

25. November 2021

**Memory of Saint Catherine of Alexandria
I myself shall give you eloquence and wisdom**

Today we celebrate the memorial of St Catherine of Alexandria, who lived between the 3rd and 4th century. In her life the words of Jesus that we heard in yesterday's Gospel apply perfectly:

"Make up your minds not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict." (Lk 21:14-15).

Catherine, being the only daughter of a pagan king named Costus, had received a good education. She had become a Christian.

When she heard that Emperor Maxentius had ordered all the people to come to Alexandria to offer sacrifice to the gods, Catherine hurried to the place where the Christians were, fearful of the death that awaited them if they refused to sacrifice.

Bravely, the young woman presented herself before the Emperor and said:

CATHERINE: "It befits your dignity that I salute you, O Emperor... If only you would acknowledge the Creator of heaven and turn your heart away from false idols!"

She then debated with the Emperor, presenting him with many arguments in favour of the Christian faith, which he did not know how to refute.

Catherine asked him, "Why have you called the people here in vain, that in their folly they should offer sacrifice to idols? No one is equal to God! Him you should worship, for He is the God of gods and Lord of lords."

The Emperor, impressed by the beauty and wisdom of the young woman, spoke to her thus, "We have been astonished at your wisdom and want to know to what lineage you belong."

CATHERINE: "I am Catherine, the only daughter of King Costus. But though I was born in purple and instructed in all the arts, I have despised all that and have consecrated myself to the Lord Jesus Christ. The gods you worship, on the other hand, cannot help you or your people. Woe to you, wretches, who worship images! Your gods are not with you, and when you call upon them in your distress and tribulation, they do not come to your aid nor protect you in danger."

EMPEROR: "If what you say is true, then all the others are wrong and you alone speak

the truth. But you are no more than a weak girl!"

When the Emperor realised that he could not resist the wisdom of that young woman, he sent for the best scholars in his kingdom to refute her arguments. Thus, fifty wise men came to Alexandria to debate with Catherine.

The Emperor said to them: "There is among us a virgin of incomparable wisdom, who surpasses all the wise men. She claims that all the gods are evil spirits. If you succeed in defeating her, you will return to your homeland with great honours."

One of the scholars, displeased, said to the Emperor, "O great Emperor, why have you summoned us for such an unhonourable dispute with a virgin whom even the least of our pupils could easily defeat? Bring her to us, that she may confess her crime and admit that she has never seen wiser masters."

When the maiden Catherine heard what was in prospect for her, she placed herself entirely in God's hands. An angel of the Lord came to her and exhorted her to stand firm, assuring her that she would not be defeated; rather, the scholars would be converted and attain martyrdom. Thus, the young woman steeled herself for the coming debate.

MASTER: "What do you say, maiden? It is impossible for God to become a man or to be exposed to suffering."

CATHERINE: "Even to the pagans it had been foretold that it would happen. The sibyl announced: 'Blessed be the God who hangs on the exalted cross!'"

Then, with the wisdom God had granted her, Catherine convinced all the scholars to the point that they could no longer refute her. At this, the Emperor became very angry.

One of the scholars said to him: "You know, O Emperor, that we have never been defeated by any man; but it is the Spirit of God who speaks through this virgin, leaving us all in such astonishment that we no longer wish or can speak anything against Christ. Therefore, O Emperor, we fearlessly profess: We are all converted to Christ."

In his anger, the Emperor ordered them all to be burned. But the wise men, strengthened and instructed by the consoling words of the maiden Catherine, remained faithful to the faith and thus received the crown of martyrdom.

Emperor Maxentius, who wanted to win Catherine over, made her many offers, all of which she refused. In the end, she herself suffered martyrdom. Thanks to her testimony and the miraculous signs that accompanied her, many people were converted to Christ, including the Emperor's wife.

In this virgin, Our Lord's promise for when we are in tribulation became a reality:

"Make up your minds not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict." (Lk 21:14-15).