

THE FIFTEEN 'OUR FATHER AND HAIL MARY PRAYERS'

Saint Bridget prayed for a long time to know how many blows Jesus Christ suffered during His terrible Passion. Rewarding her patience, one day he appeared to her and said: "I received 5480 blows upon My Body. If you wish to honor them in some way, recite fifteen Our Fathers and fifteen Hail Marys with the following Prayers, which I Myself shall teach you, for an entire year. When the year is finished, you will have honored each of My Wounds."

The prayers became known as the **Fifteen Oes**, because in the original Latin, each prayer began with the words *O Jesu, O Rex, or O Domine Jesu Christe*. Some have questioned whether Saint Bridget is in fact their author; Eamon Duffy reports that the prayers probably originated in England, in the devotional circles that surrounded Richard Rolle or the English Brigittines.

Whatever their origin, the prayers were quite widely circulated in the late Middle Ages, and became regular features in Books of Hours and other devotional literature. They were translated into various languages; an early English language version of them was printed in a primer by William Caxton. The prayers themselves reflect the late medieval tradition of meditation on the passion of Christ, and are structured around the seven last words of Christ. They borrow from artistic and Scriptural sources as well as the tradition of devotion to the wounds of Christ.

During the Middle Ages, the prayers began to circulate with various promises of indulgence and other assurances of supernatural graces supposed to attend from their regular recitation over the course of a year. These indulgences were repeated in the manuscript tradition of the Books of Hours, and may constitute one major source of the prayers' popularity in the late Middle Ages. They promise, among other things, the release from Purgatory of fifteen of the devotee's family members, and that they would keep fifteen living family members in a state of grace.

In 1651 the Brigitta Chapel was erected in Vienna, and in 1900 the new district Brigittenau was founded. In 1999 Pope John Paul II named St. Bridget as a patron saint of Europe. Her feast day is celebrated on 23 July, the day of her death. Her feast was not in the Tridentine Calendar, but was later inserted in the Roman Catholic calendar of saints in 1623 for celebration of 7 October, the day she was canonized by Pope Boniface IX in the year 1391. Five years later, her feast was moved to 8 October, where it remained until the revision of the Roman Catholic Calendar of Saints in 1969. Some continue to use the pre-1970.

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Saint Bridget of Sweden

Feast Day: October 8



Saint Bridget of Sweden

Religious, founder, Patroness of Sweden,
Mother of Saint Catherine, Co-Patroness of Europe

Saint Bridget of Sweden

*Birgitta Birgersdotter (1303—23 July 1373) was a mystic and saint, and founder of the Bridgettine Order after the death of her husband of twenty years. She was also the mother of a saint—Saint Catherine of Vadstena.

She is one of the six patron saints of Europe, together with Saint Benedict of Nursia, Saints Cyril and Methodius, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein).

LIFE

The most celebrated saint of Swede was the daughter of Birger Persson of the family of Finsta, governor and lawspeaker of Uppland, and one of the richest landowners of the country, and his wife, a member of the so-called Lawspeaker branch of the Folkunga family. Through her mother, young Birgitta was a relation of the Swedish kings of her lifetime.

In 1316, when she was 13 she married ULF Gudmarsson of the family of Ulvåsa, lord of Närke, to whom she bore eight children, four daughters and four sons. All of them survived infancy, which was very rare at that time. One of them was afterwards honored as St. Catherine of Sweden. Birgitta's saintly and charitable life soon made her known far and wide; she gained, too, great religious influence over her husband, with whom (1341-1343) she went on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

In 1344, shortly after their return, ULF died in the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra Abbey in Östergötland, and Birgitta then devoted herself wholly to religion.

It was about this time that she founded the Order of the Holy Saviour, or the Brigittines, of which the principal house at Vadstena was richly endowed by King Magnus Eriksson of Sweden and his queen.

About 1350 she went to Rome, partly to obtain from the pope authorization of the new order and partly in pursuance of her self-imposed mission to elevate the moral tone of the age. It was not until 1370 that Pope Urban V confirmed the rule of her order, but meanwhile Birgitta had made herself universally beloved in Rome by her kindness and good works. Save for occasional pilgrimages, including one to Jerusalem in 1373, she remained in Rome until her death on 23 July 1373. She was originally buried at San

Lorenzo in Panisperna before being moved to Sweden. She was canonized in the year 1391 by Pope Boniface IX, and confirmed by the Council of Constance in 1415. Because of new discussions about her works, the Council of Basel confirmed the orthodoxy of the revelations in 1436.

VISIONS

As a child, she had already believed herself to have visions; these now became more frequent, and her records of these "*Revelationes coelestes*" ("Celestial revelations") which were translated into Latin by Matthias, canon of Linköping, and by her confessor, Peter, prior of Alvastra, obtained a great vogue during the Middle Ages. Her Visions of the Nativity of Jesus had a great influence on depictions of the Nativity of Jesus in art. Shortly before her death, she described a vision which included the infant Jesus as lying on the ground, and emitting light himself, and describes the Virgin as blond-haired; many depictions followed this and reduced other light sources in the scene to emphasize this effect, and the Nativity remained very commonly treated with chiaroscuro through to the Baroque. Other details often seen such as a single candle "attached to the wall," and the presence of God the Father above, also come from Bridget's vision:

...the virgin knelt down with great veneration in an attitude of prayer, and her back was turned to the manger... And while she was standing thus in prayer, I saw the child in her womb move and suddenly in a moment she gave birth to her son, from whom radiated such an ineffable light and splendor, that the sun was not comparable to it, nor did the candle that St. Joseph had put there, give any light at all, the divine light totally annihilating the material light of the candle... I saw the glorious infant lying on the ground naked and shining. His body was pure from any kind of soil and impurity. Then I heard also the singing of the angels, which was of miraculous sweetness and great beauty...

After this the Virgin kneels to pray to her child, to be joined by St. Joseph, and this (technically known as the *Adoration of the Child*) becomes one of the commonest depictions in the fifteenth century, largely replacing the reclining Virgin in the West. Versions of this depiction occur as early as 1300, well before Bridget's vision, and have a Franciscan origin, by which she may have been influenced.

Her visions of purgatory were also well known.