

Saint of the Month for November 2013

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Margaret of Scotland
Saturday, November 16

Saint Margaret was born about 1045, probably in Hungary. She was brought up in the Hungarian court where her father, Edward, was in exile (from England). After 1066 and the Battle of Hastings, her widowed mother and her siblings fled with her to Scotland for safety.

She considered a religious life, but changed her mind; she captivated Malcolm III Canmore; he was king of Scotland from about 1057 or 1058 to 1093. They were married in 1070 at the castle of Dumferline; she was twenty-four years old. Life in the Scottish court was rather rough, and Margaret made big efforts to make it more genteel. Butler says “he (Malcolm) was rough and uncultured but his disposition was good, and Margaret, through the great influence she acquired over him, softened his temper, polished his manners, and rendered him one of the most virtuous kings who have ever occupied the Scottish throne.” Not bad!

Margaret worked wonders also with her adopted country, “promoting the arts of civilization and encouraging education and religion.” She worked to remove abuses in the Church, and moved to promote the observance of Sundays, festivals, and fasts, and to obtain good priests for the country. She formed an embroidery guild among the court ladies to provide vestments and other items for the Church.

Margaret and Malcolm were blessed with six sons and two daughters, some of whom led notably good lives. Margaret brought them up with great care, and instructed them herself in the Christian faith and managed their studies.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of her life outside the family was her care for the poor. She visited the sick and erected hostels for strangers, and did much more; this was not a transitory phase of her life, but an aspect that characterized that life in general.

Malcolm was slain near Alnwick, Northumberland (in modern day England) in 1093, when King William Rufus surprised the castle and put its garrison to the sword. In the resulting hostilities Malcolm was killed by treachery, along with his son Edward. Margaret died only four days later. She was canonized by Pope Innocent IV in 1250, and named the patroness of Scotland.

The commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial. (**Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Butler’s Lives of the Saints, 2nd Edition** (Ave Maria Press); **Magnificat**, November 2013; **Encyclopædia Britannica, 15th edition**.)

Collect from the Mass of Saint Margaret of Scotland:

O God, who made Saint Margaret of Scotland wonderful
in her outstanding charity towards the poor,
grant that through her intercession and example

we may reflect among all humanity
the image of your divine goodness.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

Saint Margaret of Scotland was certainly characterized by an abiding interest and love of the poor, in an era when there wasn't a hint of a "safety net" established by any law. She had riches and influence, but took on a humble demeanor to serve those in economic trouble. Saint Margaret of Scotland, pray for us to have compassion toward the poor in economic terms and in spiritual terms!

Note on saints' days: over the centuries many saints have had their celebrations moved, often more than once. There are only so many days in the year, and some seasons (like Lent and the beginning of Easter) generally have fewer saints' commemorations than, say, Ordinary Time. The Church has sometimes offered more than one saint on a given day, as for example Saint Margaret of Scotland, who shares November 16 with Saint Gertrude.

The celebration of a given saint might be on different days depending on what country you are in. Saint Margaret has been honored on November 16 in Scotland, but June 19 and then June 10 and now November 16 elsewhere!