

Catherine lived at a time of great division within the Church – specifically, between a papacy at Avignon and a papacy in Rome, with all the pressures and political intrigues that this symbolised and encouraged. Catherine was, at first, reluctant to get involved. She had a powerful ministry of her own, in the region of D'Orcia near Siena, but involved she eventually became and wrote (or probably dictated) letters to both Pope Gregory XI, encouraging his return to Rome, and to his successor, Pope Urban VI, to persevere even while besieged in Rome by both his foreign enemies and, at one time, the people of Rome themselves.

Pope Urban VI was, it seems, a deeply disturbed character, being described by Professor Eamon Duffy as 'violent, overbearing and probably clinically paranoid'. Catherine sought to moderate his harshness but never repudiated his right to be there in Rome as Pope. Her deep prayer and concern was for a *holy* papacy not a *different* one. In one of her last prayers she wrote:

*To you, eternal Father
I offer once again my life.
poor as I am,
for your dear bride.
As often as it pleases your goodness,
drag me out of this body
and send me back again
each time with greater suffering than before
if only I may see the reform
of this dear bride, Holy Church.
I beg you, God eternal,
give me this bride.*

(Prayer 26 p.225 *The Prayers of Catherine of Siena* ed. Suzanne Noffke OP)

We may find such language too exaggerated for our day but the sentiment is as apt for now as ever: that a Pope may be chosen who is fit to lead the Church in its quest, not for power, but for holiness, to the glory of God and not our own.

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