

indulgence for the day of the anniversary of the dedication, the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Joannes, granted another, and Pope Nicholas V a third. These indulgences, and a number of other spiritual privileges granted to the chapel, attracted a great many visitors, so that it became a place of pious pilgrimage. Elector Frederic III, in fulfilment of a vow made when beset with difficulties, visited the chapel in 1485. Emperor Ferdinand also visited it and left, as a votive offering, his gold pectoral chain on the altar.

Devotion to the Fourteen Holy Helpers continued to spread. In 1743, a magnificent church, to replace the old chapel, was begun, and completed in 1772. Churches and altars in honor of these saints are found in Italy, Austria, Tyrol, Hungary, Bohemia, Switzerland, and other countries of Europe. In the United States of America two churches are dedicated under the invocation of the Holy Helpers: one in Baltimore, Md., the other in Gardenville, N. Y. Wherever and whenever invoked, these saints have proved themselves willing helpers in all difficulties, vicissitudes, and trials of their faithful clients.



Basilica of the Fourteen Holy Helpers—Germany

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NOVENA AND STORIES OF THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS

Chapter 1

Introduction



The Fourteen Holy Helpers

AMONG the saints who in Catholic devotion are invoked with special confidence, because they have proved themselves efficacious helpers in adversity and difficulties, there is a group venerated under the collective name of Holy Helpers. They are:

1. St. George, Martyr.
2. St. Blase, Bishop and Martyr.
3. St. Pantaleon, Martyr.
4. St. Vitus, Martyr.
5. St. Erasmus, Bishop and Martyr.
6. St. Christophorus, Martyr.
7. St. Dionysius, Bishop and Martyr.
8. St. Cyriacus, Martyr.
9. St. Achatius, Martyr.
10. St. Eustachius, Martyr.
11. St. Giles, Abbot.
12. St. Catherine, Virgin and Martyr.
13. St. Margaret, Virgin and Martyr.
14. St. Barbara, Virgin and Martyr.

The reason why these saints are invoked as a group is said to have been an epidemic which devastated Europe from 1346 to 1349. It was called the Plague, or "Black Death," and among its symptoms were the turning black of the tongue, parching of the throat, violent headache, fever, and boils on the abdomen. The malady attacked its victims suddenly, bereft them of reason, and caused death in a few hours, so that many died without the last sacraments. Fear caused many attacks and disrupted social and family ties. To all appearances, the disease was incurable.

During this period of general affliction the people in pious confidence turned toward Heaven, and had recourse to the intercession of the saints, praying to be spared an attack, or to be cured when stricken. Among the saints invoked since the earliest times of the Church as special patrons in certain diseases were: St. Christopher and St. Giles against the plague, St. Dionysius against headache, St. Blase against ills of the throat, St. Catherine against those of the tongue, St. Erasmus against those of the abdomen, St. Barbara against fever, St. Vitus against epilepsy. St. Pantaleon was the patron of physicians, St. Cyriacus was had recourse to in temptations, especially in those at the hour of death; St. Achatius was invoked in death agony; Sts. Christopher, Barbara, and Catherine were appealed to for protection against a sudden and unprovided death; the aid of St. Giles was implored for making a good confession; St. Eustachius was patron in all kinds of difficulties, and, because peculiar circumstances separated him for a time from his family, he was invoked also in family troubles. Domestic animals, too, being attacked by the plague, Sts. George, Erasmus, Pantaleon, and Vitus were invoked for their protection. It appears from the invocation of these saints, so widespread in olden times during the plague and other epidemics, that their being grouped as the Fourteen Holy Helpers originated in a like visitation.

The fourteen saints venerated as the Holy Helpers are represented with the symbols of their martyrdom, or with the insignia of their state of life; also, as a group of children. The latter representation is accounted for as follows: The abbey of Langheim, in the diocese of Bamberg, Bavaria, owned a farm on which the monks kept their flocks. The sheep were tended by shepherds, who led them along the hillsides, where they grazed quietly during the day, and were driven home in the evening.

On the evening of September 22, 1445, a young shepherd, Herman Leicht, who was gathering his flock for the homeward drive, heard what seemed to him to be the cry of a child, and looking about, saw a child sitting in a field near by. Surprised, and wondering how the child came there, he was about to approach, when it disappeared. Feeling rather disturbed, the boy returned to his flock. After reaching it, he turned to look back to the place where he had seen the apparition. There the child sat again, this time in a circle of light, and between two burning candles. Terrified at this second apparition, he made the sign of the cross. The child smiled, as if to encourage him, and he was about to approach it again, when it vanished a second time. Greatly perplexed, he drove his flock home and informed his parents of the occurrence. But they called the apparition a delusion and told him not to mention it to any one. Nevertheless, feeling uneasy, and desiring an explanation, he went to the monastery and related his experience to one of the Fathers, who advised him to ask the child, if it ever should appear to him again, what it wanted.

Nearly a year later, June 28, 1446, the eve of the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the child again appeared to the boy in the same place as before and about sunset; but this time it was surrounded by thirteen other children, all in a halo of glory. He boldly approached the group and asked the child he had formerly seen in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, what it desired. The child replied: "We are the Fourteen Helpers, and desire that a chapel be built for us. Be thou our servant, and we shall serve thee." Then the group of children disappeared, and the shepherd boy was filled with heavenly consolation.

The following Sunday, after he had driven his flock to the pasture, it seemed to him that he saw two lighted candles descending from the sky to the place where he had seen the apparition. A woman who was passing at the time declared that she also saw them. The boy hastened to the monastery and told about the two apparitions. The abbot, Frederic IV, and the rest of the community, were not inclined to believe in the apparition, and ascribed it to the boy's visionary fancy. But when, in the course of time, several extraordinary favors were granted to people who prayed at the place of the apparition, the monks built a chapel there. It was begun in 1447, and finished and dedicated next year under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Fourteen Holy Helpers. The bishop granted an