

Saint George (c. 275/285 – 23 April 303)

It is likely that Saint George was born to a Greek Christian noble family in Lydda (now in Israel and called Lod) during the late third century between 275 AD and 285 AD. His father, Gerontios, was a Greek, from Cappadocia, Asia Minor, officer in the Roman army and his mother, Polychronia, was also Greek. They were both Christians, so the child was raised with Christian beliefs. They decided to call him Georgios, meaning "worker of the land". Aged 14, George lost his father, and a few years later his mother.

George decided to go to Nicomedia, the imperial city of that time, and present himself to Emperor Diocletian to apply for a career as a soldier. Diocletian welcomed him with open arms, as he had known his father, Gerontius — one of his finest soldiers. By his late 20s, George was promoted to the rank of Tribunus and stationed as an imperial guard of the Emperor at Nicomedia.

In the year AD 302, Diocletian (influenced by Galerius) issued an edict that every Christian soldier in the army should be arrested, and every other soldier should offer a sacrifice to the Roman gods of the time. George objected, and with the courage of his faith approached the Emperor and ruler. Diocletian was upset, not wanting to lose his best tribune and the son of his best official, Gerontius. George loudly renounced the Emperor's edict, and in front of his fellow soldiers and Tribunes he claimed himself to be a Christian and declared his worship of Jesus Christ. Diocletian attempted to convert George, even offering gifts of land, money and slaves if he made a sacrifice to the Roman gods, but George never accepted.

Recognizing the futility of his efforts, Diocletian was left with no choice but to have him executed for his refusal. Before the execution George gave his wealth to the poor and prepared himself. After various torture sessions George was executed by decapitation before Nicomedia's city wall, on April 23, 303. A witness of his suffering convinced Empress Alexandra to become Christian as well, and so joined George in martyrdom. His body was returned to Lydda in Palestine for burial, where Christians soon came to honour him as a martyr.

APRIL 2021

Prayer from Taizé

The exchange with God becomes real for us in prayer; by his Holy Spirit, God comes to dwell within us. By his word and by the sacraments, Christ gives himself to us. In return, we can surrender everything to him.

Prayers of Intercession for our parish

- Let us pray that through our Lenten initiatives we may discover an enhanced connection with God and with other people, within and beyond our parish community.
- Let us pray that, through the 24 hours of the Lord, we will be restored by a deep healing, finding compassion and peace which we can share with others, both in and beyond our parish community.
- Let us pray that our celebrations of Holy Week and Easter will lead to a deeper connection to God and to all people through Christ.

Some tweets by Pope Francis

- The Lord looks for us where we are, he loves us as we are, and he patiently walks by our side.
- God's grace changes lives: He takes us as we are, but He never leaves us as we are.
- To pray is to light a candle in the darkness. Prayer rouses us from the tepidness of a purely horizontal existence, lifts our gaze to higher things, makes us attuned to the Lord, allows God to be close to us; it frees us from our solitude and gives us hope.
- It is striking that the Lord spent most of his time on Earth living an ordinary life, without standing out. It is a beautiful message that reveals the greatness of daily life, the importance in God's eyes of every gesture and moment of life, even the most simple.
- Let's look at the "saints next door" who, with simplicity, respond to evil with good, have the courage to love their enemies and to pray for them.

April 8: St. Julie Billiard (1751-1816)

Born in Cuvilly, France, into a family of well-to-do farmers, young Marie Rose Julie Billiard showed an early interest in religion and in helping the sick and poor. Though the first years of her life were relatively peaceful and uncomplicated, Julie had to take up manual work as a young teen when her family lost its money.

A mysterious illness overtook her when she was about 30. Witnessing an attempt to wound or even kill her father, Julie was paralysed and became an invalid. For the next two decades she continued to teach catechism lessons from her bed, offering spiritual advice and attracting visitors who heard of her holiness.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, revolutionary forces became aware of her allegiance to fugitive priests. With the help of friends she was smuggled out of Cuvilly in a hay-cart; she spent several years hiding in Compiègne, being moved from house to house despite her growing physical pain.

But this period also proved to be a fruitful spiritual time for Julie. It was at this time she had a vision in which she saw Calvary surrounded by women in religious habits and heard a voice saying, "Behold these spiritual daughters whom I give you in an Institute marked by the cross." As time passed and Julie continued her mobile life, she made the acquaintance of an aristocratic woman, Françoise Blin de Bourdon, who shared Julie's interest in teaching the faith. In 1803 the two women began the Institute of Notre Dame, which was dedicated to the education of the poor as well as young Christian girls and the training of catechists. The following year the first Sisters of Notre Dame made their vows. The same year that Julie recovered from the illness: She was able to walk for the first time in 22 years.

Though Julie had always been attentive to the special needs of the poor, she also became aware that other classes in society needed Christian instruction. From the founding of the Sisters of Notre Dame until her death, Julie was on the road, opening a variety of schools in France and Belgium that served the poor and the wealthy, vocational groups, teachers. Ultimately, Julie and Françoise moved the motherhouse to Namur, Belgium. Julie died there in 1816. She was canonized in 1969.

Resurrection now

What I'm asking Lord, is that I may have resurrection now. I don't mean die physically and rise again, though if this is your will for me I'll try and say "yes", but I mean spiritually. I mean a new resurrection through a new baptism in your Spirit. I mean seeing things differently, recognising you and people and life itself in a new way. I mean coming alive in you and sloughing off all the deadness that covers my inward vision. This I call **resurrection now**, Lord, and I ask for it that I may live newly now and so later live eternally.

(Fr Michael Hollings and Etta Gullick)

A story from Fr O'Leary RIP (Founder of Jospice)

Some sixty odd years ago in Princes Street, Edinburgh, a gentleman was looking into the window of an art gallery and staring entranced at a particular picture of the Crucifixion. Something about the painting moved him very deeply and stirred up long-forgotten memories. Just then a ragged little urchin came up and he, too, stared at the picture. Eventually the urchin said:

"That's Jesus, sir, on the cross. They nailed Him there with that crown of thorns on His head, and killed Him, sir. He died for us, and that's His mother standing there, sir, looking at what they did to Him. After He died, they buried Him yonder, sir."

The gentleman was overcome with emotion and had to walk away down Princes Street. He had not gone far when he felt someone tugging at his coat. Turning round he saw the little urchin looking into his face. The boy blurted out breathlessly:

"I forgot to tell you, sir. I forgot to tell you - He rose again!"

May the Risen Lord, living always in our midst, bless and keep us all safe and healed in the palm of His hands.