

23. April 2026

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

“Saint George: the dragon slayer and martyr”

c. 280 in Cappadocia – †305 in Lydda

There are probably few saints as well known as Saint George, whom we celebrate today, and around whom so many stories and legends have gathered. He is highly venerated throughout Christianity and is often depicted in paintings as the slayer of the dragon. Concerning the slaying of the dragon, the following story is told about him, which I present here in abridged form from the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine:

“George, the knight (born of Cappadocian lineage), once came to the land of Libya, to the city of Silena. Near the city was a lake as vast as a sea, in which dwelt a poisonous dragon who had often driven the entire population into flight whenever they marched out armed against him. He would come right up to the city walls and poison everything with his venomous breath. The citizens of the city—still pagans—offered him two sheep every day. As the number of sheep dwindled, they began to sacrifice human beings as well, drawing lots to determine who would be chosen. The lot fell also upon the king’s daughter. Though shaken to his core, the king could not protect her, for the people threatened to burn him and his house if he did not abide by the law he himself had enacted.”

The legend continues, recounting that Saint George witnessed the moment when the king’s daughter was about to be sacrificed to the dragon.

“He rushed to her aid and said: ‘Dear daughter, fear not; I will help you in the name of Christ.’ She replied: ‘Good knight, you do not wish to die with me; it is enough that I perish. You cannot save me, but you will perish with me.’ While they were still speaking, behold, the dragon raised its head from the lake. The maiden trembled with fear and cried out: ‘Flee, good sir, flee as fast as you can.’ But George leapt onto his horse, made the sign of the Cross before him, and rode toward the dragon as it came against him. He lifted his lance with great force, commended himself to God, and struck the dragon so heavily that it fell to the ground.

To the terrified people George cried out: 'Do not be afraid, for the Lord God has sent me to you to deliver you from this dragon. Therefore believe in Christ and receive baptism, all of you, and I will slay this dragon.' Then the king was baptized, and all the people with him, and Saint George drew his sword and slew the dragon."

The same source further reports that Saint George stood up for the Christians who, during the persecution under Diocletian, were in danger of falling away from the faith. He publicly professed his faith. Thus his life was ultimately crowned with martyrdom after enduring cruel torments.

What can the story of this beloved saint teach us?

In the Holy Mass for Martyrs, as celebrated in the Old Rite in honor of George, the Gospel begins with the following words: *"At that time Jesus said to His disciples: Do not think that I came to send peace upon earth: I came not to send peace, but the sword."* (Mt 10:34)

It is certainly at first unusual to hear such a word from the mouth of our Lord, especially since He extends it even to the closest family relationships. Yet His word becomes clear when we understand that Jesus is speaking of the truth, which He Himself is.

With Jesus Christ comes, for every human being, the moment of decision: Will he align his life with God and thus with the truth, or not? We may also use the term "discernment of spirits," for the encounter with the Son of God separates light from darkness.

If we take this word into our reflection, the story of the dragon slayer shines brightly. In Sacred Scripture, the dragon always represents a power hostile to God—anti-divine, demonic forces.

As the legend tells, the pagan population was at the mercy of the dragon's tyranny and, in their desperation, even offered human sacrifices to it. This was one of the most abhorrent practices found among various pagan peoples, meant to appease powers to which they felt helplessly subjected. But with the noble knight George came deliverance for the people and the hour of decision.

In an act of charity, George not only slew the dragon to save the king's daughter, but his heroic deed also became an instrument of evangelization. The pagans were to be led out of the darkness of their confusion and fear by Christ. The dragon loses its power over them. It is the proclamation of the Christian faith—together with holy baptism—that breaks the dragon's dominion over human beings, a dominion he exercised over the then-pagan world. George came in the service of One stronger than he (cf. Lk 11:22).

This story raises the question of what is happening today in a world that is turning more and more away from Christ. Is this dragon once again exercising his dominion over humanity in various ways?

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/acts-of-the-apostles-acts-826-40-the-baptism-of-the-ethiopian-minister/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-father-draws-men-2/>