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THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

Blessed Christina of Stommeln: An ally in the fight against the Devil

Before delving into the life of this blessed woman, we will include an introductory note on the Beguines, the association to which she belonged and which experienced its heyday in the 13th and 14th centuries. The Beguines were pious women, either single or widowed, who lived together and cultivated a spiritual life. Unlike religious orders, the Beguines retained their possessions and made only temporary vows of obedience, renewing them each year. Therefore, these women could return to the world. They elected a "mistress" to run the house for one or two years. Despite the wealth that some of them brought to the community, the Beguines worked with their own hands to earn a living and lived simple, poverty-stricken lives. Beguine houses originated in Flanders (Belgium) and spread throughout Western Europe, although there were also "itinerant Beguines." Some houses adopted the rule of the Third Order of St. Francis or St. Dominic.

Conflicts with the clergy intensified, as many did not understand the Beguines' form of life. These tensions reached Rome, where German bishops succeeded in having the Beguines condemned. Subsequently, they were even persecuted and banned. Today, only a few Beguine houses remain in Flanders.

Despite the persecution they suffered, the Beguine association produced several saints. Today, we honor a blessed woman who lived among them and was particularly subject to attacks by evil spirits.

Blessed Christina of Stommeln was born in the thirteenth century near Cologne. At age thirteen, she requested admission to a Beguine convent. There, she led a very ascetic life. From a young age, she experienced mystical phenomena, such as ecstasy, during which she was completely immersed in the Passion of Christ.

She experienced intense temptations from the devil, who flattered her for the fervor she showed in her religious life and tried to convince her that if she committed suicide, she would quickly go to Heaven. From then on, the young Christina was repeatedly tempted to end her life by throwing herself into a well or removing the bandage after a medical bloodletting. Evil spirits constantly harassed her to do so immediately. However, Christina remained firm in her belief that this kind of death would be a sin, and she managed to overcome the temptation.

It may seem strange that someone as holy as Christina had to struggle for six months against such an obvious temptation and lie. The temptation to commit suicide is often related to the belief that one is no longer able to bear life and that the burdens are so heavy that, in desperation, one thinks one can free oneself from them in this way. It is probably not common for this temptation to be related to the hope of reaching Heaven soon, though it may occur in certain sects with erroneous religious beliefs.

In Christina's case, the temptation to commit suicide exploited her longing for God. When the devil attacks one's understanding and feelings, even a pure person like young Christina can be confronted with such absurd suggestions. Furthermore, we must always bear in mind that the saints also suffered such temptations in offering themselves for the liberation of others.

The Lord strengthened her, and Christina fought with all her strength. Therefore, we can ask her to help people who are confused by serious temptations, which have become a great plague today. In some countries, "assisted suicide" (euthanasia) is even presented as a socially accepted possibility for ending one's own life. The goal is to eliminate the natural and healthy fear of death and transform it into an act of mercy with a kind face. *Vade retro, Satana!*

Returning to Christina's story, her temptations continued. The devil wanted to incite her to intensify her already hard life of penance even more and suggested that she punish her body with thorns. This time, he appeared to her as St. Bartholomew, with whom she had a special relationship. However, the Spirit of God warned Christina not to exceed a certain measure in her asceticism. She again rejected the devil's insidious attacks, but not before hearing his accusations and threats that she would be killed for her disobedience and end up in hell. Christina's decisive response caused the devil to retreat for a time: *"You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. You cannot take my life because God is with me."*

Later, the devil continued to torment her, trying to prevent her from receiving Holy Communion. He appeared to her in the form of a snake or a toad and bothered her while she ate, among other things. During Lent, while she contemplated the Lord's suffering, the devil suggested that none of this was real. He tried to awaken her desire for a normal life, showing her a happy family and convincing her that such a life would be better than her miserable existence in the monastery. He even claimed that marriage had been ordained by God from the beginning and that those who lived in celibacy were deceived and heretical. Christina resisted again, so the devil threatened to spread a malicious rumor about her.

The blessed woman rejected many other temptations until the evil spirits finally left her alone. She was then able to lead her spiritual life in peace for another twenty-four years. I wanted to share this brief outline of her life—or rather, her spiritual struggle—because I want to count on Blessed Christina as an ally in the fight against the powers of darkness, and I also want to encourage you to fight this battle with the strength of Christ. Our deep devotion to the Lord may provoke the devil's wrath, and he may try to lead us astray from the path of holiness. However, God will strengthen us and keep these spirits at bay. In this way, we will help expand the Kingdom of God.

Blessed Christina, pray for us, that we may recognize and reject the devil's insidious attacks. *Vade retro, Satanas!* (Begone, Satan!)