

Saint Agatha

Died: 251

This holy virgin and martyr, St Agatha, is held in great veneration by the Greek as well as the Latin Church; and although her original Acts have not been preserved, many well-authenticated facts concerning her martyrdom are found in the Bollandists, Surius, and others.

St Agatha was a native of Sicily, and descended of a noble and opulent family. These circumstances, added to her extraordinary beauty, inflamed Quintianus, a man of consular dignity, with such love of her, that he resolved to compel her to become his wife. The edicts of the emperor Decius against the Christians having been published, he ordered Agatha to be arrested as a Christian, and conducted to Catania, where he then resided.

The holy virgin, St Agatha, having heard the proclamation against the Christians, retired to a solitary place in order to avoid the snares of Quintinus, concerning which she had received some intimation.

The emissaries of the governor, however, discovered her place of concealment, and after having been arrested, she prayed after the following manner: "O Jesus Christ, Lord of all things, Thou seest my heart, and knowest my desire, which is to possess only Thee, since I have consecrated myself entirely to Thee. Preserve me, dear Lord, from this tyrant, and enable me to overcome the devil, who layeth snares for my soul.

When St Agatha appeared before Quintianus, in order the more easily to overcome her modesty, he gave her up to Aphrodisia, an abominable woman, who, together with her daughters, publicly professed immodesty. In her infamous house the saint suffered greater torture than the darkest and most fetid dungeon could afford. All the arts of Aphrodisia and her partners in crime were unceasingly applied, in order to induce the saint to comply with the wishes of Quintianus; but Agatha, who from her infancy had been consecrated to Jesus Christ, was enabled by his divine grace to overcome all their attempts.

Quintianus, having been informed that the efforts of Aphrodisia for an entire month had been employed in vain, commanded that the saint should be again brought before him. He upbraided her, that, being a free woman and noble, she had allowed herself to be seduced into the humble servitude of the Christians.

The holy virgin courageously confessed that she was a Christian, and that she knew of no nobility more illustrious, nor liberty more real, than to be a servant of Jesus Christ.

Quintianus, irritated at her rebuke, commanded her to be buffeted and led to prison. The following day she was again summoned, and asked whether she had resolved to save her life.

St Agatha replied: "God is my life and my salvation." The governor then put her to the torture, which was executed with barbarous cruelty.

Quintianus then remanded the saint to prison, commanding that her wounds should be left undressed, in order that she might expire under the torture.



But at midnight St. Peter appeared to her in a vision, perfectly cured her wounds, and freed her from all pain; during the entire of that night there appeared in the interior of the prison so resplendent a light that the guards fled in terror, leaving the door of her dungeon open, so that she could have escaped, as the other prisoners advised her, but that she was unwilling, as she said, to lose by flight the crown which was being prepared for her in heaven.

Quintianus, nothing moved by her miraculous cure, but on the contrary more irritated, after four days devised new torments for the saint.

He commanded that she should be rolled over broken tiles, mixed with burning coals; but she endured all with constancy; and while the tyrant was planning fresh torments, the saint, perceiving that her life was drawing to a close, made the following prayer:

“O Lord, my Creator, who hast preserved me from infancy, hast given me strength to overcome these torments, and hast taken from me the love of the world, receive now my soul. It is time that I should at last pass from this miserable life to the fruition of Thy glory.”

Just as she had finished these words, she tranquilly expired, and went to be united to God, to praise him and love him forever. This happened in 251. Her name is mentioned in the Canon of the Mass.

The incorrupt body of St Agatha was transferred to Constantinople in the 11th century, and then returned to Catania. The body is now preserved in different reliquaries. "The arms, legs, and breasts are preserved in a glass case in an incorrupt condition, although rather dried and dark after more than 17 centuries. The skull and principal relics are at Catania, enclosed in an effigy on which rests a costly jeweled crown. The reliquary consists of the figure of the Saint from the head to the waist and is situated in an upright position. The figure is entirely covered with precious gems, rings, bracelets, pins, chains, and jeweled flowers and crosses.