

Saint Catherine of Siena

1347-1380

HELL

In the renowned *Dialogue on Divine Providence* of Saint Catherine of Siena, there is a description of the Inferno, “Daughter, the tongue is not sufficient to describe the pain of these poor souls. As there are three principal vices – namely: love for oneself, from which the second one is derived, which is love for one’s reputation, and from the reputation proceeds the third, which is pride – with injustice, cruelty and with other dirty and ungodly sins which follow these – which is why I tell you that in Hell they have four main torments, from which proceed all the other torments.

The first is that they know they are deprived of My vision, and that is for them such a great punishment that, if it were possible, they would choose the fire and the worst torments and be able to see Me, instead of not having punishments and not being able to see Me. This first penalty produces in them the second penalty – that of the worm of the conscience, which is always gnawing at them, seeing themselves deprived, because of their own sin, of Me and of the company of the Angels, having merited the company of demons and the vision of them instead.

To see the devil (which is the third punishment) multiplies in them every effort. As the Saints always exult in the vision of Me, and they see them renewed with happiness the fruits of the toils that they carried for Me, with such an abundance of love and disregard for themselves, in this way, on the contrary, in these poor souls the torments are renewed by the vision of the devil, because in seeing him

they come to know themselves more, thereby knowing that it is by their own fault that they were made to deserve it. And it is for this reason that the worm gnaws even more, and the fire of this conscience never ceases to burn. And the punishment is even greater because they see his own figure as is, which is so horrible that there is not one man’s heart that could imagine it. And if you remember well, when I showed him to you in his own form for a brief moment in time (which you know lasted but an instant), you chose, after you came back to yourself, to want to walk a road of fire, even if it endured until Judgment Day, rather than ever see him again. Despite all this that you saw, nevertheless you do not really know how horrible he is, because he shows himself, because of Divine Justice, to be more horrible to the soul that is deprived of Me, and more or less so according to the gravity of their sins.

The fourth torment is the fire. This fire burns but does not consume, because the soul cannot consume itself; it is not a material thing that the fire can consume, because it is without a body. But I, because of Divine Justice, have permitted that the fire burns them painfully, so that it scourges them but does not consume them. And it scourges and burns them with extreme pain, in different ways, according to the difference of the sins, who more and who less, according to the gravity of the sin.

From these four torments come all of the others: cold and heat and gnashing of teeth and still others. Now, since they



did not want to correct themselves after the first reproach was done unto them, for false justice and the injustice in their life, and since in the second reproach, which is the hour of death, they did not want to hope and they did not regret the offense which they did to Me, but (they regretted) only of their punishment, at that time – in this way, they have miserably received eternal death.”

