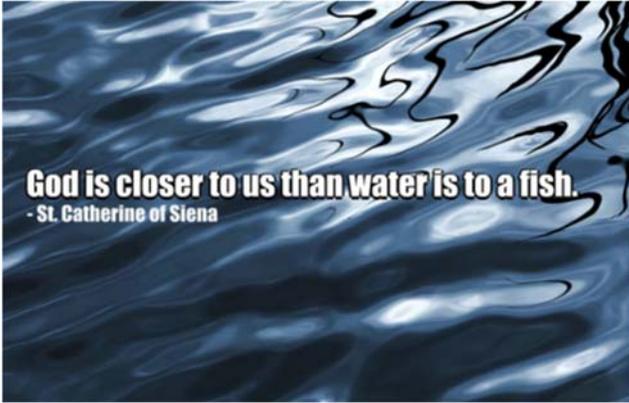


Dear Brothers and Sisters



Today, March 6th, is *Laetare Sunday*. 'Laetare' means 'Rejoice', and we can rejoice because we are just past the midpoint of Lent. Also known as Rose Sunday or Refreshment Sunday, we are given encouragement as we progress towards the end of the penitential season.

One woman knew the meaning of this season, with its penance and rejoicing, very well. She was the twenty-fourth of twenty-five children, Caterina Benincasa (Kate Goodhouse in English)! Her life was very short. But what a life! She died from

a stroke at the age of thirty-three. We know her today as Saint Catherine of Siena. She is a wonderful woman to walk with in Lent, as we open up our lives in front of the Church, and allow the Word of God to "scrutinize" us.

In her "writings" (mostly dictated, as she was fairly illiterate) she insists that on the Lenten journey the very first question we must ask is not, "Who is God?" No! The first question is, "WHO AM I?"

In coming to know ourselves, she says, we need to accept all our inadequacies and our limitations; all our sins, and failures, hang-ups and neurosis, and all the wounds and hurts of our history.

Catherine encourages us not to fear this downward journey; and not to run away from all those areas of our lives which seem dark, murky, twisted, devious, disordered, broken, imperfect, ambiguous...Stay with this "soil" she urges us, for it is a reminder that we are only poor creatures; a reminder that we need God who is the bubbling, running, fresh, effervescent source of life deep within us.

For there, and only there, can we meet the One who created us and loves us. God who is LIFE! Yes, we come to meet God through self-knowledge. It may be a painful journey. But the pain heals.

Self-knowledge is not morbid introspection. It is not navel-gazing. And it is much more than mere psychological self-understanding. It is to see ourselves in the light of the One who gives us our life. Catherine, having made this journey, describes herself as "dwelling in the cell of self-knowledge".

Those of us who dwell outside the cell of self-knowledge can find our lives very complicated, often problematic, unsettled, sometimes dull, flat and grey. We never get our act together!

Those of us who don't really know who we are can suffer from all kinds of emotional, psychological, sexual and spiritual aches. And these aches just keep on aching. They never seem to be resolved.

Lent is a "time of grace", a "favorable time", an "acceptable time". As we begin the 4th week, this time has not run out - yet.

Like Catherine, may we come to dwell in the "cell of self-knowledge", set free from all illusions, half-truths and fantasies.

Fr. Sean