

In Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall*, a fence separates two neighbors. On the left side is a man who believes "good fences make for good neighbors." At night, he comes and adds more stones to the fence to make sure his neighbor will not cross the property line. On the right side of the fence the other neighbor questions the value of the fence. He understands that a fence may be necessary to keep cows from grazing on the property of another, "but here there are no cows."ⁱ The neighbor on the right would like a better relationship and feels the best way to mend the wall is to take it down all together. Sometimes we need to build bridges to become better neighbors.

October 16th is the Feast of Saint Hedwig. In one Polish city, a statue of the saint stands next to a monumental bridge. Hedwig helped the Salesian people to become good neighbors and come together even though they may have lived in different countries. Her loving example and holy life helped to build a bridge between the Germans, the Poles, and the Czech people.

Hedwig lived in the 12th and 13th centuries. After receiving a solid Christian education at a convent in Bavaria, she married Duke Henry I and became the Duchess of Silesia. After their seventh child was born, Duke Henry and Duchess Hedwig took a mutual vow of chastity.ⁱⁱ "Choicest of blessings is a modest wife, priceless her chaste soul. A holy and decent woman adds grace upon grace; indeed, no price is worthy of her temperate soul" (Sirach 26: 15-16). Seeing the value in helping others, the Duke and Duchess helped to build hospitals and promote Catholicism throughout the region.

Hedwig took her Christian faith very seriously. Prayer, meditating on Sacred Scripture, and receiving Holy communion were very important to her. "In her own household she had scripture read aloud during mealtimes."ⁱⁱⁱ She lived a simple life: she fasted, ate plain food, and lived with few personal possessions. Instead of spending money on herself, she used wealth to serve those most in need. One possession that she held onto at all times was a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. When she encountered the sick, she would bless them with it, and some received miraculous healing.

When her children had grown, she devoted her time and energy to helping others through spiritual and corporal works of mercy. She opened the castle to shelter the sick and disabled. The poor, the sick, the hungry, the widows, the orphans, and expectant mothers all knew they could turn to her with their needs. "Unlike other princesses of the time, Hedwig helped people with her own hand, and not through her servants"^{iv} She offered a mother's love and attention to the poor.

Jesus tells us that we should visit those in prison as a good corporal work of mercy. Hedwig did much more than merely visit. She helped those in debtor's prison to be freed by paying their debts. She sought pardons for some and tried to lift the death sentences of others. She used her position as a duchess to seek justice for the oppressed.

As a widow, she lived in a monastery in the latter years of her life. Her daughter Gertrude was the Abbess of the Cistercian nuns at Trebnitz. Although she lived like a nun, Hedwig did not take religious vows. She used her wealth to support the monastery. Saint Paul advises us to pray without ceasing. Hedwig was known for locking herself in the chapel to pray all night long.

When Saint Hedwig died in 1243, she was buried with the statue of Mary that she always carried with her. "Images and statues of Saint Hedwig usually depict her holding a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, feeding the poor, or holding a church."^v

Jesus asks, "Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God" (Luke 12:6). Like God, Saint Hedwig noticed the less fortunate and responded to their corporal and spiritual needs. Let us pray to be just as observant and just as responsive to the needs of our neighbors. In doing so, we can build bridges and help to mend divisions.

ⁱ www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44266/mending-wall

ⁱⁱ <https://mycatholic.life/saints/saints-of-the-liturgical-year/october-17-st-hedwig/>

ⁱⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/news/this-princess-saint-was-not-harry-potters-owl-st-hedwig-of-silesia-16538

^{iv} Ibid

^v Ibid