

February 7

Cornelius the Centurion

All that we know about Cornelius is contained in the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 10–11). He was the first Gentile converted to the Christian faith, along with his household. A centurion was commander of a company of one hundred men in the Roman army, responsible for their discipline, both on the field of battle and in camp. A centurion was a Roman citizen, a military career man, well-paid, and generally noted for courage and competence. Some centurions, such as Cornelius, and those whom we know about from the gospel narratives, were men of deep religious piety.

The author of Acts considered Cornelius' conversion very momentous for the future of Christianity. He records that it occurred as the result of divine intervention and revelation, and as a response to the preaching of Peter, the chief apostle. The experience of Cornelius' household was regarded as comparable to a new Pentecost, and it was a primary precedent for the momentous decision of the apostolic council, held in Jerusalem a few years later, to admit Gentiles to full and equal partnership with Jewish converts in the household of faith.

According to tradition, Cornelius was the second Bishop of Caesarea, the metropolitan see of Palestine. Undoubtedly, Cornelius and his household formed the nucleus of the first church in this important city, a church that was gathered by Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:40 and 21:8).

FEBRUARY 7

Rite I O God, by thy Spirit thou didst call Cornelius the Centurion to be the first Christian among the Gentiles: Grant to thy Church, we beseech thee, such a ready will to go where thou dost send and to do what thou dost command that, under thy guidance, it may welcome all who turn to thee in love and faith and proclaim the Gospel to all nations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Rite II O God, by your Spirit you called Cornelius the Centurion to be the first Christian among the Gentiles: Grant to your Church such a ready will to go where you send and to do what you command, that, under your guidance, it may welcome all who turn to you in love and faith, and proclaim the Gospel to all nations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

For Liturgical Celebration: [Common of a Saint, A23] [For the Mission of the Church, A52]