



Painting by St. Catherine of Bologna

Twelve Gardens of Stewardship

Garden of the Arts

St. Catherine of Bologna

St. Catherine, patron saint of artists, was herself a painter and a writer. The beauty of her works, her life and her remarkable death provides inspiration for appreciating God's gift of creativity.

Catherine de Vigri was born in Bologna, Italy in 1413, daughter of a diplomatic agent of the Marquis of Ferrara. At the age of eleven, she was appointed maid of honor to the daughter of the Marquis and shared her training and education. When the daughter eventually married, she wanted Catherine to remain in her service, but Catherine left the court and became a Franciscan Tertiary at the age of fourteen.

Catherine had determined to live a life of perfection, and was admired by her companions for her holiness. Eventually her Community became part of the Poor Clares. She soon began to experience visions of Christ and Satan, and wrote of her experiences, one of which occurred one Christmas. Through

her efforts with Pope Nicholas V, the Poor Clare convent at Ferrara erected an enclosure, and Catherine was appointed Superioress. The reputation of the Community for its holiness and austerity became widespread. She then was appointed Superioress of a new convent in Bologna.

In Lent of 1463, Catherine became seriously ill, and she died on March 9th. Buried without a coffin, her body was exhumed eighteen days later because of cures attributed to her and also because of the sweet scent coming from her grave. Her body was found to be incorrupt and remains so today in the Church of the Poor Clare convent in Bologna. She was canonized in 1712.

Despite the opportunity to live a noble life at court, St. Catherine eagerly responded to her call to lead the religious life. Her piety, charity, and kindness attracted many to follow her along the road to perfection. The beauty of her life and death encourages us to resolve to live in perfect charity as a Lenten goal.

Some of her art and manuscripts survive, including a depiction of St. Ursula from 1456, now in the Galleria Academic in Venice. In the 1990s, new works by Catherine de'Vigri came to light and were published in Italian, in her native Bologna. Here is their description by Cardinal Giacomo Biffi:

"The works of Catherine of Bologna, many of which have long remained unknown, are now revealed in their surprising beauty. We can ascertain that she was not undeserving of her renown as a highly cultivated person, nor was it due to a complicated series of historical circumstances. We are now in a position to meditate on a veritable monument of theology which, after the Treatise on the Seven Spiritual Weapons, is made up of distinct and autonomous parts: The Twelve Gardens, a mystical work of her youth, Rosarium, a Latin poem on the life of Jesus, and The Sermons, i.e. Catherine's words to her religious sisters.[...]"