

Women of the Church

Month 23

St. Agatha

Week 1

St. Agatha was one of the virgin martyrs of the Church. She was born in 231 AD and died in 251 AD. She lived in Italy and is also known as St. Agatha of Sicily. She was born to a rich and noble family. Agatha became a consecrated virgin at an early age and chose to dedicate herself wholly to Jesus and the Church in a life of prayer and service. She was described as beautiful and many men were attracted to her and made advances toward her.

One of the men attracted to Agatha was Quintianus, a man of high diplomatic ranking. Due to this, he thought he could force her to marry him. But Agatha refused his proposal. Because she was a Christian during a time of persecution, he had her arrested and brought before a judge, who was actually him. Quintianus expected her to give in to his demands when she was faced with torture and possible death, but Agatha only reaffirmed her belief in God as she prayed for courage. Quintianus pursued a number of cruel and abusive actions toward Agatha, including having her imprisoned in a brothel and a prison, torturing her on an iron track, burning her with torches and whipping her. Finally he had her breasts severed. Through all of this, Agatha endured and persisted with her faith with a sense of cheer and dedication to the Lord. Quintianus returned her to prison after her breasts were severed, with no medical attention. She is said to have had a vision of St. Peter, who comforted her and healed her wounds with his prayers. She was further tortured by Quintianus after this. At this point there was an earthquake in the region. Quintianus was concerned about an uprising and had Agatha returned to prison, where she then quickly died.

A year after her death, the city of Catania was in great peril from an eruption on Mount Etna. Agatha's veil was taken and held against the onrushing flames, and suddenly the danger ceased. Her grave is now venerated at Catania in Sicily. There is a major festival in Catania every year in her honor and memory. St. Agatha's feast day is February 5. She is the patron saint of rape victims and victims of domestic violence, breast cancer patients and nurses, fires and earthquakes, among many others.

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/calendar/day.cfm?date=2018-02-05>

https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=14

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Week 2 Reflections

--St. Agatha endured tremendous suffering in her young and short life. Unlike others, who may have been able to find relief or better times after suffering, this was not the case with Agatha; she endured without relief and without better times in her earthly life. However, Agatha knew that her suffering brought her closer to God and she found peace and joy in consecrating herself to him.

How do I respond to suffering in my life, particularly that which may be incurred from others?

Are there ways I can draw closer to God through the trials in my life? How so?

Are there ways to grow through suffering? What might these be?

--Agatha demonstrated unbelievable bravery, courage and persistent face in the face of torment, persecution and even torture. Her convictions, great devotion and faith sustained her through all of this.

What sustains me in times of trouble?

Are there ways I can be more brave and courageous? What would strengthen this in me?

Have I developed strong convictions that I stand by no matter what?

--Although it appeared obvious that Agatha was mistreated and abused, it did not appear that anyone in her community advocated for her or assisted with freeing her from this. Evil seemed to be tolerated, overlooked and/or accepted.

What can be done to support and advocate for others who are being mistreated or abused—as a society, and as individuals? What might my role in this be?

Why do individuals, groups and/or organizations sometimes turn a “blind eye” to evil? What can I personally do to address this?

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Week 3-Prayers and Devotions

“O Heavenly Father, who raised Agatha to the dignity of Sainthood, we implore Your Divine Majesty by her intercession to give us health of mind, body and soul. Free us from all those things which hold us bound to this earth, and let our spirit, like hers, rise to your heavenly courts. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You, forever. Amen.”

“O glorious Saint Agatha, through whose intercession in Christ I hope for the restored health of body and soul hasten to lead me to the true Good, God alone. By your intercession O blessed Agatha, may I ever enjoy your protection by faithfully witnessing to Christ. You invite all who come to you to enjoy the treasure of communion with the Holy Trinity. Moreover, if it be for God’s greater glory and the good of my person, please intercede for me with the request of [mention request here].

Saint Agatha, you found favor with God by your chastity and by your courage in suffering death for the gospel. Teach me how to suffer with cheerfulness, uniting myself to Christ crucified with a simplicity and purity of heart. Amen.”

The two prayers above are taken from <https://www.nursebuff.com/prayer-to-saint-agatha/>
This website also includes a prayer for nurses.

Reference to a St. Agatha novena: <https://www.praymorenovenas.com/st-agatha-novena>

Other prayers: <https://www.daily-prayers.org/angels-and-saints/prayer-to-agatha-of-sicily/>

There is a festival in honor of St. Agatha held in Catania Italy every year on the first few days of February. For inspiration, resource this event! Here are a couple references:

<https://www.visitsicily.info/en/santagata-in-catania/>

<https://en.sicilying.com/blog/st-agatha-festival/>

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Week 4 Practical Applications

--Suffering was a large part of St. Agatha's life. We all experience some type of suffering—sometimes significant and ongoing, sometimes situational and short lived. Suffering is never comfortable, expected, or welcome for us as humans. However, our perception and attitude toward it can make a big difference in how we manage and cope. Think of a way you have suffered or are suffering. What are some steps you can take to accept and/or embrace the suffering? What are some things you might be able to offer to help relieve the suffering of another?

--St. Agatha was persistent in standing for her convictions and faith. There are many opportunities to “stand up for the faith” in our daily lives. Sometimes these seem clear and big, sometimes they are more subtle. Identify one aspect of faith that you feel strongly about, one that you feel called to “stand up” about. Decide upon one or two ways you can practically implement this in your life. Then do it! Journal about your experience and your feelings afterwards.

--One way to extend the above application is to look at known evil that exists around us. This may be something like child abuse or domestic violence. Or it may be something like an unfair or unjust attitude expressed by a person or group against another person or group. What can you do to take a stand on this, to say “no” and seek justice and good for all involved? Explore ways you might intervene or support what is right. Journal your thoughts and experiences.

--Here is an activity from an article on St. Agatha:

“Bake an Agatha loaf! On St. Agatha's feast day people would bake loaves attached to a picture of St. Agatha and prayers for protection from fires. The parish priests would bless the loaves, and people would keep them in their homes in case of a poor harvest and famine. The prayers would then be hung above the main door of each home to invoke St. Agatha's guardianship.”

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/calendar/day.cfm?date=2018-02-05>