



BASILICA OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS—GERMANY

NOVENA AND STORIES OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS

Chapter 16

St. Barbara, Virgin/Martyr (Fourteenth Holy Helper)



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The Legend of St. Barbara, Virgin and Martyr

The Fourteenth Holy Helper

LEGEND

NICOMEDIA, a city in Asia Minor, was St. Barbara's birthplace. Her father Dioscurus was a pagan. Fearing that his only child might learn to know and love the doctrines of Christianity, he shut her up in a tower, apart from all intercourse with others. Nevertheless Barbara became a Christian. She passed her time in study, and from her lonely tower she used to watch the heavens in their wondrous beauty. She soon became convinced that the "heavens were telling the glory of God," a God greater than the idols she had been taught to worship. Her desire to know that God was in itself a prayer which He answered in His own wise way.

The fame of Origen, that famous Christian teacher in Alexandria, reached even the remote tower, and Barbara sent a trusty servant with the request that he would make known to her the truth. Origen sent her one of his disciples, disguised as a physician, who instructed and baptized her. She practised her new religion discreetly while waiting for a favorable opportunity of acquainting her father with her conversion.

This opportunity came in a short time. Some workmen were sent by Dioscurus to make another room in the tower, and when they had made two windows she directed them to make a third. When her father saw this additional window, he asked the reason for it. She replied, "Know, my father, that the soul receives light through three windows, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and the three are one." The father became so angry at this discovery of her having become a Christian, that he would have killed his daughter with his sword, had she not fled to the top of the tower. He followed her, and finally had her in his power. First he wreaked his vengeance on her in blows, then clutching her by the hair he dragged her away and thrust her into a hut to prevent her escape. Next he tried every means to induce her to renounce her faith; threats, severe punishments, and starvation had no effect on the constancy of the Christian maiden.

Finding himself powerless to shake his daughter's constancy, Dioscurus delivered her to the proconsul Marcian, who had her scourged and tortured, but without causing her to deny the Faith. During her sufferings, her father stood by, exulting in the torments of his child. Next night, after she had been taken back to prison, Our Lord appeared to her and healed her wounds. When Barbara appeared again before him, Marcian was greatly astonished to find no trace of the cruelties that had been perpetrated on her body. Again she resisted his importunities to deny the Faith, and when he saw that all his efforts were in vain, he pronounced the sentence of death. Barbara was to be beheaded. Her unnatural father claimed the privilege to execute it with his own hands, and with one blow severed his daughter's head from her body, on December 4, 237.

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

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.

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.

At the moment of the saint's death a great tempest arose and Dioscurus was killed by lightning. Marcian, too, was overtaken by the same fate.

LESSON

SINCE early times St. Barbara is invoked as the patroness against lightning and explosions, and is called upon by those who desire the sacraments of the dying in their last illness, and many are the instances of the efficacy of her intercession.

We all wish for a happy and blessed death. To attain it, we must make the preparation for it the great object of our life; we must learn to die to the world and to ourselves, and strive after perfection in virtue. There is no greater comfort in adversity, no more powerful incentive to withdrawing our affections from this world, than to remember the blessing of a happy death. Well prepared, death may strike us in any form whatsoever, and however suddenly, it will find us ready.

We can be guilty of no greater folly than to delay our preparation for death, repentance, the reception of the sacraments, and the amendment of our life, from day to day, from the time of health to the time of illness, and in illness to the very last moments, thinking that even then we can obtain pardon. St. Augustine observes: "It is very dangerous to postpone the performance of a duty on which our whole eternity depends to the most inconvenient time, the last hour." And St. Bernard remarks: "In Holy Scripture we find one single instance of one who received pardon at the last moment. He was the thief crucified with Jesus. He is alone, that you despair not; he is alone, also, that you sin not by presumption on God's mercy." If you, therefore, wish for a happy death, prepare for it in time.

Prayer of the Church

O GOD, who among the wonders of Thy might didst grant the victory of martyrdom also to the weaker sex, graciously grant us that we, by recalling the memory of Thy blessed virgin and martyr Barbara, through her example may be led to Thee. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Novena in Honor of St. Barbara, Virgin 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. BARBARA

O GOD, who didst adorn Thy holy virgin and martyr Barbara with extraordinary fortitude in the confession of the Faith, and didst console her in the most atrocious torments; grant us through her intercession perseverance in the fulfilment of Thy law and the grace of being fortified before our end with the holy sacraments, and of a happy death. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

INVOCATION OF ST. BARBARA

INTREPID virgin and martyr, St. Barbara, through thy intercession come to my aid in all needs of my soul. Obtain for me the grace to be preserved from a sudden and un-provided death; assist me in my agony, when my senses are benumbed and I am in the throes of death. Then, O powerful patroness of the dying, come to my aid! Repel from me all the assaults and temptations of the evil one, and obtain for me the grace to receive before death the holy sacraments, that I breathe forth my soul confirmed in faith, hope, and charity, and be worthy to enter eternal glory. Amen.

St. Barbara, at my last end
Obtain for me the Sacrament;
Assist one in that direst need
When I my God and Judge must meet:
That robed in sanctifying grace
My soul may stand before His face.

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