

7. February 2026
LIVES OF SAINTS

**“Saint Theodore of Heraclea:
the Dragon Slayer”**

How rich are the stories of the saints, which introduce us to people who lived their faith to the utmost and followed Our Lord with total conviction! Undoubtedly, many of them show us a radicalism that could frighten us. As Saint Francis de Sales said, some saints are more to be admired than imitated. However, there is something we must always keep in mind—and something each of them would attest to: it was the grace of our Heavenly Father that enabled them to do extraordinary things. Whether they were tireless missionaries who spared no effort to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, saints who practiced works of mercy to the point of total self-denial, or monks who lived the monastic life with great discipline and asceticism and contributed to the building up of the Church.

But we cannot forget the many others who, in a more discreet but no less fruitful way, served God in the heroic fulfillment of their duties. It was always the holy presence of the Lord that shaped and sanctified them. In this sense, the life of each saint is also a message from Christ addressed to us, exhorting us to follow the path that God has laid out for us and encouraging us to respond to the universal call to holiness.

Today we encounter St. Theodore of Heraclea, one of the martyrs of the early Church. He is known as the “dragon slayer,” a title of honor he received as a result of the following story recounted in the legend of the saints:

“Many glorious deeds are told of St. Theodore. It is said that he killed a huge dragon in Eujaita. This beast terrorized the entire region, devouring livestock and even threatening people. So the people cried out to Theodore for help. But the saint cried out to God for help. It happened that, while he was praying long and fervently, sleep overcame him. Then the angel of God appeared to him in a dream and exhorted him to attack the dragon in the name of the Lord and kill it. The saint immediately got up and mounted his horse, carrying a golden cross in his hand. Before the dragon’s cave, he prayed fervently to God again, then stood up and shouted in a powerful voice, ‘Come out, fierce dragon! I conjure you by the name of the eternal King, my Lord Jesus Christ.’ A roar echoed in the cave, and the monster crawled out, ready to launch a powerful attack on the knight. But Theodore, without hesitation, ran like an arrow and pierced the

dragon's chest with his spear. After this feat, he praised the Most High, gave thanks for heavenly help, and returned home happy."

Even if this story is considered a mere fable, one cannot overlook the courage that this commander of a Roman garrison and soldier of Christ showed in his many exploits. At first, he was a secret Christian. He ruled with great prudence and protected Christians who were suffering extreme persecution. At the same time, he won many people over to the holy faith, thus weakening the "power of the dragon," which kept the pagan people chained in ignorance. In 306, the Roman emperor's last edict against Christians was promulgated, leaving them only the choice of sacrificing to the gods or dying.

Emperor Licinius, who had heard of the exploits of his soldier Theodore but also knew that he was a Christian, tried to force him to sacrifice to the Roman gods. However, the saint fearlessly confronted his judges and declared before the entire legion: "I was a soldier of Christ even before I was a soldier of the emperor. I worship the one true God and his only-begotten Son. Your gods are nothing but evil demons. This is my faith, for which I am willing to suffer anything."

Because he was still young and because of his fearless words, which made a great impact, they gave Theodore time to reconsider his decision. They also promised him that he would obtain a high military position and be elevated as a priest of the goddess Cybele if he sacrificed to the idols.

But the saint was not seduced by flattery or promises. On the contrary, he destroyed the images of the idols and distributed the gold and silver from which they were made among the poor. When confronted for burning the image of the goddess Cybele, Theodore replied: "I have set fire to a piece of wood to test the power of your goddess, of whom I was offered to become a priest. But look—her divinity has not passed the test of fire!"

The emperor and the judges became even more enraged and subjected him to all kinds of torture. However, none of them could break him; on the contrary, he endured all the pain and cruelty with the strength of the Lord, without ever wavering. Legend even has it that when he was crucified, an angel descended with heavenly light, freed him from his bonds, and gently placed him on the ground, saying: "Comfort and joy be with you, O Theodore! Jesus Christ has sent me to you. He is and will remain with you. He, who is truthful, has promised it. As a sign of this, he will completely restore your health." Then the angel disappeared, and instantly the saint felt strong and encouraged.

The two representatives of the emperor sent to take him down from the cross found him in the market square preaching fervently. Then they themselves, as well as many other people, asked to be baptized. When the emperor found out, he sent armed men to kill Theodore and the new converts. However, some of the soldiers converted, and the others returned without having carried out the order. Thus, Theodore continued to preach, and many people embraced the Christian faith.

Finally, the emperor sent one of his henchmen, who beheaded Theodore. The saint died as a true fighter for the Kingdom of God and resisted the furious dominion of the “dragon” until he completed his struggle with martyrdom.

May God give us the strength to resist the “dragon,” who even today tries to devour the faithful, and may we, like Theodore, prefer to die for the witness of Christ rather than renounce our faith!

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/sheep-without-a-shepherd/>