

Daily Saints - 19 November



Saint Mechtilde of Helfta: also known as Mechtilde of Hackeborn-Wippra
Mechtilde of Hackenborn, Mechtilde of Magdaburg, The Nightingale of Helfta

Feast of Saint Mechtilde of Helfta

Born: c.1241, Helfta, **Died:** 19 November 1298, Helfta, **Venerated in** Roman Catholicism, **Attributes:** Scales and a Sword, heart, book, and dove

Patron saint against blindness (one well-known miracle was healing the blindness of a nun).

Mechtilde was born in 1240 or 1241 at the ancestral castle of Helfta, near Eisleben, Saxony. She belonged to one of the noblest and most powerful Thuringian families. So fragile was she at birth, that the attendants, fearing she might die unbaptized, hurried her off to the priest who was just then preparing to say Mass. He was a man of great sanctity, and after baptizing the child, uttered these prophetic words: "What do you fear? This child most certainly will not die, but she will become a saintly religious in whom God will work many wonders, and she will end her days in a good old age."

When she was seven years old, her mother took her to visit her elder sister Gertrude, who was a nun in the monastery of Rodardsdorf. She became so enamored of the cloister that her pious parents yielded to her entreaties and, acknowledging the workings of grace, allowed her to enter the aluminate. Here, being highly gifted in mind as well as in body, she made remarkable progress in virtue and learning.

Ten years later (1258) she followed her sister, who, now abbess, had transferred the monastery to an estate at Helfta given her by her brothers Louis and Albert. As a nun, Mechtilde was soon distinguished for her humility, her fervor, and that extreme amiability which had characterized her from childhood and which, like piety, seemed hereditary in her race. While still very young, she became a valuable helpmate to Abbess Gertrude, who entrusted to her direction the aluminate and the choir.

Mechtilde was fully equipped for her task when, in 1261, God committed to her prudent care a child of five who was destined to shed luster upon the monastery of Helfta. This was that Gertrude who in later generations became known as St. Gertrude the Great. Gifted with a beautiful voice, Mechtilde also possessed a special talent for rendering the solemn and sacred music over which she presided as Domna cantrix. All her life she held this office and trained the choir with indefatigable zeal. Indeed, Divine praise was the keynote of her life as it is of her book; in this she never tired, despite her continual and severe physical sufferings, so that in His revelations Christ was wont to call her His "nightingale".

In her revelations, Christ, the Virgin, and other members of the hierarchy of heaven enter as living realities. She is particularly fond of the angels, whom she loves to picture as the associates of men on earth and in heaven. The Lord would say to Mechtilde: "Everything you have and by which you can please me you have from me and through me."

In one extraordinary vision, she perceived that "the smallest details of creation are reflected in the Holy Trinity by means of the humanity of Christ because it is from the same earth that produced them that Christ drew his humanity."

One of the visions recounted by Mechtilde states that Jesus having appeared to her, commanded her to love Him ardently and to honor His Sacred Heart in the Blessed Sacrament as much as possible. He gave her His Sacred Heart as a pledge of His love, as a place of refuge during her life, and as her consolation at the hour of her death. From this time Mechtilde had an extraordinary devotion to the Sacred Heart, and she received such great graces from It that she was accustomed to saying that if she had to write down all the favors and all the blessings which she had received by means of this devotion, a large book would not contain them.

In one vision, Mechtilde received the heart of Jesus. When she asked Him how to greet Mary, He told her to hail Mary's "virginal heart." Mary appeared numerous times to the saint, including one time when she revealed her heart inscribed with letters of gold, "Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee!"

Mechtilde reported that Jesus said, "In the morning let your first act be to greet My Heart and to offer Me your own. Whoever breathes a sigh toward Me, draws Me to himself." Opening to her the wound of His most gentle heart, He said to her: "Consider how great is my love: If you want to know it well, you will not find it expressed more clearly anywhere than in the Gospel. No one has ever expressed stronger or more tender feelings than these: As my Father has loved me, so have I loved you (John 15:9)".

Richly endowed, naturally and supernaturally, ever gracious, beloved of all who came within the radius of her saintly and charming personality, there is little wonder that this cloistered virgin should strive to keep hidden her wondrous life. Souls thirsting for consolation or groping for light sought her advice; learned Dominicans consulted her on spiritual matters. At the beginning of her own mystic life, it was from St. Mechtilde that

St. Gertrude the Great learned that the marvelous gifts lavished upon her were from God.

Only in her fiftieth year did St. Mechtilde learn that the two nuns in whom she had especially confided had noted down the favors granted her, and, moreover, that St. Gertrude had nearly finished a book on the subject. Much troubled at this, she, as usual, first had recourse to prayer. She had a vision of Christ holding in His hand the book of her revelations and saying: "All this has been committed to writing by my will and inspiration; and, therefore you have no cause to be troubled about it." He also told her that, as He had been so generous towards her, she must make Him a like return, and that the diffusion of the revelations would cause many to increase in His love; moreover, He wished this book to be called "The Book of Special Grace "because it would prove such to many. When the saint understood that the book would tend to God's glory, she ceased to be troubled and even corrected the manuscript herself. Immediately after her death, it was made public.

Saint Mechtilde and Saint Gertrude perceived Jesus' heart as the breast of a mother. Just as a mother gives milk to nourish her child, so Jesus in the Eucharist gives us his lifeblood.

Mechtilde was distressed over her eternal salvation and prayed that the Most Holy Virgin would assist her at the hour of death. The Blessed Virgin appeared to her and reassured her, saying: "Yes, I will! But I wish, for your part, that you recite three Hail Marys every day, remembering in the first the power received from the Eternal Father, in the second the wisdom received from the Son, with the third one the love that has filled the Holy Spirit". The Blessed Virgin taught her to pray and to understand especially how the Three Hail Marys honor the three persons of the Blessed Trinity.

Mechtilde died on November 19, 1298, with Gertrude in attendance. As she lay dying, she prayed earnestly to Mary for the nuns of her convent. Mary and Jesus are said to have appeared to her, and Jesus placed about her neck a necklace of sparkling gems.