

Saint Dymphna

Her Life, with Devotions in her Honour.

By a devotee.

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SAINT DYMPHNA. Patroness of those afflicted with nervous and mental disorders.

ISLE OF SAINTS has long been a title popularly given to the island evangelised by Saint Patrick, which nestles in the blue waters of the Atlantic. And appropriately it is so called, for the names of Irish saints would more than fill the Church's calendar. Yet Catholics for the most part are entirely unfamiliar with so many of these glorious saints. One such forgotten or unknown saint, who, on account of her spotless virtue and glorious martyrdom, is sometimes referred to as the 'Lily of Eire', is Saint Dymphna. True, the records of the life and martyrdom of this holy virgin are for the most part meagre and unsatisfactory, but sufficient is known regarding the principal facts of her life and of her many well-authenticated miracles to attest to an exalted sanctity.

Favoured by nature and grace.

Dymphna was born in the sixth century, when Ireland was almost entirely Catholic. Yet, strange to say, her father, a petty king of Oriel, was still a pagan. On the other hand, her mother, a descendant of a noble family, was a devout Christian, remarkable both for her piety and her great beauty. Dymphna, like her mother, was a paragon of beauty and a most sweet and winning child, the 'jewel' of her home. Every affection and attention was lavished upon her from birth.

Heaven, too, favoured the child with special graces. Dymphna was early placed under the care and tutelage of a pious Christian woman who prepared her for baptism, which was conferred by the saintly Father Gerebran or Gerebernus. (After his martyr death, he is venerated as a Saint.) The latter, who seems to have been a member of the household, later taught little Dymphna her letters along with the truths of religion. Dymphna, a bright and eager pupil, advanced rapidly in wisdom and grace.

When still very young, Dymphna, like so many other Irish maidens before and after her, being filled with fervour and love for Jesus Christ, chose him for her divine Spouse, and consecrated her virginity to him and to his blessed Mother by a vow of chastity.

Sorrows and trials.

It was not long, however, before an unexpected cloud overshadowed the happy childhood of the beautiful girl. Her mother died and Dymphna shed many secret tears over this bereavement. At the same time, however, she found great comfort in her faith, which already had taken deep root.

Dymphna's father, too, was in mourning for his deceased wife for a long time. Many believe his grief drove him insane. At length he was persuaded by his counsellors to seek solace in a second marriage. So he commissioned certain people of his court to search for a woman who would be like

his first spouse in beauty and character. After visiting many countries in vain, the messengers returned, saying that they could find none so charming and amiable as his own lovely daughter, Dymphna. Giving ear to their base suggestions, the king conceived the evil design to marry Dymphna. With persuasive and flattering words, he manifested his purpose to her. As may be expected, Dymphna was greatly horrified at the suggestion; but to avoid incurring her father's wrath by outright refusal, she asked for a period of forty days in which to consider the proposal. She had recourse to Father Gerebran immediately. He advised her to flee her native country and since the danger was imminent, to make no delay.

With all speed, therefore, Dymphna set out for the Continent, accompanied by Father Gerebran and the court jester and his wife. After a favourable passage, they landed on the coast near the present city of Antwerp in Belgium. Having stopped for a short rest, they resumed their journey and came to a little village named Gheel (Geel). Here they were hospitably received and began to make plans for making it their permanent residence.

In the meantime, the king discovered Dymphna's flight. Filled with rage, he set out with his followers in search of the fugitives. After some time they were traced to Belgium, and their place of refuge was located. At first Dymphna's father tried to persuade her to return with him; but Father Gerebran sternly rebuked him for his wicked intentions.

Whereupon he gave orders that Father Gerebran should be put to death. Without delay, his wicked retainers laid violent hands upon the priest and struck him on the neck with a sword. With one blow of the steel, the head was severed from the shoulders, and another glorious martyr went to join the illustrious heroes of Christ's kingdom.

Martyred by her father.

Further attempts on the part of Dymphna's father to induce her to return with him proved fruitless. With undaunted courage, she spurned his enticing promises and scorned his cruel threats. Infuriated by her resistance, the father drew a dagger from his belt and with his own hand struck off the head of his child. Recommending her soul to the mercy of God, the holy virgin fell prostrate at the feet of her insanely raving father. Thus, the glorious crown of martyrdom was accorded to Saint Dymphna in the fifteenth year of her life, on the fifteenth day of May, between 620 and 640. The day of her death has been assigned as her feast-day.

The records of Dymphna's life and death say that the bodies of the two martyred saints lay on the ground for quite some time after their death, until the inhabitants of Gheel removed them to a cave, which was the customary manner of interment in that part of the world at the time. But after several years had elapsed, the villagers, recalling their holy deaths, decided to give the bodies a more suitable burial. When the workmen removed the heap of black earth at the cave's entrance, they were astonished to find two beautiful tombs, whiter than snow, which were carved from stone. When the coffin of Saint Dymphna was opened, there was found lying on her breast a red tile bearing the inscription: 'Here lies the holy virgin and martyr, Dymphna.' The remains of the saint were placed in a small church. Later, necessity obliged the erection of the magnificent 'Church of Saint Dymphna' which now stands on the site where the bodies were first buried. Saint Dymphna's relics repose there in a beautiful golden reliquary.

Patroness of the mentally afflicted.

Miracles and cures began to occur in continually increasing numbers. Gradually Saint Dymphna's fame as patroness of victims of nervous and mental disorders was spread from country to country. More and more, mentally afflicted persons were brought to the shrine by relatives and friends, many coming in pilgrimages from far-distant places. Novenas were made and Saint Dymphna's relic was applied to the patients. The remarkable cures reported caused confidence in the saint to grow daily. At first, the patients were lodged in a small annex built onto the church. Then gradually it came about that they were placed in the homes of the families living in Gheel.

From this beginning, Gheel developed to become a town world-famed for its care of the insane and mentally afflicted. An institution called the 'Infirmery of Saint Elizabeth', conducted by the Sisters of Saint Augustine, was later built for the hospital care of the patients. Most of the patients, after some time spent in the institution, are placed in one or other of the families of Gheel, where they lead a comparatively normal life. Every home in Gheel is proud to welcome to its family circle such patients as are ready to return to the environment of family life. Generations of experience have given the people of Gheel an intimate and tender skill in dealing with their changes. Their remarkable spirit of charity and Christ-like love for these afflicted members of society is a lesson to our modern-day world, so prone to put its whole reliance on science and to forget the principles of true Christian charity.

Renowned psychiatrists testify that a surprisingly large number of patients could leave mental institutions if they could be assured of a sympathetic reception in the world, such as the people of Gheel take pride in showing. In fact, psychiatrists state that institutions can help certain cases only to a given extent; and when that point is reached, they must have help from persons outside if the progress made in the institution is to be permanently effective. Gheel is the living confirmation of this statement and an exemplar of the gospel teaching on charity.

DEVOTIONS IN HONOUR OF SAINT DYMPHNA.

LITANY IN HONOUR OF SAINT DYMPHNA.

For private use only.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Christ, hear us.
Christ, graciously hear us.

God the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.
God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
God the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, virgin and mother of God, pray for us.
Health of the sick, pray for us.
Comfortress of the afflicted, pray for us.
Help of Christians, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, virgin and martyr, pray for us.
Saint Dymphna, daughter of royal parents, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, child of great beauty of soul and body, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, docile to the lessons of your pious mother, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, obedient to your saintly confessor, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, who abandoned the court of your father to escape the danger of impurity, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, who chose a life of poverty on earth so that you might lay up treasures in heaven, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, who sought strength and consolation in Holy Mass, Holy Communion and prayer, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, ardent lover of the divine Bridegroom, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, devoted to the Mother of God, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, beheaded by your own father, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, martyr of holy purity, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, brilliant example of Christian youth, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, renowned for many miracles, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, glory of Ireland and Belgium, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, full of compassion for those in need, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, protector against all nervous and mental disorders, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, consoler of the afflicted, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, friend of the helpless, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, comforter of the despondent, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, light of those in mental darkness, pray for us.

Saint Dymphna, patroness of those who suffer from nervous and mental diseases, pray for us.

That we may love the Lord our God with all our hearts and above all things, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may hate sin and avoid all its occasions, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may carefully preserve the virtue of purity according to our state, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may receive the sacraments frequently, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may obtain the spirit of prayer, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may be humble and obedient, resigning ourselves to God's holy will, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may learn to have confidence in God during our affliction, we beseech you, hear us.

That we may obtain the grace of final perseverance, we beseech you, hear us.

In moments of temptation, we beseech you, hear us.

In times of sickness, diseases, war, and persecution, we beseech you, hear us.

In our last illness, we beseech you, hear us.

At the hour of death, we beseech you, hear us.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Versicle. Pray for us, Saint Dymphna.

Response. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O God, since You gave Saint Dymphna to Your Church as a model of all virtues, especially holy purity, and willed that she should seal her faith with her innocent blood and perform numerous miracles, grant that we who honour her as patroness of those afflicted with nervous and mental illness, may continue to enjoy her powerful intercession and attain eternal life. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

PRAYER FOR CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL.

O God, who led the holy virgin and martyr Saint Dymphna through danger and trial to her glorious crown in heaven, help us through her intercession to trust in You in all the afflictions and trials of our own lives, and by accepting Your will, to ascend from the darkness of this life to the eternal glory of heaven. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER IN ANY AFFLICTION.

Compassionate Saint Dymphna, who restored health and soundness of mind to so many through the power of your heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, behold me (or mention the person afflicted) in this suffering. Trusting in your powerful intercession, I beg you to ask Jesus, the merciful Healer of the sick, to restore me (or . . .) that, helped by this grace I (he, she) may serve Him better and promote devotion to you together with the many others who have experienced your help. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father...

PRAYER IN TEMPTATIONS AGAINST PURITY.

Lord Jesus Christ, Who has willed that Saint Dymphna faithfully preserved the robe of innocence and purity, valiantly resisting all the allurements of evil passions, help me, too, O Lord, to overcome all temptations against purity and to remain steadfast in love of Christ, in order to preserve this great gift of God. Implore for me the grace of perseverance in prayer, distrust of myself, and flight from the occasions of sin, and finally the grace of a good death, so that in heaven I may be happy with God for all eternity. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THOSE AFFLICTED WITH MENTAL ILLNESS.

Lord Jesus Christ, Who has willed that Saint Dymphna should be invoked by thousands of clients as the patroness of nervous and mental diseases and has brought about that her interest in these patients should be an inspiration to and an ideal of charity at her great shrine and throughout the world, grant that, through the prayers of this youthful martyr of purity, O Lord, those who suffer from nervous and mental illness everywhere on earth may be helped and consoled. I recommend to You in particular . . . (here mention those you wish to pray for).

Be pleased to hear the prayers of Saint Dymphna and of Your blessed Mother, Health of the Sick and Comfortress of the Afflicted, in behalf of those whom I recommend to the love and compassion of Your Sacred Heart. Give them the consolation they need and especially the cure they so much desire, if it be Your will. May we all serve Your suffering members with a charity that may merit for us the reward of being united forever in heaven with You, Our Divine Head, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

O God, we beg You through Your servant, Saint Dymphna, who sealed with her blood the love she had for You, her eternal Spouse, to grant relief to those in our midst who suffer from mental afflictions and nervous disorders.

Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.
