



Balta Lelija

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THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS
St. Radegund of Thuringia

There is a rich array of saints to write about, and each time it is a profound experience to witness how God's grace reaches a person and leads them beyond themselves. They show us what becomes possible when one hears God's call and follows it. We must not assume that this was not also accompanied by struggles in which these people became aware of their own weakness. Yet they held fast to God, and thus the Lord was able to guide them and be glorified through them. It is moving when a person who holds a high social position is so deeply drawn to the holy faith that they do not shy away from performing the simplest—and often most difficult—acts of service toward their neighbor. Saint Radegund followed such a path and became a model for many other nobles to walk the way of Christ and to give their lives.

Radegund is the first queen to descend from the princely throne into a humble monastic cell to follow the poor Jesus in poverty; she is the first German princess upon whom monastic life exerted its wondrous influence, inspiring many crowned heads to follow her example. Born in 519, she was the daughter of Berthar, King of Thuringia, and was orphaned at an early age when her father was cruelly murdered by his brother Hermanfried out of a lust for power.

The Frankish king Chlotar I declared war on Hermanfried for breaking his word, killed him in 529 at the Battle of the Unstrut, and took the young Radegund away among other prisoners. Her extraordinary beauty captivated his heart so powerfully that he had her prepared for baptism through careful instruction and educated in the liberal arts, intending to elevate her to the throne as his wife. Radegund found great joy in her scholarly studies, but an even greater joy in Christian piety. Far from desiring to one day share the Frankish throne with the destroyer of her homeland and the murderer of her family, she longed instead for the martyr's crown for Jesus' sake.

But the king, who was likely unaware of her wish, made all the preparations for the wedding. The day before the ceremony, Radegund fled, but she was found and was then forced to marry Chlotar. She found ever deeper comfort in her faith and used her position to perform works of mercy.

When the king murdered her brother for unknown reasons, Radegund pleaded to be allowed to leave the court. After some time, Chlotar relented. She then fled to a bishop, whom she urgently begged to consecrate her as a nun; he did so upon recognizing her unyielding resolve. She then lived as a hermit in great austerity. Yet she had not yet found the place where she could live out the rest of her life in the Lord. The king regretted having let her go and sought to bring her back by force. She was forced to flee.

Radegund fled to Poitiers, seeking the protection of the right of asylum at the tomb of St. Hilarius. The king did not dare to violate this right of asylum; rather, he granted her permission and the means to build a convent there and to enter it herself.

Now her path was clear.

Radegund devoted all her energies to ensuring the stability of her beloved convent—both internally and externally—where she would live for another forty years until her death. The monastic community grew rapidly; after only a few years she found herself surrounded by two hundred sisters of various ranks and stations, including some from the highest nobility; yet her humility would not allow her to assume leadership of the convent herself. On her advice, Agnes—a young woman of exceptional intellect and heart whom she had raised—was elected abbess; the Church venerates her as a saint on May 13. For herself, Radegund strictly adhered to the position and duties of a simple nun, taking her turn in the kitchen, cleaning the cells and latrines, and carrying wood and water like the other nuns; she zealously continued her study of Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers, and remained the tireless caretaker of the poor and the sick.

Yet her humility was not strong enough to prevent her from being loved and honored by everyone, both inside and outside the convent, as the true superior; and she, too, loved the virginal community with all the fervor of a tender mother. When the many young nuns gathered around her, sweet expressions of her heart would often slip from her lips: “You are so dear to me, my precious children, that I no longer even think of having other relatives, or of having been married to a king: I live only for you—my daughters, you—my chosen ones, you—my young flowers that I have planted, you—the apples of my eye, my life, my peace, my happiness!”

A heavenly joy filled the holy queen when Emperor Justin II of Constantinople, in response to her earnest plea, presented her with a fragment of the Holy Cross of our Savior set in gold

and precious stones, along with a Gospel book and several relics. With extraordinary festivity she received the sacred objects and henceforth named her convent “The Monastery of the Holy Cross.” For this solemn occasion, the famous poet and holy priest Fortunatus—Radegund’s chaplain and almsgiver—composed the magnificent hymn “Vexilla regis prodeunt,” which was sung for the first time at this feast and has since been part of the Church’s Passion hymns during public worship.

St. Radegund ended her life with the same penitence with which she had lived all her years. She died on August 13, 587, and many miracles were reported at her tomb. She is a great saint who may intercede for our times, especially that those who hold high positions in human society may humbly submit themselves to God in order to make right decisions for the people.

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-last-step-2/>