

From Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2018:

**OCTOBER 7: BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN, *Mystic and Prophetic Witness*,  
1373**

Birgitta Birgersdotter came from a noble Swedish family and was born around 1302 or 1303. Early in her life she discerned a religious vocation, but was married against her will at the age of 13 to a member of the Swedish nobility. The couple had eight children. Brigid sought to live a holy, religious life. When her husband was absent, she openly practiced a strict asceticism, and when he was home, she did so secretly. Both she and her husband became members of the Franciscan Third Order which admitted laypeople.

From childhood, Brigid had experienced visions. Christ, Mary, and the saints spoke with her often in Swedish and shared with her warnings intended for others, which Brigid would write down or dictate to her confessor. Eventually these messages became increasingly political, which caused her great discomfort. Although Brigid enjoyed a good relationship with the royal family, she sharply criticized the king, becoming a symbolic leader for the aristocratic Swedish opposition.

Brigid advised popes and rulers throughout Europe, and criticized the extravagant lifestyles of the clergy, monastic orders, and laity, challenging four popes to return to Rome from Avignon. She also tried to persuade the rulers of England and France to negotiate peace and end the war that would later be called the Hundred Years' War. Because of her struggles, she was recognized throughout Europe as an uncomfortable counselor and a visionary.

After the death of her husband in 1344, Brigid devoted herself entirely to the religious life. The Order she founded, the Brigittines, was based on the revelations she had received earlier in her life. Her monastery would always have a women's and men's cloister next to one another, joined by a shared church, in which the monks, nuns, and laity would pray together. The abbess would be in charge of both the men's and women's cloister. To get papal approval for her order's founding, Brigid traveled to Rome. In 1370, Urban V recognized the new Order and allowed its foundation at Vadstena,

Sweden. Brigid was, in fact, not the first abbess there, but rather her daughter Catherine.

Except for several pilgrimages, Brigid remained in Rome for the rest of her life. She ministered to rich and poor, sheltered the homeless, and worked untiringly for the return of the pope from Avignon to Rome. In 1372, she was spurred by a vision to visit the Holy Land. On the return trip from Jerusalem Brigid fell ill and entered eternal life on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1373. In Sweden she is celebrated on October 7<sup>th</sup>, which is the anniversary of her canonization.

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I O God, who beholds all things and whose judgment is always mercy; by the example of thy servant Brigid of Sweden, give to us in this life the vision of thy Kingdom, where Jesus Christ is all and in all, that we may pattern our lives on things heavenly, where our lives are hidden with Christ in thee, O Father, who with him and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

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**Lessons and Psalm**

Sirach 51:13–22

Psalm 12

Matthew 11:2–11

*Preface of a Saint (1)*