

FEBRUARY 5: AGATHA OF SICILY, *Martyr*, 251

Agatha of Sicily was one of the most highly venerated virgin martyrs from the early church. It is believed that she was born around 231 to a rich and noble family. From a very young age, she chose to dedicate her life to God as a consecrated virgin, but this did not stop men from making unwanted advances towards her.

One of those men was Quitianus, the local Roman prefect, who thought that he could use his status and power to compel her to give up her vow. He tried to blackmail her by threatening to expose her as a Christian, but she would not yield to him. Because she consistently spurned his advances, he denounced her as a Christian during the Decian persecution. When she came to the trial, she learned that he was both her accuser and her judge.

In spite of this, Agatha refused to change her mind, and so Quitianus sentenced her to be imprisoned in a brothel. While she remained confined there for a month, she never wavered in her resolve that she would never willingly give herself to him or to any other man.

Eventually Quitianus grew impatient with her fortitude and sentenced her to be tortured to death. She was killed in the year 251. Counted as a virgin martyr because of her refusal to consent, she is regarded as the patron of all those who are subjected to sexual harassment or assault. Because of her popularity, she was one of the very few saints who were retained on the calendar of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer after the Reformation.

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I Almighty and everlasting God, who didst strengthen thy martyr Agatha with constancy and courage: Grant us for the love of thee to make no peace with oppression, to fear no adversity, and to have no tolerance for those who wouldst use their power to abuse or exploit; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

II Almighty and everlasting God, who strengthened your martyr Agatha with constancy and courage: Grant us for the love of you to make no peace with oppression, to fear no adversity, and to have no tolerance for those who would use their power to abuse or exploit; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

Lessons and Psalm

2 Esdras 51:1–12

Psalm 125

Matthew 5:10–12

Preface of a Saint (1)