

Saint Gertrude of Helfta

Part 1

1256 - 1302

PURGATORY

Saint Gertrude of Helfta, known as the Great, was born in Eisleben (Thuringia) in 1256. At the age of five she entered the monastery of the Cistercian nuns of Helfta (Saxony). At the age of 25, on January 27, 1281, she had her first mystic experience. She put into writing all that was occurring in her soul. In 1284 she received the invisible stigmata. At the age of 45, shortly before dying, she had also the transverberation of her heart. She had a tender devotion for the humanity of Christ. Gertrude already understood the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She died in 1302.

Her mystic experiences were numerous, among them the one of a soul of Purgatory. One day Gertrude was praying for a person who died a short time earlier and saw his soul like a toad that was burning on the inside for the sins he committed. It seemed that he had an internal pain and an enormous weight was forcing him to remain bent down to the ground, without being able to get up again.

Gertrude understood that he appeared under the shape of a toad because during his religious life he had neglected to think about divine matters. She also realized that the pain that was tormenting him internally was due to the work that he had done without the permission of his superior and of which he had hidden the earning. In this way he expiated his disobedience. Then Gertrude recited the Psalms in supplication for that soul and asked Jesus whether he had benefited from it: "Certainly, the souls in

Purgatory are lifted up by such supplications, but also brief prayers that are said with fervor are of even greater benefit for them."

During the last moments of her life before dying, Gertrude had to suffer a terrible temptation from the devil. Satan reprehended her for having performed sacrifices and good works to benefit just the souls of Purgatory, accusing her of having much neglected herself by having abandoned the way of perfection. He instilled in her the doubt of having wasted time in unnecessary and useless things and of having been irresponsible in not applying the merits of her sufferings for the salvation of her soul. The devil said to her: "Who do you think you are and who made you offer the daily prayers and your sacrifices for the souls that you do not even know? You will immediately repent bitterly of your mistake and I will have enjoyment of this. You shall see that you will truly pay for this mistake."

Gertrude remained very troubled and began to doubt of having mistaken everything in life, due to the pains that she would have to face after the judgment. But the Lord appeared and said to her: "My daughter, why do you trouble yourself? You must know that your charity towards others has been very dear to me and for this now I free you from all the sufferings to which you were destined. Since I promised a great recompense to those who offer themselves for the salvation of their brothers and sisters, I will multiply your joy one hundred times in Heaven.



All the souls that you have saved will come to meet you shortly to lead you to Paradise."

