

- If you like our upper stained-glass windows, you should thank St. Catherine of Siena.
- One day about 15 years ago, when we were preparing to renovate our church, our architect called to tell me that we had an opportunity to purchase some stained-glass windows from a church in Pennsylvania that was closing.
- He said the windows, which depict scenes from the life of Jesus and Mary and included numerous saints, would be perfect for us. In fact, there was even a window in honor of St. Ann that spelled her name without an “e” on the end, just as our parish spells it.
- To secure the windows, we needed \$400,000. Of course, at that point we didn’t have *any* extra money for stained glass windows; but the architect was convinced we needed these windows, so I agreed to allow him to send me pictures of the windows.
- On the intervening days between that phone call and the arrival of the pictures by mail, I prayed to St. Catherine of Siena, asking her to help us find a way to get the windows.
- And I told her that if I found an image of her in any of the windows, I would take that as my sign from her that we were supposed to buy them.
- When the pictures came, I eagerly scanned through them, and low and behold, there she was: St. Catherine of Siena, pictured with St. Dominic, receiving a crown of thorns from our Infant Lord, seated upon Our Lady’s lap.
- As there was another parish interested in securing these windows, we had to act fast. So, without any money – or permission from the diocese, for that matter – I called the architect and told him we would take the windows. Then I prayed like crazy!
- Through the intercession of St. Catherine of Siena, and the generosity of 19 families, we got all the money we needed within 2 weeks.
- Whenever I tell that story, people always ask why I went to St. Catherine of Siena. And I went to her because she’s long been an intercessor for me – a saint to whom I’ve turned countless times for help. And she’s never let me down.
- What I love about St. Catherine of Siena is that, despite the outsized role she played in 14<sup>th</sup> c. Church politics and bringing the pope home from Avignon, St. Catherine was incredibly humble. Despite her vast talents, she knew her place with God.
- One day, as she was in prayer with God the Father, St. Catherine asked Him: “Tell me Lord, who am I, what am I? Lord, tell me also, who and what art Thou?”
- His answer became burned in her memory forever. He said: “*Daughter, thou art she who is not. I am He who is.*” As you can imagine, these words not only burned themselves into her memory, but they shaped and molded her!
- They totally changed the way she looked at God and herself.
- Last Sunday I spoke about how we need to consider how we approach the question of our own salvation, and how we will get to Heaven.
- Rather than believing our virtues and vices are like debits and credits that can be balanced against each other in some type of divine accounting system, we must understand our utter need for God.
- We are saved by God’s grace alone. We get to go to Heaven only because of God’s mercy. And while our salvation does depend on our cooperation with God’s grace, even our capacity to cooperate with God’s grace *is* a grace from God.

- We *need* God. And the more we recognize our utter need for God, the more likely we will seek Him out and receive His love and mercy.
- Only God exists of Himself. He alone is the Creator. Everything else that exists – you and me, and this whole world – only exist because of God. Truly, as God the Father said to St. Catherine, *we are they who are not*, without Him.
- Moreover, God doesn't owe us anything. Everything we have: our talents, our treasures, our loved ones... all of it is a gratuitous gift from our Lord. We have nothing that we can claim totally as our own, as totally of our own efforts, except our sins.
- And when we sin, when we turn away from God to serve ourselves, we are turning toward nothingness. Yet, when we turn toward God with the understanding that we *need* Him, that apart from Him we can do nothing, it is then that we become something.
- This understanding of our complete and total dependence upon God, of our utter nothingness before His divine majesty, is a fundamental concept we must embrace, like St. Catherine of Siena, if we wish to be saints.
- Of course, this means that we must have a healthy measure of humility, which we hear about in our readings today.
- In our first reading the prophet Zephaniah tells us that it is humility that shelters us from the Lord's anger. It is through humility that we can take refuge in the name of the Lord and are protected from all disturbance.
- In our second reading, St. Paul is even more insistent upon the necessity of humility, proclaiming the lowly, weak, and foolish of this world to be God's elect. It is the humble souls who will shame those who are wise and strong by the worldly standards.
- St. Paul makes it clear: we cannot boast of ourselves. If we can boast of anything, we can only boast in the Lord, for all that we have comes from Him. And if we make it to Heaven, we shall see that we did not get there by our own efforts, but only by His grace.
- Then, in our magnificent Gospel passage from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out for us the way in which we actually endear ourselves to the Lord: by practicing the Beatitudes – all of which require that we have humility.
- Becoming humble is not a matter of thinking *less* of yourself. It's a matter of thinking *less about* yourself. It's a matter of thinking first about God, because *He is Who Is*, loving and serving Him above else, and holding others in higher esteem than yourself.
- The net effect of striving for humility and practicing the Beatitudes is that a purification takes place in our souls: a purification of our wills, of our intentions, and of our love for God and for others. And this purification is what prepares us for Heavenly glory.
- Consciously cultivating humility, living a life of the Beatitudes: these actions rightly order our lives to God and to others. And over time, we are not only purified, but we are perfected such that we can be united with God for all eternity in Heaven.
- God desires that all men be saved. What prevents His will being done in this matter is our sinfulness – our willed turning away from all that He is toward the nothingness of ourselves.
- Until we are perfectly purified of our sins, whether in this life through our prayers, sufferings, and penances, or in the fires of purgatory, we will not go to Heaven.
- May we come to realize that God alone *is He Who Is*, and that we are nothing without Him, and thereby grow in that true humility that purifies and prepares us for eternal union. St. Catherine of Siena, pray for us.