

## Women of the Church Study Month 11

### St. Gertrude of Nivelles

St. Gertrude of Nivelles lived in present day Belgium in the 7th century, during a time when Christianity was not widespread. She was an abbess, who with her mother Itta, founded the Abbey of Nivelles. Her biography states that she was “an intelligent young woman, scholarly and charitable, devoting herself to the sick, elderly and poor”. She was also described as knowing much of Scripture by memory.

Gertrude was born into a family of wealth.. Her father, a nobleman, was part of a royal court. At a feast given by her father, and attended by the king, Gertrude (age 10) was asked if she would like to marry the son of a duke. Gertrude flatly rejected this offer and stated she would have no earthly spouse, but Christ the Lord. Shortly after her father’s death, Gertrude entered monastic life. The foundation of the above mentioned abbey stopped any suitors who might be interested in marrying her.

Gertrude became known for her devotion to scholarly and charitable works, and for taking care of orphans, widows, and pilgrims. She was known for her hospitality to pilgrims and her aid to missionary monks from Ireland. Gertrude was exceptionally pious. She is described as becoming exhausted by charity, fasting and prayer near the end of her short life.

The first miracle attributed to Gertrude was a miraculous vision in which she saw a flaming light at the altar of Pope Sixtus II, the Martyr, as she was standing in prayer. In the second miracle, she helped save two sailors, who called upon her, from a terrible storm and sea monster.

Most representations of St. Gertrude depict her as an abbess with mice, rats and cats. It is said the mice represented the souls in Purgatory for whom she had an intense devotion. There is not one single story which links her as the patroness of cats, but several legends. It is known that her nuns kept cats to control the rodent population. It was also said that the water from her abbey’s well would chase away rats and mice, just as cats would.

Gertrude is known as a patroness of cats, gardeners and travelers. Gertrude was not formally canonized; in 1677 Pope Clement XII declared her universal feast day to be March 17.

#### Resources:

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/93339/saint-gertrude-nivelles-patron-saint-cats-more-or-less>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrude\\_of\\_Nivelles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrude_of_Nivelles)

<http://www.catholictradition.org/Saints/nivelles.htm>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06533c.htm>

## Reflections

--St. Gertrude's life can be seen as a source of inspiration. She was pious, fasting and praying almost continuously. She was generous, giving land, building hospitals. She cared for others, tending to the needs of the poor. Gertrude had other options for her life, but she chose to be different in choosing to serve Christ.

-What about Gertrude's life was most inspiring? Why?

-In what ways might I become more "pious" in my spiritual life?

-What is it like to be "different" by serving Christ?

--St. Gertrude seemed to have a tremendous amount of faith throughout her life. Even as a ten year old child, she declined marriage, placing Jesus first over a secular life of wealth and nobility.

-What were some of the possible sources of Gertrude's strong faith that allowed her to make this choice, even as a child?

-From what sources do I draw my faith?

-When have I, or when might I, choose Jesus and his way, over the way of the world?

--St. Gertrude and her mother generously used their wealth and resources to assist and serve others. St. Gertrude took care of widows, orphans and pilgrims and was known for her work with the sick, elderly and poor, living in poverty herself.

-How can I be generous with my own resources?

-How can I help those around me in need?

-What can I "give up" for the good of others?

## Prayers and Devotions

--Lord, Let us be inspired by St. Gertrude of Nivelles. Let us have the kind of faith she did. Let us say no to distractions of the world. Let us be holy, even within our secular lives, placing you first in all things. Let us be generous to others, even when we can be wealthy ourselves. Let us be devoted to praying for others. Let us see and tend to the needs of others and the world around us, whether these be travelers, the ill or elderly, animals or the earth itself. In Jesus' name, amen.

Related Scriptures-

### **1 John 2:15-17**

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

### **1 Peter 1:15-16**

But as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

### **Philippians 2:4**

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

## **Romans 12:10**

Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.

--St. Gertrude of Nivelles, patron saint of cats, I ask you to pray that my sweet kitty(ies) always be content, energetic, curious, playful, and good-natured. I pray my cat(s) will be a joy to me and those I love. Carry my cat(s) to the throne of the Father and ask Him to bless my cat(s) with long life and great happiness.

<http://www.practicalprayers.com/prayer-st-gertrude-nivelles-cats/>

### **Practical Applications**

Practical applications related to St. Gertrude's life fit well into the Lenten season! She was an exemplary model of fasting, almsgiving and prayer through her piety, generosity and faith.

--There a variety of ways to "fast", as noted in Christian literature, messages and devotionals. Reflect upon something which would be hard, but good for you to give up; it might even be something you really want to give up. This could be traditional—like giving up candy—or it could be more contemporary or practical—like giving up making judgments of others! It might be helpful to put or do something in place of what you have given up—for example, fruit instead of candy, compliments instead of judgments. Think about the motivation behind the fasting; hopefully some type of spiritual meaning and benefit for you in your walk with the Lord can be discerned. Try this out for several days, or longer. Journal your feelings and progress.

--Many people find satisfaction and joy in giving to others, but sometimes it can be easy to lose sight of unique ways we can truly give. Choose a new way you can be more generous in your life. This may be generosity with money, material goods, time or talent (or a combination). You might give a gift card to a homeless person or buy a meal and deliver it to a family in need. You might donate pet supplies or food to a shelter (remember the cats in honor of St. Gertrude!!). You might tutor a student or offer some free babysitting. You might make cards for persons confined to their homes or you might write a prayer or poem for someone who needs encouragement. Decide upon a regular plan whereby you can be generous with one of these resources. Keep track of this plan and its results in your journal.

--Most of us find ourselves in need of more faith at times, especially during times of challenge of stress. We often see others struggling in their lives and in their own faith. Think about one way you can actively strengthen your faith. Then determine one way you can share this with others. After you have done this, then pursue efforts at strengthening your faith and helping others around you do that. This may be done in all kinds of ways by thoughts, words, and actions! It may include praying, talking, doing things. Consider including some of the spiritual disciplines/practices (eg—Scripture reading, meditation, solitude) or works of mercy into your plan. See the websites below for resources on these.

<https://www.learnreligions.com/what-are-spiritual-disciplines-712414>

[https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/top/church21/pdf/Spring\\_2009.pdf](https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/top/church21/pdf/Spring_2009.pdf)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual\\_practice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_practice)

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-corporal-works-of-mercy.cfm> and <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy.cfm>