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Saint Winefride Virgin and Martyr

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English / Συναξαριακές Μορφές





Her father, whose name was Thevith, was very rich, and one of the prime nobility in the country, being son to Eluith, the chief magistrate, and second man in the kingdom of North Wales, next to the king. Her virtuous parents desired above all things to breed her up in the fear of God, and to preserve her soul untainted amidst the corrupt air of the world. About that time Saint Beuno, Benno, or Benow, a holy priest and monk, who is said to have been uncle to our saint by the mother, having

founded certain religious houses in other places, came and settled in that neighborhood. Thevith rejoiced at his arrival, gave him a spot of ground free from all burden or tribute, to build a church on, and recommended his daughter to be instructed by him in Christian piety.

When the holy priest preached to the people, Wenefride was placed at his feet, and her tender soul eagerly imbibed his heavenly doctrine, and was wonderfully affected with the area truths which he delivered, or rather which God addressed to her by his mouth. The love of the sovereign and infinite good growing daily in her heart, her affections were quite weaned from all the clings of this world; and it was her earnest desire to consecrate her virginity by vow to God, and, instead of an earthly bridegroom, to choose Jesus Christ for her spouse. Her parents readily gave their consent, shedding tears of Joy, and thanking God for her holy resolution. She first made a private vow of virginity in the hands of Saint Beuno; and some time after received the religious veil from him, with certain other pious virgins, in whose company she served God in a small nunnery which her father had built for her, under the direction of Saint Beuno, near Holy-Well. After this, Saint Beuno returned to the first monastery which he had built at Clunnock, or Clynog Vaur, about forty miles distant, and there soon after slept in our Lord. His tomb was famous there in the thirteenth century. Leland mentions, that Saint Beuno founded Clunnock Vaur, a monastery of white monks, in a place given him by Guithin uncle to one of the princes of North-Wales. His name occurs in the English Martyrology.

After the death of Saint Beuno, Saint Wenefride left Holy-Well, and after putting herself for a short time under the direction of Saint Deifer, entered the nunnery of Gutherin in Denbighshire, under the direction of a very holy abbot called Elerius, who governed there a double monastery. After the death of the abbess Theonia, Saint Wenefride was chosen to succeed her. Leland speaks of Saint Elerius as follows: “Elenus was anciently, and is at present in esteem among the Welsh. I guess that he studied at the banks of the Elivi where now Saint Asaph’s stands. He afterwards retired in the deserts. It is most certain that he built a monastery in the vale of Cluide, which was double, and very numerous of both sexes. Among these was the most noble virgin Guenvrede, who had been educated by Beuno, and who suffered death, having her head cut off by the furious Caradoc.” Leland mentions not the stupendous miracles which Robert of Salop and others relate on that occasion, though in the abstract of her life inserted in an appendix to the fourth volume of the last edition of Leland’s Itinerary, she is said to have been raised to life by the prayers of Saint Beuno. In all monuments and calendars she is styled a martyr: all the accounts we have of her agree that Caradoc, or Cradoc, son of Alain, prince of that country, being violently fallen in love with her, gave so far way to his

brutish passion, that finding it impossible to extort her consent to marry him, or gratify his desires, in his rage he one day pursued her, and cut off her head, as she was flying from him to take refuge in the church which Saint Beuno had built at Holy Well. Robert of Shrewsbury and some others add, that Cradoc was swallowed up by the earth upon the spot; secondly, that in the place where the head fell, the wonderful well which is seen there sprang up, with pebble stones and large parts of the rock in the bottom stained with red streaks, and with moss growing on the sides under the water, which renders a sweet fragrant smell; and thirdly, that the martyr was raised to life by the prayers of Saint Beuno, and bore ever after the mark of her martyrdom by a red circle on her skin about her neck. If these authors, who lived a long time after these transactions, were by some of their guides led into any mistakes in any of these circumstances, neither the sanctity of the martyr nor the devotion of the place can be hereby made liable to censure. Saint Wenefride died on the 22nd of June, as the old panegyric preached on her festival, mentioned in the notes, and several of her lives testify: the most ancient life of this saint, in the Cottonian manuscript, places her death, or rather her burial at Guthurin on the 24th of June. The words are: “The place where she lived with the holy virgins was called Guthurin, where sleeping, on the eighth before the calends of July, she was buried, and rests in the Lord.” Her festival was removed to the 3rd of November, probably on account of some translation; and, in 1391, Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, with his clergy in convocation assembled, ordered her festival to be kept on that day throughout his province with an office of nine lessors, which is inserted in the Sarum Breviary. The time when this saint lived is not mentioned in any of her lives: most, with Alford and Cressy, think it was about the close of the seventh century. Her relics were translated from Guthurin to Shrewsbury in the year 1138, and deposited with great honor in the church of the Benedictine abbey which had been founded there, without the walls, in 1083, by Roger earl of Montgomery. Herbert, abbot of that house, procured the consent of the diocesan, the bishop of Bangor, (for the bishopric of Saint Asaph’s, in which Guthurin is situated, was only restored in 1143,) and caused the translation to be performed with great solemnity, as is related by Robert, then prior of that house, (probably the same who was made bishop of Bangor in 1210,) who mentions some miraculous cures performed on that occasion to which he was eyewitness. The shrine of this saint was plundered at the dissolution of monasteries.

Several miracles were wrought through the intercession of this saint at Guthurin, Shrewsbury, and especially Holy-Well. To instance some examples: Sir Roger Bodenham, knight of the Bath, after he was abandoned by the ablest physicians and the most famous colleges of that faculty, was cured of a terrible leprosy by bathing in this miraculous fountain, in 1606, upon which he became himself a

Catholic, and gave an ample certificate of his wonderful cure, signed by many others. Mrs. Jane Wakeman of Sussex, in 1630, brought to the last extremity by a terrible ulcerated breast, was perfectly healed in one night by bathing thrice in that well, as she and her husband attested. A poor widow of Kidderminster in Worcestershire, had been long lame and bedridden, when she sent a single penny to Holy-Well to be given to the first poor body the person should meet with there; and at the very time it was given at the Holy-Well, the patient arose in perfect health at Kidderminster. This fact was examined and juridically attested by Mr. James Bridges, who was afterwards sheriff of Worcester, in 1651. Mrs. Mary Newman had been reduced to a skeleton, and to such a decrepit state and lameness that for eighteen years she had not been able to point or set her foot on the ground. She tried all helps in England, France, and Portugal; but in vain. At last she was perfectly cured in the very well while she was bathing herself the fifth time. Roger Whetstone, a Quaker near Bromsgrove, by bathing at Holy-Well was cured of an inveterate lameness and palsy, by which he was converted to the Catholic faith. Innumerable such instances might be collected. Cardinal Baronius expresses his astonishment at the wonderful cures which the pious bishop of Saint Asaph’s, the pope’s vicegerent for the episcopal functions at Rome, related to him as an eyewitness. See Saint Wenefride’s life, written by Robert prior of Shrewsbury, translated into English with frequent abridgments, and some few additions from other authors, (but not without some mistakes,) first by F. Alford, whose true name was Griffith, afterwards by J. F., both Jesuits; and printed in 1635, and again with some alterations and additional late miracles by F. Metcalf, S. J., in 1712. Lluydh, in his catalogue of Welsh manuscripts, mentions two lives of Saint Wenefride in that language, one in the hands of Humphrey, then bishop of Hereford, the other in the college of Jesus, Oxon.

Source: *http://saints.sqpn.com/stw06001.htm*