39// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. AGATHA

St. Agatha the virgin was right fair, noble body and of heart, and was rich of goods. This glorious virgin served God in the city of Catania, leading a pure and holy life. Quintianus the provost of Sicily, being of a low lineage, was lecherous, avaricious, and a miscreant and paynim, and for to accomplish his evil desires fleshly, and to have riches, did do take St. Agatha to be presented and brought tofore him, and began to behold her with a lecherous sight; and for to have her himself, he would have induced her to make sacrifice unto the idols.

QUINTIANUS CONSINGS AGATHA TO THE KEEPING OF APHRODISIA

And when he saw her firm in her purpose, he put her in the keeping of a woman named Aphrodisia, which had nine daughters, over foul, like unto the mother. This did he for to induce St. Agatha to do his will within thirty days. Aphrodisia and her daughters entreated the holy virgin to consent to the will of the provost, and sometime they made to her great promises of temporal goods and of great eases, and sometimes they made to her menaces of grievous torments for to suffer, and great pains, to which St. Agatha answered freely: My courage and my thought be so firmly founded upon the firm stone of Jesu Christ, that for no pain it may not be changed; your words be but wind, your promises be but rain, and your menaces be as rivers that pass, and how well that all these things hurtle at the foundement of my courage, yet for that it shall not move.

In this manner answered she, and alway wept in making her prayers, and much great desire had she to come to Jesu Christ by martyrdom and by torments. When Aphrodisia saw well that in no wise she would be moved, she went to the provost Quintianus, and said to him: Sooner should the stones wax soft, and iron turn to soft lead, than turn the courage of this maid, or to take from her the Christian faith. I and my daughters have done none other thing night ne day, one after another, but to labour how we might turn her heart to your consenting. I have promised her in your name your precious adornments, clothes of gold, houses, lands, towns, servants, and great meinys [retinues], and all this she despiseth and reputeth them at no value.
**Refusing Quintianus’ Command to Worship Idols, Agatha Is Imprisoned**

When Quintianus heard this, anon he made her to come tofore him in judgment, and demanded her of her lineage, and at the last he would constrain her to make sacrifice unto the idols. And St. Agatha answered that they were no gods, but were devils that were in the idols made of marble and of wood, and overgilt. Quintianus said: Choose one of two; or do sacrifice to our gods, or thou shalt suffer pain and torments.

St. Agatha said: Thou sayst that they be gods because thy wife was such an one as was Venus, thy goddess, and thou thyself as Jupiter, which was an homicide and evil.

Quintianus said: It appeareth well that thou wilt suffer torments, in that thou sayst to me villainy.

St. Agatha said: I marvel much that so wise a man is become such a fool, that thou sayest of them to be thy gods, whose life thou ne thy wife will follow. If they be good I would that thy life were like unto theirs; and if thou refusest their life, then art thou of one accord with me. Say then that they be evil and so foul, and forsake their living, and be not of such life as thy gods were.

Quintianus said: What goest thou thus vainly speaking? make sacrifice unto the gods, or if thou do not I shall make thee to die by divers torments. St. Agatha abode firm and stable in the faith. Then Quintianus did do put her in a dark prison, and she went also gladly, and with as good will as she had been prayed to go to a wedding.

**After a Second Refusal, Quintianus Orders Her Breasts Removed**

On the morning Quintianus made her to be brought tofore him in judgment, and said to her: Agatha, how art thou advised for thy health? She answered: Christ is mine health.

Quintianus said: Reny Christ thy God, by which thou mayest escape thy torments.

St. Agatha answered: Nay, but reny thou thine idols which be of stones and of wood, and adore thy maker, that made heaven and earth, and if thou do not thou shalt be tormented in the perpetual fire in hell.

Then in great ire Quintianus did her to be drawn and stretched on a tree and tormented, and said to her: Refuse thy vain opinion that thou hast, and thou shalt be eased of thy pain.

And she answered: I have as great dilection in these pains as he that saw come to him that thing which he most coveteth to see, or as he that had found great treasure. And like as the wheat may not be put in the garner unto the time that the chaff be beaten off, in like wise my soul may not enter into the realm of heaven, but if thou wilt torment my body by thy ministers.

Then Quintianus did her to be tormented in her breasts and paps, and commanded that her breasts and mammels should be drawn and cut off. When the ministers had accomplished his
commandment, then said St. Agatha: Over felon and cruel tyrant, hast thou no shame to cut off
that in a woman which thou didst suck in thy mother, and whereof thou wert nourished? But I
have my paps whole in my soul, of which I nourish all my wits, the which I have ordained to
serve our Lord Jesu Christ, sith the beginning of my youth.

ST. PETER HEALS AGATHA IN PRISON

A
fter, Quintianus did do put her in prison, and commanded that none should enter for to heal
her, ne none should give to her meat ne drink. And when she was fast closed in the prison,
there came an ancient noble man, and tofore him a child bearing a light, and divers ointments in
his hand. This noble man said that he was a surgeon, and in comforting her said: How well that
the tyrant hath tormented thee bodily, nevertheless thou hast more tormented him in his heart by
thy answers. I was there when he made thy paps to be cut off, and saw how I might well heal
them.

Then said she: I knew never of medicine corporal, and it were shame to me to take it
now. That which I have avowed and kept to my Lord, sith mine infancy, yet I shall keep it if it
please him.

The ancient nobleman answered: I am also Christian, and a good master and leech, be not
ashamed.

She answered: Whereof should I be ashamed? Thou art ancient and of great age, and how
well that I be a young maid, nevertheless my body is defeated by the torments, that the wounds
suffer nothing to enter into my thought whereof I should be ashamed, and not for but I thank thee
fair father that thou art so diligent to heal me, but know that my body shall receive no medicine
of no man.

And this nobleman said: Wherefore sufferest thou not me that I may heal and guerish
thee?

She said: Because I have Jesu Christ, my Saviour, which with a word healeth all, and if
he will he may heal me.

And the good man smiling said: And he hath sent me hither for to heal thee; I am his
apostle, and know verily that thou art whole in the name of him, and anon the apostle vanished
away.

Then she fell down in prayers and said: Lord Jesu Christ, I yield thee thankings that thou
hast remembered me, and hast sent thine apostle St. Peter to me, which hath comforted me, and
healed my wounds. And after the orison made, she saw that her paps were again restored to her
and all her wounds healed.

And all that night was the prison fulfilled with great clearness and light, so that the
keepers fled for the great dread that they had, and left the prison all open. Then said to her the
other prisoners that were in the prison, that she should go their way, and she said: That shall
never happen that the keepers of the prison shall suffer any harm for me, ne that I shall lose my
crown; I shall abide in the faith of Jesu Christ my Lord, which hath comforted and healed me.

**THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. AGATHA**

After four days Quintianus made her to be brought tofore him in judgment, and said to her
that she should do sacrifice to the idols.

She answered: These words be vain, and thy commandments evil, they make the air to
stink, he is much mechant [wicked] that believeth in a stone without entendment, and leaveth our
Lord the very God that hath healed me, and hath restored to me again my paps.

Quintianus demanded her: Who is he that hath healed thee?

She said: Jesu Christ.

Quintianus said: Namest thou yet Jesu Christ?

She answered: I shall have in my heart Jesu Christ as long as I shall live.

Quintianus said: Yet shalt thou see if he may help and heal thee. And then he made her,
all naked, to be rolled upon burning brands, and anon the ground where the holy virgin was
rolled on, began to tremble like an earthquake, and a part of the wall fell down upon Silvain,
counsellor of Quintianus, and upon Fastion his friend, by whose counsel she had been so
tortmented. And then all the city of Catania was abashed, and the people came running unto the
house of Quintianus, saying, in a great bruit [noise], that the city was in a great peril for the
torments that he did to St. Agatha.

Quintianus redoubled the bruit of the people, and went out behind and commanded that
she should be remised in prison. When she came into the prison she joined her hands, holding
them up to heavenward, and said in praying: Lord God Jesu Christ which hast created me of
nought, and sith my youth hast kept me and hast suffered me to live well in my youth, which hast
taken from mine heart the love of the world and hast made me to overcome the torments, and
hast lent me patience among the pains, I pray thee that thou take my spirit, for it is time that thou
make me to depart from this world and to come to thy mercy.

This orison and prayer made she on high tofore many persons. And anon after she gave
up the ghost, and rendered her soul, the year of our Lord two hundred and fifty-three in the time
of Decius, the emperor of Rome.

**HER BURIAL**

After this the Christian people took the body for to bury it worshipfully, and whiles they
arrayed it with ointments for to embalm the corpse, anon came a young man clad in silk,
and well an hundred that followed him, richly clothed, which were never tofore seen in the city,
ne never after also. This young man, whom followed the fair company, set him on that one side
of the tomb in which the body should be put, and when the body was embalmed within the tomb, this young man set, at the head of the body, a short table of marble stone, in which was written this scripture: *Mentem sanctam, spontaneam, honorem deo dedit et patriæ liberationem fecit*; which is as much to say: The holy saint Agatha had always holy thought and pure, and gave honor to God with a free will in all her works, and purchased by her prayers peace and deliverance to all the country.

After that the table containing this scripture was set at her head, the young man and all his company departed from the tomb, being closed, without appearing any more afterward, wherefore it is supposed that this young man was her good angel. This was published over all, whereof the Jews and Saracens began to sing and worship the sepulchre of the tomb of St. Agatha. Quintianus, the provost, died of an evil death in the way as he went for to seek the goods and riches of St. Agatha, and also for to have taken her parents, and never after could be known where her body became.

**A MIRACLE OF ST. AGATHA**

And for to prove that she had prayed for the salvation of the country, at the beginning of February, the year after her martyrdom, there arose a great fire, and came from the mountain toward the city of Catania and burnt the earth and stones, it was so fervent. Then ran the paynims to the sepulchre of St. Agatha and took the cloth that lay upon her tomb, and held it abroad against the fire, and anon on the ninth day after, which was the day of her feast, ceased the fire as soon as it came to the cloth that they brought from her tomb, showing that our Lord kept the city from the said fire by the merits of St. Agatha.

To whom pray we that she by her prayers may get and impetre [beseech] grace of our Lord to be kept from all perils of fire in this world, and when we shall depart hence to eschew the perpetual fire, and to come to the glory and joy in heaven. Amen.

The [iconography of St. Agatha](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#). For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#). Scanned by Robert Blackmon. [bob_blackmon@mindspring.com](mailto:bob_blackmon@mindspring.com).

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.