

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: June 16

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IN BRIEF

Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren

Thirteenth-century Cistercian nun and mystic, a pioneer of devotion to the Heart of Christ.

Feast day	June 16
Born	1182, Tongeren, Belgium
Died	June 16, 1246, Abbey of Aywières, Brabant, Belgium
Era	13th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren

Novena to Saint Lutgardis

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren

Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren (also known as Lutgarde or Lutgarde of Aywières) was one of the great mystics of the thirteenth century. Born in 1182 in what is now Belgium, she became a Benedictine and then a Cistercian nun, and she was among the first to live and pass on a devotion to the Heart of Christ, centuries before Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. Blind in her last years, she died on June 16, 1246, at the abbey of Aywières, and the Church celebrates her feast on that day.

Who was Saint Lutgardis?

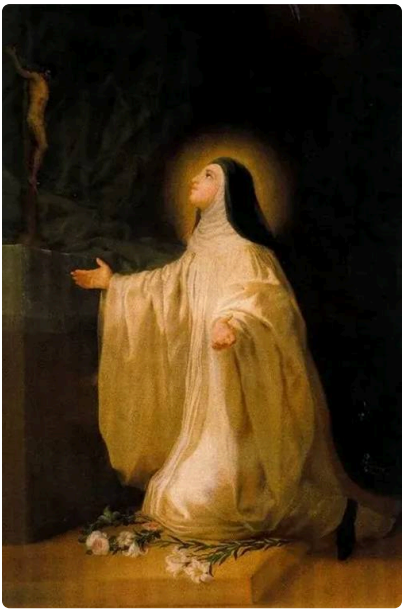
Lutgardis was born in 1182 in Tongeren (Tongres in French), in the prince-bishopric of Liège, into a wealthy merchant family. At about the age of twelve, her mother placed her in the Benedictine convent of Saint Catherine in Tongeren. This was not an early vocation: the girl was sent there to be educated, and nothing yet suggested a religious life.

Everything changed when she was about seventeen. According to her biographer, she saw Christ showing her the wound in his side. The Belgian theologian Jacques Leclercq summed up this turning point in a striking phrase: "the mystical life swept over her like a hurricane." Lutgardis then chose to give herself entirely to God.

A biography to read with care

We know her life through the Dominican friar Thomas of Cantimpré, who knew her personally and wrote her *Life* in three books. The text is precious, but the Bollandists, the scholars who specialize in the history of the saints, have pointed out that its author was quite credulous and fond of the marvelous,

which was much prized in his time. It must therefore be read with discernment, distinguishing the historical framework, which is fairly reliable, from the accounts of wonders.



Saint Lutgardis, by Francisco Goya.

Key dates

- **1182**: Born in Tongeren.
- **c. 1194**: Enters the Benedictine convent of Saint Catherine in Tongeren as a pupil.
- **c. 1199**: Vision of Christ showing her the wound in his side, which transforms her life.
- **Before 1207**: Elected prioress, she refuses the office and leaves for the Cistercian abbey of Aywières, in Brabant.
- **c. 1234**: Having gone blind, she spends her last twelve years in silence.

- **June 16, 1246**: Dies at the abbey of Aywières.
- **1584**: Her name is entered in the Roman Martyrology.

A mystic of the Heart of Christ

The vision of her youth is often considered the first medieval vision of the Sacred Heart. With Saint Gertrude the Great and Saint Mechtilde of Hackeborn, Lutgardis is counted among the first to spread this devotion. She meditated at length on the Passion of Christ and lived in great closeness to him.

Thomas of Cantimpré attributes many extraordinary experiences to her: visions, ecstasies, levitations, stigmata and gifts of healing. Her sisters are said to have noticed blood on her after a deep ecstasy. An artistic tradition, developed above all in the seventeenth century, shows her embraced by Christ, who leans down from the cross toward her.

Beyond these accounts, one thing stands out consistently: her prayer for others. She interceded for sinners, for the sick and for the unhappy. Her mysticism was not a private treasure; it turned into intercession.

Choosing the hidden life

Before she was twenty-five, Lutgardis was elected prioress of her community. She refused the office. Seeking a more austere and more hidden life, she left Tongeren to join the Cistercian nuns of Aywières, in Walloon Brabant.

The choice was a hard one. She spoke only Dutch (the Flemish of her region), while the community spoke French. She thus accepted that she would neither lead nor teach much, and that her life would be above all a life of prayer. For a gifted woman already admired by others, this was a deliberate step into the background.

Blindness and a peaceful death

In her last years she lost her sight. She lived another twelve years in silence and humility. According to her biographer, Christ had told her the day of her death, which came on June 16, 1246.

Why is Saint Lutgardis invoked for the sick and the blind?

Lutgardis is not the official patron of a country or a profession, but her life naturally draws certain people to her. Because she lost her sight and lived her last years in darkness without losing her peace, she is a friend to the blind and visually impaired and to all who live with illness or dependence. Because her whole life was spent praying for others, she is also invoked for sinners and for those who suffer.

And because her first encounter with Christ was a vision of his wounded side, she belongs among the early witnesses of devotion to the Sacred Heart, a devotion dear to Catholics in the United States, Ireland, the Philippines and around the world.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Lutgardis and the novena to Saint Lutgardis.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Lutgardis in art

Lutgardis is shown in the habit of a Cistercian nun. The most famous image of her is the embrace of the crucified Christ, who detaches an arm or leans down from the cross toward her: this is the subject of the celebrated Baroque statue group by Matthias Bernhard Braun on Charles Bridge in Prague. Francisco Goya also painted her, gazing upward in prayer. A heart, or the wounded side of Christ, may recall her vision.

What her holiness teaches

Lutgardis reminds us that meeting Christ can overturn a life that seemed already mapped out. She also shows a rare path: turning down an honorable responsibility in order to choose obscurity, accepting a foreign language and, later, blindness, without ever ceasing to pray for others. Her cult, ancient and recognized by the Roman Martyrology, has remained alive in Belgium and in the Cistercian order.

Where to pray to Saint Lutgardis

- **Aywières** (Walloon Brabant, Belgium): the site of the former Cistercian abbey where she lived and died, with a memorial plaque.
- **Tongeren** (Belgium): her hometown, where she was educated at the convent of Saint Catherine.
- **Charles Bridge** (Prague, Czech Republic): the famous Baroque statue of her vision.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren

No traditional prayer to Saint Lutgardis has become widely known, and her words have reached us only through the account of her biographer, Thomas of Cantimpré. Saintspedia therefore offers an original prayer, inspired by her life: her encounter with the Heart of Christ, her choice of a hidden life and her constant prayer for others.

Praying with Saint Lutgardis

Lutgardis truly began to pray after an encounter: Christ showing her the wound in his side. Her prayer was first of all a gaze on the love of Christ, and then an intercession for sinners, the sick and the unhappy. You can follow her example by looking at a crucifix for a few moments in silence before entrusting to the Lord the people you carry in your heart.

Prayer to Saint Lutgardis

Saint Lutgardis, Christ met you by showing you his open side: teach me to look upon his Heart and to believe that I am loved.

You turned down honors to choose a hidden life: help me not to seek the first place, but faithfulness in small things.

You lived in a language that was not your own: support those who live far from home and those who struggle to make themselves understood.

You lost your sight without losing your peace: stay close to the sick, to people who are blind or visually impaired, and to all who live through the trial of dependence.

I entrust to you my intention (name it in silence). Pray for me and for all sinners, that we may find forgiveness and peace in the Heart of Christ. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Lutgardis is celebrated on June 16, the day of her death in 1246 at the abbey of Aywières. This time of year, close to the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, is especially well suited to praying with her.

You can also turn to her:

- during the month of June, traditionally dedicated to the Sacred Heart;
- when you are losing your sight or caring for someone who is blind;
- in a long illness, when you can do little but pray;
- when you are tempted by ambition or the desire to be noticed;

- when you live abroad and feel isolated by language.

A short prayer before the crucifix

> *Saint Lutgardis, friend of the wounded Heart of Jesus, teach me to rest in his love and to pray for those who suffer. Amen.*

Original text by Saintspedia.

To learn more about her, read the life of Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren, or pray the novena to Saint Lutgardis.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Lutgardis

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Lutgardis as her biographer Thomas of Cantimpré tells it. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on her feast day, June 16, begin on June 8. Since her feast often falls close to the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, this novena is a fine way to prepare for both. It can also be prayed at any time: for someone who is ill or losing their sight, for a conversion, or to grow in love for the Heart of Christ.

The nine days follow her path: a girl placed in a convent for her education, a sudden encounter with Christ, a life of prayer for others, a choice of humility, and the long years of blindness lived in peace.

How to pray this novena

Each day, if you can, begin by looking at a crucifix for a moment in silence. Then read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be, and carry the small act of the day into your life. If you miss a day, simply continue.

Day 1: A life that seemed already mapped out

Lutgardis was sent to the convent of Saint Catherine in Tongeren at about twelve, not because she felt called, but to be educated. Nothing suggested that she would become a nun, still less a mystic. God often begins his work in very ordinary circumstances.

Prayer: Lord, you are at work in my life even when I do not see it. Through the intercession of Saint Lutgardis, open my eyes to your presence in the ordinary places where you have placed me. Amen.

Today: Look back over your day this evening and name one moment when God was present.

Day 2: The wound in his side

At about seventeen, Lutgardis saw Christ showing her the wound in his side. In that moment she understood how much she was loved. Her whole life would flow from this encounter.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, show me your Heart, opened for me on the cross. Let me know, not only with my mind but deep within me, that I am loved by you. Amen.

Today: Spend five minutes in silence before a crucifix or an image of the Sacred Heart.

Day 3: Swept up by grace

A theologian wrote that the mystical life swept over her "like a hurricane." Lutgardis did not resist. She gave herself entirely to God, without keeping anything back.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, I am afraid of giving you everything. Through the prayer of Saint Lutgardis, free me from what holds me back and teach me the joy of a generous heart. Amen.

Today: Offer to God one thing you have been holding on to, and tell him so in your own words.

Day 4: Contemplating the Passion

Lutgardis meditated at length on the Passion of Christ. She did not look away from his suffering, because it was there that she found the measure of his love.

Prayer: Lord, as I contemplate your Passion, teach me not to run from the cross, neither yours nor mine. Unite my small sufferings to yours, for the good of the world. Amen.

Today: Pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, or read slowly one account of the Passion in the Gospels.

Day 5: Praying for sinners

The most constant feature of Lutgardis's life was her prayer for others, and especially for sinners. She did not judge them; she carried them before God.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for all who are far from you, and especially for (name a person). Through the intercession of Saint Lutgardis, touch their hearts and bring them home to you. Amen.

Today: Go to Confession, or plan when you will go, and pray for someone who has not been in a long time.

Day 6: Saying no to honors

Before she was twenty-five, Lutgardis was elected prioress of her community. She refused. She was not looking for a position, but for a more hidden life with God.

Prayer: Lord, free me from the need to be noticed and admired. Give me the humility of Saint Lutgardis and the joy of serving without being seen. Amen.

Today: Do a good deed in secret, telling no one.

Day 7: A stranger in her own community

At Aywières, Lutgardis lived among sisters who spoke French, while she spoke only Dutch. She accepted being unable to lead or to teach much, and lived above all by prayer.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you all who live in a country or a language not their own, all who feel misunderstood or alone. Be their companion and give them friends. Amen.

Today: Show patience and kindness to someone who struggles to express themselves, at work, at school or in your parish.

Day 8: Darkness without fear

In her last twelve years, Lutgardis was blind. She lived this trial in silence and humility, without losing her peace, still praying for others.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the blind and the visually impaired, for the sick and for those who depend on others. Through Saint Lutgardis, give them peace in their trial and people who will care for them with love. Amen.

Today: Visit, call or help someone who is ill, elderly or disabled.

Day 9: Going home to the Lord

According to her biographer, Christ had told Lutgardis the day of her death. She died at Aywières on June 16, 1246, ready to meet the One she had loved all her life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when my time comes, find me ready and full of trust. Through the intercession of Saint Lutgardis, grant me to rest forever in your Heart. Amen.

Today: Pray for the dying, and for someone you love who has died.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Lutgardis, friend of the Heart of Jesus, you met Christ in the wound of his side and spent your life praying for others. You chose the hidden life and bore blindness in peace. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Obtain for me a humble heart, a faithful prayer and a deep trust in his love. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This novena is an original text by Saintspedia. To learn more, read the life of Saint Lutgardis of Tongeren or pray the prayer to Saint Lutgardis.

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