

30. January 2026

Saint Martina of Rome

Today we celebrate once again one of the holy virgins who suffered martyrdom at the beginning of the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire, thus becoming seeds for the growth of the Kingdom of God. It is admirable to see with what faith and determination these young women remained faithful to the Lord, unbowed. Not only should we remember them and imitate their example, but we can concretely ask them to help us to remain faithful to the Lord when we ourselves suffer slander and persecution.

Time and again in my meditations and conferences I have said that I believe our faith today is threatened both from without and from within. Certainly it has been threatened in every age, but we cannot overlook the fact that we are now in a time when the truth of our faith is under attack globally (though with varying intensity depending on the region). This can easily lead to a situation of persecution.

Let us listen today to the story of Saint Martina, whose memory we are celebrating. Her legendary story tells us that she was a young woman from a noble Roman family who suffered martyrdom under the Emperor Alexander Severus. She endured many tortures until she was finally beheaded in the first half of the 3rd century.

Martina, who had been carefully instructed in the Christian faith and life, lost her parents at a tender age. Her love for Christ inflamed her heart, and with extraordinary generosity she distributed her large fortune to the poor and took a vow of virginity.

The Emperor, determined to eradicate the "sect of the Galileans", as the Christians were called, did everything in his power to win over Martina, who was highly esteemed for her beauty, nobility and charity. He even promised to make her co-regent of the empire if she made sacrifices to Apollo.

But the saint had no intention of doing so. When the emperor saw that she resisted all seductions, he tried to subjugate her by force. But God strengthened Martina. While everyone was waiting for her to sacrifice to the god Apollo on the emperor's orders, Martina said the following prayer:

"O my God and my Lord! Hear my prayer and smash this blind and mute idol so that the emperor and his people may know that You are the one true God and that no other god can be worshipped".

At that moment an earthquake shook the whole city: the statue of Apollo fell from the altar, broken into a thousand pieces, and part of the temple collapsed, burying the idolatrous priests and many of those present.

All further attempts to force the Virgin were also thwarted by the Lord. Under the protection of an angel, she endured the cruel tortures with such joy that eight of the executioners converted to Christ and were willing to suffer martyrdom themselves. Her body suffered more and more at the hands of the cruel tyrant. But during the night her wounds were healed. It is said that a great light appeared in the prison and that prayers and songs were heard from many voices.

Legend tells us that Severus, enraged, ordered Martina to be taken to the amphitheatre and thrown to the wild beasts. He wanted to see the "spectacle" himself. Martina prayed, kneeling on the sand in her dazzling beauty. Then the hungry lion came roaring out of the cage, but as if tamed by some unseen power, he lay down meekly at the feet of the Virgin. Then he rose, leapt furiously over the high barriers and killed many of the spectators. The furious emperor attributed the miracle to Martina's sorcery and had her beheaded. Only the sword could kill her!

"All things are possible to him who believes" (Mk 9:23).

The unshakeable faith of this saint stands before us as a radiant testimony, as does her steadfastness in the face of the Emperor's flattery and cruel orders. We see how the spirit of fortitude filled this virgin and made her part of that multitude of overcomers who followed the Lamb wherever He led them (Rev 14:4).

It is precisely this spirit of fortitude that we need so much today, in order to bear the noble witness of faith in our time, as Saint Martina did in hers. To do this, we must live our faith to the full and not allow ourselves to be infected by the spirit of the world. We need this faith as an armour because the same enemy who tried to defeat Martina will also try to defeat us in various ways. But the same Lord who overcame the diabolical

arrogance of the emperor through this young virgin wants to continue to overcome today through His own.

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-kingdom-of-god-3/>