

St. Margaret of Scotland

BORN 1046; DIED 1093

WIFE

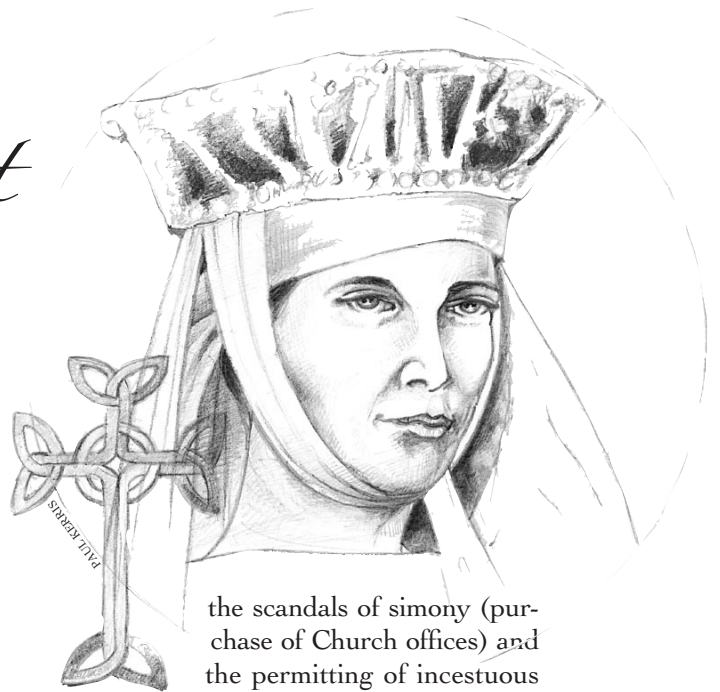
FEAST DAY: NOVEMBER 16

RULERS rarely make the spiritual welfare of their people a priority. St. Margaret of Scotland, however, was such a ruler, a woman who brought her husband the king to great virtue, and a queen who brought her subjects to better practice of their faith.

Margaret was born the eldest of three children to English royalty twenty years before the arrival of William the Conqueror in England. Her father was Edward the Exile, a claimant to the throne of England who had been forced to flee by the Danish king Knute who also claimed the throne, and her mother was Agatha of Brunswick. At Margaret's birth, her family was living in Hungary. Her family came home only to have to flee again, to Scotland, following the Battle of Hastings in 1066 by which William the Conqueror made good his claim to the throne of England.

At the time Margaret's family arrived in Scotland, Malcolm III was king. He asked Margaret's father for his consent to marry her and she, with misgivings, did so at the urging of her family. She was twenty-four when she became Queen of Scotland. She understood, perhaps better than most, that her principal vocation in marriage was to help her husband get to Heaven. Over a period of years under her holy influence, Malcolm changed from a rough, tempestuous man to become an exemplar of virtue. Two of their eight children are themselves honored as saints, "Good Queen Maud" of England and St. David of Scotland.

In her role as queen, Margaret took a direct hand in the spiritual welfare of her husband's subjects. Together, they sought justice, mercy, charity, and the happiness of those he ruled. This included calling synods to end certain irregular practices, including



the scandals of simony (purchase of Church offices) and the permitting of incestuous marriages, and to bring Scottish

Church practices closer to the norm of Rome, emphasizing the importance of receiving the Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season (this was one of those periods in Church history when the faithful felt that they were not worthy of frequent

reception of the Eucharist), and enforcing Sunday as a day of rest. She also saw to the spiritual and physical welfare of the people

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through her efforts to find and train good priests and teachers throughout Scotland and by means of having churches constructed, sponsoring new monastic foundations, and founding hospices.

Margaret herself generously gave alms, daily served food to the poor, had hostels built for travelers, and ransomed captives. She and King Malcolm often invited several hundred poor persons to dinner, serving their guests themselves. She humbly asked others to tell her of her faults, so that she might herself grow in virtue. She slept and ate little, but carefully guarded her own times of prayer and reading of Scripture. During Advent and Lent she remained in prayer from midnight to the pre-dawn prayer of Matins.

Margaret was herself dying when her husband and one of her sons were killed by treachery. Four days later, at the age of forty-seven, she too died, renowned and loved for her piety, wisdom, gentle self-mastery, temperance, generosity, and shining example of virtue. Thoroughly a wife, mother, and queen, nevertheless she lived a life focused first on the things of God.