

The prayers of Catherine of Siena may seem harsh to us today because of their disregard of the body, the desire to curb the passions and the remorseless focus on blood and sacrifice. Today's gospel passage may seem something of an antidote with its reassuring last lines emphasising Christ's mercy and care for us. We may be tempted, then, to disabuse ourselves of our sinfulness and to renegotiate the relevance of the Cross. But the other focus in today's gospel passage is also helpful here because it makes it clear that the context for the last reassuring words is not the irrelevance of the Cross or, indeed, of the Law, but that we are dependent on Christ for our salvation, for our life, as a child is on its parents. Take a child away from its parents, or better, from a relationship of love and we all know the danger that causes, leading to a lifetime of loss and insecurity. What Christ is promising us in this passage is not freedom from suffering but a way through: a way, that is, to the Father: a way that takes Christ through the Cross – and us too. The call to be child-like then is not an evasion of adulthood or a celebration of ignorance but a call to trust that the gentle Christ is with us in the harshest of times. Or, in the words of Catherine of Siena in one of her shorter prayers, perhaps learnt from another, where Father and Son work together as one through the power of the Holy Spirit.

O Holy Spirit, come into my heart;
by your power draw it to yourself, God,
and give me charity with fear.
Guard me, Christ, from every evil thought,
and so warm and inflame me again
with your most gentle love
that every suffering may seem light to me.
My holy Father, and my gentle Lord
help me in every need
Christ love! Christ love!

(The Prayers of St Catherine of Siena ed. by Suzanne Noffle OP. Page 6)

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour