

**Saint Catherine of Sweden
(Karen of Vadstena)**

Born: c.1331, Uppland, Sweden

Died: 24 March 1381, Vadstena, Sweden

Catherine was the favourite daughter of Bridget of Sweden (23 July), one of the most important women of the Middle Ages. The widowed Bridget left for Rome in 1350 to observe the Jubilee Year. Appalled at the corruption she found there, Bridget felt compelled to stay and work for Church reform. She begged Catherine to join her. Catherine left her ailing husband in Sweden, and upon reaching Rome learned that he had passed away. Tall, fair, and very beautiful, she stood out in Rome and tried to avoid attention by attending Mass at a remote church in the vineyards. One determined admirer hid among the vines with his servants poised to seize her, but at the critical moment a handsome stag ran by, diverting their attention while Catherine passed unnoticed. For that reason, artists often represent Catherine beside a stag.

After twenty-four years in Rome, Catherine and her mother planned a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Her brothers, roguish Karl and pious Birger, came from Sweden to join them. They paused in Naples at the court of the Queen Joanna, where Karl and Joanna launched a shameless affair although he had a wife in Sweden and Joanna's husband (her third) was on military venture in Spain. The scandal was resolved, only when Karl caught a fever and died in his mother's arms. Joanna gave him a funeral worthy of her consort, after which Catherine and the other pilgrims sailed to the Holy Land. Bridget died soon after their return to Rome and Catherine conducted her body back to Sweden on a two-thousand-mile procession marked by many miracles. She dedicated the rest of her life to completing Bridget's work.

The Genius of Catherine of Sweden:

Catherine was content to be an unsung collaborator who was indispensable to her mother's work. It was largely through her efforts that Bridget was canonized only eighteen years after her death.

Reflection:

"Consider it all joy...when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

James 1.2-4