

Saint Alban

First Martyr of Great Britain

St Alban was an Englishman, and a pagan by birth. During the persecution of Diocletian, he fortunately received into his house a holy ecclesiastic, who was flying from the persecutors. Alban was greatly edified by the saintly life of his guest, who was almost continually employed in prayer, was exceedingly parsimonious in the use of food, and was remarkable for his humility and blandness of manners. Knowing him to be a Christian, our saint begged to be instructed in the religion; and the clergyman so forcibly showed him the extravagances of idolatry, and the truth of the doctrines of Jesus Christ, that Alban, illuminated by divine grace, embraced the Christian faith.

It was discovered after some time that the ecclesiastic, after whom search was being made, lay concealed in Alban's house, whereupon the governor sent a party of soldiers to seize him; but Alban, upon their approach, put on the habit of the clergyman, and enabled him to effect his escape. Our saint was accordingly arrested and brought before the governor, who was engaged, at the time, in offering sacrifice to his gods. Seeing Alban, with whom he had been acquainted, in that strange dress, and judging that he had become a Christian, he threatened that if the saint would not abandon the faith, he would cause him to suffer all the torments that had been prepared for him whose habit he had assumed. The saint replied that he never would abandon that faith which he had fortunately discovered to be the only true one. The governor then caused him to be cruelly scourged; but Alban suffered this torture, and many others that followed it, with such joy, that the governor, despairing of being able to change his resolve, condemned him to be beheaded.

Saint Alban proceeded to the place of execution, as though it were to a banquet; but having arrived at the bank of the river, which should be crossed in order to reach the destined place, such a multitude had assembled, that it was considered impossible to pass the bridge before evening. Hereupon the saint, anxious to give his life for Jesus Christ, prayed to the Lord, and the waters, dividing themselves on either side, left a dry passage to the opposite bank. At the sight of this miracle the executioner was converted, and happily obtained the crown of martyrdom together with St Alban.

