



Barbara Calamari & Sandra DiPasqua

Ancient & Modern

SAINTS

Legendary stories, little-known facts, and inspiring beliefs.

Mystics, Hermits, Holy People

Michael

Anne

Joseph

Mary Magdalene

Jude

Cecilia

Valentine

Christopher

Lucy

Nicholas

Ursula

Benedict

Francis of Assisi

Clare of Assisi

Anthony of Padua

Rita of Cascia

Joan of Arc

Teresa of Ávila

Martin de Porres

Thérèse of Lisieux

Theresa Benedicta of the Cross

Padre Pio

For more than two thousand years, the Christian saints have had great influence worldwide. Now, this new, inspiring collection of biographies reveals the legendary stories, little-known facts, and inspiring beliefs of some of the best loved saints. Full color throughout, each profile includes a biography with patronage and feast dates, along with prayers both to and about the saint.

SAINTS ANCIENT & MODERN

Barbara Calamari & Sandra DiPasqua

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS We must extend out gratitude to a host of people who have not only made this book possible, but who also did a great deal to improve it. First of all, we are indebted to the staff of Viking Studio and its publisher, Megan Newman for providing us a wonderful working atmosphere. Amy Hill, the design director, Grace Veras and Spring Hoteling in the art department allowed us complete freedom of design while offering expert technical advice. We are also grateful to Torey Klass in production. Dara Stewart, our editor saw to it we were put in the talented hands of Rebecca Behan, who is not only an excellent editor herself, but did much to shepherd this project through the production process.

Shirley Santino is owed a great deal of thanks for her much needed assistance in finding a voice and structure for the manuscript. Deborah Rust has been with us on every project providing technical assistance; her help is invaluable to us. We are fortunate to have access to the work of photographers Lisa Silvestri, Robert Forlini, Larry Racioppo and David McDonald. Father Eugene Carrella can provide an exquisite picture of any saint on a moment's notice and we are grateful for his generosity in working with us. Many of our beautiful images are edited paintings from the extensive collection of Art Resources in New York City. They have been most cooperative and helpful and working with Linda Lee and their knowledgeable staff is always a pleasure. Finally, we must thank our agent Jim Fitzgerald as well as Brother Michael Mantia of Our Lady of Pompeii Church, Patricia Bates and Louis Turchioe for their steady support.

We dedicate this book to the kids: Emma, Paolo, Nicole and Raymond.





Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	8
ANCIENT SAINTS	
Saint Michael	12
Saint Anne	18
Saint Joseph	24
Saint Mary Magdalene	30
Saint Jude	36
Saint Cecilia	42
Saint Valentine	48
Saint Christopher	54
Saint Lucy	60
Saint Nicholas	66
Saint Ursula	74
Saint Benedict	80
MODERN SAINTS	
Saint Francis of Assisi	90
Saint Clare of Assisi	98
Saint Anthony of Padua	104
Saint Rita of Cascia	110
Saint Joan of Arc	116
Saint Teresa of Avila	124
Saint Martin de Porres	132
Saint Thérèse of Lisieux	138
Saint Teresia Benedicta of the Cross	144
Saint Pio	150
Written Works by the Saints	156
Canonization	157
Index	158
Picture credits	160

INTRODUCTION Catholics love the saints. They look upon them as protectors, family members, and living examples of how an ordinary life can experience an extraordinary transformation. Since no one is born a saint, these holy people have made terrible mistakes with which we can all identify. There are murderers, gamblers, and alcoholics among their numbers. They have suffered unimaginable cruelties and conquered every problem in the human condition, from bad marriages to fatal illnesses. Many who lived dis-olutely and scandalously before their conversion were rewarded with ridicule and persecution for turning their backs on conventional society. In emulation of Christ, they refused to compromise their spiritual beliefs to preserve their worldly comforts. Through it all they emerge triumphant, willing to help those on earth find God by praying for us and with us.

For more than two thousand years, the legends and stories of the Christian saints have greatly affected the course of Western civilization. The saints have influenced our holidays, our school systems, the boundaries of nations, our poetry, music, and visual arts. They have been great philosophers, uneducated savants, mystics, administrators, farmers, housewives, and soldiers, hailing from every social strata of society.

The stories of the ancient saints seem more like legends to us today and, indeed, these tales once served as the only form of popular entertainment. As a result, the exploits of these holy people became more grandiose and exaggerated upon each telling. Thousands of years ago there were few written accounts of saints' lives. Most of their stories were told visually by painters, sculptors, and stained-glass artists who concentrated on the most imaginative and fantastic aspects of their biographies. For this reason a majority of saints are depicted with the power to overturn all natural laws. Saint Lucy calmly holds her eyeballs on a dish, Saint Nicholas raises three boys from the dead, and Saint Ursula is shot with arrows as she shields young girls under her cloak.

viii



This haunting and dreamy iconography carried over in the depiction of modern saints as well. Visual portraits of the saints attempted to relay their stories with attributes or symbols contained in a single image. Saint Francis is often shown talking to animals or receiving the stigmata, Thérèse of Lisieux showers the viewer with roses, and Saint Anthony's kindness is symbolized by the image of the Christ child, who sits in his arms. These visual portrayals of the saints are vital reminders of their earthly existence. One sees them everywhere, in private homes, in churches, on clothing and jewelry, and even on the exterior walls of buildings.

Every town and country has saints that are familiar to the local residents and obscure to the rest of us. Since it is estimated that there are more than ten thousand formally recognized saints, it was possible to profile only a very few for this book. Instead of brief biographies and images of many significant saints, we opted to go into detail about a varied handful that have an ongoing influence in modern life. The saints we have chosen are in no way the most important or exalted; many are extremely popular, some less well known. They bring with them a mix of personalities and ethnic cultures that reflect the makeup of today's diverse society.

For this book, we have divided the first two thousand years of Christianity into ancient and modern time periods. The ancient saints span from prehistory to the year A.D. 1000. These saints tend to have more legendary aspects to their stories, resulting from the strong oral tradition in which they thrived. However, the modern saints are well documented by contemporary historical texts. These comprise the second thousand years. Some of these saints have influenced whole nations while others, through their particular state of life, encourage us to have a more personal relationship with them.

ix



Statue of Saint Anne with Mary



AN
CIE
NT

saints

TIMELESS

2 Saint Michael The Archangel

Feast Day: September 29

Patron of: Belgium, Brussels, England, Germany, Umbria, firemen, grocers, health, knights, mariners, policemen, soldiers

Invoked for: good health, a holy death, physical protection

Symbols: defeating the devil or a serpent, scales, sword



S

4 Saint Michael predates the Christian religion and all other saints. Considered the most powerful being in the hierarchy of angels, he is honored in the Muslim and Jewish faiths as much as he is in Catholicism. Though he has never had a human existence, Saint Michael is closely tied to the fate of mankind and has been its guardian, defending good over evil since the beginning of time. When the end of the world draws near, he will make his presence known by defeating the Antichrist. As foretold in the Book of Daniel [12:1], “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.” After he casts the Antichrist into hell, he will sound the trumpet calling for the Eternal Judgment, where the dead will receive their final reward or punishment.

As written in the Book of Revelation, Lucifer was the most beautiful and favored of God’s angels. However, he became prideful and he decided that he was God’s equal. A battle broke out in heaven between Lucifer and an angel who was heaven’s protector. As the battle raged, those loyal to God cried out, “Mi-cha-el?” (Hebrew for, “Who is like God?”). Lucifer and his followers were defeated and cast into hell for their vanity. The Archangel who had led the charge to protect heaven took the name Michael.

Despite rabbinical warnings against appealing to anyone but God, the ancient Jews saw Michael as an intermediary devoted to their protection, as he had defended God against Lucifer. From its earliest days, Church elders have looked to Michael as the protector of Christianity as well. From scriptural passages in both old and new testaments, Michael has four mandates: 1) to fight against Lucifer; 2) to rescue the souls of the faithful from the power of the enemy, especially at the hour of death; 3) to be the champion of God’s people and protector of the Church; and 4) to bring souls to judgment.



Saint Michael

Catholics believe Saint Michael and the Virgin Mary are the only beings besides Jesus able to descend into hell and release the souls suffering there. Because he vanquished Lucifer in heaven, the fallen angel has no power over Michael, even in his own domain. Since Lucifer dwells in the lowest, darkest region, then Michael, his opposite, must inhabit those points closest to heaven.

For this reason, shrines to Saint Michael are always on the highest, most inaccessible cliffs that only a celestial being capable of flight could reach. In ancient times they were visible from great distances but nearly impossible to approach, increasing their mystical appeal. One such sanctuary, founded in the dark ages is Skellig Michael, a fantastic natural monument. Dedicated to the archangel, Celtic monks built a monastery on the steep, rocky island eight miles from Kerry, Ireland, in 588. Escaping the chaos of warring tribes on the mainland, they created an ascetic environment to bring them nearer to God. Monks inhabited this shrine, living in the harshest conditions for over six hundred years. Because of its severe isolation and the impossibility of hosting visitors, Skellig Michael stands as one of the most well-preserved holy sites in the world.

Another famous yet inhospitable site dedicated to Saint Michael is the Gargano cave system in Apulia, Italy. Said to be a dwelling place for the archangel, it was miraculously discovered in the year 490 by a wealthy army commander who was pasturing his herds on Gargano Mountain. One day, his finest bull wandered off and he went in search of it. After many hours, he spotted it standing at the mouth of a cave in a remote part of the mountain. Enraged, he shot an arrow at the bull, but rather than hitting the animal, the arrow was rebounded by an unseen force and wounded the army commander in the foot. Shaken by this supernatural event, he sought advice from the local bishop, who spent three days in contemplative prayer. At the end of the third day, Michael appeared to the bishop saying, “I am the Archangel Michael and am always in the presence of God. The cave is sacred for me, I have chosen it; I myself am its watchful custodian . . . There where the rock opens wide the sins of man can be forgiven . . . What is asked for here in prayer will be granted. Therefore, go to the mountain and dedicate the grotto to the Christian religion.”

5 On the appointed day, the townspeople marched in procession, sheltered from the glaring sun by a convocation of eagles soaring overhead. Arriving at the grotto, they discovered that an altar, covered by a vermilion cloth, had been erected. They took this as proof that the archangel had consecrated the cave before their arrival. Because it is the only place of worship not consecrated by human hand, this grotto is known as the Celestial

“Who is like God?”

— Translation of the Hebrew phrase “Mi-cha-el”



Saint Michael

Basilica. This became the first pilgrimage site in Christendom and is still much visited today.

The most famous shrine to Michael is Mont-Saint-Michel in France. Situated on a rock rising a mile from the shore, this ancient monastery is an architectural wonder dating from the eleventh century. It houses a relic of the cloth that Michael is said to have left on the altar at Gargano, and it is in defense of this island that Michael's protection during war is much documented. One such battle took place in 1425, during the Hundred Years' War between England and France. In this decisive battle, 120 knights dedicated to Saint Michael held off eight thousand invading English troops. News of this heroic victory gave hope to a mostly demoralized French public. Joan of Arc's loyalty to Saint Michael has been attributed by many biographers to her youthful fascination with the incredible success of the aforementioned battle.

6 But Michael did not only extend his hand to war. In the early Church and in the East, Michael was considered a healing angel. He was beloved for the creation of sacred springs in Greece and Constantinople, and the Christians of Egypt placed the Nile River under his patronage. In the sixth century, as a plague devastated Rome, Pope Gregory I saw a vision of Michael sheathing a bloody sword over Emperor Hadrian's tomb. He interpreted this as a sign that Rome was under the archangel's protection and that the plague would soon end. In gratitude, he had a church built over the tomb, renaming it Castel San Angelo (Castle of the Holy Angel). It soon became customary for the chronically ill to spend the night in this church on certain feast days, invoking the archangel for a cure. By the Middle Ages, September 29, the feast day Michael shares with the archangels Gabriel and Raphael, became a holy day of obligation. This day, known as Michelmas Day, was set aside for settling quarterly rents and choosing magistrates in England, where the archangel's cult was once very strong. In early times there were more than four hundred recorded sightings of Michael throughout the British Isles, and he is still the patron of that nation.

As the representative of the forces of God, Michael was once considered a powerful patron to put one's country under. Today, he represents the forces of good versus evil that are a constant presence in the world. That first battle between Michael and Lucifer is ever continuing, although on a constantly changing stage. They are perpetually at war to win over as many souls as possible.



Saint Michael

In art, Michael is most frequently portrayed vanquishing Lucifer. Since Michael is said to weigh the souls of the dead to decide who gets into heaven, he is always depicted with a set of scales. For this reason he is the patron of greengrocers. Many shops and stores display a statue of Michael as a reminder that the shopkeeper is under his protection. Because of his great military achievements against Lucifer and his constant vigilance and defense of the faithful, he is also the patron of policemen and firemen and those who protect the general public. Because his shrines are on the coasts of countries he is invoked by mariners for protection while on the seas. His cult was particularly strong in Germany, where his similarity to the god Wotan caused the conversion of pagans. In Gaul, he was accepted as a replacement for the god Mercury.

Prayer to Saint Michael the Archangel

Saint Michael the Archangel,
Defend us in battle.
Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray;
And do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host,
By the power of God,
Thrust into hell
Satan and all evil spirits
Who wander through the world
For the ruin of souls.
Amen.

7



Saint Michael

FIRST CENTURY

8 *Saint Anne*

Feast Day: July 26

Patron of: Brittany, Canada, broom makers, cabinetmakers, grandparents, housewives, lace makers, miners, pregnancy, rain, those without children

Invoked for: finding a husband, a good death, help in raising children, protection in pregnancy and childbirth, protection in sea storms, protection in thunderstorms

Symbols: book, golden gate, throne



S

Saint Anne is beloved for being the mother of the Virgin Mary, and through her marriages, grandmother to Jesus and many of His apostles. Her story was first told in the second century as part of The Protevangelium of James, a gospel written about the early life of Jesus Christ. Widely read by early Christians, it was never accepted as part of the New Testament canon.

10 However, her place as matriarch of a spiritual lineage has been embraced. According to this ancient text, Anne and her husband, Joachim, had a childless marriage for almost twenty years. One day, Joachim presented his offering for the dedication of a new temple and was shunned by a priest, who declared that their childlessness was a curse from God. In humiliation, Joachim fled to the wilderness for forty days of prayer. When Anne heard the disturbing news, she begged the Lord to allow her to conceive and promised to dedicate any child she might have to the service of the Lord.

Suddenly, an angel appeared to Joachim in the hinterland and said, “Delayed conceptions and infertile childbearing are all the more wonderful! Your wife will bear you a daughter and you will call her Mary. As you have vowed, she will be consecrated to the Lord at infancy and filled with the Holy Spirit from her mother’s womb.” He was told to go back to the city and meet his wife at the golden gate of Jerusalem. A distraught Anne, with no knowledge of where her husband had gone, was visited by the same angel, who told her, “You will meet your husband at the city gate, and this will be a sign that your prayers are answered.”

Anne and Joachim were overjoyed to see each other, and Mary was conceived. When their precious only child reached the age of three, they honored their pledge to dedicate her to God. Not without tears, they left Mary at the temple to be raised in religious service. Years later, Mary became the mother of Jesus Christ.



Saint Anne

Anne’s life of service to God did not end with the one great gift of her daughter. According to an early account of her life, when Joachim died, Anne married his brother Cleophas, with whom she had another daughter. This child was also named Mary and became the mother of James the Lesser, Joseph the Just, Simon, and Jude. Anne later married again and had another daughter who gave birth to James the Greater and John the Evangelist.

Saint Anne did not live to see the torment and execution of Christ. However, even in death she continued to play an important part in the lives of early Christians. Sometime after the resurrection of Christ, Mary Magdalene, her brother Lazarus, and other apostles were driven from Jerusalem because of their faith. They journeyed by boat carrying the remains of Saint Anne and set ashore in Marseille, France. Her remains were taken farther inland from the coast to what is now Apt, France, where they were concealed in a crypt. These events were transcribed in the *Martyrology* of Apt, dating from the second century. Charlemagne consulted the text in an attempt to locate her body nearly seven hundred years later. All efforts appeared to be in vain until the reconsecration of the Cathedral of Apt. During this ceremony, a four-tenn-year-old deaf mute began striking the main altar with his staff, greatly disturbing those in attendance, including the emperor. Charlemagne was so impressed with the determination of the boy to draw attention to the altar that he gave orders to open its stairs after the mass. An underground door sealed with stones was uncovered. When these were removed, the boy led the group through the underground catacombs of the church to a wall, which he also struck with his staff. The company eagerly broke through the wall to find a crypt containing a casket of cypress wood. Inscribed on it were the words

11

**“Joachim and Anne,
how blessed a couple!
All creation is indebted
to you. For at your
hands the Creator was
offered a gift excelling
all other gifts: a chaste
mother who alone was
worthy of Him.”**

— Saint John Damascene, 7th century



Saint Anne

Here lies the body of Blessed Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary. Charlemagne had the recollection of these events written up, notarized, and sent to the pope in Rome. The original papers of this correspondence are still in existence today.

Because of these events, the Cathedral of Apt became an important pilgrimage site, and the cult of Saint Anne spread throughout France, becoming particularly strong in Brittany. Many Breton legends claim Saint Anne as a Breton queen who escaped a brutal husband. One legend supposes that angels led her to a ship that landed in Jerusalem where she gave birth to the Virgin Mary.

She remained popular in other regions of the world as well. In the East, her feast was celebrated from the beginning of Christianity. As it spread through Western Europe, her patronage of fertility was extended to farmland and in Italy, agricultural workers referred to rain as “Saint Anne’s gift;” in Germany, rain was referred to as “Saint Anne’s dowery.” Martin Luther wrote that he became a monk because of a promise he made to Saint Anne while he was caught in a terrifying thunderstorm. In the new world, Canada is still known as the “Land of Saint Anne.” The story goes that in 1650 a group of sailors were caught in a storm on the Saint Lawrence River. As they were about to perish they invoked Saint Anne for help, promising to build a shrine to her wherever they first landed. They washed ashore on the north bank of the river at Beaupré, Quebec. Today, the Cathedral of Saint Anne de Beaupré now stands on that site and attracts millions of pilgrims from around the world. The chapel is filled with ex-votos donated to the church from people who have received miraculous healings.

12

Though not a biblical figure, Saint Anne was considered second only to Saint Joseph in importance by the early Eastern Church. Her role as a powerful matriarch and grandmother to Jesus Christ served as a strong example in Western Europe, where communities depended on the wisdom and advice of the aged. To many, she is an accessible representative of a state of life, and she is invoked for a variety of favors that one might ask of a beloved grandmother. Because of her three marriages, young women ask her aid in finding a husband with the prayer “Saint Anne, find me a man.”

The Hebrew name for Anne is Hannah, which means “grace.” A common saying is “All Annes are beautiful” and because of this the name Anne became the most popular girl’s name in Central Europe during the nineteenth century. Adding “Anne” after a girl’s name is still common practice, particularly the combination of Mary Anne. Canada and Brittany, France, hold major celebrations in Saint Anne’s honor on her feast day.



Saint Anne

Anne’s patronage of the sea and storms stems from the voyage her remains made with Lazarus and Mary Magdalene. She is frequently depicted with an open book, instructing her daughter, the Virgin Mary. Because her womb held Mary she is the patron of miners who dig up secret treasures. Since tabernacles were once made only of wood, and her womb was considered a human tabernacle, she is also the patron of carpenters and cabinetmakers.

Prayer to Saint Anne

O glorious Saint Anne, you are filled with compassion for those who invoke you and with love for those who suffer! Heavily burdened with the weight of my troubles, I cast myself at your feet and humbly beg of you to take the present intention which I recommend to you in your special care [state intention].

Please recommend it to your daughter, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and place it before the throne of Jesus, so that He may bring it to a happy issue.

Continue to intercede for me until my request is granted. But, above all, obtain for me the grace one day to see my God face to face, and with you and Mary and all the saints to praise and bless Him for all eternity. Amen.

O Jesus, Holy Mary, Saint Anne, help me now and at the hour of my death.

Good Saint Anne, intercede for me.



Saint Anne

13

FIRST CENTURY

14 *Saint Joseph*

Feast Day: March 19

Patron of: Austria, Belgium, Bohemia, Canada, China, Croatia, Korea, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam, carpenters, Catholic Church, families, fathers, homeless, pregnant women, workers

Invoked for: family protection, to find work, a happy death, to sell a home

Invoked against: doubt, hesitation

Symbols: Baby Jesus, carpenter's tools, flowering branch, lily





A working man descended from royal lineage, Joseph is said to have been chosen by God to protect His greatest treasures, Jesus and Mary. In the few descriptions of him in the Gospels, Joseph never speaks, yet he is an extremely powerful force. He displays the depth of his faith by listening and quietly doing what he is told.

16 In the face of possible public scandal, he married Mary when she was pregnant with a child that was not his. When an angel told him that the child she had conceived was of the Holy Spirit, he accepted it. Then, when all citizens were required to register on the tax rolls, Joseph dutifully took a very pregnant Mary with him to Bethlehem. As the city was severely overcrowded, they could not find a proper place to sleep and that night Mary was forced to give birth in a stable. After Jesus' birth, the holy family settled back into Nazareth until an angel warned Joseph in a dream of the impending slaughter of the innocents and instructed him to flee with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Without hesitation Joseph relinquished his business and home to take his wife and young son on a perilous journey to an unknown land. Following the angel's order, they stayed in Egypt for seven years, with Joseph caring for both the financial and spiritual needs of the Holy Family.

The final mention of Joseph is in the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus straying from his family during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It is believed that Joseph died well before Jesus began his public life, and his patronage for a good death stems from the probability that he was surrounded by Jesus and Mary as he lay on his deathbed.

While the gospels concern Joseph only in regard to his relationship to Jesus, other histories of Joseph passed down from the fifth century state that Joseph was a widower who had been married forty-nine years and had six children before his first wife died. When the priests announced that all



Saint Joseph

unmarried men from the tribe of Juda were to be candidates to wed Mary, Joseph went to Jerusalem with great reluctance. He was elderly and did not think he should be seriously considered. While the other men presented themselves by putting their walking sticks on the altar, Joseph held back and did not participate. To everyone's amazement, the tip of his staff burst into a bloom of flowers, a sign from God that he was to be named the fiancé of Mary. This tale is where the early visual depictions of Joseph as an elderly man with a flowering branch come from. It was also thought in all probability he would have been older, as Joseph had to respect Mary's virginity throughout their marriage.

Despite the importance of Joseph in the life of Christ, his cult was only found in the East. It did not arrive in the West until the ninth century when he was honored in church as the Foster Father of Our Lord. The Carmelite order brought his cult to Europe when they were driven out of Jerusalem during the Crusades and the first church dedicated to him was in 1129 in Bologna, Italy. European evangelists recognized Joseph's reputation as the perfect father figure as useful in gaining conversions. Common people forced to put the needs of their family before personal ambition saw Joseph's life mirror their own.

His role of provider and father were the reasons many invoked him for help in caring for their own families. During the Middle Ages when drought and famine struck Sicily, residents throughout that island prayed to Saint Joseph for help. At midnight on March 19, Joseph's feast day, rain began pouring down, immediately followed by good weather. Sicilians have venerated Saint Joseph ever since by setting up altars and cooking special food and sweets, which are given to friends and to the poor. These festivities were adapted by the rest of Italy where Saint Joseph is greatly revered as well.

17

**“I know by experience
that the glorious Saint
Joseph assists us gener-
ally in all necessities.
I never asked him for
anything which he did
not obtain for me.”**

— Saint Teresa of Ávila



Saint Joseph

There, it is believed that Saint Joseph is an extremely powerful intercessor, having the power to overturn natural law, because Jesus had to obey his earthly father while he was a boy, and would still do whatever Saint Joseph asked of him.

Perhaps the most ardent and famous devotee of Saint Joseph was Saint Teresa of Ávila. While reforming the Carmelite order in Spain, she chose him to be the patron of her Discalced Carmelite order. Because of his tradition of taking care of the needs of the Holy Family, she requested he do the same for her nuns. The custom of burying a Saint Joseph's statue on the grounds of a home to initiate its sale originates with Teresa of Ávila. When she was in need of more land to set up her religious houses, she had her nuns bury their Saint Joseph's medals in the ground. Over time others adapted this ritual, and these medals evolved into a statue of Saint Joseph that would be buried upside down until the house was sold, then dug up and taken to the new home. Today, even some non-Catholics do this as a superstitious rite, buying Saint Joseph's Home Sale Kits off the Internet.

But it is for the excellent example he gives as a provider for the family and working man that Saint Joseph is most honored. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, and the new class of laborers it produced, patronage to Saint Joseph the Worker became universal. By the end of the nineteenth century, he was named patron of the Catholic Church out of gratitude for the care he took of Jesus.

18



Saint Joseph

In art, Saint Joseph is usually depicted with the infant Jesus. He sometimes has carpenter tools, and because of his chastity he carries a lily for purity. The flowering staff became a popular attribute for him because it is also the emblem of shepherd kings who forcefully defended their flock. This staff is also the ancestor of the bishop's crook. Because Joseph had to move on a moment's notice with the flight into Egypt and was responsible for providing shelter for his family, he is invoked for buying or selling a home. An additional feast day was declared for Saint Joseph as May 1, May Day to the rest of the world. In its attempt to combat communism, the Church dedicated this day set aside for the working man to the Patron of Workers.

Prayer for Saint Joseph's Intercession

Remember, O most chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary,
That never was it known that anyone who implored your help
and sought your intercession was left unassisted.
Full of confidence in your power,
I fly unto you and beg your protection.
Despise not, O foster father of the Redeemer,
My humble supplication, [request here]
but in your bounty, hear and answer me.
Amen.

19



Saint Joseph

FIRST CENTURY

²⁰ *Saint Mary Magdalene*
Apostle to the Apostles

Feast Day: July 22

Patron of: Provence, contemplatives, converts, gardeners,
glove makers, hairdressers, penitents, perfumers, pharmacists,
prisoners, reformed prostitutes

Invoked against: sexual temptation

Symbols: alabaster jar, long hair, skull





Though the subject of Mary Magdalene’s true identity may be fodder for a heated debate, there is one aspect of her life that all ecclesiastical writers agree upon: She never left Christ during His crucifixion, and she was the first person to see Him after His resurrection. Because Jesus chose her as His first witness and because He told her to go and tell the others what she saw, she is known as the “Apostle to the Apostles.” This title aside, it is the example she sets as a penitent and reformed sinner that she is most well known and honored.

According to ancient Jewish texts, the seaside town of Magdala was known as a place of loose morals. This town was Mary’s home, and she took its name as her own, signifying her unmarried state. It was said that Mary had wealth and took great pride in her appearance, enjoying luxuries and lapsing into promiscuity. Many shunned her because of her reputation for lewdness, and it is as this sinner that we are first introduced to her.

After Jesus had raised the son of a widow from the dead, a man named Simon invited him to be guest of honor at a dinner. While they were seated, a certain notorious woman walked into the room carrying an alabaster box. Weeping, she threw herself down and wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair and then anointed them with the oil. Simon was outraged that Jesus would accept such tribute from someone so disgraceful. But instead of judging the woman, Jesus rebuked Simon, “Does thou see this woman? I entered into thy house—thou gave me no water for my feet. But she with tears has washed my feet, and with her hair has wiped them. Thou gave me no kiss. But she, since she came in, has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou did not anoint but she with ointment has anointed my feet. Wherefore I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her, because she has loved much. But to whom less



Saint Mary Magdalene

is forgiven, he loves less.” He then told the penitent woman to go in peace, all her sins were forgiven.

In the next chapter of Luke 8:2 he mentions the travels of Christ and his followers in Galilee, among them is “Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils.” Luke also tells us that the day before Christ’s entry into Jerusalem he dined with Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary. When Judas objects to the use of such expensive oil, he is rebuked by Christ, like Simon, for being so self-righteous. “. . . For the poor you have always with you . . . but me you have not always. . .” Because in this story, Mary too wipes Jesus’ feet with her hair and anoints them with oil in the same manner as the penitent woman, Catholics believe both women to be Mary Magdalene, whom after being exorcized by Christ became one of his greatest and most loyal followers.

Indeed, her loyalty to Jesus was unsurpassed even at His death. Unlike His other disciples, Mary never renounced Jesus or ran from Him. She stood with His mother until He was dead, helped take Him down from the cross and wept outside of His tomb. On Easter morning it was Mary Magdalene who returned at dawn to keep a vigil. When she found the great stone covering the tomb rolled away, she ran back to tell Peter and the others that someone had taken Jesus’ body. They ran ahead of her, saw the open tomb, and left.

But it was Mary Magdalene who stayed behind, searching the tomb and weeping. Two angels dressed in white appeared to her and asked why she was weeping. “They have taken my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him,” she responded. A gardener asked her the same question and she begged the man to tell her where Christ’s body might be found. “Mary,” said the man, and she suddenly knew this man was not a gardener. She was talking to the risen Christ. When she went to embrace him, he told her, “Touch me

“Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.”

— Christ to Mary Magdalene according to John 20:179



Saint Mary Magdalene

not!” (The phrase *Noli me tangere* in the Latin bible). Mary spread the good news to the disciples—the last action the gospels recorded of Mary Magdalene.

The rest of her life story was written in the early Middle Ages. It is said that after the resurrection of Christ, political leaders in Israel tried to quash the cult that was rapidly growing around Him. These leaders placed Mary Magdalene, her sister, Martha, their brother, Lazarus, and other followers in a rudderless boat, in hopes that they would perish at sea. Divine Providence brought them to the coast of Marseilles, France. There they had much success converting the local people to Christianity. Mary took her apostolic mission to Provence and was greeted with equal enthusiasm. After converting the king and helping to install a bishop, she retired to a cave to live out the last thirty years of her life as a penitent. Her hair grew long enough to cover her naked body, and she repented for her previous deeds as a sinner. Once a day, angels would carry her to heaven, where she received her “daily sustenance,” which took the place of earthly food. Eventually her death drew near, and she sent for Maximinus, the bishop she had installed years earlier. She received the eucharist and died in tears.

Early French ecclesiastical writers claimed Mary Magdalene and her family as their evangelists. Since they were favorites of Christ, this divine favoritism then extended to France and the French people. Miraculous discoveries of her relics abounded from Provence to Burgundy. The Cathedral at Vézelay was dedicated to her in the twelfth century and became the center of her cult and an important stop on the pilgrimage to Compostela. Her feast, falling in the heart of summer, was happily celebrated throughout France.

24 To the people of the Middle Ages, Mary Magdalene was a wildly glamorous figure, a beautiful woman with long, red hair. She presented an alternative to the image of an ever pious saint. Here was a woman who had enjoyed luxuries, made mistakes, and tried to redeem herself. As towns grew into cities, they began to face an onslaught of urban problems such as prostitution. Though there is no mention in the Bible of Mary Magdalene ever being a prostitute, preachers invented lurid tales of her youthful sexual indiscretions. That God could extend forgiveness to such a willful, wayward creature gave hope to everyone for their own forgiveness. Homes for reformed prostitutes took her as their patron, and the word *magdalene* became a description for a fallen woman. It was not until the twentieth century that Mary Magdalene’s role as a penitent and devoted follower of Christ was stressed.



Saint Mary Magdalene

Always a popular subject for artists, Mary Magdalene is always depicted as a beautiful, sorrowful woman with long hair. In some images she carries the alabaster unguent jar and in others a skull is present, the symbol of the penitent to remind us of how we are all going to end up. The English word maudlin is a derivative of Magdalene. Oxford University has a famous college named for her. Because she loved luxury before her conversion, and bought expensive unguents after it, she is the patron of such trades as glove makers, hairdressers, and perfumers. Since devils were cast out of her, she is the patron of prisoners who cast off their chains. Because Christ appeared to her as a gardener she is the patron of the profession. Her knowledge and use of unguents also makes her the patron of pharmacists.

Prayer to Saint Mary Magdalene

Saint Mary Magdalene, woman of many sins,
Who by conversion became the beloved of Jesus,
Thank you for your witness that Jesus forgives
through the miracle of love.

You, who already possess eternal happiness
in His glorious presence,
please intercede for me, so that someday
I may share in the same everlasting joy.

Amen.

25



Saint Mary Magdalene

FIRST CENTURY

²⁶ *Saint Jude*
Apostle

Feast Day: October 28

Patron of: impossible causes

Invoked for: help in times of desperation

Symbols: Club, cloth with image of Jesus, flame over head,



S

Saint Jude was one of the original twelve apostles of Jesus. During his lifetime, his compassion and love for others was profoundly evident. Now, thousands of years after his death, his relief aid in seemingly hopeless situations ensures his place as one of the most popular and invoked saints in the world.

28 Jude Thaddeus was said to be a cousin of Jesus and the brother of James the Lesser. As an apostle of Christ, Jude learned firsthand the power of God to bring about healing and protection for what some might call “lost causes.” The most intriguing example can be found in the legends of Edessa (a city in Mesopotamia). As the story goes, King Abgar suffered greatly from leprosy and, desperate for relief, wrote a letter to Christ, which read, “I have heard about you and the cures you effect, that you do this without medicaments or herbs, and that with a word you cause the blind to see, the lame to walk, lepers to be cleansed, and the dead to live again. Having heard all this, I have decided in my mind that you are either a god and have come down from heaven to do what you do, or you are the Son of God and so do these things . . .”

Jesus was happy that King Abgar believed in Him without even seeing Him; however, He did not have time to visit the king. When the king realized he would never see Christ Himself, he sent an artist to draw a portrait. The artist was so overcome with the radiance emanating from Christ’s eyes, his hands shook and he could not accomplish his task. Jesus took a cloth and wiped His face with it, leaving His image imprinted in the cloth. Jude was sent back to Edessa to present this portrait to the king who rubbed it on his own body and was instantly cured of his disease.

In a different version of the story, Jude presented the burial cloth of Christ to King Agbar by carrying the precious material seared with Christ’s image folded up as a portrait. The king was cured when he touched the shroud. His subsequent baptism by Jude established Christianity in Edessa. Jude’s role as



Saint Jude

a helper to the despondent was sealed, as was his influence in the Mideast region of the world. The shroud, of course, has become known as the Holy Shroud of Turin.

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Jude and the apostle Simon were sent back to Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), Persia, Armenia, and southern Russia to preach. The men became popular with the local population for their keen intellect, clever dialogue, and the amusing ways in which they outwitted sorcerers and magicians in public discourses and arguments. When invited to choose, as was the custom of the day, how their losing antagonists were to be executed, Jude and Simon would reply, “We are not here to kill the living but to bring the dead back to life.” They would then joyfully preach the message of Christ, converting thousands at a time.

Jude and Simon were not without detractors, however, and in the Epistle of Jude, his only writings to survive him, Jude exhorts recent converts in the East in a.d. 60, to stay strong in the face of persecution and to persevere through harsh and difficult circumstances. These persecutions caught up with both Simon and Jude just five years later when they were martyred together for their evangelizing. Today, their relics are buried under the main altar of Saint Peter’s Basilica.

Over the centuries, Saint Jude became confused with Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver. In many instances, to avoid this confusion, he is referred to as “Thaddeus” in the writings of the evangelists. Because he shared a name with such a notorious character, few Christians invoked Saint Jude for help. The mystical saints Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth century and Bridget of Sweden in the fifteenth century were exceptions. According to a vision, Jesus told Saint Bridget of Sweden to dedicate an altar to Saint Jude, because “in accordance with his surname, Thaddeus [meaning generous or loving] he will show himself most willing to give help.”

29

Few Catholics took these words seriously until the nineteenth century when a tradition began that when Saint Jude would answer the most impos-

“...in accordance with his surname Thaddeus [meaning generous or loving], he will show himself most willing to give help.”

Saint Bridget of Sweden, fifteenth century



Saint Jude

sible of prayers, the petitioner in turn, must thank the saint in a public way. The advent of inexpensive newspapers made this obligation possible and to this day, weekly and daily periodicals all have their share of “Thank you Saint Jude” personal ads. Perhaps the grandest gesture of public thanks to this saint is the world famous Saint Jude’s Children Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. It was built by the entertainer Danny Thomas as a tribute to Jude for answering his prayers when he was struggling to support his family. This hospital serves children with “hopelessly incurable diseases” and has become a groundbreaking research institution, saving innumerable young lives on its premises and even more internationally through its discoveries. From its great success, the name Saint Jude has become a common name for research hospitals all over the world.



Shine of Saint Jude in New Orleans



Saint Jude

Since he was present at the Pentecost, Saint Jude is usually depicted with the flame of the Holy Spirit over his head. His principal attribute is the cloth with Christ’s image, sometimes displayed on his body in a medallion form. He carries the club or axe he was beaten to death with and also displays the palms of the martyr.

Prayer to Saint Jude

Saint Jude, glorious Apostle, faithful servant and friend of Jesus,
The name of the traitor has caused you to be forgotten by many,
But the true Church invokes you universally as the patron Of things despaired of; pray for me,
that I may receive the consolations and the help of heaven in all my necessities, tribulations, and sufferings, particularly (here make your request) and that I may bless God with the elect throughout eternity.
St. Jude, Apostle, martyr, and cousin of our Lord Jesus Christ, intercede for us.

Amen.



Saint Jude

SECOND CENTURY OR THIRD CENTURY

32 *Saint Cecilia*

Feast Day: November 22

Patron of: music, musicians, musical instrument makers,
poets, Rome Academy of Music, singers

Symbols: lute, martyrs palms, organ, roses



S

She has inspired masterpieces in every artistic discipline, and the popularity of her cult spans from ancient to modern times. Yet, little is known about Cecilia besides the fact that she was a rich young Roman girl martyred in her home in Trastevere.

34 Cecilia came from the senatorial family Coecilia, a family prominent in Rome's ancient history. Although Christianity was illegal, her mother raised her as a Christian, and Cecilia secretly took a vow of chastity. Her father, not taking his daughter's faith seriously, arranged a marriage for her to a nobleman named Valerian. As musicians played for the guests, Cecilia begged God to help her keep her vow.

On their wedding night, Cecilia told Valerian she had a guardian angel with her that only she could see and warned him that the angel would be upset if she were touched in an impure way. When he asked to see the angel, she directed him to go out and be baptized. Valerian did as she asked and on his return, he found Cecilia praying in her room next to an angel with flaming wings. In his hands, the angel held two wreaths made of roses and lilies. After crowning the couple, the angel vanished.

When Valerian's brother Tibertius entered the home, he was astounded at the rare beauty and fragrance of the flowers. Upon hearing of Cecilia and her guardian angel, he too was baptized. Valerian and Tibertius became active in the Christian community, making lavish gifts to the poor and burying martyrs slain for their faith. These actions came to the attention of the Roman Prefect, who demanded they make sacrifices to the Roman gods to prove their patriotism. When the two men refused, they were executed. Cecilia then had them buried together in the same tomb owned by her family.

Cecilia was also put on trial and condemned to death for refusing to renounce her faith. However, because she came from an illustrious family,

‡

Saint Cecilia

Cecilia could not be executed in public. Instead, she was shut up in her sudarium, the steam room of her bath house. The vents were sealed, and the furnaces were heated seven times higher than their normal limit in order to suffocate her. Cecilia was discovered the next day, happily praying, seemingly untouched by the hellish atmosphere of the room. The Prefect remained undeterred by her miraculous survival, and an executioner was dispatched to decapitate her. Hitting her three times with an axe, he was unable to kill her. Because Roman law decreed that three blows with the axe was the legal limit an executioner could use to kill a prisoner, Cecilia was left to bleed to death on the floor of her home. Crowds flocked to visit her as she prayed. She disbursed her worldly goods to the poor, and she left her house to the Pope to be used as a church. When she finally died three days later, she was buried in the catacombs of Saint Callixtus.

This story was recorded hundreds of years after her death, in the fifth century's *Acts of Cecilia*, which detailed her suffering and served as an inspiration for early Christians. At that time, her home was one of the first churches in Rome. Cecilia was so well regarded that her feast day was widely celebrated and there were five different masses held in her honor.

In 821, Pope Paschal decided to repair the crumbling ruin of her church. Wanting to have a relic of the saint's, he searched the catacombs. He could not find her remains, but in a dream Cecilia encouraged his search, saying that, in actuality, he had been very near her body. In the neighboring catacomb of Praxetanus, it was discovered that many bodies of the original martyrs had been moved to prevent thievery. One, a perfectly preserved 35 young woman, wrapped in gold, with bloody rags at her feet, was thought to be Cecilia. Among other martyrs with her were Valerian and Tiburtius.

**Blessed Cecilia,
appear in visions
To all musicians, appear
and inspire:
Translated Daughter,
come down and startle
Composing mortals with
immortal fire.**

— from "Anthem for St. Cecilia's Day" by W. H. Auden

‡

Saint Cecilia

These relics along with those of the ancient popes Urbanus and Lucius were installed in the altar of the Church of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere.

During the early Renaissance when many ancient texts were being translated, the lines in her Acts that read “*Cantantibus organis illa in corde suo soi domino decantabat,*” (“While musicians played at her nuptials, she sang only in her heart to God.”) were misconstrued to say that Cecilia herself played the organ at her own wedding. From this grew the legend that she not only could play every single musical instrument, but that Cecilia even invented the organ. When an early sixteenth century Florentine musical academy named Cecilia as their patron saint, other musical organizations followed suit, including the Academy of Music in Rome. This is the beginning of Cecilia’s patronage of music and poetry. From the Renaissance forward, all visual depictions of Cecilia featured musical instruments. In England it became a tradition to celebrate Saint Cecilia’s Day with musical concerts, and many great composers have written compositions in her honor.

36 It was in the spirit of this newfound respect for the arts brought on by the Renaissance that a renovation of Saint Cecilia’s in Trastevere was undertaken in 1599. When the relics of Cecilia and the other martyrs were found beneath the altar, it became a major event in the cultural world. One of the official witnesses to the uncovering of the relics was sculptor Stefano Maderno. According to those who were there, Cecilia was still incorrupt and his work, which resides in the church, is an uncanny physical likeness of the saint. Though that was almost 1,500 years after her death, the streets of Rome were thronged with thousands who came to honor her. On November 22, 1599, accompanied by forty-two cardinals, the pope came to her basilica to celebrate a Solemn High Mass. Cecilia’s remains were then reinterred beneath the high altar.

Though the story of Cecilia has always been considered a pious legend, future restorations of her church in Trastevere unearthed the bathroom of a private Roman home from ancient times. The ruins were complete with a boiler and lead pipes buried two levels underneath the building, presenting the feasibility that there might be more truth in the story of her life than was first considered possible. What cannot be denied is that Cecilia had captured the public imagination, becoming a popular subject for painters such as Raphael, Delaroche, and Poussin. Handel, Gounod, Scarlatti, and Benjamin Britten are just a few of the composers who have written musical celebrations of her. Poets from Chaucer to Auden have written odes to her. And today, it is customary for musicians to invoke her aid for a good performance.



Saint Cecilia

In art, Cecilia is represented holding or playing a musical instrument. Sometimes she is surrounded by angels. Martyr’s palms, lilies for purity, and roses for the wreath she and her husband were given by the angel on their wedding night often appear with Cecilia.

Musician’s Prayer to Saint Cecilia

Heroic martyr who stayed faithful to Jesus your divine bridegroom,
Give us faith to rise above our persecutors and to see in them the
Image of our Lord.

We know that you were a musician and we are told that you
Heard angels sing.

Inspire musicians to gladden the hearts of people by filling the air
With God’s gift of music and reminding them of the Divine Musi-
cian

Who created all beauty.

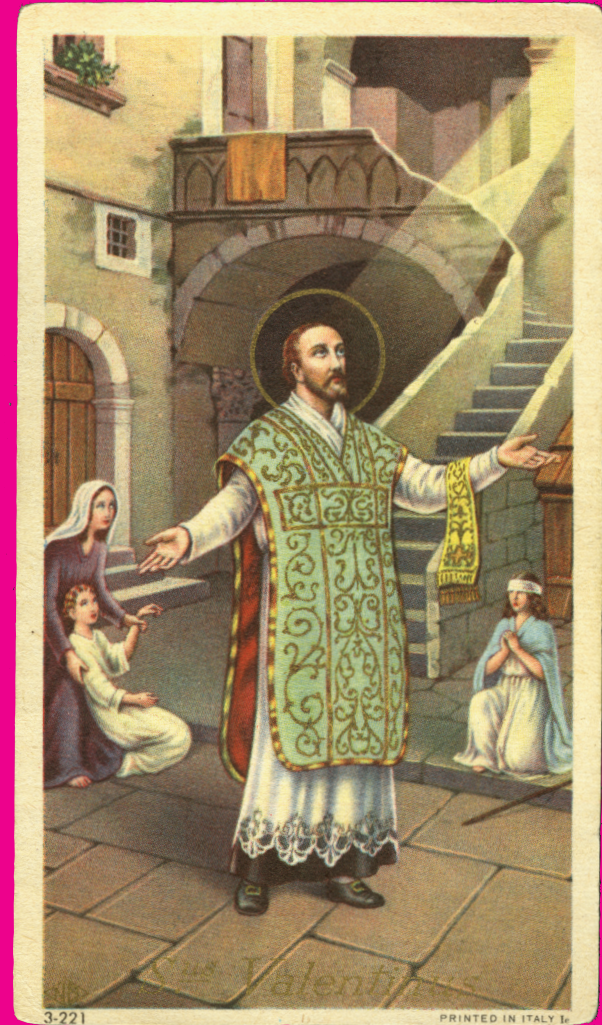
Amen.



Saint Cecilia

Saint Valentine

269 A.D.



Feast Day: February 14

Patron of: beekeepers, engaged couples, greeting card manufacturers, happy marriages, love, lovers, young people

Invoked against: epilepsy, fainting, plague

Symbols: birds, martyr's palms, rose, sun, sword



His feast day is embedded in Western civilization. His name has become synonymous with a certain type of romantic card, yet few realize that Valentine actually existed. As a saint, his first great work was to unite young couples in marriage.

40 In the year a.d. 269, when the Roman Empire was under constant attack from barbarian tribes, Emperor Marcus Aurelius Claudius issued an edict outlawing marriage for young men. He speculated that more soldiers would join the legions to defend it if they were unfettered by wives and children. Valentine was a respected healer and priest in the outlawed Christian faith. He had great sympathy for those young couples whose plans for a life together were shattered by the state and he encouraged anyone who wished to wed to come to him to be married in secret. He was arrested and imprisoned in Rome for defying the emperor. But his reputation as a learned man remained untarnished and many of his followers would visit him in prison for counseling; others came for health cures. Personally afflicted with epilepsy, Valentine was particularly drawn to treating those also suffering from the disease.

The jailer, having witnessed many successful healings at Valentine's cell door, asked the saint to treat his daughter, who had been blind since birth. During her subsequent visits to the prison, Valentine read to the girl, taught her mathematics, and beautifully described the natural world. Valentine's wisdom and kindness so impressed the jailer and his family that they converted to Christianity despite the fact that the young girl remained blind. This conversion established Valentine's status as a true threat to the state, a charge punishable by death. His execution came on February 14, the eve of the Roman festival of Lupercalia. Valentine was beaten with clubs and then beheaded. Before his sentence was carried out however, he sent a yellow crocus to the jailer's daughter enclosed with a note that read, "With love, from your



Saint Valentine

Valentine." The bright color of this flower was the first thing she ever saw, her eyesight having been miraculously restored. She is said to have planted an almond tree on Valentine's grave, and to this day the almond tree is considered a symbol of friendship and devotion.

Valentine was buried on the Flaminian Way in a catacomb that still bears his name. A church was dedicated to him there in a.d. 496. The wall of the city, the original Flaminian Gate, was a pilgrim's first stop upon entering Rome and was known as Porta S. Valentino until the seventeenth century, when it was renamed Porta del Popolo. In the ninth century, relics of the early martyrs were removed from the catacombs and transferred to local Roman churches. Valentine, too, was reinterred in the church. His body was moved to the church of Saint Praxedes, very near his original burial place. Many cities besides Rome claim his relics, among them Terni, Italy; Madrid, Spain; Dublin, Ireland; Glasgow, Scotland; and Rocamadour, France.

It is no coincidence that the liturgical feast day of the patron saint of love falls on the eve of Lupercalia, an erotic Roman fertility festival. It was common practice for church holidays to coopt pagan celebrations. The Romans considered this the official beginning of Spring, a time of reawakening fertility and warming weather. One of the activities held in honor of the goddess Februata Juno consisted of the city's bachelors drawing the names of unmarried women out of an urn. They would then become a couple for the rest of the year, with many of these matches resulting in marriage. In twelfth century southern France, this practice was reawakened as part of the Langue d'Oc poetry movement. This was a time when art and literature took on a heightened importance to the ruling classes. Noble youths known as gallants wrote missives of love they called *galantines*. The local pronunciation confused this with the word valentine and Valentines clubs sprang up. On February 14, after a Mass in honor of Love, a silver casket containing the names of unmarried local men was presented to the single women in town. The men whose names each woman drew was required to be the guardian of that lady, providing her with flowers, poems, and gifts throughout the year. He was to guard her honor chivalrously. Marriage between these Valentines was strictly forbidden.

41

**For this we sent on
Seynt Valentyne's day
When every fowle
cometh ther to choose
his mate.**

— from the fourteenth century poem
"Parliament of Fowles" by Geoffrey Chaucer



Saint Valentine

Because of the wide dispersal of his remains, the cult of Saint Valentine became extremely popular in Northern Italy, southern France, and England. His head, which was reputed to be in England, was said to bestow incredible miracles and healings on those who kissed it. Since the middle of February was considered the time of year when birds began to pair, the English, like the Romans a thousand years before them, looked upon this as the beginning of mating season. Celebrating the Feast of Saint Valentine by citing the fidelity of doves seems to be an English tradition. The oldest valentine note in existence today was written by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife in 1415, while he was imprisoned in the tower of London.

By the middle, nineteenth century sending and receiving anonymous Valentine's cards and poems declaring one's love became common in both America and England. By then, the story of the saint who had inspired this industry might have faded away, but his name and feast day is celebrated universally.



Old greeting card.



Saint Valentine

In art Saint Valentine is sometimes depicted as a bishop since it is believed he could possibly be the same person as the first martyred bishop of Interamna (Terni, Italy). Frequently a pair of doves symbolizing faithful unions, the sword he was martyred with, the sun of honest knowledge, and the rose of ardent love can be found as part of his portrait as well as martyr's palms. Because he suffered from epilepsy, he is invoked against that disease, as well as fainting spells.

Prayer to Saint Valentine

O glorious advocate and protector,
Saint Valentine,
look with pity upon our wants,
hear our requests,
attend to our prayers,
relieve by your intercession the miseries
under which we labor,
and obtain for us the divine blessing,
that we may be found worthy to join you
in praising the Almighty for all
eternity; through the merits of
Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.



Saint Valentine

THIRD CENTURY

44 *Saint Christopher*
One of the Fourteen Holy Helpers

Feast Day: July 25

Patron of: athletes, couriers, gardeners, ferrymen, fruit growers, fruit venders, motorists, pilgrims, porters, postal workers, railway workers, taxi drivers, travelers

Invoked against: death, floods, hail, sudden hurricanes, plague

Symbols: carrying the Child Jesus, flowering staff





A standard image in automobiles and taxicabs, Saint Christopher is an unavoidable presence in modern society. He is the first saint that many non-Catholics come in contact with, and his cult has faded and been resurrected over a span of two thousand years. The stories of Saint Christopher are unique and fantastic. In the West, the story begins with a fearsome giant named Reprobus.

46

Born to a tribe in North Africa, Reprobus was so proud of his great physical prowess that he vowed to serve only the greatest king in the world. He put himself in service to a ruler whom he believed to be supreme, but he soon noticed that this king trembled and crossed himself at the mention of the devil. Witnessing the king's fear, he realized that a more powerful leader yet reigned. He left the king's court, found the devil, and put himself in his service. One day, while traveling with the devil and his army, they saw a cross on the road. The devil abruptly left this path and led them through the desert. When Reprobus saw that the devil was frightened, he demanded to know the reason. "There was a man named Christ who was nailed to a cross," he was told. "And when I see the sign of his cross, I am filled with terror and I run away!"

Reprobus left in disgust and set out to find this Jesus Christ, who could make the devil quake in fear. In his travels he came across a hermit who lived besides a dangerous river. This hermit was a known Christian who spent his days guiding travelers over the rushing water. When Reprobus asked the hermit how he could join Christ's service, the hermit suggested that the mighty giant take on the task of carrying travelers across the dangerous river currents. Reprobus gladly accepted this simple solution. He set up camp near the river and found a long pole to act as his steadying staff in the raging water.

For a few days he carried travelers on his back through the currents. It



Saint Christopher

came to pass that one day he heard the voice of a small child requesting to be carried across the river. He left his shelter but found no one there. He heard the voice a second time and still saw no one. The third time the child called, Reprobus again stepped outside and to his surprise saw a child standing on the riverbank. When the boy again requested to be carried over, the giant easily picked the child up, put him on his shoulders, and began walking across the river. To his astonishment, as he neared the heavy current, the child's weight seemed to increase. As the water grew rougher, the child grew heavy as lead. Engulfed in rapids and struggling to remain upright, Reprobus was sure they would both drown. When he finally reached the other shore, Reprobus put the boy down and admonished him, "My boy, you put me in great danger, and you weighed so much that if I had the whole world on my back I could not have felt it a heavier burden!" To his amazement, the child replied, "You were not only carrying the whole world, you had him who created the world upon your shoulders! I am Christ your king, to whom you render service by doing the work you do here." The child then baptized him with the water from the river and told him that when Reprobus returned home, he was to plant his staff in the earth. "The next day you will find it bearing fruit as a form of proof of my identity." The child then vanished. Reprobus returned home and did what he was told. As promised, the next day he found his staff bearing the leaves and fruit of a palm tree. From that day on he took the name Christopher, which means "Christ bearer."

The story continues, and the powerful message that Christopher's flowering staff represented converted many to Christianity. The king, threatened by Christopher's masterly ability to relate to the common people, had the humble servant brought before him. The king said that Christopher was a fool to take the name of a crucified man as his leader. If he would denounce Christ, Christopher would be granted entrance into the king's service, and his life would be spared. When Christopher refused, the king ordered him tortured and shot with arrows. As four hundred archers aimed at the giant, one stray arrow turned in midair and went through the king's eye. Christopher told him not to worry. He said that upon his death, the king should rub some of Christopher's shed blood into his eye and vision would be restored.

47

**“You were not only
carrying the whole
world, you had Him who
created the world on
your shoulders!”**

— The Christ Child to Christopher



Saint Christopher

Upon these words, Christopher was beheaded and the tyrant took some of the blood, rubbing it into the injured eye, saying, "In the name of God and Saint Christopher." When his vision was restored, the king immediately converted to Christianity, along with those who had witnessed these events.

In the West, the story of Saint Christopher is taken as a fable for Christians to teach them to figuratively "bear Christ" in every aspect of their lives. In the East, however, the story differs. There, Christopher was known as a member of a warrior tribe of dog-headed cannibals, and traditional Orthodox iconography depicts him as a man with a dog's head. This is thought to be a literal interpretation of the Greco-Roman tradition of describing all foreigners from outside of the empire as cannibals or dog-headed. In truth, the historic Christopher was most likely from Berber tribes that resided in Libya. Many speculate he is the same person as the saint known as Menas, who always carried a picture of Christ near his heart. This holy man was martyred in Antioch and then taken to Alexandria to be honored by the Coptic Christians.

Despite the different tales of his origin, Saint Christopher is best known for his Western roots. His act of healing toward the king, his murderer, and his protection of travelers led to his adoption both as an intercessor for the sick and for those responsible for the safety of others.

48 Saint Christopher is often grouped with other saints thought to offer intercession of healing. Collectively known as the Fourteen Holy Helpers, each of these saints specializes in curing different parts of the body. Christopher was added to this group during the Middle Ages when the Black Plague raged through Europe. At this time, paintings of Saint Christopher appeared on the outside of many churches and village public walls because it was thought that anyone who saw his image would be safe from death that day. After the plague had run its course, these images became welcome sights to religious pilgrims, who found assurance in his protection of them along the road.

In the twentieth century, the cult of Saint Christopher saw great resurgence. As the patron saint of travelers and those who transport people, medallions bearing his image became prevalent, especially with the advent of the automobile. In the United States this tradition was introduced by European immigrants and became so popular that even many non-Catholics have a Saint Christopher medallion in their vehicle for protection.



Saint Christopher

Because of his flowering staff, Saint Christopher is also the patron saint of gardeners and those who buy and sell fruit. Since he carried and delivered many to safety, he is the patron of ferrymen and postal workers. Because he worked in such violent currents, he is invoked against the violence of water such as floods and hail. Being endowed with great strength and physical perfection, he is also the patron of athletes. In art, Saint Christopher is always depicted carrying the Christ Child, his staff at his side.

Traveler's Prayer to Saint Christopher

O Saint Christopher, hear our prayer,
Keep me in your loving care.
Whatever the perils of the way,
Let me not add to them this day.
So to our caution and attention,
We add a prayer for your protection,
And beg God's blessing on this journey,
That we may travel safely near and far.
Amen.



Saint Christopher

283–304 A.D.

50 *Saint Lucy*

Feast Day: December 13

Patron of: Syracuse, the blind, cutlers, electricians, glaziers, gondoliers, oculists, peasants, writers

Invoked for: clarity

Invoked against: dysentery, epidemics, eye disease, hemorrhages, throat ailments

Symbols: holding her eyes on a dish, martyr's palms, sword, oxen



S

52

Saint Lucy was a privileged young woman who chose a state of enlightenment over the prosperous, respectable life she was expected to lead in Roman society. One of the early virgin martyrs, her quiet but steadfast rebellion against civil authorities earned her an excruciating death that became a triumphant example of everlasting life, hastening the overthrow of the emperor and the legalization of Christianity.

Born in Siracusa, Sicily, Lucy was a young Christian woman of Greek ancestry. She held a deep spiritual belief that one must remain pure to be a true conduit of the Holy Spirit. Lucy secretly vowed to remain a virgin, even while her widowed mother arranged her marriage to a wealthy pagan nobleman. Secrecy was necessary at this time in history. Christianity was looked upon as a threat by the Roman emperor. Because so many soldiers in the Empire had converted, officials feared these Christians would follow the tenets of Christ over their military leaders. The state insisted that it was a man's duty to serve his nation militarily and a woman's duty to marry and bear children. When a girl refused to do this, she was considered a traitor to the empire. Thus, consecrating one's virginity to Christ was more of a bold and revolutionary stance against the state than a private act of devotion.

Lucy, therefore, did not immediately tell her mother of her decision. Instead, the two women traveled to the tomb of the virgin martyr Saint Agatha in Catania some fifty miles away. Agatha had become the patron of Catania after her veil stopped the deadly flow of Mount Etna's lava from entering the town. She was credited with so many miracles since her martyrdom thirty-five years prior, that Christians, Jews, and pagans alike were drawn to her tomb to invoke her aid. Lucy and her mother spent the night in prayer outside of the tomb petitioning the saint for healing, as Lucy's mother suffered greatly from the ceaseless bleeding of a uterine hemorrhage.



Saint Lucy

That night Agatha visited Lucy in a dream, telling her, "You have no need to invoke me, for your faith has already cured your mother. One day you will be known as the patron of your own city." As the day dawned, Lucy found her mother completely healed. She told her mother of her dream and confessed her secret vow of virginity. Impressed by Lucy's faith, her mother agreed not to force her into marriage.

Since she was no longer in need of a dowry, Lucy encouraged her mother to divest herself of all the investments she had made for her daughter's future and give the money to the poor, Lucy's fiancé, outraged to learn that their engagement was broken, denounced her faith to the governor of Siracusa. It was a dangerous time to be accused of following Christ. The emperor Diocletian had launched the most extensive and vicious anti-Christian campaign throughout the Roman Empire. When brought before the court to defend herself against the charges, Lucy asked, "Why would that man want to marry me?" The governor quipped, "Perhaps it is your lovely eyes." Lucy ripped out her eyeballs and told the governor to send them to her former fiancé. However, her eyesight was miraculously restored the next day, and she was again brought before the governor. He demanded why she so adamantly refused to marry. Lucy replied, "Those who live chaste lives are the temples of the Holy Spirit."

The governor then decreed that she be taken to a brothel and repeatedly raped until she "lost the Holy Spirit." Soldiers came to carry her off but could not move her. A thousand men were called in, to no avail. Lucy would not budge. Nor could a team of oxen drag her away. Burning pitch was poured on her skin but nothing would break her will. As she stood fast she predicted the fall of the emperor. Lucy was fatally stabbed in the throat for this pronouncement. True to her prophecy, the emperor fell within the year.

53

Immediately after her death, public opinion was so swayed by Lucy's fate that it was considered a great honor for other Christians to be buried near her in the catacombs of Siracusa. In the sixth century, the *Acts of the Virgin Martyrs* were given great recognition by ecclesiastical writers and Lucy's name was entered in the Canon of the Mass.

The people of her native city have always honored Lucy and been protective of her. In the ninth century when Siracusa fell into Muslim hands, faithful Christians hid Lucy's remains for hundreds of years until 1040, when the Byzantine army drove out the Saracens. In gratitude for their liberation, they

**“Those who live chaste
lives are temples of the
holy spirit.”**

— Saint Lucy A.D. 304



Saint Lucy

sent their most precious possession, her body, to Constantinople as a gift for the empress Theodora. Many of her relics were then distributed throughout Europe, which greatly expanded the range of her cult. In 1204, Venetian Crusaders conquered Constantinople and took Lucy's remains back to Venice, where they were installed in a church named for her. It happens that this original church was near the place where the gondolas were stored for the night. The song "Santa Lucia" became famous among gondoliers looking forward to the end of their night's work. When the church was later torn down to make way for a new train station, the station was named for Saint Lucy and her remains were interred in the nearby Church of Saint Jeremiah.

The name *Lucy* means light. According to the Julian calendar, her feast day, December 13, was considered the shortest day of the year. Celebrations combining Lucy's feast day with the winter solstice began in Sicily and spread throughout Europe. It was said that the "longest of nights and the shortest of days belong to Saint Lucy." Today, she is most celebrated in Sweden and other Scandinavian nations because when the Swedes converted to Christianity in the eleventh century, they could most easily relate to a saint who would gradually bring more light each day as the sun changed its course. Saint Lucy's Day is a major holiday in that part of the world, celebrated with torchlight processions of crowned girls in white dresses. With the change to the Gregorian calendar in the 1300s, and the shifting of the solstice to ten days later, Lucy's feast became synonymous with the start of the Christmas season. She is associated with gifts to children because of her part in curing an eye epidemic that caused blindness in children in the thirteenth century. When local families went on a barefoot pilgrimage to her tomb invoking her aid, she cured the children and sent them home, telling them that they would find gifts in their shoes. It became a common Christmas custom in many parts of Europe to celebrate the saint's feast by putting gifts in children's shoes. Lucy kept a careful watch over her native country as well, and, in 1582, Saint Lucy was credited with ending a famine in Sicily by sending three grain-loaded ships to its starving residents. The people were so hungry that they boiled and ate the grain without grinding it into flour. To this day, Sicilians do not eat anything made with flour on Saint Lucy's Day, and there are a host of traditional foods and desserts created specifically for her feast day.

54



Saint Lucy

Lucy is a popular subject for artists; she is frequently depicted calmly holding her eyeballs on a dish, referencing her story. Because of this, she is the patron of the blind and all trades relating to the eyes. Eye strain is a common problem for writers, therefore she is their patron. In art, she is sometimes portrayed in the company of Saints Agatha, Agnes of Rome, Barbara, Thecla, and Catherine of Alexandria. All of them legendary young girls, defiant and fearless in the face of death. Because of her success in healing her mother, she is invoked against hemorrhage. Since she was stabbed in the throat, she protects against throat ailments and cutlers because she was killed by a knife. As a true patron of her city, Syracuse, she was historically called upon to help in all epidemics, hence her aid against dysentery. Peasants claim her patronage because they depend on oxen, which play a part in her rebellion against the governor. Her final resting place is Venice so she is also known as the patron of that city's glaziers and gondoliers.

Prayer to Saint Lucy of Syracuse

Saint Lucy, your beautiful name signifies light.
By the light of faith which God bestowed upon you,
Increase and preserve this light in my soul so that I may avoid evil,
Be zealous in the performance of good works,
and abhor nothing as much as the blindness and darkness of
evil and sin.
By your intercession with God,
obtain for me perfect vision for my bodily eyes
and the grace to use them for God's greater honor and glory
and the salvation of all men.
Saint Lucy, virgin and martyr,
Hear my prayers and obtain my petitions.
Amen.

55



Saint Lucy

270–345 A.D.

56 *Saint Nicholas*

Feast Day: December 6

Patron of: Apulia, Bari, Greece, Italy, the Kingdom of Naples, Russia, Sicily, apothecaries, bakers, barrel makers, boatmen, butchers, children, dockworkers, grain vendors, murderers, paupers, pawnbrokers, pharmacists, thieves, wine vendors, the wrongfully accused

Invoked for: happy marriages blessed with children

Invoked against: judicial error

Symbols: anchor, bishop's staff, miter, ship, three bags of money, three gold balls



U

58

Universally loved, Saint Nicholas of Myra is so revered in the East that he is invoked in the Orthodox Mass. In the West, he has come to symbolize the celebration of Christmas in the form of a character named Santa Claus, or St. Nick. The traditions of Christmas reflect his life of wonders, which began in Patara, Turkey. As a wealthy young orphan, Nicholas had great compassion for the poor and freely shared his inheritance with others. When he heard that one of his neighbors was so desperately impoverished he was considering selling his three daughters into prostitution, Nicholas secretly went to the man's house on three consecutive nights. Each night, he threw a bag of gold coins through an open window, providing a dowry for the girls and sparing them a horrible fate.

Compassion and care for others, regardless of their circumstances, were prevailing traits throughout Saint Nicholas's life. When the local governor took a bribe to execute three innocent men, Nicholas boldly stayed the hand of the executioner and ordered the men freed. He then reproached the governor until the man admitted his crime and repented for it publicly. Three Roman officers who had witnessed this event were later wrongfully arrested and ordered executed in Constantinople. They appealed to God to send Nicholas to help them win their freedom. That night both the emperor Constantine and the local prefect had dreams of Nicholas berating them. When they compared notes the next morning, they sent for the condemned men, who told them of their appeal to Nicholas, who was by then the bishop of Myra. Constantine then freed the men and sent them to Nicholas with a letter asking him not to threaten him anymore but to pray for the peace of the world.

Even in his own lifetime, Nicholas was considered a saint, having received the bishopric of Myra under supernatural circumstance. At the time, the



Saint Nicholas

**“The West as the East
acclaims and glorifies
him. Wherever there are
people, in the country and
the town, in the villages,
in the isles, in the fur-
thest parts of the earth,
his name is revered and
churches are built in his
honor. Images of him
are set up, panegyrics
preached and festivals cel-
ebrated. All Christians
young and old, men and
women, boys and girls,
reverence his memory and
call upon his
protection. And his favors,
which know no limit of
time and continue from
age to age, are poured
out all over the earth; the
Scythians know them, as
do the Indians and the
barbarians, the Africans
as well as the Italians.”**

59

— Anonymous Greek, 10th century A.D.



Saint Nicholas

seacoast capital's bishop died suddenly, and the Christian community was at a loss for his successor. A neighboring bishop was told in a dream to name the first man who entered the church the next morning their new bishop. Nicholas was visiting the city and happened to enter the church at dawn's first light. He was thus embraced and consecrated as bishop of Myra. He accepted his office with grace and humility, standing fast against the persecutions of Diocletian, the Roman Emperor. As bishop, Nicholas was said to be present at the Council of Nicacea in 325. There, he defended the teachings of the Holy Trinity against Arius, who argued against the divinity of Christ. For his holy stance, he was thrown into prison; however, Christ and the Virgin Mary appeared to him and restored his robes and holy office. Once free, he singlehandedly brought down the megalithic Temple of Diana (the Greek goddess Artemis). According to legend, screaming demons fled as the great stones fell. Ironically, December 6, the feast day of Saint Nicholas, was also the day once celebrated as Diana's birthday.

60 Besides his love for justice, Nicholas was known as a loving shepherd of his people. During a famine that threatened his region, he heard there were ships in the harbor filled with grain. He went to the boats and asked the sailors for one hundred bushels. The grain had been carefully measured for the city of Alexandria and the sailors were terrified to deliver it with any shortages. Nicholas convinced them to give a little bit from each boat, assuring them that the customs officer would never know the difference. The grain he obtained lasted for two years, successfully ending the famine. True to his word, the sailors' donation went undetected.

Though he is the patron of children, one of the only stories of Saint Nicholas and children is a grim one. A butcher abducted three young boys to make into bacon. After cutting them up he packed them in a barrel of brine to cure. The boys' location was revealed to Nicholas in a dream. He went to the butcher and demanded to see the barrel, then miraculously pulled three whole boys from it, restoring them to life. The butcher confessed and repented for his crime. Because of this, Nicholas is the patron of butchers, barrel makers, and murderers.



Saint Nicholas

There are several stories of people borrowing money and swearing on an altar of Saint Nicholas to repay it. In one, a liar insists he had already paid his debt. While leaving the convinced court, he gloated at his moneylender. On his way home, however, he was killed in an accident on the road. The money he falsely claimed to have paid spilled out from its hiding place in his cane. Instead of picking up the money, which was rightfully his, the moneylender first invoked Saint Nicholas to bring the man back to life. Only after the liar was breathing again and able to stand up did the moneylender pick up the coins—converting to Christianity as the liar repented.

Since Myra is on the coast, there are many tales of Nicholas helping sailors at sea. He would appear to them in dreams, advising them how to steer through rough passages. “May Saint Nicholas hold the tiller,” is a common good luck saying among sailors on the Aegean and Ionian Seas. Sailors spread tales of his wonder-working in every port they entered. For this reason, there are numerous seaport chapels dedicated to Saint Nicholas. Before the Reformation, England alone had over four hundred churches in his name. When Myra fell under Muslim rule, sailors from Bari, Italy, posed as visiting pilgrims and stole the saint's remains. With the monks and townspeople of Myra in hot pursuit, they carried Nicholas's bones back to Bari, where they built a magnificent cathedral to house them. This is still a major pilgrimage site in Christendom, particularly for women having trouble conceiving children. On May 9, the feast of the translation of Nicholas's remains, manna, or sacred oil with healing powers, is extracted from his bones, diluted, and stored in hand-painted bottles. Bari is filled with pilgrims from both the East and the West who travel great distances to celebrate this festival. Many come from Russia where his cult was introduced in the eleventh century by Vladimir I. Nicholas is still invoked there as a protector of the oppressed and poor. His great popularity in Germany goes back even further, stemming from the devotion of the Greek wife of the emperor in the eighth century.

61 Because of his practice of anonymous generosity, the French would honor Nicholas by leaving gifts and candy to poor children on December 5, Saint



Saint Nicholas

Nicholas's Eve. This custom was taken up all over Western Europe but particularly embraced in the Netherlands. After the Reformation, when honoring saints became suspect, Martin Luther moved the customary celebration of Saint Nicholas's Day to December 25, changing it into a celebration of the birth of Christ. However, Saint Nicholas lived on in the common people in the guise of Sinta Klaus (Saint Claus). The first Dutch settlers in New York brought their traditional celebration of Saint Nicholas with them, while German immigrants made Christmas a major celebration. The image of Saint Nicholas driving a sled with reindeer was taken from the German myths of the gods. Odin was said to fly through the heavens the same way. In the early 1800s, visual depictions of Saint Nicholas evolved from an iconic Eastern bishop with a beard to a jolly Dutch burgher. Publication of the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" ("The Night Before Christmas") in 1823 completed his transformation from the wonder-working fourth-century saint to our present-day popular figure of Santa Claus.

One need only look at the extensive list of his patronage (only a fraction of which is listed above) to see how immensely popular this saint is. Since Saint Nicholas was a defender of the Holy Trinity, tales of his wonder-working frequently feature three individuals or three objects. It is said when he rescued his neighbor's daughters that the three bags of gold landed in stockings hung to dry over the fire place. This is where we get our tradition of Christmas stockings. Oranges or chocolate-covered gold coins also signify these bags of gold. Candy canes are symbols of his bishop's staff.

62



‡

Saint Nicholas;

Because of his defense of the wronged moneylender—a reviled profession in ancient times—pawnbrokers adopted him as a patron and use as their symbol the three golden balls. Thieves and murderers also claim his patronage, citing his sincere forgiveness of them following their repentance. Nicholas is also invoked for helping the wrongly accused to receive justice. His patronage of children stems from bringing the three murdered boys back to life, and his patronage of bakers and grain sellers is derived from his saving the city of Myra during the famine. In art, Saint Nicholas is always depicted with a beard, a bishop's hat, and staff, usually with three objects or three figures from the tales of his wonder-working.

Eastern Orthodox Saint Nicholas Prayer

Almighty God, who in your love gave to your servant
 Nicholas of Myra
 a perpetual name for deeds of kindness on land and sea:
 Grant, we pray, that your Church may never cease to
 work for the happiness of children,
 the safety of sailors,
 the relief of the poor,
 and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt
 or grief;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 One God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

63

‡

Saint Nicholas;

FOURTH CENTURY

64 *Saint Ursula*

Feast Day: October 21

Patron of: British Virgin Islands; Cologne, Germany; University of Paris; archers, drapers, educators, girls, orphans

Invoked for: the education of girls and women, a happy marriage, a holy death

Invoked against: shipwrecks on rivers

Symbols: arrows, cloak, crown, pilgrim's staff with white flag and red cross, ship





66

The story of Saint Ursula and her army of eleven thousand virgins was a major influence on the creative world of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The tale made a fascinating subject for artists of all disciplines, and the early Middle Ages are filled with accounts of mystics communicating with the souls of the young maidens. Images of thousands of girls fearlessly sailing around in their own ships captured the popular imagination. Their tragic and daring tale of martyrdom inspired one of the finest pieces of liturgical music ever written, “Chants for the Feast of Saint Ursula,” and the artists Caravaggio, Giovanni Bellini, and Claude Lorrain have all celebrated her as a famous subject. Almost every country of Europe has an artistically important visual rendition of Ursula’s story. The Reliquary of Saint Ursula can be found in Bruges and is said to contain an arm of the saint. It is adorned with six miniatures by Hans Memling. The Scuola di San’ Orsola in Venice commissioned the artist Carpaccio to create his greatest work, *The Dream of Saint Ursula*, a series of paintings based on the life of the saint, which tell her story in an almost cinematic way.

There are many different versions of this story, the first known one appearing in the eighth century when the Cult of Saint Ursula was strong. The authenticity of her legend is based on ten lines carved in the late fifth century, now found in the Church of Saint Ursula at Cologne, Germany. The words were written by a senator named Clematius who attests that due to a spiritual vision, he is dedicating a church on the grounds of an older basilica built to honor the virgins of Cologne martyred on that site on October 21 a century earlier.

The first written accounts of her martyrdom come a century later and nearly five hundred years after her death. They depict Ursula as the Christian daughter of a British king who in order to avoid a war, agrees to an arranged



Saint Ursula

marriage to a pagan prince. On the advice of an angel received in a dream, Ursula requested that she travel for three years, visiting the holy shrines of the Christians. She would bring with her ten noblewomen who would each be accompanied by one thousand virgin companions. So great was Ursula’s beauty, that the neighboring king and his son readily agreed to her request. They helped amass the eleven thousand virgins from kingdoms all over the known world. Men being unwelcome on such a voyage, Ursula and her virgins were trained in sailing their eleven massive ships, which first sailed to Cologne, Germany, and then on to Basle, where the women proceeded on foot through the Alps down to Rome. Gradually, these accompanying maidens converted from their pagan faiths to Christianity, and they were given a joyous reception by the pope and the Christian community. On their return voyage, they stopped again at Cologne, which had been overrun by the Huns. The invaders hated the prospect of so many future Christian mothers taking over the continent and the virgins were massacred. Ursula was spared for her beauty, and the leader of the Huns demanded that she marry him. When she refused, he shot her in the chest with an arrow. After her death, an army of eleven thousand angels chased the Huns from Cologne, and the grateful population converted to Christianity and erected a basilica in honor of Ursula and her virgins.

It is thought the very early stories of the virgin martyrs actually only included eleven young women, Ursula, being one of them. As the tale was recorded in Latin, the number eleven was transposed into eleven thousand, making the original story more fantastic with each recounting. In mythology, Urschel is also the name of the Teutonic moon goddess who welcomed the souls of dead maidens. It is thought that the history of this early virgin martyr could have been confused and combined with the legend of this goddess who also sailed up the Rhine River with a boatload of virginal companions.

67

**“For this most chaste
and golden army
crossed the sea with
maidenly, flowing hair.
O who has ever heard
such great things?”**

— From “Chants for the Feast of Saint Ursula”
by Hildegarde von Bingen, 12th century



Saint Ursula

her death that we feel her impact in modern times. In the sixteenth century, the Italian saint Angela Merici was inspired by her own personal visions of Saint Ursula and her virgins to found an order of nuns dedicated to educating young women. This was considered a revolutionary concept at a time when women were scarcely allowed to leave their homes. These were the first schools established for girls and young women in Europe, later coming to the Americas in the seventeenth century. Today, Ursuline academies and colleges take seriously their mandate to educate young women throughout the world, and this order of teaching nuns maintains Saint Ursula as their patron.



Chapel of the Ursuline nuns, Quebec



Saint Ursula

Though her cult is most popular in Germany and Eastern Europe, Saint Ursula can be found on the flag of the British Virgin Islands where her feast day, October 21, is a national holiday. The islands were discovered by Columbus on his second voyage in 1493. He named a larger island Saint Ursula and the surrounding ones, Once Mil Virgines (Eleven Thousand Virgins). Eventually, this name was shortened to the Virgin Islands, which is what they are known as today. Her iconography reflects the events of her life. Since Ursula was a British princess, she is depicted with a crown, and the flag she carries is the banner of Saint George, the Christian flag of England. She is frequently sheltering young girls under a cloak, and for this reason she is the patron saint of drapers. Because her fiancé was so agreeable to granting her request to travel, she is invoked for happy marriages. She was martyred by an arrow, so she is the patron saint of archers. Today, Saint Ursula is most associated with the education and empowerment of young girls.

Prayer to Saint Ursula

By the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, accept, O God,
The prayers offered to you through the intercession of Saint Ursula,
Faithful imitator of the virtues of the Heart of your Son,
And grant us the favors we are confidently asking for. Amen.
Saint Ursula, pray for us!

Amen.



Saint Ursula



Feast Day: July 11

Patron of: Europe, architects, chemists, coppersmiths, the dying engineers, farmers, monks, those in religious orders, schoolchildren, speleologists

Invoked against: gallstones, gossip, inflammatory diseases, kidney diseases, poisoning, temptation

Symbols: book of the Rule, broken sieve, cup with two serpents, miter, pastoral staff, raven with bread in its beak

72

Though his sole intention was the moral and spiritual training of individuals seeking a holy life, Saint Benedict is credited with saving Western civilization during the Dark Ages. Benedictine builders and architects created cathedrals, abbeys, castles, and churches in every country of Europe. Regions scattered throughout the continent owe their agricultural prosperity to the skills of Benedictine monks in reviving lost farming practices. Because of this Order, ancient literature was preserved, pioneering strides in medicine were made, and schools and universities were created that still exist today. After 1,500 years, the Benedictine Rule is the basis of all Western monastic rules and for this reason Benedict is considered the patriarch of Western religious orders.

Most of what is known about the life of Saint Benedict comes from the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great*. Those consulted for these writings included Benedict's first followers and eyewitnesses to his life. *The Dialogues* were completed within a generation of his death.

According to this history, Benedict and his twin sister, Scholastica, were born in Nursia (today's Norcia), a prosperous town in Umbria. His family sent him to Rome to complete his higher education. He was appalled to find that a study of rhetoric had replaced the search for truth, and that his fellow students seemed to squander every one of their advantages in the pursuit of pleasure. Disgusted by the corruption in the government and the schisms in the church, Benedict gave up his inheritance and went off to live forty miles away in the city of Affile. There he began studying the Bible with a small group of like-minded young men. His diligence was rewarded one day when his servant accidentally broke a wheat- sifter. Benedict picked up the pieces to examine them and the sifter was miraculously made whole. The notoriety of his first miracle forced him to go into hiding. This time he moved into a cave on the ridge of Mount Subiaco. A hermit living nearby advised him and brought him food. Benedict spent three years there, praying and studying. The devil appeared to him as a blackbird that constantly circled his face. When Benedict made the sign of the cross, it disappeared but he was instantly seized with an attack of lust for a woman he had previously known. He threw off his tunic and rolled himself in the sharp nettles and brambles to stop his thoughts, ridding himself of further temptation.

73

Benedict's reputation for holiness spread, and the monks of Viscovo asked him to be their leader. He warned them that he would be too strict an authority for them, but they insisted that he come. When Benedict's prediction proved true, they tried to put poison in his wine to get rid of him. However, he made the sign of the cross over the cup and it shattered. Benedict forgave the monks and returned to his cave.

“Pray and Work.”

— A summation of the Rule of Saint Benedict5



Saint Benedict



Saint Benedict

As his fame spread, many came to Subiaco asking for guidance in living a monastic life. At that time, the first monastic communities had been formed in the East, and they included harsh ascetic deprivations that Benedict felt served to hinder a true study of scripture. As an alternative, he set up twelve religious houses of twelve men each, with their own patriarch. He lived in a thirteenth house, with several other monks in training. When he realized that it was a major problem for his monks to bring fresh water up the mountains on a daily basis, Benedict spent the night in prayer. At dawn, a natural spring appeared, capable of supplying water to all thirteen communities. It is still in existence today.

These and other little miracles became well known to the surrounding towns. Many looked to this religious community of laymen for their spiritual guidance, and the local priest was overcome with jealousy. As a legitimate member of the clergy, it infuriated him that he did not warrant half the respect of Benedict and his followers. When the priest tried to poison Benedict with a loaf of bread, a raven snatched it out of Benedict's hands and flew off with it. This raven frequently appears in Benedict's iconography, along with the cup of poisoned wine wrapped in serpents, which symbolize the devil.

74 Religious counsel was only one area in which the Benedictines served their neighbors. They developed farming techniques that greatly improved the fortunes of those toiling in the fields. And because of their reputation for higher learning, these same local people entreated the monks to start a school. Students came from far-off places to study with these learned men. While Benedict was meeting with a monk named Maurus, he had a vision of a student named Placidus drowning in a lake. He ordered Maurus to save the child. Only after he had safely gotten the boy ashore did Maurus realize that he had actually run across the surface of the lake to do so. Benedict's ability to see multiple things happening at one time would continue over

his lifetime.

Placidus came from a wealthy family and in gratitude for saving his son's life, his father gave Benedict the citadel of Monte Cassino. Located high up on a mountain ridge, Monte Cassino had stood as a shrine to the gods Apollo and Jove. After spending forty days in prayer, Benedict cut down the grove of trees sacred to the gods. On the place of the temple to Jupiter, he built a church named for Saint Martin and another named for Saint John the Baptiste, considered the ideal hermit. Instead of having many small houses of monks, Benedict decided to have one large one, and in 530 the building of the most famous monastery in the world began.

The monastery at Monte Cassino was built as a city of God. Benedict was not a priest and his followers were not educated clergymen but laymen who wanted to live good lives as proscribed in the Gospel. Benedict wrote out a Rule, which every Western monastery since has based its founding principles on. This Rule was a startling break from the ideas of the day. As written, all monks had to work, either in the fields or in the construction of buildings. All monks were equal regardless of the social level into which they were born. All monks would spend hours a day reading. Prayer was to consist of the Psalms and Canticles, with the entire Psalter being recited within a week. The Rule did not legislate private prayer but advised it to be short and heartfelt. Excessive self-deprivation was discouraged, as it was often a form of vanity. Benedict's order of monks was also encouraged to have as much food and wine as needed, as well as warm blankets and clothing. They ate no meat from four-legged creatures and remained celibate. Hospitality was to be granted to all travelers, and any visitor who was willing to follow the laws of the monastery could stay as long as he or she wanted. The Rule also outlined the responsibility of the monastery to help the surrounding community in any way possible. This included sharing food, crops, and helping

75



with repayment of debt. By having a Rule to follow, it became possible for other religious orders to model their communities after the great monastery at Monte Cassino. Though the Rule is written for men, it proved to be an equally effective model for women's convents.

Near the end of his life, Benedict was outdoors in the middle of the night when a single ray of the sun appeared, illuminating the entire universe. He believed he had actually seen God and considered this the greatest of all his earthly experiences. When his sister Scholastica met him in the little house she kept outside the gates of the monastery for their yearly visit, she asked him to stay the night. He told her it was impossible to leave his duties. She bowed her head in prayer as he was leaving and a fierce thunderstorm erupted, forcing Benedict to stay. She told him that she asked God for that which Benedict refused, and God granted her prayer. Brother and sister spent the night talking and reminiscing before he returned to the monastery. Three days later, Benedict saw a dove fly into the sky. He realized it was the soul of Scholastica on its way to heaven and knew his own death would soon follow. Having the gift of prophecy, he had his tomb opened and spent six days in prayer. ~~He fell into a high fever and died surrounded by his followers.~~

Though Benedict never traveled out of Monte Cassino, at one time there were over forty thousand monasteries following his rule. His system of constant work and study created great prosperity in the areas surrounding the monasteries that employed it. While chaos and instability plunged Europe into the Dark Ages, the Benedictine monasteries were enlightened places where knowledge was preserved and shared. The immense monastery of Monte Cassino was completely destroyed in one of the fiercest battles of the Second World War, and the only parts of it not obliterated were the underground cell of Benedict, his tomb, and that of his sister.

In art, Benedict is traditionally depicted with an open book of his Rule, usually inscribed with "Pray and Work." At times a cup wrapped in two serpents is near him, symbolizing the attempts to poison him. In many instances the raven who saved him is also with him. The raven is also a symbol of the hermit, since this bird was credited with dropping food to the original desert fathers. Benedict's patronage extends to engineers, architects, and farmers because of the advances made in those fields by the early Benedictine monks. His early schools make him the patron of schoolchildren. He is invoked against kidney ailments and kidney stones because of his powers to heal them. Because he was a victim, of diabolic temptations, gossipmongers, and poisoners, he is also called on for protection against these situations. Because he could predict the time of his own and others' deaths, he is invoked by the dying for a good death.



Saint Benedict

