



St. Agatha (About 250)

The Patron Saint of Breast Cancer

Many a history textbook describes the ancient Romans as noble, enlightened, and civilized--even though their judicial system perpetrated some of the most gruesome crimes imaginable. The Romans believed that criminals (a category that included Christians) were less than human, so brutalizing them was perfectly acceptable.

By these standards, the agonies experienced by St. Agatha were just business as usual. Her troubles began with a consul named Quintianus. As the man who governed Sicily, Quintianus could have whatever he wanted--and he wanted Agatha. But she was a wealthy Christian who had consecrated her virginity to God, and she turned him down flat. Enraged by the rejection, Quintianus ordered Agatha to be arrested and stretched on the rack. Despite excruciating pain, she refused to renounce her faith or accept him as a lover. He then instructed the executioners to slice off her breasts.

Agatha was unconscious as the jailers carried her to a prison cell and left her to die. Then St. Peter arrived, descending from heaven, and restored her breasts. When the jailers reported that Agatha was alive and healthy, Quintianus had her rolled over hot coals until she died.

Because of the mutilation endured during her martyrdom, she has always been the patron of women suffering from any type of breast ailment. In recent years, she has been invoked especially against breast cancer.

From *This Saint's for You!: 300 Heavenly Allies for Architects, Athletes, Brides, Bachelors, Babies, Librarians, Murders, Whales, Widows, and You* © 2007 by Thomas J. Craughwell.

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