

# Bridget of Sweden

born about 1303; died 23 July, 1373)

## 1. Person

- Also called Birgitta
- Birgitta Birgersdotter is one of the best-known Swedes of all time.
- the patron saint of Europe (patrona Europae).
- Her father was one of the wealthiest landholders of the country, and, like her mother, distinguished by deep piety.
- From her seventh year she showed signs of extraordinary religious impressions and illuminations.
- In 1316, at the age of thirteen, she was united in marriage to Ulf Gudmarsson, who was then eighteen.
- She acquired great influence over her noble and pious husband, and the happy marriage was blessed with eight children, among them St. Catherine of Sweden.
- She was later at the court of King Magnus Eriksson, over whom she gradually acquired great influence.
- Early in the forties (1341-43) in company with her husband she made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella.
- Her husband died (1344) in the Cistercian monastery of Alvastrå in East Gothland.
- Vision: "my bride and my canal"
- Bridget now devoted herself entirely to practices of religion and asceticism, and to religious undertakings.

- The visions which she believed herself to have had from her early childhood now became more frequent and definite. She believed that Christ Himself appeared to her, and she wrote down the revelations she then received.
  
- St. Bridget now founded a new religious congregation, the Brigittines, or Order of St. Saviour, whose chief monastery, at Vadstena, was richly endowed by King Magnus and his queen (1346).
  
- To obtain confirmation for her institute, and at the same time to seek a larger sphere of activity for her mission, she journeyed to Rome in 1349, and remained there until her death, except while absent on pilgrimages, among them one to the Holy Land in 1373.
  
- Bridget made earnest representations to Pope Urban, urging the removal of the Holy See from Avignon back to Rome.
  
- Birgitta remained a resident of Rome for the last 23 years of her life, although she traveled considerably.
  
- Pope John Paul II gave a Homily, November 13, 1999, including the following about Bridget, and the role in the ecumenical movement:
 

“...Today we remember this extraordinary holy woman, ... beside me in this celebration there are the highest representatives of the Lutheran Churches of Sweden and Finland, together with my venerable Brother Bishops of Stockholm and Copenhagen. ...the King and Queen of Sweden... My greeting goes... to the political leaders here with us. ....gathered to renew... the commitment to unity of faith and unity of the Church which Saint Bridget undertook with such conviction... A passion for Christian unity sustained her entire life...Today’s celebration encourages us to meditate upon the message of Saint Bridget, whom I recently chose to proclaim a Co-Patroness of Europe ... Saint Bridget’s ... witness to the Cross are a rallying-point for us...I am very pleased ... to inaugurate and bless a statue which will make more vibrant here in the Vatican the memory of this great witness of faith. Placed on the outside of this Basilica and just beside the so-called ‘Door of Prayer’, the marble image of Saint Bridget will be an enduring invitation to pray and work always for Christian unity.”

  - The Pope, in his Homily, went on to remind his listeners of October 5, 1991, when, “a solemn ecumenical celebration was held in this same basilica for the sixth centenary of St Bridget’s canonization. On that occasion I said: “For 25 years Lutherans and Catholics have been working to rediscover their common path....”

## 2. The Fifteen Prayers of Saint Bridget of Sweden

- These prayers were revealed by Christ to Saint Bridget in the Church of St. Paul at Rome.
  
- The occasion of the revelation of the prayers: As St. Bridget for a long time wanted to know the number of blows Our Lord received during His Passion, He one day appeared to her and said: "I received 5480 blows on My Body. If you wish to honor them in some way, recite fifteen times the Our Father and Hail Mary, together with the following prayers, which I Myself will teach you for an entire year. When the year is finished, you will have honored each of My Wounds."
  
- a source for Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of Christ"
  - "...I have meditated a lot on the passion of Our Lord. When I was 35, I started praying the Prayers of St. Bridget and they really helped me understand what the passion was all about. Now I want to share it with others."
  
- The promises
  1. I will deliver 15 souls of his lineage from Purgatory.
  2. 15 souls of his lineage will be confirmed and preserved in grace.
  3. 15 sinners of his lineage will be converted.
  4. Whoever recites these Prayers will attain the first degree of perfection.
  5. 15 days before his death, I will give him My Precious Body in order that he may escape eternal starvation; I will give him my Precious Blood to drink lest he thirst eternally.
  6. 15 days before his death he will feel a deep contrition for all his sins and will have a perfect knowledge of them.
  7. I will place before him the sign of My Victorious Cross for his help and defense against the attacks of his enemies.
  8. Before his death I shall come with My Dearest Beloved Mother.
  9. I shall graciously receive his soul, and will lead it into eternal joys.
  10. And having led it there I shall give him a special draught from the fountain of My Deity, something I will not do for those who have not recited My Prayers.

11. Let it be known that whoever may have been living in a state of mortal sin for 30 years, but who will recite devoutly, or have the intention to recite these Prayers, I the Lord will forgive him all his sins.
12. I shall protect him from strong temptations.
13. I shall preserve and guard his five senses.
14. I shall preserve him from a sudden death.
15. His soul will be delivered from eternal death.
16. He will obtain all he asks for from God and the Blessed Virgin.
17. If he has lived all his life doing his own will and he is to die the next day, his life will be prolonged.
18. Every time one recites these Prayers he gains 100 days indulgence.
19. He is assured of being joined to the supreme Choir of Angels.
20. Whoever teaches these prayers to another will have continual joy and merit which will last throughout eternity.
21. There where these Prayers are being said or will be said in the future, God is present with His grace.

- the fifteenth prayers:

First Prayer

O Jesus Christ! Eternal Sweetness to those who love Thee, joy surpassing all joy and all desire, Salvation and Hope of all sinners, Who hast proved that Thou hast no greater desire than to be among men, even assuming human nature at the fullness of time for the love of men, recall all the sufferings Thou hast endured from the instant of Thy conception, and especially during Thy Passion, as it was decreed and ordained from eternity in the Divine plan.

Remember, O Lord, that during the Last Supper with Thy disciples having washed their feet, Thou gavest them Thy Most Precious Body and Blood, and while at the same time Thou didst sweetly console them, Thou didst fortell them Thy coming Passion.

Remember the sadness and bitterness which Thou didst experience in Thy Soul as Thou Thyself bore witness saying: "My Soul is sorrowful even unto death."

Remember all the fear, anguish and pain that Thou didst suffer in Thy delicate Body before the torment of the Crucifixion, when, after having prayed three times, bathed in a sweat of blood, Thou wast betrayed by Judas, Thy disciple, arrested by the people of a nation Thou hadst chosen and elevated, accused by false witnesses, unjustly judged by three judges during the flower of Thy youth and during the solemn Paschal season.

Remember that Thou wast despoiled of Thy garments and clothed in those of derision; that Thy Face and Eyes were veiled, that Thou wast buffeted, crowned with thorns, a reed placed in Thy Hands, that Thou wast crushed with blows and overwhelmed with affronts and outrages.

In memory of all these pains and sufferings which Thou didst endure before Thy Passion on the Cross, grant me before my death true contrition, a sincere and entire confession, worthy satisfaction and the remission all my sins. Amen.

#### Second Prayer

O Jesus! True liberty of angels, paradise of delights, remember the horror and sadness which Thou didst endure when Thy enemies, like furious lions, surrounded Thee, and by thousands of insults, spits, blows, lacerations and other unheard-of cruelties, tormented Thee at will. In consideration of these torments and insulting words, I beseech Thee, O my Savior, to deliver me from all my enemies, visible and invisible, and to bring me, under Thy protection, to the perfection of eternal salvation. Amen.

#### Third Prayer

O Jesus! Creator of Heaven and earth Whom nothing can encompass or limit, Thou Who dost enfold and hold all under Thy loving power, remember the very bitter pain Thou didst suffer when the Jews nailed Thy Sacred Hands and Feet to the Cross by blow after blow with big blunt nails, and not finding Thee in a pitiable enough state to satisfy their rage, they enlarged thy Wounds, and added pain to pain, and with indescribable cruelty stretched Thy Body on the Cross, pulling Thee from all sides, thus dislocating Thy limbs.

I beg of Thee, O Jesus, by the memory of this most Loving suffering of the Cross, to grant me the grace to fear Thee and to Love Thee. Amen.

#### Fourth Prayer

O Jesus! Heavenly Physician, raised aloft on the Cross to heal our wounds with Thine, remember the bruises which Thou didst suffer and the weakness of all Thy Members which were distended to such a degree that never was there pain like unto Thine. From the crown of Thy Head to the Soles of Thy Feet there was not one spot on Thy Body that was not in torment, and yet, forgetting all Thy sufferings, Thou didst not cease to pray to Thy Heavenly Father for Thy enemies, saying: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Through this great Mercy, and in memory of this suffering, grant that the remembrance of Thy Most Bitter Passion may effect in us a perfect contrition and the remission of all our sins. Amen.

#### Fifth Prayer

O Jesus! Mirror of eternal splendor, remember the sadness which Thou experienced, when contemplating in the light of Thy Divinity the predestination of those who would be saved by the merits of Thy Sacred Passion, Thou didst see at the same time, the great multitude of reprobates who would be damned for their sins, and Thou didst complain bitterly of those hopeless, lost, and unfortunate sinners.

Through this abyss of compassion and pity, and especially through the goodness which Thou displayed to the good thief when Thou saidst to him: "This day, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." I beg of Thee, O Sweet Jesus, that at

the hour of my death, Thou wilt show me mercy. Amen.

#### Sixth Prayer

O Jesus! Beloved and most desirable King, remember the grief Thou didst suffer, when naked and like a common criminal, Thou wast fastened and raised on the Cross, when all Thy relatives and friends abandoned Thee, except Thy Beloved Mother, who remained close to Thee during Thy agony and whom Thou didst entrust to Thy faithful disciple when Thou saidst to Mary: "Woman, behold thy son!", and to St. John: "Son, behold thy Mother!".

I beg of Thee O my Savior, by the sword of sorrow which pierced the soul of Thy holy Mother, to have compassion on me in all my afflictions and tribulations, both corporal and spiritual, and to assist me in all my trials, and especially at the hour of my death. Amen.

#### Seventh Prayer

O Jesus! Inexhaustible Fountain of compassion, Who by a profound gesture of Love, said from the Cross: "I thirst," suffered from the thirst for the salvation of the human race. I beg of Thee, O my Savior, to inflame in our hearts the desire to tend toward perfection in all our acts, and to extinguish in us the concupiscence of the flesh and the ardor of worldly desires. Amen.

#### Eighth Prayer

O Jesus! Sweetness of hearts, delight of the spirit, by the bitterness of the gall and vinegar which Thou didst taste on the Cross for Love of us, grant us the grace to receive worthily Thy Precious Body and Blood during our life and at the hour of our death, that they may serve as a remedy and consolation for our souls. Amen.

#### Ninth Prayer

O Jesus! Royal virtue, joy of the mind, recall the pain Thou didst endure when plunged in an ocean of bitterness at the approach of death, insulted, outraged by the Jews, Thou didst cry out in a loud voice that Thou wast abandoned by Thy Father, saying: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Through this anguish, I beg of Thee, O my Savior, not to abandon me in the terrors and pains of my death. Amen.

#### Tenth Prayer

O Jesus! Who art the beginning and the end of all things, life and virtue, remember that for our sakes Thou wast plunged in an abyss of suffering from the soles of Thy Feet to the crown of Thy Head. In consideration of the enormity of Thy Wounds, teach me to keep, through pure love, Thy Commandments, whose way is wide and easy for those who love Thee. Amen.

#### Eleventh Prayer

O Jesus! Deep abyss of mercy, I beg of Thee, in memory of Thy Wounds which penetrated to the very marrow of Thy Bones and to the depth of Thy being, to draw me, a miserable sinner, overwhelmed by my offenses, away from sin and to hide me from Thy Face justly irritated against me; hide me in Thy Wounds, until Thy anger and just indignation shall have passed away. Amen.

#### Twelfth Prayer

O Jesus! Mirror of truth, symbol of unity, link of charity, remember the multitude of wounds with which Thou wast covered from head to foot, torn and reddened by the spilling of Thy adorable Blood. O great and universal pain which Thou didst suffer in Thy virginal flesh for love of us! Sweetest Jesus! What is there that Thou couldst have done for us which Thou hast not done?

May the fruit of Thy sufferings be renewed in my soul by the faithful remembrance of Thy Passion, and may Thy love increase in my heart each day until I see Thee in eternity, Thou Who art the treasury of every real good and every joy, which I beg Thee to grant me, O sweetest Jesus, in Heaven. Amen.

#### Thirteenth Prayer

O Jesus! Strong lion, immortal and invincible King, remember the pain Thou didst endure when all Thy strength, both moral and physical, was entirely exhausted; Thou didst bow Thy Head, saying: "It is consummated."

Through this anguish and grief, I beg of Thee Lord Jesus, to have mercy on me at the hour of my death when my mind will be greatly troubled and my soul will be in anguish. Amen.

#### Fourteenth Prayer

O Jesus! Only Son of the Father, splendor and figure of His Substance, remember the simple and humble recommendation Thou didst make of Thy Soul to Thy Eternal Father, saying: "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My Spirit!" And with Thy Body all torn, and Thy Heart broken, and the bowels of Thy Mercy open to redeem us, Thou didst expire.

By this Precious Death, I beg of Thee O King of Saints, to comfort me and help me to resist the devil, the flesh and the world, so that being dead to the world, I may live for Thee alone. I beg of Thee at the hour of my death to receive me, a pilgrim and an exile returning to Thee. Amen.

#### Fifteenth Prayer

O Jesus! True and fruitful Vine! Remember the abundant outpouring of blood which Thou didst so generously shed from Thy Sacred Body as juice from grapes in a wine press.

From Thy Side, pierced with a lance by a soldier, blood and water issued forth until there was not left in Thy Body a single drop, and finally, like a bundle of myrrh lifted to the top of the Cross, Thy delicate Flesh was destroyed, the very substance of Thy Body withered, and the marrow of Thy Bones dried up.

Through this bitter Passion, and through the outpouring of Thy Precious Blood, I beg of Thee, O Sweet Jesus, to receive my soul when I am in my death agony. Amen.

#### Conclusion

O Sweet Jesus! Pierce my heart so that my tears of penitence and love will be my bread day and night; may I be converted entirely to Thee, may my heart be Thy perpetual habitation, may my conversation be pleasing to Thee, and may the end of my life be so praiseworthy that I may merit Heaven and there with Thy saints, praise Thee forever. Amen.

### 3. The Revelations

- In most of these visions, Christ and/or his mother Mary gave Birgitta messages to be given to others.
- 700 visions

### 4. Bridget's Vision of the Nativity

- From *Revelations* (1344–1349)
- This vision has become the typical Western image of the Nativity.

- "When I was at the manger of the Lord in Bethlehem, I saw a Virgin, pregnant and most very beautiful, clothed in a white mantle and a finely woven tunic.... Her womb was full and much swollen, for she was now ready to give birth. With her there was a very dignified old man; and with them they had an ox and an ass."

"I beheld a Virgin of extreme beauty wrapped in a white mantle and a delicate tunic . . . with her beautiful golden hair falling loosely down her shoulders. . . . She stood with uplifted hands, her eyes fixed on heaven, rapt, as it were, in an ecstasy of contemplation, in a rapture of divine sweetness. And while she stood in prayer, I beheld her Child move in her womb and . . . she brought forth her Son, from Whom such ineffable light and splendor radiated that the sun could not be compared to it. . . . And then I heard the wonderful singing of many angels."

"Her (Mary's) back was turned against the manger. Verily though all of a sudden, I saw the glorious Infant lying on the ground naked and shining . . . Then I heard also the singing of the angels, which was of miraculous sweetness and great beauty . . . When therefore the Virgin felt that she had already born her Child, she immediately worshipped him, her head bent down and her hands clasped, with great honor and reverence and said to him: Be welcome my God, my Lord, and my Son."

- Das Gemälde von Hugo van der Goes (d. 1482)
  - The greatest Netherlandish painter of the second half of the 15th century.
  - a large triptych of the Nativity known as the Portinari Altarpiece (Uffizi, Florence, c.1475-76)

## 5. Other Visions

- [Christ:] "For your heart was as cold toward my love as steel; and yet, in it there moved a modest spark of love for me, namely, when you thought me worthy of love and honor above all others. But that heart of yours then fell upon the sulphurous mountain when the glory and delight of the world turned against you and when your husband, whom you carnally loved beyond all others, was taken from you by death....

And when at your husband's death your soul was greatly shaken with disturbance, then the spark of my love—which lay, as it were, hidden and enclosed—began to go forth, for, after considering the vanity of the world, you abandoned your whole will to me and desired me above all things."

- [Mary:] O you to whom it has been given to hear and see spiritually, hear now the things that I want to reveal to you: namely, concerning that archbishop who said that if he were pope, he would give leave for all clerics and priests to contract marriages in the flesh. He thought and believed that this would be more acceptable to God than that clerics live dissolutely, as they now do. For he believed that through such marriage the greater carnal sins might be avoided; and even though he did not rightly understand God's will in this matter, nonetheless that same archbishop was still a friend of God."

"For after he [Christ] instituted in the world this new sacrament of the eucharist and ascended into heaven, the ancient law was still then kept: namely, that Christian priests lived in carnal matrimony. And, nonetheless, many of them were still friends of God because they believed with simple purity that that this was pleasing to God....

After those earlier Christian priests had observed these practices for a time, God himself, through the infusion of his Holy Spirit, put into the heart of the pope then guiding the Church another law more acceptable and pleasing to him in this matter... so that he established a statute in the universal Church that Christian priests, who have so holy and so worthy an office, namely, of consecrating this precious Sacrament, should by no means live in the easily contaminated, carnal delight of marriage."

- [In a letter, Birgitta gives instruction to a bishop on his lifestyle:]

"Of your clothing, I advise you never to have in your possession more than three pairs at one time; everything beyond this, you should immediately give to God himself....

Of silver vessels, reserve for yourself just enough for your own person and for the guests who eat at your own table; donate the superfluous pieces to God with a cheerful mind. For the rest of your household and the guests who sit at

other tables certainly can, without any embarrassment, eat and drink using vessels of tin, clay, wood, or glass....

Nor should you have overly large and expensive horses, but rather those that are moderate in size and price.... Indeed, I tell you that as often as prelates, out of pride and vainglory, mount big horses, the devil mounts the prelates' necks."

- [From the opening chapter; Christ is speaking:]

"I have chosen and taken you to myself to be my bride to reveal to you my sacred counsels, for this so pleases me. And also you are mine by all manner of right, when in the death of your husband you gave your will into my hands, and also after his death, when you thought and prayed how you might become poor for me and for me abandon all things.... Therefore, take upon yourself gladly a little labor, so that you may the sooner be made clean and come to a great reward. For it is right for the bride to work with her husband until she is weary, so that she afterwards may more surely and trustingly take her rest with him."