

St. Radegund

(Thuringia [modern Germany]/France) 518-587

*Queen of France Radegund cared for the poor, the sick and captives.
She founded a hospital for lepers, whom she waited on herself,
and was one day seen kissing their diseased bodies.*

(Patroness of the 1st Council of Catholic Nurses in the United States
founded in Boston in 1909)



St. Radegund (also known as [aka] Radegundes) was born in 518, probably in Erfurt, Thuringia, current day, Germany. She was a princess and the daughter of the King of Thuringia, Berthaire, a pagan, who was assassinated by his brother, Hermenefrid. In 531 Theodoric, King of Austrasia, and his half-brother, Clotaire I, King of Neustria, attacked Hermenefrid, vanquished him, and carried home a great booty. Among the prisoners was Radegund, who was twelve years old. King Clotaire received her as his booty, caused her to have a Christian education and had her baptized.

From the time of her baptism, she exhibited Christian virtue: fed the poor whom she personally served, and had a dedicated prayer and penitential life. She desired to remain a virgin but was required to marry King Clotaire. She fulfilled her duties of state while continuing her pious exercises. Her piety upset the king who stated he had married a nun rather than a queen, who had converted his court to a monastery. She bore these criticisms with patience and humility. She cared for the sick, poor and captives. She founded a hospital for lepers, whom she waited on herself.¹ When King Clotaire had Radegund's brother assassinated, in an effort to seize his holding in Thuringia, Queen Radegund begged his leave to retire from court, which he granted.

Radegund moved to Sais, an estate of the king in Poitou. She lived an austere life and gave almost her whole income to serve the poor. She had a monastery built in Poitiers, funded by the King, and overseen by a holy virgin, Agnes, the first abbess. When King Clotaire repented of having allowed his wife to leave court, he went, with his son, Sigebert, to retrieve her. Queen Radegund wrote the bishop of Paris, St. Germanus requesting his assistance. He interceded and the King repented of his intent and returned to court without Queen Radegund. She collaborated with Abbess Agnes to establish the rule of St. Caesarius of Arles at the monastery of the Holy Cross, where she lived with over 200 nuns, some of whom were daughters of senators and some of royal blood.

In the year 560 AD, Clotaire, who was the fourth son of Clovis the great (466-511), became the sole king of France. He repented at the tomb of St. Martin in Tours in the last year of his life. He is reported to have said at the last moments before his death, "How powerful is the heavenly king, by whose command the greatest monarchs of the earth resign their life!" King Clotaire died in 561 AD after reigning fifty years. His four sons divided the kingdom and Childebert, her grandson, following the death of his father and two uncles, served as a protector of his grandmother, Radegund, until her death on August 13, 587 AD. St. Gregory, Archbishop of Tours performed the funeral Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and interment.

At her funeral a blindman recovered his sight and many miracles occurred at her tomb. Her bones were enshrined in the Church of Our Lady in Poitiers, France until they were dispersed by the Huguenots. (Memorial - August 13).

St. Radegundes, Queen of France, from Rev. Alban Butler's (1883) *Lives of Saints* (*with permission* from Loreto Publications):

She was daughter of Bertaire, a pagan king of part of Thuringia in Germany, who was assassinated by his brother Hermenfred. Theodoric, or Thierry, king of Austrasia, or Metz, and his brother Clotaire I, then king of Soissons, fell upon Hermenfred, vanquished him, and carried home a great booty. Among the prisoners, Radegundes, then about twelve years old, fell to the lot of king Clotaire, who gave her an education suitable to her birth, and caused her to be instructed in the Christian religion and baptized. The great mysteries of our holy faith made such an impression on her tender soul, that, from the moment of her baptism, she gave herself to God with her whole heart, abridged her meals to feed the poor, whom she served with her own hands, and made prayer, humiliations, and austerities her whole delight. It was her earnest desire to serve God in the state of perpetual virginity; but was obliged at length to acquiesce in the king's desire to marry her. Being by this exaltation become a great queen, she continued no less an enemy to sloth and vanity than she was before, and she divided her time chiefly between her oratory, the church, and the care of the poor. She also kept long fasts, and during Lent wore a hair-cloth under her rich garments. Clotaire was at first pleased with her devotions, and allowed her full liberty in them; but afterward, by ambition and other passions, his affections began to be alienated from her, and he used frequently to reproach her for her pious exercises, saying, he had married a nun rather than a queen, who converted his court into a monastery. His complaints were unjust; for she made it one of the first points of her devotion never to be wanting in any duty of her state, and to show the king all possible complaisance. She repaid injuries only with patience and greater courtesy and condescension, doing all the good in her power to those who were her declared enemies in prepossessing her husband against her. Clotaire at length caused her brother to be treacherously assassinated, that he might seize on his dominions in Thuringia. Radegundes, shocked at this base act of inhumanity, asked his leave to retire from court, which she easily obtained. Clotaire himself sent her to Noyon, that she might receive the religious veil from the hands of St. Medard. The holy prelate scrupled to do it for some time, because she was a married woman; but was at length prevailed upon to consecrate her a deaconess.

Radegundes first withdrew to Sais, an estate which the king had given her in Poitou, living wholly on bread made of rye and barley, and on roots and pulse, and never drinking any wine; and her bed was a piece of sackcloth spread upon ashes. She employed almost her whole revenue in alms, and served the poor with her own hands. She wore next to her skin a chain which had been given her by St. Junian, a holy priest in that country, whom she furnished with clothes worked with her own hands. St. Radegundes went some time after to Poitiers, and there, by the orders of king Clotaire, built a great monastery of nuns, in which she procured a holy virgin, named Agnes, to be made the first abbess, and paid to her an implicit obedience in all things, not reserving to herself the disposal of the least thing. Not long after, king Clotaire, repenting that he had consented to her taking the veil, went as far as Tours with his son Sigebert, upon a religious pretense, but intending to proceed to Poitiers, and carry her again to court. She was alarmed at the news, and wrote to St. Germanus of Paris, desiring him to divert so great an evil. The bishop having received her letter, went to the king, and throwing himself at his feet before the tomb of St. Martin, conjured him, with tears, in the name of God, not to go to Poitiers. The king, at the same time, prostrated himself before St. Germanus, beseeching him that Radesgundes would pray that God would pardon that wicked design, to which he said he had been prompted by evil advice. The same lively faith which made the saint pass with joy from the court to a cloister, and from the throne to a poor cell, filled her with alarms when she heard of her danger of being called again to a court. Her happiness seemed complete when she saw herself securely fixed in her solitude.

Being desirous to perpetuate the work of God, she wrote to a council of bishops that was assembled at Tours in 566, entreating them to confirm the foundation of her monastery, which they did under the most severe censures. She had already enriched the church she had built with the relics of a great number of saints; but was very desirous to procure a particle of the true cross of our Redeemer, and sent certain clerks to Constantinople, to the emperor Justin, for that purpose. The emperor readily sent her a piece of that sacred wood adorned with gold and precious stones; also a book of the four gospels beautified in the same manner, and the relics of several saints. They were carried into Poitiers, and deposited in the church of the monastery by the archbishop of Tours in the most solemn manner, with a great procession, wax tapers, incense, and singing of psalms. It was on that occasion that Venantius Fortunatus composed the hymn, *Vexilla regius prodeunt*. St. Radesgundes had invited him and several other holy and learned men to Poitiers; was herself a scholar, and read both the Latin and Greek fathers. She established in her monastery of the Holy cross the rule of St. Caesarius of Arles, a copy of which she procured from St. Caesaria II, abbess of St. John's at Arles. She probably took that name from St. Caesaria, sister of St. Caesarius, first abbess of that house, who died in 524. She was her worthy successor in all her great virtues, no less than in her dignity; and her admirable sanctity is much extolled by Fortunatus. She excelled particularly in holy prudence, which, as St. Ambrose remarks, must be, as it were, the salt to season all other virtues, which cannot be perfect or true without it. St. Caesaria sent to St. Radegundes, together with the copy of this rule, an excellent letter of advice, most useful to all superiors and others, which has been lately published by Don. Martenne. In it she says that persons who desire sincerely to serve God, must apply themselves earnestly to holy prayers, begging continually of God that he be pleased to make known to them his holy will, and direct them to follow it in all things; that they must, in the next place, diligently hear, read, and meditate on the word of God, which is a doctrine infinitely more precious than that of men, and a mind which can never be exhausted; that they must never cease praising God, and giving him thanks for his mercies; that they must give alms to the utmost of their abilities, and must practice austerities according to the rules of obedience and discretion. She prescribes that every nun shall learn the psalter by heart, and be able to read; and she gives the strictest caution to be watchful against all particular fond friendships or familiarities in communities. St. Radegundes, not satisfied with these instructions, took with her Agnes, the abbess of her monastery, and made a journey to Arles, more perfectly to acquaint herself with the obligations of her rule. Being returned to Poitiers, she assisted Agnes in settling the discipline of her house.

In the year 560, Clotaire, who was the fourth son of Clovis the Great, became sole king of France, his three brothers and their sons being all dead. In the last year of his reign he went to the tomb of St. Martin at Tours, carrying with him very rich gifts. He there enumerated all the sins of his past life, and with deep groans, besought the holy confessor to implore God's mercy in his behalf. He founded St. Medard's abbey at Soissons, and gave great marks of a sincere repentance. Yet during his last illness, he showed great alarm and disturbance of mind at the remembrance of the crimes he had committed, and said in his last moments: "How powerful is the heavenly king, by whose command the greatest monarchs of the earth resign their life!" He died in 561, having reigned fifty years. His four sons divided his kingdom; Charibert, who reigned at Paris, had the Isle of France, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Poitou, Guienne, and Languedoc. Chilperic resided at Soissons, and enjoyed Picardy, Normandy, and all the Low Countries. Gontran was king of Orleans, and his dominions were extended to the source of the Loire, and comprised also Provence, Dauphine, and Savoy. Austrasia fell to Sigebert, and comprehended Lorraine, Champagne, Auvergne, and some provinces in Germany. Charibert lived but a short time; and the civil wars between Sigebert, married to Brunehault, and Chilperic, whose concubine was the famous Fredegonda, distracted all France. Childebert, son of Sigebert and Brunehault, after the death of his father, and two uncles Chilperic and Gontran, became sovereign of Austrasia, Orleans, and Paris and continued, as his father had always been, a great protector of St. Radegundes, and her monastery of the Holy Cross, in which she had assembled two hundred nuns, among whom were several daughters of senators, and some of royal blood. The holy foundress, amidst all the storms, that disturbed the kingdom, enjoyed a perfect tranquility in her

secure harbor, and died in the year 587, the twelfth of king Childebert, on the 13th of August, on which day the Church honors her memory. St. Gregory, archbishop of Tours, went to Poitiers upon the news of her death, and, the bishop of Poitiers being absent, performed the funeral office at her interment.

The nun Baudonivia, who had received her education under St. Radegundes, and was present at her burial, relates that during it a blind man recovered his sight. Many other miracles were performed at the tomb of this saint. Her relics lay in the church of our Lady at Poitiers till they were dispersed by the Huguenots, together with those of St. Hilary, in 1562. See her life written by Fortunatus of Poitiers, her chaplain; and a second book added to the same by the nun Baudonivia, her disciple. See also St. Gregory of tours, Hist. Fr. 1. 3, c. 4, 7, etc.. and 1. De Glor. Conf. C. 23. On her life compiled by Hildebert, bishop of Mans, afterward archbishop of Tours, who died in 1134, see Mabillon, Annual. At. 1, p. 298. Hildebert has borrowed every part of this history from Fortunatus and Baudonivia, but given a more elegant turn to the style. Obscure passages he has passed over. (Butler, Vol 5, p164-169)

References:

- 1) Herbert J. Thurston, S.J. & Donald Attwater (1956), *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Vol III. Notre Dame, Indiana, Christian Classics, 318-320.
- 2) Father Alban Butler (1883). *Lives of the Saints*. V.5. Re-published by Loreto Publications, Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire (2020). Vol 5. p 164-169.
- 3) *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed 20 May 2022.
<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04070a.htm>

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 / 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