



BASILICA OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS—GERMANY

NOVENA AND STORIES OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS

Chapter 8

St. Christopher, Martyr (Sixth Holy Martyr)



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The Legend of St. Christophorus, Martyr

The Sixth Holy Helper

LEGEND

AN ANCIENT tradition concerning St. Christophorus relates: He was born in the land of Canaan, and was named Reprobus, that is Reprobate, for he was a barbarous heathen. In stature and strength he was a giant. Thinking no one his like in bodily vigor, he resolved to go forth in search of the mightiest master and serve him. In his wanderings, he met with a king who was praised as the most valorous man on earth. To him he offered his services and was accepted. The king was proud of his giant and kept him near his person. One day a minstrel visited the king's castle, and among the ballads he sung before the court was one on the power of Satan. At the mention of this name the king blessed himself, making the sign of the cross. Reprobus, wondering, asked him why he did that. The king replied: "When I make this sign, Satan has no power over me." Reprobus rejoined: "So thou fearest the power of Satan? Then he is mightier than thou, and I shall seek and serve him."

Setting forth to seek Satan, he came into a wilderness. One dark night he met a band of wild fellows riding through the forest. It was Satan and his escort. Reprobus bravely accosted him, saying he wished to serve him. He was accepted. But soon he was convinced that his new master was not the mightiest on earth. For one day, whilst approaching a crucifix by the wayside, Satan quickly took to flight, and Reprobus asked him for the reason. Satan replied: "That is the image of my greatest enemy, who conquered me on the cross. From him I always flee." When Reprobus heard this, he left the devil, and went in search of Christ.

In his wanderings, he one day came to a hut hidden in the forest. At its door sat a venerable old man. Reprobus addressed him, and in the course of the conversation that ensued the old man told him that he was a hermit, and had left the world to serve Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth. "Thou art my man," cried Reprobus; "Christ is He whom I seek, for He is the strongest and the mightiest. Tell me where I can find Him."

The hermit then began instructing the giant about God and the Redeemer, and concluded by saying: "He who would serve Christ must offer himself entirely to Him, and do and suffer everything for His sake. His reward for this will be immense and will last forever." Reprobus now asked the hermit to allow him to remain, and to continue to instruct him. The hermit consented. When Reprobus was fully instructed, he baptized him. After his baptism, a great change came over the giant. No longer proud of his great size and strength, he became meek and humble, and asked the hermit to assign to him some task by which he might serve God, his master. "For," said he, "I can not pray and fast; therefore I must serve God in some other way." The hermit led him to a broad and swift river nearby, and said: "Here build thyself a hut, and when wanderers wish to cross the river, carry them over for the love of Christ." For there was no bridge across the river.

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.

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

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.

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.

Henceforth, day and night, whenever he was called, Reprobus faithfully performed the task assigned to him. One night he heard a child calling to be carried across the river. Quickly he rose, placed the child on his stout shoulder, took his staff and walked into the mighty current. Arrived in midstream, the water rose higher and higher, and the child became heavier and heavier. "O child," he cried, "how heavy thou art! It seems I bear the weight of the world on my shoulder." And the child replied, "Right thou art. Thou bearest not only the world, but the Creator of heaven and earth. I am Jesus Christ, thy King and Lord, and henceforth thou shalt be called Christophorus, that is, Christ-bearer. Arrived on yonder shore, plant thy staff in the ground, and in token of my power and might tomorrow it shall bear leaves and blossoms."

And the child disappeared. On reaching the other shore, Christophorus stuck his staff into the ground, and behold, it budded forth leaves and blossoms. Then, kneeling, he promised the Lord to serve Him ever faithfully. He kept his promise, and thenceforth became a zealous preacher of the Gospel, converting many to the Faith. On his missionary peregrinations he came also to Lycia, where, after his first sermon, eighteen thousand heathens requested baptism. When Emperor Decius heard of this, he sent a company of four hundred soldiers to capture Christophorus. To these he preached so convincingly, that they all asked for baptism. Decius became enraged thereat and had him cast into prison. There he first treated him with great kindness, and surrounded him with every luxury to tempt him to sin, but in vain. Then he ordered him to be tortured in the most cruel manner, until he should deny the Faith. He was scourged, placed on plates of hot iron, boiling oil was poured over and fire was lighted under him. When all these torments did not accomplish their purpose, the soldiers were ordered to shoot him with arrows. This, too, having no effect, he was beheaded, on July 25, 254.

Two great saints refer to the wonderful achievements of St. Christophorus. St. Ambrose mentions that this saint converted forty-eight thousand souls to Christ. St. Vincent Ferrer declares, that when the plague devastated Valencia, its destructive course was stayed through the intercession of St. Christophorus.

LESSON

THE legend of St. Christophorus conveys a wholesome truth. We ought all to be Christ-bearers, by preserving in our hearts faith, hope, and charity, and by receiving Our Lord worthily in holy communion. He alone is worthy of our service. In the service that we owe to men, we ought to serve God by doing His will. We can not divide our heart, for Our Lord Himself says, "No man can serve two masters" (*Matt.* vi. 24). If you serve the world, it deceives you, for it can not give you what it promises. If you serve sin, Satan is your master. He, too, deceives his servants, and leads them to

perdition. Christ on the cross conquered these two tyrants, and with His help you can also vanquish them. Therefore, give yourself to Him with all your heart, and you shall find peace in this world, and eternal bliss in the next. St. Augustine learned this truth by sad experience, and therefore exclaims: "Thou hast created us for Thee, O Lord, and our heart is restless till it rests in Thee."

Prayer of the Church

GRANT us, almighty God, that whilst we celebrate the memory of Thy blessed martyr St. Christophorus, through his intercession the love of Thy name may be increased in us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Novena in Honor of St. Christophorus, 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. CHRISTOPHORUS

O GOD, who didst make St. Christophorus a true Christ-bearer, who converted multitudes to the Christian faith, and who didst give him the grace to suffer for Thy sake the most cruel torments; through the intercession of this saint we implore Thee to protect us from sin, the only real evil. Preserve us, also, against harmful elementary forces, such as earthquake, lightning, fire, and flood. Amen.

INVOCATION OF ST. CHRISTOPHORUS

GREAT St. Christophorus, seeking the strongest and mightiest master thou didst find him in Jesus Christ, the almighty God of heaven and earth, and didst faithfully serve Him with all thy power to the end of thy life, gaining for Him countless souls and finally shedding thy blood for Him; obtain for me the grace to bear Christ always in my heart, as thou didst once bear Him on thy shoulder, so that I thereby may be strengthened to overcome victoriously all temptations and resist all enticements of the world, the devil, and the flesh, and that the powers of darkness may not prevail against me. 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.