



# The Legend of St. Erasmus, Bishop and Martyr

## The Third Holy Helper

### LEGEND

THE pious historians of the early Christian times state, as a rule, only what the saints did and suffered for the Faith, and how they died. They deemed the martyrs' glorious combat and their victorious entrance into heaven more instructive, and therefore more important, than a lengthy description of their lives.

Hence we know little of the native place and the youth of St. Erasmus, except that at the beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era he was bishop of Antioch in Asia Minor, the city where the name of "Christian" first came into use. When a long and cruel persecution broke out under the Emperor Diocletian, St. Erasmus hid himself in the mountains of the Libanon, and led there, for some years, an austere life of penance and fasting. Finally he was discovered and dragged before the judge.

At first, persuasions and kindness were employed to induce him to deny the Faith, but when these efforts failed recourse was had to the most cruel torments. He was scourged, and finally cast into a caldron filled with boiling oil, sulphur, and pitch. In this seething mass God preserved him from harm, and by this miracle many spectators were converted to the Faith. Still more enraged thereat, the judge ordered the holy bishop to be thrown into prison and kept there in chains till he died of starvation. But God delivered him, as He had once delivered St. Peter. One night an angel appeared to him and said: "Erasmus, follow me! Thou shalt convert a great many." Thus far he had led numbers to the Faith by suffering, now he was to convert multitudes as a missionary.

Delivered from prison by the power of God, he went forth into many lands and preached the Faith. Mighty in word and deed, he wrought many miracles and converted great numbers of heathens. At length he came to Italy, where Emperor Maximin persecuted the Christians as fiercely as did Diocletian in the East. As soon as Maximin heard of Erasmus and the conversions effected by his preaching and miracles, he ordered the slaughter of three hundred of the converts. Erasmus himself was most cruelly tortured, but to no purpose. He remained firm. Then cast into prison, he was again liberated by an angel.

At last the hour of deliverance came to this valiant and apostolic confessor and martyr of Christ. He heard a heavenly voice, saying: "Erasmus, come now to the heavenly city and rest in the place which God has prepared for thee with the holy martyrs and prophets. Enjoy now the fruit of thy labor. By thee I was honored in heaven and on earth." Erasmus, looking toward heaven, saw a splendid crown, and the apostles and prophets welcoming him. He bowed his head, saying: "Receive, O Lord, the soul of thy servant!" and peacefully breathed forth his spirit on June 2, 308.

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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.

#### 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**

THE tortures which St. Erasmus suffered for the Faith seem almost incredible, and the events related of him are truly wonderful. Martyrdom and miracles illustrated the doctrine he preached; he converted multitudes and gained the crown of heaven.

Perhaps you say that in our times there are no longer any martyrs, at least not in civilized countries. Are you quite sure of it? St. Augustine writes: "Peace also has its martyrs." It is certainly not easy to suffer torments like the martyrs and to receive finally the death-dealing blow of the sword. But is it not also a martyrdom to suffer for years the pains of a lingering illness? Again, how difficult the combat with the world, the flesh, and the powers of hell! How carefully must we watch and pray to gain the victory! This is our martyrdom. Let us imitate the example of the holy martyrs in bearing the trials and sufferings of life, and we shall receive, as they did, the crown of heaven.

#### Prayer of the Church

O GOD, who dost give us joy through the memory of Thy holy martyrs, graciously grant that we may be inflamed by their example, in whose merits we rejoice. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### Novena in Honor of St. Erasmus, 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. ERASMUS

O GOD, grant us through the intercession of Thy dauntless bishop and martyr Erasmus, who so valiantly confessed the Faith, that we may learn the doctrine of this faith, practise its precepts, and thereby be made worthy to attain its promises. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## INVOCATION OF ST. ERASMUS

HOLY martyr Erasmus, who didst willingly and bravely bear the trials and sufferings of life, and by thy charity didst console many fellow-sufferers; I implore thee to remember me in my needs and to intercede for me with God. Staunch confessor of the Faith, victorious vanquisher of all tortures, pray to Jesus for me and ask Him to grant me the grace to live and die in the Faith through which thou didst obtain the crown of glory. 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.

### 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.