

THE BLESSED VIRGIN BRIGID, ABBESS OF KILDARE
(From Lives of Saints for Young People, Volume 5)

Saint Brigid lived at the time when Christ's Holy Church was just being revealed in Ireland. In those days, the country was still wild and many of the kings and warriors were brutal and cruel.

The power of God's Grace to change people and even whole lands, was shone forth in this holy saint. For, St. Brigid is remembered above all else for her holy love, compassion and charity. By her Christ-like example, she taught kings to be merciful, the greedy to be charitable and the pagans to seek Christ.

Brigid was born in the year of our Lord 436, at Tirconnell, Ireland. Her mother was a slave, her father, the master. Before St. Brigid was born, her mother was sold to a different master, a pagan magician. Brigid's mother was a Christian, strong in the faith, and she strove to raise her child according to the Gospel.

Soon after St. Brigid's birth, the magician moved to the province of Connaught, taking his household with him. Here, Brigid's mother, whose name was Broiksech, became close to the Christian Bishop, Mel. St. Brigid herself was raised under the careful and loving eye of this holy bishop, and she grew strong in the Lord under the guidance of her elder.

Very early in life, St. Brigid showed special gifts of God's Grace, and several people were healed of illnesses through her pure prayers. Moreover, the saint was a hard worker, and she did every task to the glory of God. The people of the district had a special reverence for this blessed child, because of her open-hearted love for everyone and every creature.

Now, in the old Irish law, if a master bought a slave woman who was expecting a child, he bought only the mother. and the child- when it was born, was free. When the saint grew older, she wanted to go to visit her father, Dubthach, who lived in the province of Munster. The magician agreed to help her make the journey, and she went to her father's house. To her great joy, St. Brigid soon brought her father to a true

understanding of the Gospel of the Holy Church. The blessed maiden worked on her father's estate, and continued to struggle in fasting and prayer.

Once, the council of the bishops of Ireland was to be held in the town of Moy Liffey in nearby Leinster province. A woman in St. Brigid's neighborhood had some need to take her problems to the bishops for their advice and help, and she asked St. Brigid to go with her on the journey. There was a certain holy bishop named Ibhair at the council, and it was revealed to him by God's Spirit that a blessed maiden was coming to the council. When St. Brigid entered the council room; Bishop Ibhair rose to his feet and glorified God. "This is the Mary whom I foresaw," he said. Then, he blessed and consecrated the chosen maiden.

Shortly after this, St. Brigid went to visit her mother, who was still in slavery. The mother was very ill, but she still had to work hard in her master's dairy. The young saint took over her mother's duties, and with her hard work and prayers, the dairy soon began to produce more butter than ever before. St. Brigid had a custom of always dividing the butter into thirteen portions, one each commemorating the twelve Apostles, and a larger portion in honor of Christ the Savior. This last portion, she always gave away to the poor people in the area. Soon, the magician and his wife heard of these things and they came to look over their dairy. They saw that it was now clean and well run. The calves were in good health, and there was much butter being sold every day. The magician's wife, however, out of greed, demanded of Brigit that she fill a large container with butter then and there, so the mistress could take it home with her. There was only a small quantity of butter left at that time, for the saint had given the extra butter away to the poor people. The magician's wife became angry and began to mock and scold her. At this, the saint brought what butter there was in the churn, and began to pray to God, making the sign of the Cross upon herself and upon the butter. The merciful Lord heard the prayers of his servant, and when she began to take the butter out of the churn, there was more than there had been. Indeed, by God's miracle, there was even more than was needed to fill the container.

When the magician saw this, he was amazed. He asked to be taught about this Christ Whom St. Brigid and her mother adored. Moreover, he set St. Brigid's mother free. After he had been taught the Christian Faith, the magician and his whole

household were baptized into Christ's Holy Church, and he gave away the cows and the dairy to the poor, and completely changed his way of life.

St. Brigid returned to her father's house, and though he loved her, he was often angry with her. The saint was in the habit of giving away something to every beggar or poor person who asked for help. In this way, Brigid was giving away all her father's food, property and wealth. In despair, St. Brigid's father took her to the fortress of King Dunlaing of Leinster, and asked him to take her into his service as a worker. It was the law in those days that no one could carry his sword into the king's house. So, when Dubtach started to enter the king's house, he took off his sword and gave it to St. Brigid to hold, until she was sent for.

"Where is my sword?" he asked in alarm. "Father, a poor leper came and asked help of me. I had no gold, so I gave him your sword, that he might sell it."

St. Brigid was brought before the king, and her father angrily told him what had happened with the sword. The king asked in surprise: "Why do you take your father's wealth, and even his sword, and give it away?" St. Brigid replied: "The Virgin's Son knows. If I had your power and wealth and all of Leinster, I would give it all to the Lord of the poor."

The king was amazed. Then Brigid boldly told him and all those present about the Gospel of Christ and the life God commands of all those who would obtain the Heavenly Kingdom. The king glorified Christ because of the love and compassion of His Saint, and sent her away in peace.

Not long after this, a certain man came and asked for the hand of Brigid in marriage. Her father was happy to give her away, and the family encouraged her to marry the man. He was wealthy and had a good reputation, and everyone thought that he would be a good husband. The saint, however, had already decided to become a nun. She replied to all, "The Son of the Virgin knows. Nothing is good for us if it harms our souls."

St. Brigid soon went down to the cathedral at Telcha Mide, to Bishop Mel, her

Elder, with eight other virgins to be tonsured. When they came to church on the day of their tonsure, St. Brigid, out of humility, stood at the end of the line, thinking to herself that the others were all more worthy than she. When Bishop Mel saw the merciful saint standing last of all, he called her forth, and said: "Blessed are the least, for they shall be first." He tonsured St. Brigid first and set her over the rest as abbess. She later founded the convent at Kildare.

For many years, then, St. Brigid struggled and guided her nuns. God granted her many gifts of grace. People from across the whole country came to the saint for healing, comfort and for help.

The saint knew and often helped the great apostle, Saint Patrick in his tireless labor of enlightening Ireland. St. Brigid was charity and mercifulness. The number of the poor that she fed is known only to God, and she saved many from prison and death.

St. Brigid lived for eighty-eight God-pleasing years. As the time of her repose drew near, Bishop Nin, called by the people, "The Pure-Hand," arrived. He came to visit St. Brigid, and found her near death. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy and gave her the Holy Communion. Soon after, the saint gave up her holy soul into the hands of Christ the Savior, to Whom be all glory and adoration, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

The great St. Columba (Colum-cille), who was the apostle to the Scots in Scotland, when he was sailing to his monastery on the isle of Iona, was caught in a great storm. He called upon Christ and His Saint Brigid to calm the storm, and his prayers were answered. After that, he wrote an ode to the saint, from which the following troparion is composed:

Pure virgin and flame of the lord, Brigid, guide to the Eternal Kingdom. deliver us, by thy prayers, from the throngs of demons and the storms of life, and pray to Christ God that our souls be saved.

IRISH SODA BREAD

(St. Brigid's Bread)

Makes 1 loaf.

Ingredients:

2 cups flour

2 Tablespoons sugar

1 ½ teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

2 Tablespoons chilled butter

¾ – 1 cup buttermilk

½ cup currants

Sift the dry ingredients (flour, sugar, baking powder and soda, salt) together into a bowl.

Cut butter into flour mixture until butter is split pea size

Add buttermilk and mix thoroughly into a soft, biscuit-like dough

Stir in ½ cup currants.

Knead on lightly floured board for about 3 minutes or until smooth

Form into a flat round. Place on greased cookie sheet. Cut a cross ½ inch deep in the center. Brush with milk.

Bake at 350 for 40 minutes or until knife or cake tester comes out clean. Cool on Wire rack.

