

The Legend of St. Dionysius, Bishop and Martyr The Seventh Holy Helper

LEGEND

WHEN St. Paul the Apostle, in the year of Our Lord 51, came to Athens to preach the Gospel, he was summoned to the Areopagus, the great council which determined all religious matters. Among the members of this illustrious assembly was Dionysius. His mind had already been prepared to receive the good tidings of the Gospel by the miraculous darkness which overspread the earth at the moment of Our Lord's death on the cross. He was at that time at Heliopolis, in Egypt. On beholding the sun obscured in the midst of its course, and this without apparent cause, he is said to have exclaimed: "Either the God of nature is suffering, or the world is about to be dissolved." When St. Paul preached before the Areopagus in Athens, Dionysius easily recognized the truth and readily embraced it.

The Apostle received him among his disciples, and appointed him bishop of the infant Church of Athens. As such he devoted himself with great zeal to the propagation of the Gospel. He made a journey to Jerusalem to visit the places hallowed by the footsteps and sufferings of our Redeemer, and there met the Apostles St. Peter and St. James, the evangelist St. Luke, and other holy apostolic men. He also had the happiness to see and converse with the Blessed Virgin Mary, and was so overwhelmed by her presence that he declared, that if he knew not Jesus to be God, he would consider her divine.

The idolatrous priests of Athens were greatly alarmed at the many conversions resulting from the eloquent preaching of Dionysius, and instigated a revolt against him. The holy bishop left Athens, and, going to Rome, visited the Pope, St. Clement. He sent him with some other holy men to Gaul. Some of his companions remained to evangelize the cities in the south, while Dionysius, with the priest Rusticus and the deacon Eleutherius continued their journey northward as far as Lutetia, the modern Paris, where the Gospel had not yet been announced. Here for many years he and his companions labored with signal success, and finally obtained the crown of martyrdom on Oct. 9, 119. Dionysius was beheaded at the advanced age of 110 years. The spot where the three martyrs Dionysius, Rusticus, and Eleutherius suffered martyrdom, is the well-known hill of Montmartre. An ancient tradition relates that St. Dionysius, after his head was severed from his body, took it up with his own hands and carried it two thousand paces to the place where, later, a church was built in his honor. The bodies of the martyrs were thrown into the river Seine, but taken up and honorably interred by a Christian lady named Catulla not far from the place where they had been beheaded. The Christians soon built a chapel on their tomb.

St. Dionysius was not only a great missionary and bishop, but also one of the most illustrious writers of the early Church. Some of his works, which are full of Catholic

VI. Prayer of Married People

HOLY Helpers, powerful intercessors at the throne of God, by whose providence we were indissolubly joined in holy wedlock through the sacramental bonds of matrimony; obtain for us, through your intercession, the grace to dwell together in mutual love and peace, and to fulfil faithfully the duties of our state of life; that following the example of the saints and elect who lived in wedlock, we may merit God's grace and blessing by a virtuous life here on earth, and united in heaven praise and bless Him for ever. Amen.

THIS NOVENA IS RECITED FOR NINE CONSECUTIVE DAYS

III. Prayer for the Sick

MERCIFUL Holy Helpers, look benignly upon me, who implore your intercession for a sick person. Our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, who Himself went about healing and doing good, appointed you the special protectors and intercessors of the sick, and restored to bodily and spiritual health many for whom you prayed. Encouraged thereby to invoke you, I implore you to offer up to His sacred Heart all the pains and torments He suffered during His bitter passion. Offer up to Him also your own sufferings for God's glory, which you underwent during life, and in death; offer up to Him all the anguish and distress suffered by the sick person for whom I invoke your intercession. Ask Him to restore him to health of body, and to infuse into his soul the grace of salvation, so that he may devote his life with renewed vigor to the service of God and to the fulfilment of his duties, and thereby gather rich merits for eternity.

But if God, in the designs of His providence, should otherwise dispose, implore for the sick person patience in his illness, resignation to the divine will, and the grace of a happy death. Assist him in his agony, and conduct his soul to the throne of the Almighty. Amen.

IV. Prayer of Parents for Their Children

HOLY Helpers, assist me to give thanks to God for blessing me with children. Having received them from Him, it is my duty to train them for His service. Therefore I commend them to your special protection. Guard them from sin, help them to know and fulfil their duties, preserve them from all harm of body and soul; pray for them that they may be and remain children of God, For me, obtain the grace always to take good care of them, to edify them by good example, to punish their faults wisely, to preserve their innocence, and to instruct them unto piety, so that they and I may together enjoy the eternal happiness of heaven. Amen.

V. Prayer of Children for Their Parents

HOLY Helpers, mighty intercessors with God in all necessities; God strictly commanded that children should love, honor, and obey their parents. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself gave them the example of submission and obedience by being subject to His mother and foster-father. I commend myself to your powerful intercession and implore you to obtain for me the grace to follow His example. For my parents I implore protection from all evil of body and soul, a long and prosperous life, and a happy death. Reward them for all the care, anxiety, labor, and trouble which they underwent patiently for my sake with the eternal crown of heavenly glory. Amen.

doctrine and Christian wisdom, are still extant, and well worthy of a convert and disciple of St. Paul, whose spirit they breathe.

LESSON

THE apostolic men like St. Dionysius, who converted so many to Christ, were filled with His spirit, and acted and lived for Him alone. They gave their lives to spread His religion, convinced that the welfare of individuals and nations depends upon it.

On religion depends the security and stability of all government and of society.

Human laws are too weak to restrain those who disregard and despise the law of God. Unless a man's conscience is enlightened by religion and bound by its precepts, his passions will so far enslave him, that the impulse of evil inclinations will prompt him to every villainy of which he hopes to derive an advantage, if he can but accomplish his purpose secretly and with impunity.

True religion, on the contrary, insures comfort, peace, and happiness amid the sharpest trials, safety in death itself, and after death the most glorious and eternal reward in God. How grateful, therefore, must we be to the men who preached the true religion amid so many difficulties, trials, and persecutions; and also to those who preach it now, animated by the same spirit. And how carefully should we avoid all persons, books, and periodicals that revile and calumniate our holy Faith, and attempt its subversion!

Prayer of the Church

O GOD, who didst confer on Thy blessed servant Dionysius the virtue of fortitude in suffering, and didst join with him Rusticus and Eleutherius, to announce Thy glory to the heathens, grant, we beseech Thee, that following them, we may despise, for the love of Thee, the pleasures of this world, and that we do not recoil from its adversities. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Novena in Honor of St. Dionysius, Bishop and Martyr

PREPARATORY PRAYER

ALMIGHTY and eternal God! With lively faith and reverently worshiping Thy divine Majesty, I prostrate myself before Thee and invoke with filial trust Thy supreme bounty and mercy. Illumine the darkness of my intellect with a ray of Thy heavenly light and inflame my heart with the fire of Thy divine love, that I may contemplate the great virtues and merits of the saint in

whose honor I make this novena, and following his example imitate, like him, the life of Thy divine Son.

Moreover, I beseech Thee to grant graciously, through the merits and intercession of this powerful Helper, the petition which through him I humbly place before Thee, devoutly saying, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Vouchsafe graciously to hear it, if it redounds to Thy greater glory and to the salvation of my soul. Amen.

PRAYER IN HONOR OF ST. DIONYSIUS

O GOD, who didst confer Thy saving faith on the people of France through Thy holy bishop and martyr Dionysius, and didst glorify him before and after his martyrdom by many miracles; grant us through his intercession that the Faith practised and preached by him be our light on the way of life, so that we may be preserved from all anxieties of conscience, and if by human frailty we have sinned, we may return to Thee speedily by true penance. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

INVOCATION OF ST. DIONYSIUS

GLORIOUS servant of God, St. Dionysius, with intense love thou didst devote thyself to Christ after learning to know Him through the apostle St. Paul, and didst preach His saving name to the nations, to bring whom to His knowledge and love thou didst not shrink from martyrdom; implore for me a continual growth in the knowledge and love of Jesus, so that my restless heart may experience that peace which He alone can give. Help me by thy powerful intercession with God to serve Him with a willing heart, to devote myself with abiding love to His service, and thereby to attain the eternal bliss of heaven. Amen.

Prayers of Petition and Intercession

I. Three Invocations

1. GREAT friends of God, Holy Helpers, humbly saluting and venerating you, I implore your help and intercession. Bring my prayers before the throne of the Most Holy Trinity, so that I may experience in all the difficulties and trials of life the mercy of the eternal Father, the love of the incarnate divine Son, and the assistance of the Holy Ghost; that despondency may not depress me when God's wise decree imposes on my shoulders a heavy burden. Above all, I implore your assistance at the hour of death. Help me then to gain the victory over the temptations and assaults of Satan, and to leave this world hopefully trusting in God's mercy, to join you in heaven, there to praise Him for ever and ever. Amen.

2. With confiding trust I turn to you, Holy Helpers, who were selected by God before many other saints to be the special intercessors and advocates of the distressed. Obtain for me strength and courage to struggle and suffer on earth for the glory of God, for the propagation of our holy faith, and for my own perfection. You are fruitful branches of the true and living vine, Jesus Christ, for whom you heroically suffered hunger and thirst, persecution and ignominy, afflictions and adversity, tortures and death. Here on earth you were true disciples and dauntless martyrs of Christ. Assist me to follow your example and to suffer for His sake, so that I may not be parted from Him as a useless member, but persevere in His service despite all trials and tribulations of life. Knowing my inconstancy and weakness, I have recourse to you, O glorious members of the Church triumphant, and implore you to support my feeble prayers, and to bear them before the throne of the Almighty, who, for your sake, will hear them. Amen.

3. Great friends and servants of God, Holy Helpers! Humbly saluting and venerating you, I implore your help and intercession. God has promised and granted that whosoever invokes your aid shall be relieved in his needs and succored at the hour of death. Therefore I have recourse to you and confidently implore your aid. I am surrounded by difficulties and my soul is oppressed with grief. Burdened with sins, the fear of God's rigorous judgment appalls me, whilst Satan ceases not to exert all his power to accomplish my eternal ruin.

Therefore I implore your assistance, powerful Holy Helpers, in my dire distress. By the penitential life you led, by the cruel tortures you suffered, and by your holy death I entreat you to pray for me. Obtain for me the remission of my sins and perseverance to the end in God's grace. Assist me in my agony and protect me against the wily assaults of Satan, that through your help I may die a happy death and enter a blissful eternity. Amen.

II. Prayer in Illness

COMPASSIONATE Holy Helpers, who restored health to so many through the power of the name of Jesus; behold me suffering from bodily illness and from wounds of the soul. Implore the kind, merciful Good Samaritan, your and my Lord Jesus Christ, to heal the wounds of my soul by washing them in His most precious blood, and to quicken my spirit by His sanctifying grace. If it, then, be God's holy will and for the welfare of my soul, let me experience the powerful effect of your intercession, that, restored to health, I may serve God with greater fervor, and promote your veneration together with so many who experienced your help in illness and suffering. Amen.