

Tallinn 25 11 2025

**Memory of Saint Catherine of Alexandria,
patron saint of the Old Dominican Monastery**

Welcome to everyone in our Dominican chapel. It does not have the monumental dimensions of the old Dominican church but it serves the same purpose, that is to accompany the people of Tallinn and Estonia on their spiritual journey and quest for God. It's 17th century ceiling seems to have anticipated the presence of Dominicans in this living room three centuries later. Each of these roses are like beads of the rosary, inviting us to turn us to Christ and deepen our faith. In grateful memory of the Dominicans who lived, prayed and worked in this house and in the previous Dominican monastery of Tallinn, we are gathered here in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Homily

What we know of our patron saint Catherine of Alexandria cannot be founded on historical evidence. Church historians are puzzled at how her life appeared in devotional practice in the ninth century. So, rather than searching for certainty about her life, let us try and understand why her life as described by late hagiographers came to stand as a model of Christian life. For, beyond doubt, Catherine became very popular in the whole of Europe. Her numerous representations in manuscripts, paintings or sculpture testify how much this way of life inspired Christians. Still today, the story of Catherine can inspire us as we search for God.

The first thing which is stressed in the accounts of Catherine's life is her great science. She is described as speaking all the languages of the world, though it is not mentioned that she knew Estonian! She was well trained in the sciences of her time. Through her education and passion for knowledge, she came to the conclusion that God was the creator of the universe and sent his only Son to share our humanity. This part of her character made her a patroness for the philosophers and this is probably the reason why the Dominicans who arrived in Tallinn in the year twelve hundred and thirty-nine chose her as their patroness. In times of fake news, propaganda and media manipulation, in which impulses and emotions rule the world, it is good to be reminded that reason is a precious path to truth and to God. Let us not be charmed by all those who pretend to be prophets and gods of bad news, as today's gospel reminds us.

A second element of Catherine's hagiography which may inspire us today is that she loved engaging in discussions with other scientists and with the emperor. They had very different opinions from Catherine but she was bold enough to enter into debate. It was her way of preaching. To dare entering in discussion with people of goodwill with other opinion is a way to build bridges and to discover the humanity of the other. To remain enclosed in one's little world will not make the world any better!

A third element which is highlighted in her life accounts, is her fidelity in faith. Her opinions were not appreciated by everyone and this will lead her to death, quartered by two wheels, often included in her representations. She remained faithful to the faith she had come to by reason. This attitude may be hard to understand for us but this part of her character should edify us as it gives witness to the fact that our earthly life is a preparation for another life which we shall start in the light of the resurrection.

Prayers of the faithful

Lord, we pray for all those who live or work in the Latin Quarter. Grant them health and vision. Inspire them so that they may contribute to the building of your Kingdom on earth by showing the beauty of your creation and by building bridges between people. Let us pray.

Lord, we pray for all visitors of the Latin Quarter. Bless their visit, so that it may widen their horizons and offer them time to open their heart to your message.

Lord, we pray for the people in our neighbourhood who have passed away. We pray especially for the Dominican brothers who lived, prayed and worked in Tallinn for many centuries. Welcome them in your resurrection.

Lord, we pray for peace in the world and in Estonia. Protect those who have to live in injustice or violence particularly in Ukraine, Congo, Soudan, Myanmar, Holy Land, Nigeria, Venezuela. Call people to be messengers of peace.

Lord, we pray for the future of the Latin Quarter. Help us to cherish it as a place where brothers and sisters can live together and where your glory can shine through its inhabitants and activities.