

Women of the Church Study

Month 3

St. Rita of Cascia

St. Rita may not be as well-known as some of the other saints. However she has a most unusual and amazing story. According to the National Shrine of St. Rita “The life of St. Rita shows her patience, persistence and above all, her love of God”. St. Rita is the patron saint of the impossible, difficult marriages, infertility and parenthood. Read on and you will see why...

St. Rita was born in Italy in 1381 to parents who were well respected peacemakers. At a young age Rita became acquainted with and attracted to local Augustinian nuns and asked to join the convent. However, her parents, seeking security and safety for her, arranged a marriage to Paolo Mancini when Rita was just 12 years of age. Paolo mistreated Rita verbally and physically. He was also known to pursue other women and he had many enemies. Rita's influence over him eventually led him to be a better man. But in time, he became a victim of a conflict with another family. He was murdered when Rita and Paolo's two sons were young. In their society, it was expected that the sons would avenge the murder of their father. Rita, influenced by the peace keeping example of her parents, pledged to forgive her husband's murderers and tried to convince her sons to do the same, using the forgiveness of Christ as an example. Rita even asked God to take her sons, rather than let them become murderers themselves. Both sons died within a year due to dysentery. Rita was left both a widow and childless.

Rita placed her trust in God to help find her way. She felt called to religious life in the Augustinian convent she had known as a child. The nuns there were hesitant and refused her request to join. They felt her family history would make her presence detrimental to communal harmony. Rita was not discouraged and asked for entry again. The sisters directed her to make peace between her husband's family and the rival family before they would consider accepting her into the convent. Through Rita's intercession and efforts, she was able to convince both of the families to enter into a peace agreement. At the age of 36, Rita was accepted into the Augustinian convent.

Years later, at age 60, while in contemplation before an image of Jesus very dear to her, she was moved by a deeper awareness of Christ's suffering and pain. She spoke of her willingness to share in this pain. Rita was united with Jesus as a thorn from this crown penetrated her forehead. This stigmata/wound remained open and visible until the day of her death.

Several months before her death Rita made a simple request to have a rose from the garden of her family home brought to her. Even though it was winter, a relative found a single fresh rose growing in the snow covered garden. She picked this miraculous rose and took it to Rita. Rita die peacefully in 1457. A carpenter (partially paralyzed) spoke of Rita's beautiful life in humbly bringing peace to the people of Cascia; he was healed as he uttered these words. So many people came to look upon Rita that her burial was delayed. Rita's body seemed to be free from nature's' usual course. Her body is still incorrupt today, resting in a glass coffin in the basilica of Cascia. Her feast day is May 22.

References: www.saintrita shrine.org/life-of-saint-rita
www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=205

Reflections

There are many pertinent aspects of St. Rita's life—including her patience, persistence, courage, and most of all her faith--which we can consider and reflect upon.

Although Rita was placed in and endured some very difficult and challenging circumstances in her life, she did not seem to succumb to these or become a “victim”. She did not try to get out of her circumstances or run away from them. Rather, through intercessory prayer and the actions of peace and love, she made good out of her situation, eventually changing the hearts of others.

-How do I respond to challenging and difficult circumstances in my life?

-What might I do to develop or increase patience and persistence through the hard times of life?

-Have I experienced a change in myself, others or circumstances through prayer or acts of love?

Rita was obedient to her parents marrying Paolo, yet he mistreated her. Placed in this difficult marriage, she was able to influence her husband to become a better man; he eventually asked for her forgiveness. Although Rita

tried to influence her sons to forgive, she saw that they sought to avenge their father's death. Not wanting them to commit the sin of murder, Rita asked God to take her son's before this could happen. She lost both sons due to illness a short time later.

--How do I respond to being treated unjustly? How do I find the courage to both stand up for what is right while showing others the way to love and forgive?

--How far might I go to try to positively influence others when they seem to be doing what is wrong?

Rita's goal to enter the convent was opposed by the nuns. They placed a heavy demand on her; if she was to be considered admittance to the convent, she was to make peace between the two families. A seemingly impossible task, Rita, with God's help, was able to accomplish this. She became known as a peacemaker in her community.

--When I am faced with an "impossible" task, how might I model St. Rita to try to accomplish it?

--What kind of virtues do I need to further develop to try to do the "impossible" in my life?

Rita lived a life of holiness and total devotion to the Lord. She seemed to rise above her earthly circumstances and place God's call and will above all else. She had a close relationship with Jesus and was more than willing to join in the sufferings of Christ. Humble and loving, she was well respected and revered by those around her.

--Despite all the things that are going on in my earthly life, how can I better pursue holiness and my relationship with Jesus each day?

--How can I better understand/accept suffering in my life in light of Jesus' suffering?

Prayers

Scripture verses to incorporate in prayer for persistence and courage--

*And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.

Galatians 6:9 (RSVCE)

*Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you."

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NRSVCE)

Prayers--

*O God, Who bestowed in St. Rita such grace that she loved her enemies, and bore in her heart and on her forehead the mark of your love and Passion, grant us, we beseech you, through her merits and intercession, a love for our enemies. Through our contemplation of your sufferings and Passion, may we merit the reward promised to the meek and the suffering. You live and reign forever. Amen

<https://www.stpatrickmalvern.org/saints/st-rita-of-cascia/>

*Oh powerful St, Rita, rightly called Saint of the Impossible,

I come to you with confidence in my great need.

You know well my trials

For you yourself were many times burdened in this life

Come to my help,

Speak for me,

Pray for me,

Intercede on my behalf before the Father.

I know that God has a most generous heart

And that He is a most loving Father

Join your prayers to mine

And obtain the grace I desire

(Make your request)

You who were so very pleasing to God on earth

And are so much now so in heaven

I promise to use this favor when granted to better my life.

To proclaim God's mercy,

And to make you more widely known and loved. Amen

<https://santaritabronx.com/novena-to-saint-rita>

Practical Applications/Activities

--We all have or have had difficult circumstances in our lives, issues or problems that seem insurmountable or impossible to solve or even manage.

Identify one of these things in your life. Thoughtfully develop a plan for yourself which includes how can you rise beyond the circumstance, how you can find God in the situation, how you can find courage and persistence. The plan might include prayer, scripture meditation, learning and speaking words of hope, focusing on positive interactions, gratitude, activities (such as helping another), becoming a model/example, etc. Try to focus on God's promises and faith throughout your plan, knowing He is always with you and will never forsake you! It may help to journal the plan. Strive to be accountable to what you develop and plan.

--St. Rita provides an example of a life of love and peace. This was evident in her relationships with others. Think of a person in your life who seems "difficult", possibly someone with whom you have had conflict or someone who may have hurt you in some way. Now the hard part—think of something you might actively do for or toward that person to promote love and peace. This can be a very small step, but may lead to greater things! It may be helpful to journal your feelings regarding this person before you do anything else. Maybe make a list of possible things you could try. Then journal the outcome. (Good luck 😊)