



*Series:* **SAINTS**

Texts: **outline from the works of saint Bridget of Sweden**

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# INDEX

<b>History of saint Bridget</b> .....	5
<b>Fifteen prayers</b>	
<i>The promises of Jesus to saint Bridget</i> .....	11
<b>The Brigidine Rosary</b> .....	35
<b>The prayers of saint Bridget to be recited for 12 years</b> .....	39
<b>Prayers of saint Bridget</b> .....	49
<b>Prayers</b> .....	53



# HISTORY OF ST. BRIDGET

She is an example to imitate, particularly in the task of the new evangelization in Europe (...) a saint of European dimensions (...) a prophetic sign of reconciliation and hope for the European continent and for the whole of humanity.

*John Paul II*  
*Apostolic Letter for the VI<sup>th</sup> centenary*  
*of the Saint's canonization (8.9.1999)*

Saint Bridget was born in 1303 of an aristocratic family at Finsta, a Swedish region of Uppland.

She is known essentially as a mystic and foundress of the Order of the Most Holy Saviour. We must not, however, forget that the first part of her life was that of a lay person, happily married to a devout Christian, and with eight children. My intention in presenting her as a co-patron of Europe is that she may inspire, not only those who have been called to a vocation of special consecration, but also those called to an ordinary lay life in the

world, and above all, to the demanding vocation to form a Christian family.

Let us not be misled by the well-to-do position of her family background, she lived with her husband Ulf, they lived a married life in which their love was united to deep prayer, the study of the Holy Scriptures and to a life of mortification and charity.

Together they founded a small hospital where they frequently assisted the sick. Bridget used to serve the poor personally.

At the same time she was appreciated for her educational gifts which she was able to use during the period that her services were requested by the court of Stockholm.

The advice she gave on various occasions to princes and sovereigns for the correct management of their duties was the fruit of these experiences. But the first ones to benefit from this were obviously her children, and not by chance, Catherine, one of her daughters, is venerated as a Saint.

However, this period of her life was merely a first stage.

The pilgrimage she made to Santiago di Compostela with her husband Ulf, ended symbolical-

ly this period and prepared her for the new life which began a few years later when, on the death of her husband, she heard the voice of Christ entrusting her with a new mission and guiding her step by step with a series of extraordinary mystical graces.

Bridget left Sweden in 1349 and settled in Rome, seat of the Successor of Peter. This move to Italy was a decisive stage for the widening of Bridget's mind and heart, not only geographically and culturally, but above all spiritually. Many places saw her as a pilgrim with a strong desire to venerate the relics of the Saints: Milan, Pavia, Assisi, Bari, Benevento, Pozzuoli, Naples, Salerno, Amalfi, and at the Sanctuary of St. Michael the Archangel of Mount Gargano.

Her last pilgrimage undertaken between 1371 and 1372 brought her to cross the Mediterranean directed to the Holy Land, thus allowing her to spiritually embrace, besides many places of Catholic Europe, the very sources of Christianity in those places made holy through the life and death of our Redeemer.

More than this devout pilgrimage, it was really through the deep meaning of the mystery of Christ

and the Church, that Bridget contributed to the building of the ecclesiastic community at a notably critical time in its history.

Her intimate union with Christ was in fact accompanied by special charisms of revelation which made her a reference point for many members of the Church of her time.


We perceive in Bridget the strength of prophecy. Her words are at times an echo of those of the Great prophets of old. She is sure of herself when she speaks to princes and Popes revealing to them God's plans on historical events. Neither does she spare severe warnings on the subject of moral reform for Christians and even for the clergy itself.

Certain aspects of her extraordinary mysticism at times provoked some understandable questions, about which the discernment of the church acted, by referring to the only public revelation, which has in Christ its fullness and in the Holy Scriptures its established norms. Even the experiences of the great saints are in fact not free from those limitations which always accompany the human reception of God's voice. There is no doubt, however, that the Church, by recognising the sancity of Bridget's holiness accepted the



overall authenticity of her interior experience, without at the same time, making any proclamations regarding each revelation.

She is a significant witness to how charism has its place in the Church when lived in total docility to God's Spirit and in conformity with the needs of the church. Particularly, as the Scandinavian countries, Bridget's homeland had, during the XVIth. century, separated themselves from full communion with the Holy Seat of Rome. The Swedish saint thus remains a special ecumenical "link", also made stronger by the commitment of her Order in this field.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johannes Paulus II". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a distinct flourish at the end.

*From the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II on the occasion of the proclamation of St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Catherine and St. Teresa Benedetta of the Cross, Copatrons of Europe (1.10.1999)*

