

16. October 2025

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

“Saint Hedwig: Purified by Suffering and Lover of the Poor”

With joy, I ventured to undertake this series on the lives of the saints in order to meditate on them and benefit from their example. But I did not know what awaited me, nor the wonderful people I would encounter. Through them, the life of Christ becomes so palpable that our own efforts seem insignificant in comparison to those they undertook to follow the Lord. Thus, their shining example teaches us humility.

What heroic saints have made and continue to make God's light shine in the world! They followed the Lord with such patience and perseverance, undaunted by the difficulties they encountered along the way! Through them, the Lamb of God has left an unforgettable witness imprinted on the firmament of the Church.

One of these great luminaries is the saint celebrated today according to the traditional calendar: Saint Hedwig, a German princess from Bavaria. She married Duke Henry of Silesia at the age of twelve and had seven children with him. Six of them, as well as her husband, died before her. The greatest pain she suffered was the loss of her son, Henry, who was destined to succeed his father. He died in battle against the Mongols. When they placed her firstborn son's body in her lap, it is said that she uttered the following prayer:

'I thank you, O Lord, for granting me a son like this, who in life always loved and showed me great respect, and never caused me the slightest displeasure. Although I would dearly love to see him alive, I am glad that by shedding his blood he is already with you, O God, in heaven.'

Saint Hedwig was much loved by her subjects and known for her generosity. She even learned Polish out of love for her people. She herself lived and ate very modestly and ascetically. She did not mind wearing worn-out clothes. In many ways, her life resembled that of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, who was in fact her niece.

According to the 'Legend of Hedwig', she was always surrounded by thirteen poor people, whom she took with her everywhere. When she arrived at a castle or inn, she would first take care of them, and on more than one occasion she offered them the good

food that had been prepared for her. This is why the saying among the courtiers was: 'It is better to eat like a beggar with the lady than at the lord's table.'

Her service to the poor was motivated by her deep love for Christ. Thus, charity and works of mercy filled her daily life. Contemplation was the source of her charity. Together with her husband, she founded a convent in Trebnitz that housed one hundred nuns and cared for eight hundred impoverished women.

Not seldom did she exert influence over her husband. In this regard, there is a beautiful example:

Once, during a military campaign, Duke Henry ordered a village to be burned, apparently without justifiable reason. Hedwig tearfully begged him to compensate those affected. When he replied that rebuilding the houses and returning the stolen livestock would suffice, she responded: 'Yes, my noble lord, you can restore the lost property, but how will you repair the tears that have been shed because of you? And how will you pay for the bitter suffering you have caused?'

Despite everything, her husband allowed her to lead a life hardly different from that of a strict religious order. After 22 years of marriage, Henry and Hedwig took a vow of abstinence.

There is not enough time to recount everything that Saint Hedwig, the patron saint of the Silesians, did for the people. As well as her love for the poor, she felt a deep reverence for priests and religious people, and encouraged all kinds of ecclesiastical works.

As with her niece, Saint Elizabeth, combining such an austere, God-centred life with the demands of a ducal court was not easy. Thus, she encountered much resistance, but thanks to her perseverance, she succeeded.

Following the deaths of her husband and son, Hedwig and her entire convent fled to Krossen. She spent the last years of her life there. On 16 October 1243, at the age of almost seventy, she died and was buried in the convent church. She was quickly venerated and miracles occurred at her tomb, leading to her canonisation by Pope Clement IV only twenty-four years later.

The prayer in her honour, contained in the traditional Roman Missal, clearly reflects the essence of her life and invites us to give ourselves unreservedly to God's love in the present time:

"O God, who instructed Blessed Hedwig to turn wholeheartedly from the pomp of this world to the humble following of Your Cross, grant that through her merits and by following her example, we may learn to despise the fleeting pleasures of this world and overcome all our adversities by embracing Your Cross."

Reflection on the Gospel of the Day: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-time-of-gods-forbearance-2/>