



23. July 2022

Saint Bridget of Sweden

Gal 2:19-20

In fact, through the Law I am dead to the Law so that I can be alive to God. I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

In today's meditation, we want to get to know a little about St. Bridget of Sweden, whose feast we celebrate today. In speaking about her, we should also mention her daughter, St. Catherine of Sweden, whose memorial is celebrated on 24 March.

Here are some historical facts about St. Bridget.

Brigida (in Swedish Birgitta) was born in 1303 in Finstad, near Uppsala, of the noble Folkung lineage. The year of her birth was the same year in which Pope Boniface VIII and St. Gertrude of Helfta died. In 1316, Brigida married the nobleman Ulf Gudmarsson. Their happy marriage produced eight children, including St Catherine of Sweden. The death of her husband, whom she loved as her own heart, marked the great turning point in her life.

With the help of the Swedish king, around 1346 Bridget founded the first monastery of the The Bridgettines, also called the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, since Christ Himself is said to have communicated to St. Bridget the writing of the Rule and the instructions for the construction of the church. This order, founded primarily to atone for the sins of their nation and to venerate the Passion of Christ, was of great importance for the religious and literary culture of Northern Europe.

Obedying an inner voice, Brigid left for Rome in 1349. She spent the last 24 years of her life in Italy, working for the reform of the Church and striving (unfortunately in vain) to bring the Pope of Avignon back to Rome. From her youth, Bridget had received mystical experiences and revelations, which she wrote down in Swedish.

Her daughter, St Catherine of Sweden, had submitted to her father's wish for her to marry, despite having promised her virginity to the Lord. But she was able to resolve this conflict by convincing her future husband to live a Josephine marriage, i.e. without the acts of the spouses. She spoke to him with such conviction, enthusiasm and vigour about the angelic virtue of chastity that he too took - and kept - a vow of virginal purity. So they married, but from the beginning they lived together as brother and sister, in a life of deep piety, practising fasting and other mortifications and competing with each other in works of mercy. Since her husband died prematurely, St. Catherine was able to support her mother in all her labours and even became superior of one of her convents in Sweden. By then, her saintly mother had died in her arms after having made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Certainly the words of St. Paul that "it is Christ who lives in me" also apply to these two holy women: Bridget and her daughter Catherine. But they can also be realised in us, the deeper our inner union with the Lord becomes, so that his Spirit reigns in us, moulding and perfecting us.

Brigid was called by God at an early age to be his messenger, for her locutions and visions were of great importance both politically and to counteract the decline of the Church at that time. Her profound motherhood is reflected in her Meditations on the Passion, as well as in her vision of the birth of Christ with the Virgin Mary kneeling before the Child, which became significant for later depictions of the Nativity. Because of their religious content and symbolically rich expressions, St Bridget's revelations constitute the most important literary monument of the late Middle Ages in Scandinavia.

Let us listen to some of the sentences that God communicated to Bridget. One day he said to her:

"I am the Creator of the heavens and the earth. I have three qualities: I am most mighty, most wise, and most virtuous. I am namely so mighty that all the angels in Heaven honor me, the demons in hell dare not look upon me, and all the elements obey my command. I am also so wise that no one can fathom or understand my wisdom, and I have so great insight that I know all that has been and will come to be. I am thereto so rational that not the least little worm or any other animal, no matter how ugly it may seem, has been made without a cause. I am also so virtuous that all good flows from me as from a good spring, and all

sweetness emanates from me as from a good wine. Therefore, no one can be mighty, wise, or virtuous without me. (...)

First, I am the richest of all, for I give to everyone according to their needs but possess after this donation not less than before. Second, I am the most generous, since I am ready to give to anyone who prays with love for my mercy. Third, I am the wisest of all, since I know what is best for each and everyone. And fourth, I am charitable, since I am more ready to give than anyone is to ask.”