

Saint Christina the Astonishing

Patroness of the mentally ill. Saint Christina the Astonishing (also known as Saint Christina Mirabilis) lived her life to please God, not man. Many considered her to be insane. There is an element of strangeness that caused her to live a life of poverty and loneliness in the eyes of the world.

Her story (from Butler's Lives of the Saints): "Christina was born at Brusthem in the diocese of Liege, in 1150, and at the age of fifteen was left an orphan, with two elder sisters. When she was about twenty-two Christina had a seizure, was assumed to be dead, and in due course was carried in an open coffin to the church, where a Mass of requiem was begun. Suddenly, after the Agnus Dei, Christina sat up, soared to the beams of the roof, and there perched herself. Everyone fled from the church except her elder sister, who, though thoroughly frightened, gave a good example of recollection to the others by stopping till the end of Mass. The priest then made Christina come down (it was said that she had taken refuge up there because she could not bear the smell of sinful human bodies). She averred that she had actually been dead; that she had gone down to Hell and there recognized many friends, and to Purgatory, where she had seem more friends, and then to Heaven. This was only the beginning of a series of hardly less incredible occurrences. Christina fled into remote places, climbed trees and towers and rocks, and crawled into ovens, to escape from the smell of humans [she could smell sin]. She would handle fire with impunity and, in the coldest weather, dash into the river, or into a mill-race and be carried unharmed under the wheel. She prayed balancing herself on the top of a hurdle or curled up on the ground in such a way that she looked like a ball. Not unnaturally, everyone thought she was mad or 'full of devils,' and attempts were made to confine her, but she always broke loose...

She lived by begging, dressed in rags, and behaved in a terrifying manner. The last years of her life Christina passed in the convent of St. Catherine at Saint-Trond, and there she died at the age of seventy-four. Even while she lived there some who regarded her with great respect. Blessed Mary of Oignies had regard for her, the prioress of St. Catherine's praised her obedience, and St. Lutgardis sought her advice."

Feast day: July 24



Prayer to Saint Christina the Astonishing:

St. Christina, you lived a life of poverty and loneliness in the eyes of others. But you knew that in the eyes of God, you were wealthy and had His love and the companionship of saints and angels. Help us to see beyond the things of the world and to realize we are never alone with God and that we are surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses that have gone before us." Pray that we remember to offer up our sufferings for those who do not see beyond the material and who are seeking love and fulfillment, that they may come to know God and realize that they are never alone. Amen.