



Saint Agatha

There are a number of legends concerning the life of St. Agatha of Sicily. The following account is based on the “Passio Sanctae Agathae” written in the fifth century.

Agatha was born in the first part of the third century into a wealthy and noble Christian family in Catania, Sicily. She was a beautiful young virgin, and at the age of 15 Agatha expressed her desire to live a life consecrated to God.

It is generally believed that when she was 21 she became a deaconess in the church, as she is often seen in paintings from as early as the 6th century, wearing a white tunic and red veil typical of the rank of deaconess during her time.

Her duties would have included teaching young followers about the Christian faith, and to prepare them for Baptism and Holy Communion.

In the years 250 to 253 AD, Roman Emperor Trajan Decius ordered the persecution of all Christians.

The prefect of Catania at that time was a man named Quintianus. Legend says that Quintianus, upon seeing Agatha, fell madly in love with her. It is more likely, though, that his true desire was to gain control of her family’s property and lands.

When Agatha refused his advances he sent her to a brothel as punishment. She refused to accept customers and was sent back to Quintianus. After refusing Quintianus’ advances time and again, Agatha was imprisoned, suffered repeated tortures, and then brutally had her breasts cut off.

It is said that she responded to this horrible mutilation by saying to Quintianus, “Cruel man, have you forgotten your mother and the breast that nourished you, that you dare to mutilate me this way?”

She was returned to her cell without any medical attention to her wounds. It is believed that during the night Saint Peter appeared in her cell, and healed her wounds.

Quintianus, now had a horrible hatred of Agatha, and ordered that she be burned on a bed of coals. While she lay burning on the coals her red veil stayed miraculously intact.

An earthquake struck Catania during this last torture of Agatha, and Quintianus became fearful for his safety, he had her returned to prison and then he fled the city. Agatha died a few hours later on February 5, in the year 251.

The people of Catania believe that the carrying of Santa Agatha’s veil in procession, has saved the city from many eruptions of Mount Etna, earthquakes, the plague, and is also responsible for saving the people of Catania from the wrath of Emperor Fredrick II in 1231.

Devotion to Saint Agatha remains strong, but not only in Catania, she has also become the patron and protector of all of Sicily. Her feast day is February 5th, the date of her death.

-Saint Agatha is the patron saint for breast cancer, rape victims, fire, nurses and natural disasters.

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