

**St. Bridget of Sweden**

**1303–1373**

*Mystic*

*Third Order Franciscan with husband*

*Most zealous in serving the poor, especially the sick*

*Set apart a house for reception of the sick*

*Would often wash and kiss their feet*

*Founded Brigittines (Order of the Most Holy Savior)*

*following the death of her husband*



<sup>1</sup>**Bridget** was born in Sweden of noble and pious parents, and led a most holy life. While she was yet unborn, her mother was saved from shipwreck for her sake. At ten years of age, Bridget heard a sermon on the Passion of our Lord, and the next night she saw Jesus on the cross, covered with fresh blood, and speaking to her about His Passion. Thenceforward meditation on that subject affected her to such a degree that she could never think of our Lord's sufferings without tears.

She was given in marriage to Ulfo, prince of Nericia [a province in Sweden], and won him, by example and persuasion, to a life of piety. She devoted herself with maternal love to the education of her children. She was most zealous in serving the poor, especially the sick, and set apart a house for their reception where she would often wash and kiss their feet. Together with her husband she went on pilgrimage to Compostella to visit the tomb of the apostle St. James. On their return journey, Ulfo fell dangerously ill at Arras, but St. Dionysius, appearing to Bridget at night, foretold the restoration of her husband's health, and other future events.

Ulfo became a Cistercian monk, but died soon afterwards, whereupon Bridget, having heard the voice of Christ calling her in a dream, embraced a more austere manner of life. Many secrets were then revealed to her by God. She founded the monastery of Vadstena under the rule of our Saviour, which was given her by our Lord Himself. At His command she went to Rome where she kindled the love of God in very many hearts. She made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but on her return to Rome she was attacked by fever and suffered severely from sickness during a whole year. On the day she had foretold, she entered eternal life on July 23, 1373. Her body was translated to her monastery of Vadstena [Sweden], and becoming illustrious for miracles, she was enrolled amongst the saints by Boniface IX.<sup>1</sup>

St. Bridget of Sweden the patron saint of Sweden, widows, and is one of the six patron saints of Europe, together with Benedict of Nursia, Cyril and Methodius, Catherine of Siena and Edith Stein. (Memorial: October 8).

*There is no sinner in the world, however much at enmity with God,  
who cannot recover God's grace by recourse to Mary, and by asking her assistance.*

The following is from *the original* Reverend Alban Butler's *Lives of Saints* (1883) republished in 2020 by Loreto Publications:<sup>2</sup>

St. Birgit, more commonly called Bridget, or Birgit, was daughter of Birger, a prince of the royal blood of Sweden, legislator of Upland, and Ingeburgis, daughter to Sigridis, a lady descended from the kings of the Goths. Both the parents spent their lives in fervent exercises of piety, and had a singular devotion to the sacred passion of Christ. Birger consecrated all Fridays in a special

manner to practices and penance, and never failed on that day to confess his sins, and receive Holy Eucharist, endeavoring to put himself into such a disposition as to be able to bear patiently all the crosses that might befall him till the next Friday. Ingeburgis was no less devoutly inclined, but died soon after the birth of our saint, which happened in the year 1304. Bridget was brought up by an aunt, who was a lady of singular piety. She did not begin to speak till she was three years old, and the first use she made of her tongue was to praise God. Nor did she even in her childhood ever take pleasure in any discourse but what was serious. So strong and early was the grape of devotion with which God favored her, that from her cradle all her views and desires tended only to piety, and in its exercises she found her greatest delight. No symptoms ever appeared in her of anger, spite, envy, jealousy, untowardness, or disobedience. She assisted assiduously at the church office, and at sermons. At ten years of age she was most tenderly affected by a sermon which she heard on the passion of Christ; and the night following seemed to see Him hanging upon his cross, covered with wounds, and pouring forth his blood in streams in every part of his body; at the same time, she thought she heard Him say to her: "Look upon me, my daughter." "Alas," said she, "who has treated you thus?" She seemed to herself to hear him answer: "They who despised me, and are insensible to my love for them." The impression which this moving spectacle made upon her mind was never effaced, and from that time the sufferings of her redeemer became the subject of her most assiduous meditation, even when she was at work at her needle, and she could scarce ever call them to mind without shedding abundance of tears. In obedience to her father, when she was only sixteen years of age, she married Ulpho, prince of Nericia in Sweden, who was himself only eighteen. This pious couple passed the first year after their marriage in continence, and having enrolled themselves in the third order of St. Francis, lived in their own house as if they had been in a regular and austere monastery. They afterwards had eight children, four boys and four girls, who were all favored with the blessings of divine grace. Benedict and Gudma dying in their infancy, left their parents secure of their happiness; Charles and Birger died in the holy war in Palestine; Margaret and Cecily served God faithfully in the married state; and Indeburga and Catharine became nuns. The last was born in 1336, and died in 1381. She is honored among the saints on 22<sup>nd</sup> March. After the birth of these children, the parents, at the suggestion of St. Bridget, made a mutual vow of continency, and consecrated their estates more than ever to the use of the poor, whom they looked upon as their own family, and for whom they built a hospital, in which they served the sick with their own hands. Ulpho entered into the most perfect sentiments of virtue and penance, with which the example of his wife inspired him, and resigning his place in the king's council, and renouncing the court, he imitated her in all her devotion. To break all worldly ties by forsaking their country and friends, they made a painful pilgrimage to Compostella. In their return Ulpho fell sick at Arras, where he lodged with his wife and eight children, first in the street of the Lombards, but afterwards in the city, at the house of a clergyman or canon of our Lady's the cathedral, son of a nobleman named Bazentin, where, in the following century, Lewis XI lodged in 1477. He received the Viaticum and extreme unction from the hands of bishop of Arras, Andrew Ghini, a native of Florence. Bridget spared neither solicitude, pains, nor prayers for his recovery, and received assurance of it by a revelation. He was accordingly restored again to his health, and arrived in Sweden where he died soon after, in 1344, in the odor of sanctity, in the monastery of Alvastre, of the Cistercian order, which rule, according to some, he had embraced, though others say that he was only preparing himself for that state. At least his name is inserted in the menology of that order on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February.

Bridget being by his death entirely at liberty to pursue her inclinations as to the manner of life which she desired to lead, renounced the rank of princess which she held in the world, to take upon her more perfectly the state of a penitent. Her husband's estates she divided among her children, according to the laws of justice and equity, and from that day seemed to forget what he had been in the world. She changed her habit, using no more linen except for a veil to cover her head, wearing a rough hair-shift, and, for a girdle, cords full of knots. The austerities which she practiced are incredible; on Fridays she redoubled her mortifications and other exercises, allowing herself no refectio but a little bread and water. About the time of her husband's death, in 1344, she built the great monastery of Wastein, in the diocese of Lincopen, in Sweden, in which she placed sixty nuns, and, in a separate enclosure, friars, to the number of thirteen priests, in honor of the twelve apostles and St. Paul; four deacons, representing the four doctors of the church, and eight lay-brothers. She prescribed them the rule of St. Austin, with certain particular

constitutions, which are said to have been dictated to her by our Savior in a vision, but this circumstance is neither mentioned by Boniface IX in the Bull of her canonization, nor by Martin V in the confirmation of her order, and the popes, when they speak of this rule, mention only the approbation of the Holy See, without making any inquiry about any such private revelation. The diocesan is the superior of all the monasteries of this order situated in his diocese, but no new convent can be founded but with an express license and confirmation of the Pope. The chief objects of the particular devotion prescribed by this rule are the passion of Christ, and the honor of His holy Mother. In this institute, as in the order of Fontevrault, the men are subject to the prioress of the nuns in temporals, but in spiritual the women are under the jurisdiction of the friars; the reason of which is because the order being principally instituted for religious women, the men were chiefly admitted only to afford them such spiritual assistance as they want. The convents of the men and women are separated by an inviolable enclosure, but are contiguous so as to have the same church in which the nuns keep choir above the doxal, the men underneath in the church, but they can never see one another. The number of religious persons in each double monastery is fixed as above, but most of the great or double monasteries which were situated in the North, were destroyed at the change of religion, with that of Wastein, or Yatzen, which was the chief house of the order. There are two rich convents of nuns of this order at Genoa, into one of which only ladies of quality can be admitted. The greatest part of monasteries of Brigittines, or of the order of our Savior, which now subsist, are single, and observe not the rule as to the number of religious, or the subjection of the friars to the nuns. There are still some double monasteries in Flanders, one at Dantzic, about ten in Germany, and some few others.

St. Bridget had spent two years in her monastery at Wastein when she undertook a pilgrimage to Rome in order to venerate the relics of so many saints which are honored in that city, and especially to offer up her fervent prayers at the tombs of the apostles. The example of her virtue shone forth with brighter luster in that great city. The austerity of her watchings and penance, the tenderness of her devotion, her love of retirement, her fervor in visiting the churches, and in serving the sick in the hospitals, her severity towards herself, her mildness to all others, her profound humility, and her charity, appeared in all she did. Remarkable monuments of her devotion are still shown in the church of St. Paul and other places at Rome, and in its neighborhood. For the thirty last years of her life she was accustomed to go every day to confession, and she communicated several times every week. The frequent use of the sacraments kindled every time fresh ardor in her soul. Nothing is more famous in the life of St. Bridget than the many revelations with which she was favored by God, chiefly concerning the sufferings of our blessed Savior, and revolution which were to happen in certain kingdoms. It is certain that God, who communicates Himself to His servants many ways, with infinite condescension, and distributes His gifts with infinite wisdom, treated this great saint and certain others with special marks of His goodness, conversing frequently with them in a most familiar manner, as the devout Blossius observes. Sometimes He spoke to them in visions, at other times He discovered to them hidden things by supernatural illustration of their understandings, or by representations raised in their imagination so clearly, that they could not be mistaken in them; but to distinguish the operations of the Holy Ghost, and the illusions of the enemy, requires great prudence and attention to the just criteria or rules for the discernment of spirits. Nor can any private revelations ever be of the same nature, or have the same weight and certainty with those that are public, which were made to the prophets to be by them promulgated to the church, and confirmed to men by the sanction of miracles and the authority of the church.

The learned divine John de Turrecremata, afterwards cardinal, by order of the council of Basel, examined the book of St. Bridget's revelations, and approved it as profitable for the instruction of the faithful; which approbation was admitted by the council as competent and sufficient. It, however, amounts to no more than a declaration that the doctrines contained in that book is conformable to the orthodox faith, and the revelation piously credible upon an historical probability. The learned cardinal Lambertini, afterward Pope Benedict XIV, writes upon this subject as follows: "The approbation of such revelations is no more than a permission, that, after a mature examination, they may be published for the profit of the faithful. Though an assent of Catholic faith be not due to them, they deserve a human assent according to the rules of prudence by which they are probably and piously credible, as the revelations of B. Hildegardis, St. Bridget, and St. Catharine of Sienna." What is most of all praiseworthy in St. Bridget is, that in true

simplicity of her heart, she always submitted her revelations to the judgment of the pastors of the church, and deeming herself unworthy even of the ordinary light of faith, she was far from every glorying in any extraordinary favors, which she never desired, and on which she never employed her mind but in order to increase her love and humility. If her revelations have rendered her name famous, it is by her heroic virtue and piety that it is venerable to the whole church. To live according to the spirit of the mysteries of religion, is something much greater and more sublime than to know hidden things, or to be favored with the most extraordinary visions. To have the science of angels without charity is to be only a tinkling cymbal; but both to have charity, and to speak the language of angels, was the happy privilege of St. Bridget. Her ardent love of Jesus Christ crucified moved her to make a painful pilgrimage to visit the holy places in Palestine, where she watered with her pious tears the chief places which Christ had sanctified by his divine steps, and purpled with His adorable blood. In her journey she visited the most renowned churches in Italy and Sicily, with a devotion that excited all who saw her to fervor. Being returned safe to Rome, she lived there a year longer, but during that interval was afflicted with grievous distempers, under which she suffered the most excruciating pains with an heroic patience and resignation. Having given her last moving instructions to her son Birger, and her daughter Catharine, who were with her, she was laid on sackcloth, received the last sacraments, and her soul, being released from its prison of clay took its flight to that kingdom after which she had always most ardently sighed, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1373, being seventy-one years old. Her body was buried in the Church of St. Laurence in Panis Perna, belonging to the convent of Poor Clares; but a year after her death, in July 1374, it was translated to her monastery of Wastain in Sweden, by the procurement of her son Birger and St. Catharine. She was canonized by Boniface IX in 1391, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, and her festival is appointed on the day following. At the petition of the clergy and nobility of Sweden the general council of Constance examined again the proofs, and unanimously declared her enrolled among the saints on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1415. Her canonization was again confirmed by Martin V in 1419.

The life and sufferings of our divine redeemer are the book of life in which both souls which now begin to serve God, and those who have long exercised themselves in the most perfect practices of all heroic virtues, find the most powerful incentives and mean of spiritual improvement. The astonishing example which our most amiable and adorable savior here sets us of infinite meekness, patience, charity, and humility, if seriously considered and meditated upon, will speak a language which will reach the very bottom of our hearts, and totally reform our innermost affections and sentiments. That inordinate self-love and pride which by the contagion of sin seems almost interwoven in our very frame, will be beat down to the very ground; the poison of our passions, with which our souls are so deeply infected in all their powers, will be expelled by this sovereign antidote; and sincere compunction, patience, humility, charity, and contempt of the world will entirely possess our affections. The more a soul is advanced in the school of Christian virtues, the more feelingly she will find every circumstance in those sacred mysteries to be an unfathomed abyss of love, clemency, meekness, and humility and an inexhausted source of spiritual riches in all virtues. By this meditation she will daily learn more perfectly the spirit of our divine redeemer, and put on that blessed mind which was in Christ Jesus. In this interior conformity to Him consists the reformation and perfection of our inner man: this resemblance, this image of our divine original formed in us, entitles us to the happy portion of his promises.

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#### References:

- 1) Dom Prosper Gueranger, O.S.B. (2013). *The Liturgical Year: Volume XIV-Time after Pentecost Book Five*. Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publication.
- 2) Reverend Alban Butler (1883). *The Lives of the Saints* as republished by Loreto Publications: Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, 2020. Book Six, 136-144

Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses ([www.ciciams.org](http://www.ciciams.org) / [www.nacn-usa.org](http://www.nacn-usa.org)): to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at [www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka)