

Dear brothers and sister in Christ
Care soure Bridgitine, care Madre Fabia

It is a joy to have the possibility to celebrate this great occasion – the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of St Bridgit as the co-patroness of Europe.
And a joy to do so together as sisters and brothers with a special connection to Saint Bridget and Sweden and in service of the wider Europe and for the unity of the church.

Such a wonderful story we just heard.
A story about friendship, about faith, about trust and confidence, and about the love and power of Jesus.

We might wonder – what kind of persons were those four friends or relatives that carried their paralytic friend.

Obviously, they cared a lot about him, and they were ready to go more than a mile for him.

Even to break up the roof to reach Jesus. The kind of friends we all long to have.

It must have taken a lot of confidence and trust in Jesus to do so.

And what was the thoughts of the paralytic man himself?

We do not know. Could he speak and make himself understood? Was it on his initiative or not?

Did they carry him with or without his approval?

Questions we do not have any answers to?

What we do know – is that Jesus had become known, against his will, through his preaching and actions in such a way that he had to take his refuge into the desert and wilderness to be left alone

When he came back to Capernaum people gathered around him to hear him teach, in such a way that it was not possible to come through to reach him for the four friends.

Secondly, the gospel emphasizes not only the faith and confidence of the paralytic man, but the faith of the four friends, or perhaps of all five of them. “He saw their faith”, their confidence and trust in Jesus and his ability to help and to heal,
and probably – behind that – as well their sorrow and despair of the hardship of life.

We do not know of course, if this was the case with the paralytic man, but in a more general sense, there are times in life, when we can be more or less paralytic also in a spiritual sense. When God seems far away and our spirit is weak and fragile, and trust and confidence is not at place – due to the hardship of life or due to our personal history.

At those times we need our friends in the church and the family of God. Friends that can pray for us, comfort us and carry us literally to Jesus and his lifegiving presence. Friends that in confidence and caring love embraces us with their faith and confidence in such a way that the grace of Jesus may break through also in our lives. Or that we may be those friends for others.

Those friends are both earthly and celestial friends gathered in the earthly and celestial church.

One of those who has walked before us is Saint Bridgit of Vadstena in Sweden. A saint our two church traditions have in common.

In that way she is also an important sign of unity and points us towards the reunification of our two church traditions.

Of course, in many ways we are already united. We confess the one baptism of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and we share a lot of faith, traditions and spirituality. Although, we still long and wait for the reunification and the full communion between the church province of Sweden and Rome. Might that day come, rather sooner than later.

However, also in that perspective, it was a great joy and honor that the holy Father, Saint John Paul II 25 years ago declared our *Sankta Birgitta* as the co-patroness for Europe.

It's a blessing for both our church traditions and connects us even more with each other and with the whole of Europe.

In the midst of that relation is your order – carissime soure di Santa Brigida – your life, your work, your prayers and your care and love for unity, for our continent, for Sweden and for our church province.

In that perspective the great John Paul II declared 25 years ago, in his *Motu proprio*, that:

The hope of building a more just world, a world more worthy of the human person, stirred by the expectation of the impending Third Millenium, must be coupled with an awareness that the human efforts are of no avail if not accompanied by divine grace: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain*” (Ps 127:1).

In his proclamation of Saint Bridgit of Sweden as co-patroness of Europe the Pope emphasized the importance that Christianity has had for laying the foundation of the European culture and is bound up with its history.

In that sense, the proclamation of Saint Bridgit is a reminder for all Christians of the vocation to contribute to the future development of the continent, renewed in light of the Gospel and its call to a life of holiness. That wealth of holiness is at the same time the secret of the past of the church as well as the hope of her future.

St Bridget was chosen as a person and a saint that unites North and South of Europe as well as ordinary life as a devoted wife and mother and later, after her husband's death, her devoted life for the restoration and unification of a church in crisis of that time.

Still her life, work and prayers are a bridge for unifying the church of Europe in full visible and sacramental communion.

Today we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of Saint Bridget as the co-patroness of Europe.

And we have today a completely different and more severe situation in Europe and in the wider world than we had 25 years ago.

Also today, we need good friends, that care for us, that pray for us and who can carry us when we have difficulties or are even spiritually or physically paralytic.

Both on earth as in heaven!

In front of war, division and uncertainties both in society and in the church, we need to open our hearts in trust and confidence for the presence of Jesus – the prince of peace

In confidence that there is another world order that may open the most closed circumstances and in ways we can't foresee or predict.

That may break through sooner than we may dare to expect or trust.

In the name of Jesus!