

Sunday December 16th @ 10 am

Great Hall

Epiphany Seattle Spiritual Formation Forum

Background

Catherine (1447 – 1510) was born into a prominent religious family; her father was the viceroy of Naples and two of his family had been popes. In 1463 she married Guiliano Adorno, a wealthy but worldly man with whom she had little in common. After ten years of living a life of worldly vanity, she was converted to the contemplative life. Her husband had lost his fortune so with the remaining income they lived among the poor in Genoa. Guiliano became a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, and both he and Catherine worked among the poor and the sick. In 1479 they began working full time in a nearby hospital. A year later Guiliano died, and Catherine became the matron of the hospital.

Catherine of Genoa was a woman whose spirituality ran deep. Her love for God was matched only by her love for others. Though her writings are full of life and fervor, creative and inspiring, she is best remembered for her acts of charity. Her main work *Life and Teachings*, along with her *Dialogues*, were her most important literary contributions. The following passage comes from *Life and Teachings*. As you will note, she was a woman who had keen insight into the pure love of God and the human struggle of accepting that love.

Excerpts from Life and Teachings

1. Little by Little

The creature is incapable of knowing anything except what God gives to it from day to day. If it knew beforehand what God intends for it, it would never be at peace. At times I have thought that my love was complete, but later, as my sight grew clearer, I became aware that I had many imperfections. I did not recognize them at first because God's love for me has it planned that I will achieve it little by little for the sake of preserving me and keeping me humble to be tolerable to myself and others!

Every day I feel the motes in my eyes being removed as God's pure love casts them out. We cannot see these imperfections because if we saw them, we would not bear the sight. Thus, God lets us imagine that we are complete. But never does God cease to remove them. From time to time, I feel that I am growing only to see that I still have a long way to go. They become visible to me in the mirror of God's Truth, of his Pure Love where everything I thought was straight appears crooked.

2. The Key of My House

Our self-will is so subtle and so deeply rooted within our own selves and defends itself with so many reasons, that when we try to fight against it, we manage to lose in the end. We end up doing our own will under many covers – of charity, of necessity, or of justice. But God’s love will stand naked and without any cover since it has nothing to hide.

I have seen this love. Indeed, every day I feel myself more occupied with him, and I feel a greater fire within, it is as if I have given the keys of my house to Love with permission to do all that is necessary. I became so consumed with this love that as I stood contemplating this work within me, I felt that even if I were cast into hell, hell itself would have appeared to me all love and consolation.

3. No Comfort Except in God

I find my mind more restricted upon God every day. It is like a man who at first is free to roam the city, and then is confined to a house, and then to a room, then to a smaller room, then to the cellar, and finally bound and blind-folded until there is no way of escape. With no comfort except in God who was doing this all along through love and great mercy, I came to a place of great contentment.

4. Living Without Self-Will

God and sin cannot live peaceably side by side. After considering things as they truly are, I felt a desire to live without self-will. When God gives light to the soul, it no longer desires to live with that part of it that continues to block the light. The soul desires to offer itself entirely to God so that it can no longer live except in the manner willed by his tender love. In this manner, it will begin to produce works that are pure, full, and sincere. These are the works that are pleasing to God.

Since I am determined to join myself to God, I find that I am also bound to be the enemy of his enemies. And since I find nothing that is more his enemy than the self that is in me, I am constrained to hate this part of me more than any other. Indeed, because of the war that exists between it and the Spirit, I am determined to separate it from myself and treat it as nothing.

5. Renouncing the Care of Ourselves

I then saw others who were fighting against their evil inclinations and forcing themselves to resist them. But I saw that the more they struggled against them, the

more they committed them. So, I said to them, “You are right in lamenting your sins and imperfections, and I would be lamenting with you if it were not for the fact that God is holding me. You cannot defend yourself and I cannot defend myself. The thing we must do is renounce the care of ourselves unto God who can defend our true self. Only then can God do for us what we cannot do ourselves.”

As to the renouncing of we, I told them, “Take a piece of bread and eat it. When you have eaten it, its substance goes into you to nourish the body and the rest is eliminated because your body no longer needs it. For the body is more important than the bread; it was created as a means, but it is not to remain forever with us. Likewise, we must remove all evil inclinations from our bodies; they cannot live on within us, lest we die.”

6. Content to Wait Upon God

God gives us his light in an instant, allowing us to know all that we need to know. No more is given to us than is necessary in his plan to lead us to perfection. We cannot seek this light; it is given to us from God only as he chooses. Neither do we know how it comes, or how we even know that it is! If we try to know more than we have been made to know, we will accomplish nothing. We simply wait like a stone, with no capacity until he brings us life.

Therefore I will not weary myself with seeking beyond what God wants me to know. Instead I will abide in peace with the understanding God has given me, and I will let this occupy my mind. If we are to see properly, we must pluck out of our eyes our own presumption. If we gaze too long at the sun, we go blind; in this manner, I think, does pride blind many of us who want to know too much.

When God finds a soul that rests in him and is not easily moved, he operates within it in his own manner. That soul allows God to do great things within it. He gives to such a soul the key to the treasures he has prepared for it so that it might enjoy them. And to this same soul he gives the joy of his presence with entirely absorbs such a soul.

7. God’s Clever Strategy

The selfishness that is within us, however, is so contrary to God that God cannot induce us to do his will except by a clever strategy: promising us greater things than

what the world can give – even in this life – and promising a kind of consolation that the world does not know. God does this, I think, because he knows how much we are attached to pleasure. He knows that we are the kind who will not leave our one little toy unless we are offered four!

8. Vision of the Life to Come

If we could see what we will receive in the life to come (as a reward for what we have done here), we would cease to occupy ourselves with anything but the things of heaven. But God, who desires that we see by faith and who desires that we not do good because of selfish motives, gives us this vision little by little, sufficient to the level of faith of which we are capable. In this manner, God leads us into a greater vision of that which is to come until faith is no longer needed.

On the other hand, if we were somehow informed that we were about to die, and that the life that awaits us will be miserable because of our sins, and that we would have to suffer eternally, I feel sure that we – for fear of it – would rather let ourselves be killed than commit one single sin! But God – as unwilling as he is that we avoid sin out of the motive of fear and therefore never lets us see it – will show it in part to souls who are clothed and occupied with him.

9. Steadfast Trust

May this be our prayer: “I do not want to turn my eyes from you, O God. There I want them to stay and not move no matter what happens to me, within or without.” For those who trust in God need not worry about themselves. As I think about you, my spiritual children, I see that God’s pure love is attentive to all of your needs. It is because of this tender love that I need not ask anything of God for you. All I need to do is lift you up before his face.

Bible Selection: Titus 3:1-8

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with

Abraham.^[a] The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.^[b] ²⁴ He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ He said, ‘Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.’ ³⁰ He said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Reflections

Catherine went beyond loving God; she loved the ways of God. It is one thing for us to love God’s grace and mercy, his power and steadfastness, but it is quite another to love his ways.

Think of the contrast between our ways and God’s ways! We seek the spectacular act of devotion, the quantum leap of faith; God focuses on the seemingly insignificant changes that occur “little by little.” We are concerned to watch out for number one; God invites us to “renounce the care of ourselves.” We want to relegate God to the extracurricular category of our lives; God wants our complete attention. We want things done right now; God possesses eternal patience. These are the ways God chooses to work, and as we come into line with God’s ways and operate in constancy with his ways, we learn that they are altogether good.

Richard Foster

Reflection Questions

1. “God appeals to us through other good people, through sermons, or through the reading of good books,” writes Teresa of Avila. Which people, which

sermons, and which books has God used to appeal to you?

2. In section 3, Teresa describes how reason, faith, memory, the will, and understanding work together to help us overcome our desire for sin. In your own words, explain what each of these capacities does in its efforts to help us turn from sin.

3. According to Teresa, God actually uses our trials and temptations to reach us “how to be on our guard in the future.” What would your spiritual life be like if you had never experienced any kind of temptation?

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Epiphany Parish is place where belonging takes precedence, and relationship is primary – relationships between individuals and their own innate gifts, among people, and between people and God

Epiphany Promises You

Belonging over believing
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Contact Us

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