

Educational Material – St. Bridget

Who was St. Bridget (Birgitta)?

Bridget lived 1303-1373. Both by her parents and her husband, she was in the politically leading circles of medieval Sweden. She experienced an inner struggle between the worldly life her position demanded and a thirst for a more simple, spiritual life. After becoming a widow in 1344, she broke off her worldly commitments, seeing herself a messenger from God. She had revelations, in which she had vocations from God, Christ, St. Mary to give messages to political as well as church leaders. The revelations were written down, enabling us to study them today.

Bridget was critical about worldly and spiritual leaders for surrendering their ideals, conducting immoral life styles and exploiting the poor. In order to urge for repentance, her revelations are filled with vivid and drastic descriptions of hell and doom awaiting those who not comply with the ethical principles she taught. The highest leaders, as the Pope and the Swedish king, already knew her and therefore listened to her - perhaps not always complying to her message.

"A true humility is to without regard to neither persons' opinions, praises, complaints, nor resistance, wandering the path of Jesus, not longing for prosperity but being like one of the simple people."

(St. Bridget)

Following Bridget - Our Saviour's Order

In 1349, Bridget went to Rome, in order to acquire papal permission to found an order. She sought to make the Pope return to Rome from the french town of Avignon, where the Popes for political reasons lived at the time.

Only in 1370 her order was approved, but not until after her death the convent/nunnery?? was built. The Swedish king donated an estate in Vadstena, where the convent was established. Bridget died July 23, 1373, and was declared a saint October 7, 1391 (celestial birthday). The order St: Bridget founded is Our Saviour's Order (Ordo Sancti Salvatoris). Elisabeth Hesselblad (1870-1957) made a great contribution in order to vitalize the order in our time. Nowadays, there is again a Birgittine community in Vadstena (from where they were expelled 1595).

Where is St. Bridget today?

St. Bridget is buried in the community church of Vadstena.

In the Finsta chapel of Uppsala cathedral, there is something rather unusual in a Lutheran church: a modern reliquary. In the late 1980's the cathedral received as a beautiful gift from the Birgittine sisters in Rome a relic from St. Bridget. This relic, a small piece of bone, is in the shrine dedicated to the memory of one of Sweden's most well knows citizens. The design of the shrine, as well as the cube surrounding it, has been inspired by the robe worn by the sisters (OSS). The five red points represent the five wounds of Christ: one in each hand, one in each foot, and one in the side.

Saints in the Church of Sweden

The reformer Martin Luther criticized the use of saints in the medieval Catholic church. The main argument was, that there is no need for any mediator between God and man. The faithful should direct their prayers not to the saints, but rather to God and Christ. However, the saints can be models to us. The saints are human beings that have reached a bit further, who can inspire us to a deeper commitment to our world and a deeper understanding of God's vocation to us. However, Lutheran churches do not appoint any people as saints.

“Show me, Lord, your way, and make me want to walk it.
Amen.”

(Prayer by Saint Bridget)