
The Sign of the Cross. II.

St. Agnes (Jan. 21) was another 13-year old girl, whose "little body was scarce a sheath of their swords." St. Ambrose adds: "She had no fear when she found herself grasped by the bloody hands of the executioners. She was unmoved when they dragged her with clanging chains... She quailed not when the weapons of the angry soldiery were pointed at her breast... She was ready to submit her neck and hands to the iron shackles, but they were too big to clasp her slender limbs... The spectators were all in tears (they were pagans) and she alone did not weep..." He goes on to say that this little girl taunted the executioner: "Headsman, why waitest thou? Perish the body which draweth the admiration of eyes from which I fain would turn away." She was finally beheaded.

St. Martina (Jan. 30), daughter of a wealthy family, gave her wealth to the poor when her parents died. She was scourged, mangled with iron hooks and prongs, and pieces of broken pottery. Her limbs were cut off, piece by piece, and boiling tallow poured on her body. She was thrown to the wild beasts, but they would not touch her; thrown on a burning pile, she remained alive. During the course of her tortures an earthquake and thunderstorm threw the whole city of Rome into confusion, but she remained calm. Like these other holy virgins, she was finally beheaded.

St. Agatha (Feb. 5), came of a noble line. In her second responsory it is said: "Agatha went to prison with great joy, like a guest to a banquet, and recommended her struggle to the Lord in prayer." Her dialogue with the Praetor who directed her torture is one of the most spirited found in the Acts of the Martyrs. White hot metal, the rack, live embers, and sharp petsheds were used in her torture; she died of her wounds.

Sts. Faustinus and Jovita (Feb. 15) were brothers of noble birth who suffered under Trajan. Twice they were taken from one city of Italy to another, and exhibited in torture wherever they went. "They preached Christ by their sufferings in every place where they were shown." Wild beasts and fire were common tortures to them. In Naples they were chained together and thrown into the sea, but were miraculously rescued. Taken back to their home city of Brescia, they were beheaded with the axe.

St. Simeon (Feb. 18), second Bishop of Jerusalem (A.D. 62) ruled his see until well into the second century, when he was captured with other relatives of Our Lord and members of the house of David. He was crucified at the age of 120, and the joy with which he greeted this distinction of suffering the same death as his Master was a marvel to all beholders.

The Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (March 10). Two stories stand out in their Second Nocturne. The first one tells of a guard who was posted by the lake whereon their bodies were stretched naked to freeze to death, and who heard them praying that their number of forty might remain intact. As he listened he saw angels descending with thirty-nine crowns; then he saw one of the forty run from the ice to a warm bath nearby. The guard then proclaimed himself a Christian, and suffered with the rest.

The other story tells of Melithen, the youngest: "His mother stood by, and when she saw that his legs were broken, but that he was yet alive, she cried, and said: 'My son, have patience but a little longer. Behold how Christ standeth at the door to help thee.' When she saw the bodies of all the others put upon carts and taken away to be burned, and that her son was left behind, because the multitude wickedly hoped that being but a lad, if he lived, he might yet be drawn to commit idolatry, the hold mother took him on her own shoulders and bravely followed behind the carts laden with the bodies of the martyrs. In her arms Melithen gave up his soul to God."