

**Homily for the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women  
Awards for the Women of Distinction**

**Memorial of St. Bridget of Sweden | July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 AD**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

It is good to be here with all of you, members from parishes all around our diocese of the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. What a joy it is to see so many of you here filling our Cathedral to celebrate those to be awarded the title of “Woman of Distinction.” I give thanks to each of you for your generosity, your faith, and your love which have brought the members of your parish to name you for this award, and I give thanks to God for the way that His grace and goodness have been made visible in your lives and how your fidelity to Him has born such abundant fruit for His Kingdom.

We have for our meditation today the beautiful example of St. Bridget of Sweden. Along with only a few other women in the Communion of Saints, St. Bridget was given the gift of receiving from God the call to both the vocation of marriage as well as religious life. Born around 1303, she was married at a young age to Ulf Gudmarsson, a nobleman of Sweden. They were blessed with eight children, though they lost two of them during pregnancy or infancy. I know many of you have suffered the loss of a child through miscarriage or

later on in your child's life, and St. Bridget is for us a beacon of hope in the midst of that suffering, both in her prayerful perseverance in carrying that cross, and in the blessedness that she now enjoys with all things made good in the Lord.

Bridget was renowned for her generosity. She had been born in a wealthy family and remained in a high class of her society after marriage, but this abundance turned her heart all the more to works of charity. In particular, her love was given to the unwed mothers and their children that were prevalent in her city at that time. In this, she is a tremendous example to all of us. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the dignity of women and the gift of motherhood are now no longer under the legal attack that they were in our country since 1973, but in our State of Illinois, the identity and gift of being a woman sadly is now under even greater assault. Abortion, and the culture of death that comes with it, are still enshrined as a fundamental right here in Illinois. Of course, this is an attack on the goodness of every woman in our state, but above all it attacks and degrades women who are pregnant, especially those who are poor, alone, unwed, young, and in minority groups in our communities.

How horrible that the abuse and trauma of abortion are above-all unleashed on women who are already suffering the most! Our response to

these women must be the same abundant generosity and love shown by St. Bridget. Caring for them, loving their babies, helping them to find the relationships and friendships that can carry them into the highest of feminine joys: that of being a mother.

Many of you, today, have your husbands by your side. Bridget and Ulf, in 1341, went on pilgrimage along the Camino to Santiago de Compostela. I hope that your travels here today were less arduous than the trek they made from Sweden to Spain! Yet, in a similar way, in all the ways that you and your husband, together, make your pilgrimage through this life, you emulate the prayerfulness and faithfulness that Bridget and Ulf lived out in their marriage. This is an often-forgotten call of married life: to pray together for your family, your parish, and our world, and to seek together the Kingdom of God here and now, and in eternity.

You have been entrusted to each other not just for the “good times and bad” of this life, but to truly seek the highest good of union with God. Men and women pray in different ways, and have a natural capacity for different virtues and gifts, but these differences are precisely for the sake of building each other up in God’s grace and complementing the gifts that God has given you through your spouse.

Now, however, we turn to the second half of Bridget's life, and the second vocation that God entrusted to her feminine love. In 1344, shortly after returning from that pilgrimage, Ulf died, sending Bridget into the loss, uncertainty, and mourning that some of you here have faced in your own life. The one that she had known for so long, and lived so much of her life with, was now gone. The pain and emptiness of a loss like this is almost impossible to express, but Bridget stands for us as an example of bringing that anguish to God. Only in God can we face death, and through tears, still find hope. Bridget was brought in this period nearer to the suffering Heart of Christ than ever before, and gradually began to hear the Lord's call to turn her lifelong charism of charity into a religious community. It would officially be called the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, though these groups of men and women dedicating their lives to love of the poor would quickly be popularly known as Bridgettines.

In 1350, in another providential connection to our own time, Bridget and her first followers did not hesitate to go on pilgrimage to Rome during the Jubilee year, quickly showering love and care on those suffering from the plague that was then ravaging the continent. Today our world remains ravaged by COVID-19. Praise the Lord we face fewer casualties than at first,

but so many people are still spiritually suffering the effects of the isolation, fear, and mistrust that have damaged the fabric of our society and torn so many from the practice of their faith. Like Bridget, we are called to charity in the face of sickness, to risk our lives for the eternal good of our neighbors, friends, and family.

I know many of you already live lives of great generosity and witness to Christ, but St. Bridget stands before us today as a particular exemplar of a woman who gave herself to God through her life as a wife, mother, and self-consecration, and who found in Him joy unto eternity. Let us not be afraid of running out of God's love if we give ourselves in these, and other ways. He is the vine, and as long as we remain united to Him, we need not fear anything that this world can inflict upon us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.