

## **ST BRIDGET OF SWEDEN, CO-PATRONESS OF EUROPE**

Today, July 23, the Church celebrates the feast day of St. Bridget of Sweden.

Born in 1303, when she was 13/14, Bridget married an 18-year old man named Ulf. They had eight children, of whom one was St. Catherine of Sweden. For once we have a saint rooted in the ordinary way of life. Her dedication to the study of the Scriptures enabled her to influence her family so much so that her family became a true “domestic church.” On account of his wife, Ulf learned to improve his character and he advance in the Christian life. Together with her husband, Bridget adopted the Rule of the Third Older of St Francis. She practiced works of charity towards the poor and the needy with great generosity and, she even also founded a hospital.

What I like about St Bridget is that he first period of her life demonstrates what we could define an authentic conjugal spirituality. We don't have many saints of this nature. Together, Christian spouses can follow a path of sanctity, supported by the grace of the sacrament of marriage. Many times, as it happened in the lives of St Bridget and Ulf, it is the wife who, with her religious sensibility can help the husband follow a path of faith. Just think of so many women who still today become torch bearers of their families with their testimony of Christian life. May the Spirit of the Lord fuel the sanctity of Christian spouses in our parish. Married couples can show the world the beauty of marriage lived by the values of the Gospel: love, tenderness, mutual help, fecundity in generating and educating children, openness and solidarity with the world around them and participation in the life of the Church.

The second period of Bridget's life began when she became a widow. Hence, Christian widows and widowers can also find in Saint Bridget a model to follow. After her husband died, Bridget renounced further marriage to deepen her union with the Lord through prayer, penance and further works of charity. She distributed her goods to the poor, and she established herself in the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra. Later, in 1346, she began the order of the Most Holy Saviour, also known as Bridgettines. Bridget's sanctity, characterized by the multiplicity of gifts and experiences, makes her an eminent figure in the history of Europe. Pope St John Paul II declared patron of Europe. Today I wish to invoke the powerful intercession of St Bridget on the married couples and the widows and widowers of the parish as she stands out a fitting patron to these.