

## HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. ROCKE

### ST. ROCH'S BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

**S**t. Rocke was born in Montpelier, which is a town of great name upon the border of France, and was born of noble progeny. His father was lord of Montpelier, and was named John, and was come of the noble house of France. And though he was noble of birth, and rich of lordship, he was also virtuous in all humanity. He had a wife of noble kindred and fair of visage named Libera, which both devoutly served our Lord Jesu Christ, and lived in divine love and holy works. And how well that they thus had lived long, yet had they no child ne heir, wherefore they oft made their prayers, and vowed pilgrimages.

And on a day most specially, the wife made her prayers to our Blessed Lady, praying devoutly for to have a child, and was in very contemplation, in which she heard the voice of an angel saying: O Libera, God hath heard thy prayer, and thou shalt receive of him grace of thy petition.

And anon she went to her husband and told him as she had heard of the angel. And then they, hereof joyful, accomplished the act of matrimony, and she conceived, and at time was delivered of a son, which in his baptism was named Rochus or Rocke. And this Rocke had impressed in the shoulder on his left side a cross, which was a token that he should be acceptable and beloved of God, which thing when his father and mother saw they blessed God.

And his mother herself nourished and gave suck to the child, and fed it and committed and did gladly the other business of a nurse. Which devout mother fasted twice in the week, and the blessed child Rocke abstained him twice also, when his mother fasted in the week, and would suck his mother but once that day, which was to all a great wonder, and that day he was gladder, merrier, and sweeter than the other.

And after, when he came to five years of age, he disposed him to the works of penance, and was much obedient to father and mother. And in the twelfth year of his age he fasted many and divers fastings for Christ's love. And the more his members grew, the more the cross, that tofore was spoken of, appeared larger and more apparent.

In that time the father of St. Rocke was sick and saw his last end approach, and called to him his son Rocke, and said: O mine only son Rocke, thou seest well that I shall shortly finish my life; alway the will of God be fulfilled, and four things, with my lordship and heritage, I leave to thee, and command thee to accomplish. First, like as thou hast begun that thou serve busily God. Secondly, that thou remember poor people, widows and orphans. Thirdly, I constitute and ordain thee governor and dispenser of all my treasures, that thou dispend them in charitable and meek works. And fourthly that, with all diligence thou haunt and frequent the hospitals of sick and poor men.

These foresaid things Rocke promised to his father to fulfil them to his power. And anon after his father died, whom Rocke buried honourably, and laid in a sepulture, and in the twentieth year of his age he buried also his devout mother. And in few days he executed the testament of his father effectually, and visited religious places of poor people; wretches oppressed, and sick men, he cured by counsel and works; widows and orphans he comforted; and poor maidens to marry he relieved. And in these good offices and works he dispended his father's goods. And when he had finished his father's commandments he decreed to leave the country of Montpelier and to make and seek other divers pilgrimages, and clad him with the habit of a pilgrim, and covered his head with a bonnet, a scrip on his shoulder, and a pilgrim's staff in his right hand, and so departed.

### **HIS MINISTRY DURING THE PLAGUE IN ITALY**

**A**nd after many desert places he came to Rome, but tofore he came into a town called in Latin Aquapendens, where as was a common and hard pestilence, which, when Rocke knew of many by the way, he desirously went unto the hospital of that town, called Water-hanging, and gat with great prayers and labour of one Vincent, which had the rule of the hospital, that he might there, day and night, serve the sick people.

Vincent was afeard and dreaded lest Rocke, which was a young flowering man should be smitten with pestilence. But after that he came, them that were sick he blessed in the name of Christ, and as soon he had touched the sick men they were all whole. And they said and confessed as soon as and this holy man Rocke was come in. All they that were vexed and sick, and the fire of pestilence had infected, he extincted it and delivered all the hospital of that sickness. And after he went through the town, and each house that was vexed with pestilence he entered, and with the sign of the cross and mind of the passion of Jesu Christ he delivered them all from the pestilence. For whomsoever Rocketouched, anon the pestilence left him.

And when the town of Water-falling was delivered from the contagion of the pestilence, Rocke went to the city of Cesena which is a great city of Italy, which no less pestilence vexed, and he in a short space delivered it from the pestilence. And from thence he came to Rome, which was then so full of pestilence that unnethe [hardly] in all the town could not be found one house void thereof.

In those days there was at Rome a cardinal of the title of Angleria, which is a province of Lombardy, and the blessed Rocke came into this cardinal's place. And as he stood tofore him a little, suddenly a marvellous comfort and hope entered into the courage of the cardinal. He understood the young man Rocke to be right dear with God, for his cheer, his manners, and his attemperance showed it, wherefore he commended him to Rocke that he should deliver him from the pestilence and conserve him. And then Rocke did sign in the cardinal's forehead and made with his finger a cross. And anon an apparent sign and a very cross was seen impressed in his forehead, and so the cardinal was preserved from the pestilence. Nevertheless, for the novelty of the thing, he prayed St. Rocke that the token of the cross should be taken away, lest thereby it should be to the people a new spectacle. Then Rocke exhorted the cardinal that he should bear the sign of the cross of our Redeemer, in memory of his passion, in his forehead perpetually, and worship it reverently, by which sign he was delivered from the hard pestilence.

The cardinal then brought St. Roche to the pope, which anon saw that is godly, a bright ray and heavenly, shining out of the forehead of Roche. And after, when his divine virtue was known to the pope, Roche obtained of him full remission of sin. Then the cardinal began to inquire of Roche of his lineage and of his country, but Roche affecting no mortal glory, hid his lineage and received again of the pope his blessing and departed from him. And abode at Rome with the same cardinal three years continually, and laboured in visiting and helping the poor people and them that were sick of the pestilence.

And after three years the cardinal, being old, died, and Roche forsook Rome and came to the town of Armine, a noble city of Italy, which also he delivered from the said pestilence. And when that town was delivered, he went to the city of Manasem in Lombardy, which was also sore oppressed with sick men of the pestilence, whom with all his heart he served diligently, and by the help of God made that town quit of the pestilence. And from thence went to Piacenza, for he understood that there was great pestilence. Roche was ever of great study how he might, in the name of Jesu and of his passion, deliver mortal men from the hurt of pestilence. And so an whole year he visited the houses of poor men, and they that had most need, to them he did most help, and was always in the hospital.

### **ST. ROCH HIMSELF CONTRACTS THE PLAGUE**

**A**nd when he had been long in the hospital of Piacenza, and had helped almost all the sick men therein, about midnight he heard in his sleep an angel thus saying: O Roche, most devout to Christ, awake and know that thou art smitten with the pestilence, study now how thou mayst be cured. And anon he felt him sore taken with the pestilence under his both arms. . . . And he was so sore vexed with the pain, that they that were in the hospital were deprived of their sleep and rest of the night, wherefore St. Roche arose from his bed and went to the uttermost place of the hospital, and lay down there abiding the light of the day.

And when it was day the people going by saw him, and accused the master of the hospital of offence, that he suffered the pilgrim to lie without the hospital, but he purged him of that default, saying that: The pilgrim was smitten with the pestilence as ye see, and unwitting to us he went out.

Then the citizens incontinent [without delay] put out St. Roche from the city and suburbs, lest by him the city might be the more infected. Then St. Roche, sore oppressed with fervent pain of the pestilence, suffered patiently himself to be ejected out of Piacenza, and went into a certain wood, a desert valley not far from Piacenza, always blessing God. And there as he might he made him a lodge of boughs and leaves, always giving thankings to our Lord, saying: O Jesu, my Saviour, I thank thee that thou puttest me to affliction like to thine other servants, by this odious ardour of pestilence, and most meek Lord, I beseech thee to this desert place, give the refrigery and comfort of thy grace.

And his prayer finished, anon there came a cloud from heaven by the lodge that St. Roche had made within boughs, whereas sprang a fair and bright well, which is there yet unto this day. Whose water St. Roche drank, being sore athirst, and thereof had great refreshing of the great heat that he suffered of the pestilence fever.

There was nigh unto that wood a little village in which some noblemen dwelled; among whom there was one well beloved to God named Gotard, which had great husbandry, and had a great family and household. This Gotard held many hounds for hunting, among whom he had one much familiar, which boldly would take bread from the board. And when Rocke lacked bread, that hound, by the purveyance of God, brought from the lord's board bread unto Rocke.

Which thing when Gotard had advertised oft that he bare so away the bread, but he wist not to whom ne whither, whereof he marvelled, and so did all his household. And the next dinner he set a delicate loaf on the board, which anon the hound by his new manner took away and bare it to Rocke. And Gotard followed after and came to the lodge of St. Rocke, and there beheld how familiarly the hound delivered the bread to St. Rocke.

Then Gotard reverently saluted the holy man and approached to him, but St. Rocke, dreading lest the contagious air of the pestilence might infect him, said to him: Friend, go from me in good peace, for the most violent pestilence holdeth me.

Then Gotard went his way and left him, and returned home, where, by God's grace, he said thus to himself all still: This poor man whom I have left in the wood and desert, certainly is the man of God, sith this hound without reason bringeth to him bread. I therefore, that have seen him do it, so ought sooner to do it, which am a Christian man.

By this holy meditation Gotard returned to Rocke and said: Holy pilgrim, I desire to do to thee that thou needest, and am advised never to leave thee. Then Rocke thanked God which had sent to him Gotard, and he informed Gotard busily in the law of Christ. And when they had been awhile together the hound brought no more bread. Gotard asked counsel how he might have bread, for more and more he hungered and asked remedy of St. Rocke. St. Rocke exhorted him after the text, saying: In the sweat of thy visage thou shalt eat thy bread, and that he should return to the town, and leave all his goods to his heirs, and follow the way of Christ and demand bread in the name of Jesu.

Then Gotard was ashamed to do so where he was known, but at the last by the busy admonition of St. Rocke, Gotard went to Piacenza, whereas he had great knowledge [i.e. was well known], and begged bread and alms at the door of one of his gossips [relatives]. That same gossip threatened sharply Gotard, and said he shamed his lineage and friends by this foul and indecent begging, and put him away, being wroth and scorning him. For which cause Gotard was constrained to beg busily at the doors of other men of the city. And the same day the gossip that so had said to Gotard was taken sore with the pestilence, and many others that denied alms to Gotard. And then anon the city of Piacenza was infect with contagious pestilence, and Gotard returned to the wood and told to St. Rocke all that was happed.

And St. Rocke told to Gotard tofore, that his gossip should hastily die, which was done indeed. And St. Rocke, moved with pity and mercy, being full sick, went into Piacenza, being full of pestilence, and left Gotard in the wood. And though St. Rocke were sore vexed with the pestilence, yet he with great labour went to Piacenza and with touching and blessing he helped and healed them all, and also cured the hospital of the same city. And he being sore sick and almost lame returned again to Gotard into the wood. And many that heard that he and Gotard

were in the place of the desert valley, came to them whom they found all with Rocke, and tofore them all he did these miracles. The wild beasts which wandered in the wood, what hurt, sickness or swelling they had, they ran anon to St. Rocke, and when they were healed they would incline their heads reverently and go their way.

And a little while after Gotard, and his fellows, for certain necessities and errands, returned into Piacenza and left that time St. Rocke alone in the valley. And St. Rocke made his prayers to Almighty God that he might be delivered from the wounds of pestilence, and in this prayer he fell asleep. And in the meanwhile returned Gotard from the city, and when he came and joined him to Rocke sleeping, he heard the voice of an angel saying: O Rocke, friend of God, our Lord hath heard thy prayers, lo, thou art delivered from the pestilence, and art made all whole, and our Lord commandeth that thou take the way toward thy country.

With this sudden voice Gotard was astonished which never tofore knew the name of Rocke. And anon Rocke awoke, and felt himself all whole by the grace of God like as the angel said. And Gotard told unto Rocke how he had heard the angel and what he had said. Then St. Rocke prayed Gotard that he should keep his name secret and to tell it to no man, for he desired no worldly glory.

Then after a few days St. Rocke with Gotard and his fellows abode in the desert, and informed them all in godly works, and they then began to wax holy, wherein he exhorted them and confirmed, and left them in that desert valley.

### **ST. ROCH DIES IN PRISON**

**A**nd St. Rocke, as a pilgrim doing penance, entended, burning in the love of God, toward his country and came to a province of Lombardy called Angleria, and applied him toward Almaine [Germany], where the lord of his province made war with his enemy, whose knights took St. Rocke as a spy, and delivered him to their lord as a traitor. This blessed saint, always confessing Jesu Christ, was deputed unto a hard and strait prison, and the blessed Rocke patiently went into prison and suffered it gladly. Where day and night remembering the name of Jesu, he commended him to God, praying that the prison should not disprofit him, but that he might have it for wilderness and penance. And there he abode five years in prayers.

In the end of the fifth year, when God would that his soul should be brought into the fellowship of his saints and be always in the sight of God, he that bare meat to St. Rocke into the prison, as he was accustomed every day, he saw a great light and shining in the prison, and St. Rocke kneeling on his knees praying, which all these things he told to his lord. And the fame hereof ran all about the city, so that many of the citizens ran to the prison because of the novelty of this thing. And there saw and beheld it and gave laud thereof to Almighty God, and accused the lord of cruelty and woodness [madness].

Then at the last, when St. Rocke knew by the will of God that he should finish his mortal life, he called to him the keeper of the prison, and prayed him that he would go to his lord, and to exhort him in the name of God and of the glorious Virgin Mary, that he would send to him a priest, of whom ere he died he would be confessed, which thing was anon done. And when he

had confessed him to the priest and devoutly taken his blessing, he prayed him that he might abide alone three days next following for to be in his contemplation, by which he might the better have mind of the most holy passion of our Lord. For Rocke felt well then that the citizens prayed the lord for his deliverance, which things the priest told to the lord.

And so it was granted to St. Rocke to abide there alone three days. And in the end of the third day the angel of God came to St. Rocke, saying thus: O Rocke, God sendeth me for thy soul, of whom in this last part of thy life that what thou now desirest thou shouldest now ask and demand.

Then St. Rocke prayed unto Almighty God with his most devout prayer, that all good Christian men which reverently prayed in the name of Jesu to the blessed Rocke might be delivered surely from the stroke of pestilence. And this prayer so made, he expired and gave up the ghost.

Anon an angel brought from heaven a table [writing tablet] divinely written with letters of gold into the prison, which he laid under the head of St. Rocke. And in that table was written that God had granted to him his prayer, that is to wit, that who that calleth meekly to St. Rocke he shall not be hurt with any hurt of pestilence. And then after the third day the lord of the city sent to the prison that St. Rocke should be delivered out of it. And they that came to the prison found St. Rocke departed from this life, and saw through all the prison a marvellous light, in such wise that without doubt they believed him to be the friend of God. And there was at his head a great taper burning, and another at his feet, by which tapers all his body was light.

Furthermore, they found under his head the foresaid table, by which they knew the name of the blessed Rocke by authority. Which name known, the mother of the lord of that city knew many years tofore St. Rocke to be the son of the lord John of Montpelier, which was brother germain [i.e., with the same two parents] to this lord of whom we have said, which thing, and all that was done, was because they knew not his name. Then they knew him to be nephew to the lord, and also by the sign of the cross which St. Rocke bare, as tofore is said that he had it when he was born out of his mother's belly.

Then they being thereof penitent, and in great wailing and sorrow, at the last with all the people of the city they buried St. Rocke solemnly and religiously, which soon after the holy saint was canonised by the pope gloriously. And in his glorious name and honour they builded a great and large church.

Then let us reverently with devotion pray unto this glorious saint St. Rocke, that by his intercession and prayer we may be delivered from the hard death of pestilence and epidemic, and that we may so live in this life and be penitent for our sins, that after this short life we may come unto everlasting life in heaven. Amen. The feast of St. Rocke is always holden on the morn after the day of the Assumption of our Lady, which life is translated out of Latin into English by me, William Caxton.

The [iconography of St. Roch](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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