

St Dympna

Feastday May 15th

We do not have much historical evidence for details of Dympna's life. However, we are fortunate that there is a strong tradition in both Ireland and Belgium that help us put together some of her story.

St Dympna lived in the 7th century. She was the daughter of a pagan Chieftain and a Christian mother. It is said that both she and her mother were extremely beautiful. When Dympna was fourteen she consecrated her life to Christ. When her mother died at a young age her father was so grief-stricken that it is said that he became mentally unstable. His advisors suggested to him that he should marry again. Dympna was so like her mother whom he grieved that he began to desire her. She was advised by her priest friend St Generbran to leave the country so with him she went to live in a little village called Gheel near Antwerp in Belgium. After much searching, her father eventually found them. He ordered his soldiers to kill both of them but having slain the priest they refused to kill Dympna. So he himself drew his sword and killed her. The people of Gheel took care of their bodies and in time great devotion to them developed in the area. In fact, Gheel itself became known for its care of people who suffered from mental conditions.

Nowadays there is a heightened awareness of mental health issues and with this there is a renewal of devotion to St Dympna which is very noticeable in Ireland Belgium and America. Holy wells in honour of St Dympna are to be found in Culdavnet Co. Monaghan and Kildalkey Co. Meath. People visit these wells and pray to St Dympna especially near and on her feastday, May 15th.

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