



## St Catherine of Siena

St. Catherine of Siena (March 25, 1347–April 29, 1380) had a deep love for Christ from a young age, so much so that when her family tried to persuade her to get married at the age of 16, she cut her hair short and began fasting in protest.

Her family relented, allowing her to spend much of her time secluded in prayer in her bedroom. At the age of 18, she joined the Dominican Third Order.

Gradually, her reputation for holiness and personal charisma attracted a circle of followers. Before long, she was employing multiple scribes to keep up a lively correspondence with an ever-widening circle of influential Church and secular leaders, including kings, queens, and even the pope.

These leaders turned to her for her advice and guidance, a role which led her to travel across Europe seeking reconciliation between warring parties. She urged Pope Gregory XI to return his administration to Rome and lobbied on behalf of the legitimacy of Pope Urban VI during the Great Schism of 1378.

When she wasn't resolving international crises, Catherine helped care for victims of the Black Plague in the city's hospitals, caring for the worst patients and even burying those who had died. Today she is one of the patron saints of nurses.

Her rich prayer life included frequent visions and ecstasies, the fruits of which were recorded in her *Dialogue of Divine Providence*. Her hundreds of letters are considered to be one of the early great works of Tuscan literature.

Her rigorous abstinence may have contributed to her death at the age of 33. She is one of two patron saints of Italy (the other is St. Francis), one of six patron saints of Europe, and a Doctor of the Church.