

29 April 2026 -- Feast of Catherine of Siena

1 Jn 1:5-2:2; Luke 10:38-42

Homily

Christian mystics can, in a way, be divided into two categories or two families. There are the mystics of light and the mystics of darkness. The former are those who are fascinated by everything we can know and experience about God, and everything we can say about God. The latter are those who are fascinated, almost obsessed, by the fact that God is greater than and beyond anything we can know, feel or say about Him. There are some great mystics in both categories

Saint John, or, if you prefer, the author of the first Letter of John, certainly belonged to the first category. *'Now this is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you: God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all'*. John likes to speak of *'what was in the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands... the Word of life made visible'*. John does not deny the existence of darkness; but this darkness is not in God; it is in us. It is the darkness of our sins. If we recognise our sins, God's light can penetrate us, free us from our darkness and make us shine with God's light. If we don't recognise our sins, we remain in darkness.

I am by no means an expert on Catherine of Siena. But the little I do know about her convinces me that, like John, she belonged to the mystics of light. She was not only a great contemplative who saw the light of God in her moments of contemplation, but also someone who was always anxious to shed this light on all the ecclesiastical, social and political situations of her time.

Mystics of darkness can have a lasting influence thanks to the depth of their writings, whose meaning is never fully understood by their readers, generation after generation. Mystics of light usually have a community of disciples who gather around them during their lifetime. This was the case with Catherine. She began to have a community, or rather a 'family' as they called themselves, made up of men and women, lay people and clerics, who gathered around her and called her 'mother', when she was still only 21 years old -- just like Saint Bernard, whose writings she read, who came to Cîteaux with a group of 30 disciples, all much older than himself, when he was only 22, or the great Origen, who was put in charge of the catechetical school in Alexandria at the age of 18. It seems that people matured a little more quickly in those days than they do today...

Document extrait du [site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont](#), qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

Mystics like Catherine don't just sell everything to buy the field where they know a treasure is hidden or the precious pearl they long for. They never stop ploughing the field, because they know that the real treasure will be in the harvest after the land has been meticulously cleared, weeded, ploughed and watered. They never stop looking for a more precious pearl, because they know that they will be enriched not by the only pearl they can find, but by the search.

Let us ask Catherine to obtain for us the grace to be tireless seekers of light and to know how to share that light with the world, so that all the darkness that lies in our sins and the sins of the world can be penetrated and removed by that light.

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