

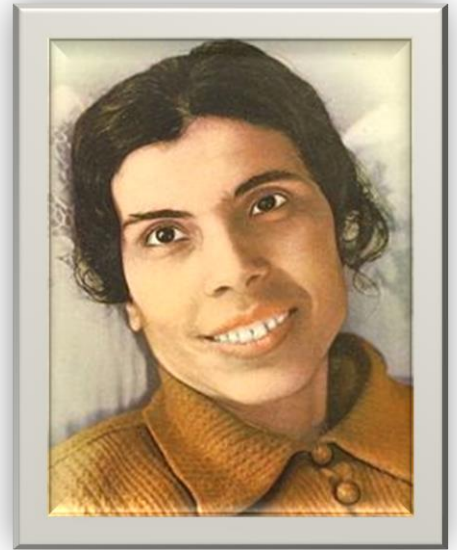
EUCHARIST FAST & FEAST

One of the most frequent of the miraculous phenomena which have occurred in the lives of the saints is the Eucharistic fast, in which the Eucharist was the principal, or only, food during prolonged fasts - or was the sole nourishment for years at a time. The following are the many saints who have maintained such fasts.



1. Blessed Alexandrina Maria da Costa

Alexandrina Maria da Costa (30 March 1904 – 13 October 1955), also known as Blessed Alexandrina of Balazar, was a Portuguese mystic and victim soul, who was born and died in Balazar (a rural parish of Póvoa de Varzim). Alexandrina left many written works, which have been studied mainly in Italy by Father Umberto Pasquale and Signorile couple. On 25 April 2004 she was declared blessed by Pope John Paul II who stated that "her secret to holiness was love for Christ".



Alexandrina was born in April 1904. In 1918, the year after the apparitions of Fatima, Alexandrina and her sister Deolinda and another girl were home when three men knocked at the door, one of whom had previously tried to molest Alexandrina. They broke into the house.

Alexandrina (to preserve her chastity) jumped from an upstairs window. The men fled but Alexandrina's spine had been irreparably injured and she had to remain in bed for the rest of her life. The slightest movement caused her intense pain. She began to grow closer and closer to the Lord and realised that she was suffering in a special way for the salvation of souls. She received Holy Communion every day and her thoughts frequently turned to Jesus in the tabernacle.

Jesus gave Alexandrina the following message to prepare her for the new phase of her mission:-

“You will not take food again on earth. Your food will be my Flesh; your blood will be my Divine Blood, your life will be my Life. You receive it from me when I unite my Heart to your heart. Do not fear, my daughter. You will not be crucified any more as in the past ... And now a new trial awaits you, which will be the most painful of all. But in the end I will carry you to Heaven and the Holy Mother will accompany you.”

On Good Friday 1942 Alexandrina started the total fast which continued for thirteen years until her death. During all this time she took no food or drink whatsoever, but received Holy Communion with great devotion each day. This phenomenon is not unique, as a few saints have received this special calling from God, but such occurrences are extremely rare in the life of the Church.

People came in increasing numbers to visit Alexandrina, which added greatly to her sufferings, but she always maintained a cheerful disposition and received everyone most courteously. Her constant silent prayer was : - **“O Jesus, place on my lips a deceiving smile in which I can hide all the martyrdom of my soul. It is enough that only you know of my endurance.”** While many thousands came to see Alexandrina and implore her intercession, she was not without her detractors. Some disbelieved that she lived on the Holy Eucharist alone, and rumours were circulated that she was fraudulent, which caused her and her family further suffering.

A medical examination of Alexandrina took place, which she accepted in a spirit of obedience and resignation. One of the doctors performing the examination asked her:- *“Why do you not eat?”* She replied, **“I do not eat because I cannot. I feel full. I do not need it. However, I have a longing for food.”** The results of this examination were inconclusive, and so it was suggested that Alexandrina go to a hospital in Porto to have the fast medically certified. She agreed to the proposal on three conditions; that she would be able to receive the Holy Eucharist each day, that Deolinda could accompany her, and that she be there only for observational purposes and not have to undergo any more medical examinations. These conditions were agreed and Alexandrina went to the hospital in Porto by ambulance, offering up all the sufferings that this journey would inevitably bring. She said:-



“I embraced my family and friends and only Jesus knew the sorrow it cost me to separate myself from them. I looked only into his Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and implored them to give me courage and strength to bear this new affliction. As they levered my stretcher downstairs I murmured to my weeping family, 'Courage! All for Jesus and for souls!' I was unable to say more. There was such a tightening of my heart that I felt it would be impossible to keep back the tears.”

After a very difficult journey Alexandrina arrived at the hospital on 10th June 1943 and was put under the strictest supervision. Two people kept her under intense scrutiny around the clock, all the time she was in hospital. Alexandrina said that she found Dr Enrico Gomes de Araujo, the doctor in charge of conducting the observation, to be strict “even to the point of harshness”. Dr

Araujo visited Alexandrina several times each day and interrogated her, and she underwent many other trials and indignities during her stay in hospital. Alexandrina's own physician, Dr Azevedo, visited her on occasions, and his support and company afforded her some relief. After thirty days of being constantly monitored, another physician, disbelieving the genuineness of Alexandrina's fast, insisted that she remain for a further ten days. On 19th July 1943, the day before she left hospital, all the children of the hospital gathered around Alexandrina's bed and she prayed with them. Later, over 1,500 people arrived to catch a glimpse of the 'Victim of Balasar' and the police had to be brought in to control the crowd. Dr Araujo told Alexandrina that the observation was concluded and said "In October, I will come to visit you at Balasar, not as a doctor-spy, but as a friend who respects you." Dr Araujo's official report confirmed Alexandrina's fast as scientifically inexplicable. It stated:-

"It is absolutely certain that during forty days of being bedridden in hospital, the sick woman did not eat or drink . . . and we believe such phenomenon could have happened during the past months, perhaps the past 13 months . . . leaving us perplexed."

A further report by Drs Lima and Azevedo confirmed the above :-

"We the undersigned, Dr C. A. di Lima, Professor of the Faculty of Medicine of Oporto and Dr E. A. D. de Azevedo, doctor graduate of the same Faculty, testify that, having examined Alexandrina Maria da Costa, aged 39, born and resident at Balasar, of the district of Póvoa de Varzim .have confirmed her paralysis ..And we also testify that the bedridden woman, from 10 June to 20 July 1943 remained in the sector for infantile paralysis at the Hospital of Focel Duro, under the direction of Dr Araujo and under day and night surveillance by impartial persons desirous of discovering the truth of her fast. Her abstinence from solids and liquids was absolute during all that time. We testify also that she retained her weight, and her temperature, breathing, blood pressure, pulse and blood were normal while her mental faculties were constant and lucid and during these forty days, she did not have any natural bodily functions"

While this phenomenon was inexplicable to everyone else, Alexandrina knew the cause of it, for Jesus had already told her:- "You are living by the Eucharist alone because I want to prove to the world the power of the Eucharist and the power of my life in souls."

2. Saint Catherine of Siena (25 March 1347 in Siena – 29 April 1380 in Rome), was a tertiary of the Dominican Order, and a Scholastic philosopher and theologian. She also worked to bring the papacy of Gregory XI back to Rome from its displacement in France, and to establish peace among the Italian city-states. Since 18 June 1866 she is one of the two patron saints of Italy, together with St. Francis of Assisi. On 3 October 1970 she was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI, and on 1 October 1999 Pope John Paul II named her as a one of the six patron saints of Europe, together with Benedict of Nursia, Saints Cyril and Methodius, Bridget of Sweden and Edith Stein.



The fast of St. Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) has been recorded for us by none other than one of her confessors, BI. Raymond of Capua. In his biography of St. Catherine he informs us that following a vision of Our Lord, food was no longer necessary to the saint. BI. Raymond writes: "When she was obliged to take food, she was so incommoded that it would not remain in the stomach and it would be quite impossible to describe her grievous pains on such occasions." At the start of her fast, the confessor who served her at the time commanded her to take food daily, but after a time the saint asked him: "If therefore you see, by the numerous experiments of which you have been witness, that I am killing myself by taking nourishment, why do you not forbid me, as you would forbid me to fast, if the fast produced a similar result?"

BI. Raymond tells us that the confessor had nothing to reply to this reasoning and said to her, "Henceforth act according to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, for I perceive that God is accomplishing marvelous things in you." Sometime later, when her confessor inquired whether she did not at least experience an appetite, the saint replied, "God satisfies me so in the Holy Eucharist that it is impossible for me to desire any species of corporal nourishment." On asking if she did not at least experience hunger on the days on which she did not communicate, the saint answered, "His sole presence satiates me, and I acknowledge that, to be happy, it even suffices for me to see a priest who has just said Mass."

When St. Catherine's fast became well-known many criticized her, and even religious persons were opposed to her. Some attributed the fast to ". . . a kind of

vanity, that she did not fast really, but fed herself well in secret." Others said she wished to be noticed and that she was being deceived by the devil. Bl. Raymond writes: "Catherine was willing to appease their murmurs, and determined that every day she would go once and take a seat at the common table and endeavor to eat. Although she used neither meat, nor wine, nor drink, nor eggs, and did not even touch bread. what she took, or rather, what she tried to take, caused her such sufferings that those that saw her, however hard-hearted they were, were moved to compassion; her stomach could digest nothing, and rejected whatever was taken into it; she afterwards suffered the most terrible pains and her whole body appeared to be swollen; she did not swallow the herbs which she chewed, she only drew from them their juice and rejected their substance. She then took pure water to cool her mouth; but every day she was forced to throw up what she had taken, and that with so much difficulty that it was necessary to assist her by every possible means. To this Bl. Raymond adds, "As I was frequently witness of this suffering, I felt an extreme compassion for her, and I counselled her to let men talk, and spare herself such torture . . ."

"For the seven year period prior to her death, Saint Catherine of Siena took no food into her body other than the Eucharist. Her fasting did not affect her energy, however. She maintained a very active life during those seven years. As a matter of fact, most of her great accomplishments occurred during that period. Her death had nothing to do with malnutrition, or anything connected with lack of food."

Not only did her fasting not cause her to lose energy, but became a source of extraordinary strength, she becoming stronger in the afternoon, after having received our Lord in His Eucharist. One of the only sufferings she found almost intolerable, was to be denied Her Lord in the Eucharist. Neither the Priests at the Basilica of Saint Dominic, nor Catherine's Superior in the Mantellate approved of her receiving the Eucharist daily. They tried to discourage Catherine, unsuccessfully. The Priests flatly refused, insisting she receive solely from her Confessor; it didn't matter if he was out of town. At that time, Catherine would seek comfort looking at the Priest during the Mass. After all, through his consecrated hands, he was bringing her Lord to her on the altar where she could adore Him, even if she could not receive Him. Catherine endured the worst anguish over this until Raymond came to Siena and she was able to receive Communion daily. When he was in town, he would only have to hear her plea, "Father, I hunger," and, if at all possible, he would celebrate Holy Mass.

Pope Gregory XI, who Catherine convinced to return to Rome from Avignon, later decreed a papal bull allowing her to receive daily, her Lord in His "Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity"16, the Eucharist.

Saint Catherine of Siena had Visions during the consecration of the Mass, sometimes seeing Jesus dressed as a Priest, repeating the words He spoke at the Last Supper. Other times, when she gazed upon the raised Host, instead of seeing the Consecrated Host, she saw the Baby Jesus in the Priest's hands. When we hear some people say they do not need Miracles of the Eucharist to believe in the Lord truly Present in the Consecrated Host, I can't help recall Catherine, who was strengthened in her belief in Him when she saw the Host in this miraculous form. She did not need the miracle to believe, but she did not refuse the help it gave her when she needed strength, or maybe as Mother Angelica said, the grace to believe.



The Miraculous communion of St. Catherine of Siena

On the website of the J Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles) we find a description of this beautiful work of art by Domenico Beccafumi painted in the second decade of the 16th century:

Like with Jesus, there are those always putting His chosen ones to the test, possibly, as with Jesus to trick them? One day, a Priest who did not believe in Catherine's Visions and her special relationship with the Eucharist, gave her an unconsecrated host, under the guise it was Holy Communion. Her angry words lashed out at the Priest for trying to cheat and delude someone who hungered for Jesus, in His Body and Blood.

Priests were touched by happenings during Holy Mass with Saint Catherine of Sienna. One reported he saw the Host go to her without him moving his arm. Other Priests said they saw the Host nod to her, almost as if in recognition. There were those who could feel their arms being pulled toward her, with the Host. Raymond of Capua reported he saw a Host travel clear across the church to Catherine. It was as if the Lord desired her as much as she longed for Him. There was a magnet between them and that Magnet was the Eucharist.

At the moment of receiving Communion, her face would become transfixed, as if glorified, surrounded by an aura. Catherine often went into ecstasy at that time, levitating. Her friends remained with her so they could assist her home, as even from childhood, Catherine was always left weakened after an ecstasy.

3. Therese Neumann was born on Good Friday, April 9, 1898, in Konnersreuth, Bavaria, a remote farming village of 1400 people. The daughter of a tailor and the oldest of ten children, she grew up in a strict, but loving, Catholic home.

Therese experienced her first vision of Christ—"The glorified child Jesus"—at age eleven during her First Communion, but didn't consider it extraordinary; she thought this was what everyone experienced on this occasion. By 1913, she had decided to become a missionary nun and serve in Africa, but the outbreak of World War I delayed her entry into the convent.

Therese Neumann was once asked how it was possible that she never ate or drank and lived on the Eucharist alone, and she responded "The Saviour can do all things. Did He not say that "my Flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink?"

Soon after the stigmata appeared in 1926, she drank only a small cup of tea daily. That did not attract much attention. But one day in 1927 a vision again appeared before her saying that she no longer needed any earthly food or drink. From, 1927 till her death in 1962 she did not eat anything, she did not drink anything!

Professors and Doctors were flabbergasted. One Dr. Otto Buchinger arrived in Konnersreuth with his team to expose "the pure fable" with his scientific equipment. After a thorough German fashion investigation, the learned Doctor wrote a book "Wirkliches and Wirkendes" (The Real and the Workable), in which he declared without any hesitation that this was no fraud. Here was something which defied the modern science.



The phenomena and the miracles were inexplicable by any so called rational thinking. Some mysticism was at work here. How can a human being seemingly in mortal flesh stop eating and drinking? How can a simple woman actually physically suffer the same agony as Lord Jesus suffered on the Cross? And develop the same scene in her own person and body?

Even the church had sent three nurses to find out the truth or otherwise of the miracle of "inedia" (the ability to survive without food and drink). She was kept

under the closest -watch, even when she was bathing, to ensure she is not gulping down any water! When she rinsed her mouth, the water taken in and thrown out was measured, to find whether any water was swallowed. There was no escape. Miracle went on happening.

The only thing Therese put on her tongue was the sacred Wafer, which the Church Priest offered during communion (a kind of collective prayer). The Wafer just disappeared on her tongue! It was observed that at times the wafer would fly from the priest's hand and float through the air into her mouth. This is recorded in a Book: "Therese Neumann von Konnersreuth" by Fritz Gerlich (1929), and even photographed.

At times during her ecstasies, she would fall to her knees and stretch out her tongue, when a host wafer would suddenly materialise on it! (D. Scott Rego's "Miracles" Contemporary Books Inc Chicago - 1982, page 69)

Therese's miracles do not end here. There is one more - perhaps most amazing to those who think that science explains everything and that anything defying the laws discovered by science does not exist. It was observed that the blood that came out during stigmata defied gravity. The phenomenon was carefully witnessed on 8-7-1927 by a reporter from "Berlin Hefte" at Therese's home. He was present during the Passion on that day. He reported: -
"Soon a drop of blood which increased in size formed at one of the foot stigmata. It grew and grew in size until finally it dropped from the wound. Gravity would have commanded that the drop of blood flows downwards. But it didn't. It flowed almost directly upward towards the toes, exactly as happened almost 2000 years ago on the Cross of the Christ". (D. Scott Rego - ibid page 69)

This is then the story of a great woman Saint of this century, who defied all the egoistic psyche of modern science and modern thinking. She proved that the Lord of your Love has His eyes on you. He can come to you in unpredictable ways. Only one condition should be satisfied. you should be, as Marcus says, "desperately, deeply, violently in love with Him."

May you, my Parsi reader, have the same Love and Attraction towards Asho Zarathushtra as Therese had for her Lord. Pray that your consciousness may awaken to the presence of your Paigambar Saheb within you. May His Lightning thunder on the dark clouds of confusion, and the Rain of His grace immerse you fully and completely.