

As the Church's liturgical cycle rolls on and presents each of us, and especially each person summoned to preach, with the challenge of making something new or worthwhile for others to hear and for oneself to understand, one can feel at a loss for what to say until one prays and opens up the riches of the vast treasure that the Church holds in her saints and scriptural readings and none more so than St. Catherine of Siena: a woman from a very simple background supposedly unable even to write and yet a counsellor of popes and kings and able to attract great crowds because of the quality of her preaching. Where did she get this? A word from Karl Rahner may help in the context of how children can be every bit as inspired and in relationship to God as any adult, culled from an article by Jessie Rogers in a recent Irish Theological Quarterly:

A challenge to theological assertions of the full dignity of very young children (as well as those with profound intellectual disability) is the fact that they have not developed rational capacities, an aspect that has historically been common to definitions of human personhood. For Rahner, knowledge includes more than 'the power of comprehending, of gaining mastery and subjugating'. To 'know' God is to stand before incomprehensible mystery. It is not the ability to intellectually comprehend, but the 'capacity to be grasped'.

Now, although Catherine of Siena was no child when dealing with the Pope and kings and people generally, her source of inspiration was the same. She allowed herself to be grasped by the knowledge of God's love. This caused her much pain as well as joy, as it threw into relief her own sensuality and desire to have her own will satisfied, but her long periods spent in solitude, fasting and prayer, gave her a wisdom which surprised even herself:

*When you saw that this tree could bear no fruit
but the fruit of death
because it was cut off from you who are life,
you came to its rescue
with the same love
with which you had created it:
you engrafted your divinity
into the dead tree of our humanity.
O sweet tender engrafting!
You sweetness itself,
stooped to join yourself
with our bitterness.
You, splendour,
joined yourself with darkness,
you, wisdom,
with foolishness;
you, life,
with death,
you, the infinite
with us who are finite.
What drove you to this
to give back life to this venture of yours
that had so insulted you?
Only love,
as I have said,
and so by this engrafting,
death is destroyed.*

(Prayer 17. Thursday March 3rd 1379. At Rome)