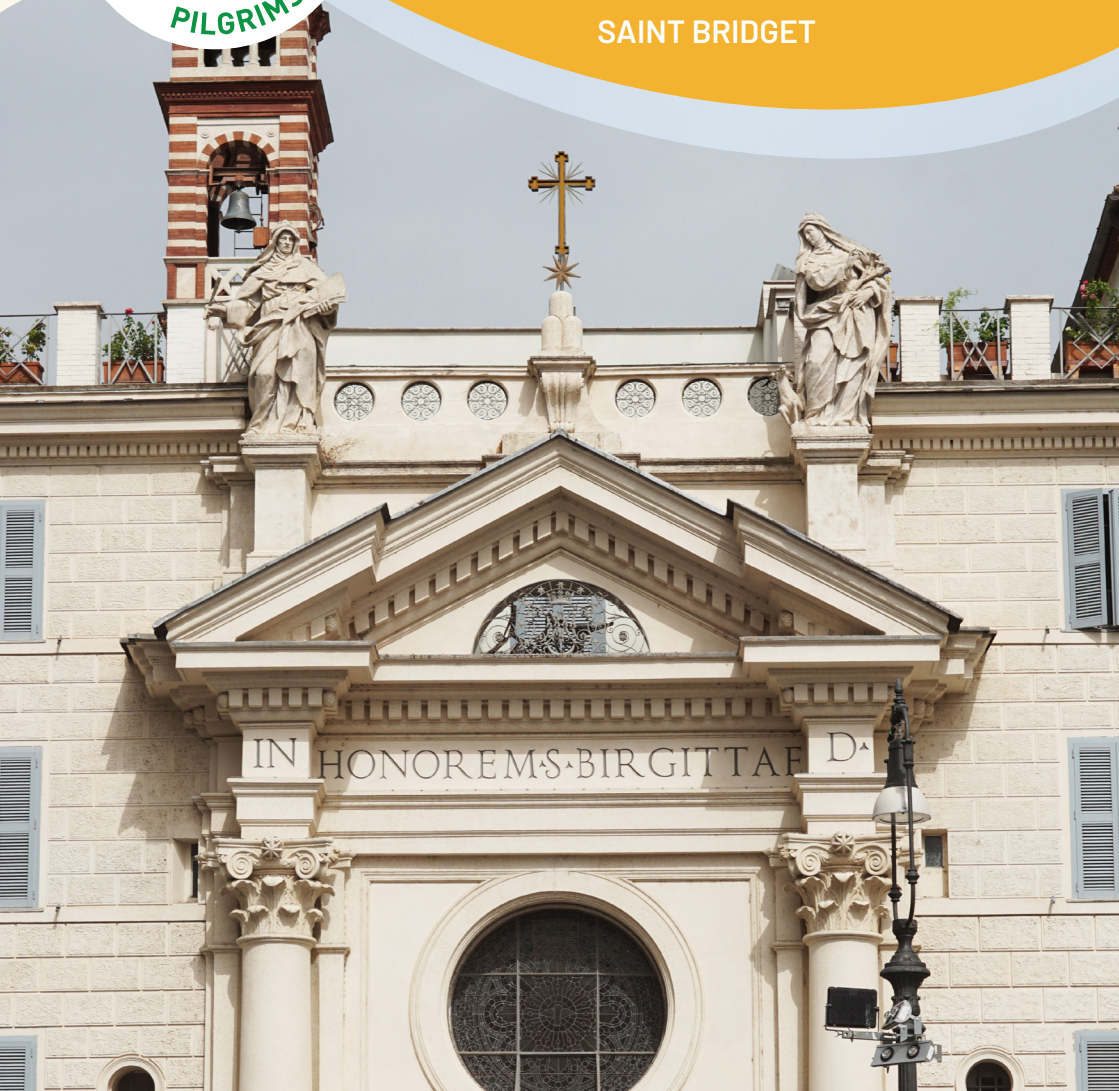




WOMEN PATRONS OF EUROPE AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

Church of
Santa Brigida

SAINT BRIDGET





DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION
SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD



MINISTERO
DEL TURISMO
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

WOMEN PATRONS OF EUROPE AND DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

Jubilee journeys

Church of Santa Brigida

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Section for Fundamental Questions
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4 themed routes to follow

The Jubilee is a great event for all people during which each and every pilgrim can immerse themselves in the endless mercy of God.

It's the Year of return to the essence of fraternity, mending the relationship between ourselves and the Father.

It's the Year that calls us to conversion, an opportunity to take stock of our lives and ask the Lord to direct them towards holiness. It's the Year of solidarity, of hope, of justice, and of commitment to the service of God, living in joy and peace with our brothers and sisters.

But, above all, the Jubilee year has at its center the encounter with Christ.

For this reason, the Jubilee asks us to get moving and to overcome the confines in our lives. When we move we don't just change place physically, but we transform ourselves too. For this reason, it's important to prepare well, to plan the route and



have a clear sight of our destination. In a sense the Holy Year pilgrimage begins before the journey itself: its starting point is the decision to do set out on the path.

To fully experience the 2025 Jubilee, through walking and prayer, four routes have been prepared for pilgrims within the city of Rome, each with its own theme.

Europe in Rome

The Pilgrim Path of the Churches of the European Union, includes visits to 28 churches and basilicas, historically linked to EU member countries for cultural or artistic reasons or because they served as places of welcome for pilgrims from individual member states of the European community.

Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches

Originally the idea of Saint Philip Neri in the 16th century, the pilgrimage of the Seven Churches is one of the most ancient Roman traditions. It's a 25 km route winding through the streets of Rome.

Jubilee Churches

This is one of the churches designated as a meeting place for pilgrims. Catecheses will be held in these churches in different languages to rediscover the meaning of the Holy Year. They will also offer the sacrament of Reconciliation and host events aimed at nourishing the faith with experiences of prayer.

Women Patrons of Europe and Doctors of the Church

This is a pilgrimage that involves stopping in prayer in those Roman Churches linked to Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Saint Brigid of Sweden, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, and Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

The Church of Santa Brigida in Campo de' Fiori

Reasons for a pilgrimage

Bridget, or Birgitta Birgersdotter, was born in Sweden, and died in a building located in Rome's Piazza Farnese in 1373, after having lived there for about 19 years.

Just as it was at the time of the conversion of the first Christians of Scandinavia by the Benedictine monk Oscar/Ansgarius, in the 9th century, so the relationship with Rome was decisive in this story too. St Bridget arrived in the eternal city on pilgrimage in 1349, ahead of the Jubilee of 1350.

In the first period of her life, she had lived with her heart entirely focused on her homeland. She married Ulf, the governor of an important district of the kingdom of Sweden, with whom she had eight children. Her house was a real «domestic church» and she was able to bring her husband ever closer to the Church and educate their offspring in the faith, indeed their daughter Karin/Caterina was also canonized. The spouses entered the Franciscan Third Order, the branch of the order established by Francis of Assisi for those who wanted to offer their lives and work as lay Christians in the world, retaining possession of goods and using money. The couple also founded a hospital to support trav-

elers and the poor.

After a pilgrimage to Santiago, the spouses took the decision to live the faith even more radically and thus they began a life of prayer and penance, linked to the Cistercian monastery of Alvastra. At the time of her husband's death, in 1344, Bridget decided not to remarry, but to live as a widow, offering her life to the Lord, as suggested by St Paul's letters.

In 1349 Bridget left Sweden, never to return, and travelled to Rome. (fig.1) She wanted the Pope to approve her plan, inspired by the Lord, to found a new religious order, dedicated to the Holy Savior, with a female and a male branch, both led by a single abbess. This detail shows the dignity of women, for Bridget was known as a spiritual mother in the Christian faith.

In Rome she lived as a widow, wearing a white veil on her head, together with her daughter Karin, accompanied by two confessors. Under their tutorage, she became one of the best educated women in Rome in the study of Sacred Scripture and theology, indeed she was better educated than most of the clergy of the time. She dedicated herself to the apostolate and to prayer, publicly intervening in the life of the city and its church. Like Catherine of Siena, she

urged the pontiffs, who were residing in Avignon at the time, to return to Rome, as the Lord wanted. St Catherine of Siena was younger than Bridget of Sweden, and they both died in the city, Bridget in 1373 and Catherine in 1380, because of their love for the Church of Rome.

From Rome, Bridget went on pilgrimage to many places, but above all to Assisi and to the Holy Land, which was her great dream.

Many Swedes residing in Rome, Scandinavian pilgrims, and Romans themselves, were struck by the power of her testimony and visited her continuously, so that her home became a powerhouse for the sharing of the faith.

Bridget arranged for her daughter to found a monastery in Vadstena where the sisters lived according to her rule, and Karin became the first abbess of the new order, although her mother must be considered its true founder, despite the fact that she never saw the new foundation with her own eyes.

Bridget had around 700 visions, of which 600 occurred in Rome, in the building where she lived and where her church now stands. In them Bridget dialogued with God himself, with the Virgin Mary and with the saints. John Paul II stated that her canonization does not mean that all of these visions must be accepted uncritically, but rather that the Church has verified «the overall authenticity of her internal experiences.»

To give a flavor of these visions, the painter Niccolò di Tommaso depicted the saint, while she was still alive, in 1373-1375, in a painting which is now in the Vatican Museums. In it she «sees» the Madonna kneeling before the Child Jesus to whom she has just given birth, saying: “My Lord and my God and my Son”.



fig.1

Bridget died in 1373, before the final return of Pope Gregory XI from Avignon to Rome. Initially she was buried in the church of San Lorenzo in Panisperna in Rome, but her relics were brought to Vadstena a year later by her children Birger and Karin who wanted her to be returned to her homeland. There, in Sweden, it is possible to venerate them event today, after they were hidden away during the Reformation which closed down the monastic foundation, preserv-

ing only the abbey church and demolishing the remaining structures.

The rebirth of the Vadstena monastery in modern times, as well as that of the Bridgettine complex in Rome, is due to a new Swedish saint who can be considered a 'second Bridget': Saint Mary Elizabeth Hesselblad, who was canonized by Pope Francis.

allowed to restore the Bridgettine Order in 1911, but with new constitutions which focused on the issue of ecumenism which was emerging at the time. It was in the house of St Bridget that Hesselblad held ecumenical prayer sessions and the house became the first home of the ecumenical magazine *Unitas*.

Visiting the church

Saint Bridget initially lived in Rome in a building where the Palazzo della Cancelleria now stands. But soon a Roman friend of hers, Francesca Papazuri, made the so-called Palatium Magnum available to her, a building that is today known as the Casa di Santa Brigida, which at the time did not have a church attached, and it was there that she lived for 19 years.

This medieval building had two floors, while the current one has five. Two rooms of the ancient palace where Bridget and her daughter Karin lived have been preserved, and both have now been transformed into chapels. In the corridor leading to the two rooms, Bridget's hair shirt and relics of her cloak are on display.

The original church was built just before the Reformation, in 1513, and soon, with the attached palace, became a refuge for fleeing Swedish Catholics.

(fig.2) The church was rebuilt from its foundations starting in 1705, and at the same time the entire palace was also rebuilt. The church has a single nave, and is decorated in baroque style, with the



fig.2

Having converted to Catholicism, she expressly requested to be allowed to spend the most serious phases of her illness in the house of St Bridget in Rome. When she was unexpectedly healed, she was

vault fresco painted by Biagio Puccini in the early 18th century showing the Apotheosis of St Bridget. The canvases on the walls are also by him and represent episodes from the life of the saint and some of her visions. (fig.3)

In the sanctuary area, on the right, is the tomb of St Mary Elisabeth Hesselblad, who can also be venerated from the cloister.

In the crypt of the church is the Chapel of St Catherine in honor of Bridget's daughter. Inaugurated in 1972, at the behest of Pope Paul VI, it is used by the Church of Sweden for evangelical Lutheran services.

Saint Bridget thus serves, even today, as a bridge uniting Rome and Sweden. This bond was strengthened when, in 1951, Sweden allowed the celebration of Catholic Masses outside embassies, again in 1982 when full diplomatic relations were established between the Holy See and Sweden and once more in the year 2000, when Lutheranism ceased to be the state religion.

Even today, the House of Saint Bridget and its church are like a «little Sweden» in Rome and the program of ecumenical

prayer held there promotes awareness of the common Baptism of all Christians, their common Trinitarian and Christological faith, and their common privilege of having recognized Christ as true man and true God - elements which are part of the same faith and could not exist without each other.



fig.3