Gertrude's Unique Influence On Christian Spirituality

ST. GERTRUDE: A UNIQUE INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

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VATICAN CITY, 6 OCT 2010 (VIS) -

In his general audience, held this morning in St. Peter's Square, the Pope dedicated his catechesis to St. Gertrude, "one of the most famous mystics and the only woman in Germany to receive the title of 'Great'", which was given to her "for her great cultural and evangelical importance. With her life and thought she made a uniquely incisive contribution to Christian spirituality", he said.

Born in the year 1256, at the age of five "she entered the convent, as often happened at that time, for education and study. There she spent her whole life".

Gertrude "was an outstanding student. ... She went on to dedicate herself totally to God in monastic life and for twenty years nothing exceptional happened: her principal activities were study and prayer". Then, at the age of twenty-five, "she had a vision of a young man who took her by the hand and guided her to loosen the knot of thorns oppressing her soul. In that hand, Gertrude recognised ... the One Who saved us with His blood on the cross: Jesus.

"From that moment her life of intimate communion with the Lord became more intense", the Holy Father added. She abandoned "the profane humanistic sciences for theological studies,

and in her monastic observance she moved from a life she herself defined as 'negligent' to one of intense mystical prayer, showing exceptional missionary ardour".

Gertrude, Pope Benedict explained, "understood that she had been distant from God, ... that she had dedicated herself too avidly to liberal studies, to human knowledge, disregarding the spiritual sciences and depriving herself of the taste of true wisdom. Now she was being led to the mountain of contemplation where she abandoned the old self to clothe herself in the new".

This German saint "dedicated herself to writing, to revealing the truth of faith with clarity, simplicity, grace and conviction, serving the Church with love and faithfulness, and becoming much appreciated by theologians and men of piety". Among her writings - of which few remain "because of the events that led to the destruction of the convent of Helfta" - are the "'Herald of Divine Love' or 'The Revelations', as well as the 'Spiritual Exercises', a rare jewel of mystic spiritual literature", said the Holy Father.

"Gertrude added other prayers and penance to those imposed by the monastic rule, with such devotion and faithful abandonment to God that she aroused in those who met here the conviction of being in the presence of the Lord. And in fact God Himself brought her to understand that He had called her to be an instrument of His grace. Yet Gertrude felt unworthy of this immense divine treasure, and confessed that she had not protected and cherished it". She died in 1301 or 1302.

In closing, Benedict XVI highlighted how the example of St. Gertrude "shows us that the focal point of a happy and authentic life is friendship with Jesus the Lord. This is learned through love for Sacred Scripture and the liturgy, through profound faith and through love for Mary, so as to gain increasing knowledge of God and, therefore, to know true happiness which is the goal of our existence".

Having concluded his catechesis, the Holy Father reminded the various pilgrim groups present that October is the month dedicated to the Holy Rosary, and that tomorrow marks the feast day of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary.

"The Rosary", he said turning to address Polish pilgrims, "is a special prayer of the Church and a spiritual weapon for each one of you. May meditation on the lives of Jesus and Mary be a

light for all of us on our evangelical journey of spiritual renewal and conversion of heart".