

11. August 2026
THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS
“Saint Susanna, Martyr”

At a time when, unfortunately, moral confusion scarcely spares even our Holy Church, and many people stray from the path of virtue or never set foot on it in the first place, it is important not to forget that the saints of the early Church, in particular, have given us shining examples of chastity.

We must not forget that these saints, who gave their lives to preserve their chastity, not only bring their light into this darkness but have also received great grace from God for the Church. They are a living reminder of the importance of placing the Lord's commandments above all else.

One of these radiant women is Susanna. She is not the biblical Susanna, whom we might first think of—the one saved from death by Daniel's intervention, who restored her honor before all the people—but rather, Susanna of Rome.

The legend goes:

"Saint Susanna was one of the noblest virgins in Rome. Closely related to Emperor Diocletian, she was carefully instructed in the Christian faith from her earliest years by her holy father, Gabinius, and her uncle, Saint Pope Caius. She lived according to the faith with childlike faithfulness and piety. Out of love for Jesus, she took a vow of chastity at age 12. Diocletian was well aware that Gabinius, his brother Caius, and Susanna professed the Christian faith. However, because they were so closely related to him, he pretended not to know anything about it. After declaring Maximian Galerius his co-regent and heir to the empire, he decided to marry Susanna to Galerius and make her empress. Therefore, he sent Claudius, his sister's son, to Gabinius to reveal his intention. Gabinius asked for time to consider and informed Pope Caius. They then conveyed the matter to Susanna and asked her what she intended to do. She replied: "The Christian faith and virginal purity are of greater value to me than the imperial crown. I will marry no one. I will not break the vow of fidelity I promised to God. I have vowed my purity to Christ the Lord. Neither honor nor wealth nor anything else shall cause me to stray from this."

Caius and Gabinius were pleased with her answer. They encouraged her to remain steadfast and advised her to prepare for the difficult struggle with prayer, fasting, and good works; for, by all appearances, rejecting the emperor's proposal would cost her her life. "What could be more pleasing to me," she said, "than to receive the crown of martyrdom instead of the imperial crown?"

It is astonishing how Susanna held fast to her promise and the courageous spirit within her. She was not shy about expressing her conviction in a very clear—we might even say blunt—manner, knowing full well that this could hasten her death. At first, however, her words had a different effect. The legend recounts:

"After three days, Claudius returned and demanded an answer from Gabinius. Upon entering the house, he saw Susanna, approached her, and, along with other tokens of respect, tried to kiss her hand. Susanna withdrew her hand with holy indignation and said in a solemn voice, "I have never permitted this from any man, not even in my childhood. I will permit it even less to you, for you are an idolater, and your mouth is defiled by the idolatrous sacrifices you have eaten." Upon this, she rebuked him so forcefully for his audacity that Claudius stood there deeply astonished for some time; but then, moved by an inner prompting, he resolved to embrace Christianity along with his wife and children, and did so. Maximus, another courtier who had been sent by Claudius to hear Gabinius's reply, also followed his example."

Like many pagan rulers, the emperor reacted in anger and had the new converts burned alive. He handed Susanna over to his wife, Selena, so that she might persuade Susanna to change her mind. However, Selena was a secret Christian herself and supported Susanna in remaining faithful to the Lord. After some time, Selena informed the emperor that Susanna would stand by her decision.

Diocletian then left it to Maximianus Galerius, the rejected suitor, to take further action against Susanna. He intended to take her by force that night. The legend continues:

"But when he opened the door to her room, he saw her praying, surrounded by a heavenly radiance. Horrified, he fled and reported it to Diocletian. Diocletian dismissed it as sorcery and ordered Macedonius, an apostate Christian, to force Susanna to worship the gods or execute her. Macedonius, who could achieve nothing through either promises or threats, had Susanna flogged most cruelly and beheaded in her own home. During her martyrdom, she

turned her eyes toward heaven and thanked God that He had deemed her worthy to suffer for His sake and to die for His love."

We must bow our heads in reverence and gratitude before the Virgin and Martyr Susanna. We must also ask her to help us bear witness to our faithfulness to Christ. Furthermore, through her intercession, we ask to more deeply discover the value of chastity, to live it, and to convey it to a world that has often lost all sense of it!