

Did you know . . .

Female Saints in the Canon of the Mass...Part 1

The Canon of the Holy Mass, also called the Great Eucharistic Prayer, comes between the Offertory and Holy Communion. Canon, from the Greek *kanon*, meaning “the rule.” “It is used for this part of the Mass to show that the prayers said during it are never changed. The Canon is meant to strengthen the priest’s prayers in asking for blessings and provisions from God through the invocation of saints and martyrs.”

Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and the Apostles are mentioned first, then other saints and martyrs. Among those invoked are seven women, besides Virgin Mary: Anastasia, Felicity and Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes and Cecilia.

St. Felicity and St. Perpetua. St. Felicity is the first woman to appear in the Canon after The Blessed Virgin. Both of these saints were from Africa, youthful heroines who were well-educated in their lifetime. They were arrested at Carthage during the Christian persecutions under Severus. At the time of their imprisonment, St. Perpetua had just given birth and St. Felicity was in the 8th month of her pregnancy. They were happy to become martyrs, exposed to the rage of a fierce cow in the amphitheater and eventually killed by sword.

St. Agatha. St. Agatha was from Sicily and was known for her wealth and nobility as well as for her virtue and beauty. When she was quite young, she consecrated her virginity, choosing Christ for her spouse. Quintian, a high-ranking official, tried to force her to marry him by arresting her knowing she was a Christian. She did not give in, even when faced with torture. Instead, her faith in God became even stronger, announcing that her freedom came from Jesus. She received strength from a vision of St. Peter, but finally died after saying her final prayer.

(Next week: The other four female saints of the Canon will be presented.)

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