

Hungarian Saints

Saint Hedwig of Poland (1374 – 1399)



Hedwig also called Jadwiga, queen of Poland, she was born in Buda. Hedwig's father was one of the most active European kings in the fourteenth century. Louis d' Anjou, King of Hungary from 1342-1382, had connections with almost every royal house in Europe. Unexpected early deaths of her sister and her father, followed by considerable diplomatic and political intrigue, resulted in Hedwig being chosen by the Poles as queen and she arrived in Poland at the age of ten, in 1384. She was crowned the same year, and it was decided that she should marry Jagello. Hedwig and Jagello married in Krakow in 1385.

They ruled Poland well together for the next fourteen years. The Hapsburgs replied by claiming that Hedwig was an adulterous and Jagello a usurper, and that Wilhelm had consummated their 'marriage'. These slanders damaged Hedwig's reputation even after papal praise for the royal couple and Boniface IX's promise to be godfather to their future child. Jagello meanwhile took a personal part in the Christianizing of Lithuania, destroying pagan temples and shrines. Royal decrees ordered baptism, but force was not used. But baptisms in large numbers took place after sometimes slight instruction.

When the Vilnius diocese was set up, Hedwig sent the cathedral chalices, vestments, and paintings, and endowed a college to train Lithuanian priests. She admired the Byzantine liturgy and attempted to unite her people through the use of Slavonic rites. In Cracow cathedral she endowed sixteen priests to sustain the Divine Office almost continuously. She also dealt with the dangerous Teutonic Knights by skilful negotiation. In 1399, expecting a child, she withdrew from public life. A daughter was born prematurely and she herself died four days later. She was buried in Wawel cathedral.

She was canonized in 1997, and her fast celebrated on July 17.