

Saint of the Month for January 2013

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr
Monday, January 21

Saint Agnes died for the faith when she was about 13 years old, in roughly 304 A.D. Not too much is known about her. Despite being from a noble Roman family she did not escape the persecution of Christians, and was tortured and beheaded. These persecutions were not continuous, but could be very intense at times. They didn't end until Constantine became emperor and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire; this was done initially via the Edict of Milan, in 313 A.D., which made Christianity a tolerated sect, and brought official Roman persecution to an end.

Her name is included in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), one of only a few saints to be listed in addition to Mary, Joseph, the Apostles, and some early popes. She appears in a list of women saints: (Felicity, Perpetua (both March 7), Agatha (February 5), Lucy (December 13), Agnes, Cecilia (November 22), Anastasia) that is recited after the Consecration.

The church has looked to the martyrs for inspiration and as role models, and given them high esteem for their ultimate sacrifice. One of the early church leaders to do this was the 37th Pope, Saint Damasus I, who lived from 305 to 384, and was Pope 366-384. He was born in Spain, and summoned synods and councils, the best known of which was the First Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.), which affirmed the decisions of Nicea (325 A.D.), and also taught the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit; these wordings are reflected in the English translation of the Creed from Nicea and Constantinople that we have today in the Roman Missal, Third Edition. (For further details, please see the December 2012 Saint of the Month.) In connection with this month's saint, Agnes, he is known for promoting the veneration of martyrs, and is believed to have adorned her tomb with sacred poetry and to have written a celebrated epitaph about her. Many Fathers of the Church, following St. Ambrose, have honored St. Agnes in their writings.

Her commemoration is given the rank of Obligatory Memorial. (**Magnificat**, January 2013; **Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Catholic Dictionary, Revised** (Our Sunday Visitor))

Collect from the Mass of St. Agnes:

Almighty ever-living God,
who choose what is weak in the world to confound the strong,
mercifully grant,
that we, who celebrate the heavenly birthday of your
Martyr Saint Agnes,
may follow her constancy in the faith.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (Roman Missal, Third Edition)

Collect from the Mass of St. Damasus I (December 11):

Grant, we pray, O Lord,

that we may constantly exalt the merits of your Martyrs,
whom Pope Saint Damasus so venerated and loved.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (Roman Missal, Third Edition)

Not many of us are called to make this sacrifice, but we need to be ready to hold fast to our beliefs despite ridicule, harassment, and worse (a status that Fr. Robert Sewvello preached might make us a “white martyr”). May we obtain extra strength for the journey from the heroism of the martyrs. Saint Agnes, pray for us!