

St. Lucy



ST. LUCY

Feast Day: December 13

Died: December 13, 304 A.D.

Patron Saint of the Blind & Eye Disorders

St. Lucy is a virgin and martyr of Syracuse in Sicily, whose feast day is celebrated by Catholic and Orthodox Churches on December 13th

The story of St. Lucy is connected with a period of great political uncertainty and anxiety in the Roman Empire. It was an anxious time as the enemies of the Roman Empire attacked on all sides. After 400 years, the Roman Empire was declining under the constant onslaught of its enemies. Diocletian (Caius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus, 245-313) became the Emperor in 284 and set about trying to regain Rome's former power and glory. Diocletian would celebrate Rome's last great military victory over its ancient enemy, the Persian Empire. Other victories came on the Germanic border but these victories would not bring peace to the Empire.

It was into this time of great anxiety that Lucy was born, in Syracuse, Sicily; into a rich and noble Roman family about the year 283. Her father, a patrician, died when she was five years old. That left her dependent upon her sickly mother Eutychia, who was of Greek descent. This is not surprising considering Syracuse was originally a Greek city and at one time the richest Greek city in the Greek Empire.

Lucy raised a devout Catholic, privately decided in her teenage years to consecrate her virginity to God, and devote her worldly goods to the service of the poor. However, Eutychia, not knowing of Lucy's promise and suffering from a bleeding disorder feared for Lucy's future. She arranged Lucy's marriage to a young man of a wealthy pagan family.

Lucy had to do something. An opportunity arose for Lucy to try to persuade Eutychia to agree to her desires. Not far away was the shrine of the famous virgin-martyr Agatha, who had been executed in the Decian persecution (5 Feb. 251 A.D.). Her tomb in Catania was attracting numerous visitors and many miracles had been reported through her intercession. Eutychia was persuaded to make a pilgrimage to Catania in the hope of being cured. While there, St. Agatha came to Lucy in a dream and told her that because

of her faith her mother would be cured. Agatha also told Lucy that God would do great things through her.

Eutychia was in fact cured, and Lucy, availing herself of the opportunity, persuaded her mother to allow her to continue to distribute part of their riches among the poor. As a result of this miraculous cure, Eutychia realized how saintly her daughter had become.

Also, Lucy could now tell her mother of her vow of virginity to Christ. At first Eutychia was quite dismayed, especially when Lucy, refused to marry. Joyful at her cure, Lucy's mother agreed to let Lucy help the poor and for now not marry. As Lucy's reputation grew in Syracuse, the clouds of persecution gathered over Sicily. . Lucy was renowned for her beauty and her sparkling eyes. It was said she had a radiance about her that came from her love for Christ

Meanwhile, at the imperial palace in Rome, Diocletian realized that the empire was now too unwieldy and too exposed to attacks on all sides. To better manage the empire he split the Empire into three parts with himself as Augustus Caesar or head Caesar. General Galerius was appointed Caesar in the East and General Maximian as Caesar in the Western part of the Empire. They would report to Diocletian. Diocletian at first was very tolerant of the Catholic Faith. Indeed, the Catholic faith grew in great numbers and erected churches in the principle cities. Many Catholics held high positions throughout the Empire. Catholics even served in the Roman Army.

However, as the Empire reeled under the continued attacks of its many enemies, Galerius and Maximian persuaded Diocletian to attempt to reinstate the ancient pagan religion throughout the empire. It was thought that this would unify and strengthen the empire as in centuries past.

In 303 A.D, Diocletian issued three edicts that began the last and worst of the persecutions against the Catholic Faith. The first ordered the destruction of the churches and the burning of all Catholic writings, especially the Bible. Even more of the precious history of the early Church would be lost. The second edict was directed against the clergy. Great numbers of bishops, priests and deacons were arrested and martyred. Others were sold off as slaves in the salt and copper mines. The third edict was directed at the laity. Villages and towns would be leveled and their inhabitants slaughtered or sold into slavery for being Catholic.

In 304 A.D. the frightful persecution came to Sicily. The Roman governor, Pascasio, probably to court favor with the emperor, was determined to carry out the three decrees with the full weight of the Roman Army behind him.

With the persecution in full swing, Lucy had now to help the poor and her fellow

Catholics who had taken refuge in the extensive catacombs underneath Syracuse. Lucy had become well known in Syracuse for her faith and charitable works. In these sorrowful days Lucy carried food and drink to Catholics hiding in the dark underground catacombs. It is said she wore a wreath on her head with candles to light her way because her arms were full of food and water. Word of her heroic deeds spread and did not escape the ears of informants.

Upon hearing of this, the pagan youth to which Lucy was betrothed became furious. Perhaps he had presumed that Lucy's inheritance was already his property. Adding insult to injury, his friends and household servants taunted the young man saying that "Lucy had found a better Bridegroom than he" (meaning Jesus). Whether motivated by pride, greed, jealousy or a combination of all three, in his anger he denounced Lucy to Pascasio, the governor, as a Christian. Lucy was now caught up in the great persecution of Diocletian. Her patrician status could no longer save her.

Pascasio seized this opportunity to make Lucy an example of Rome's greatness and displeasure. Thus, the governor wanted to destroy the beautiful "light" that was Lucy. He was not content to just kill Lucy's body. Lucy had radiance about her, both physically and spiritually. It was his intent to show the Catholics of Syracuse that the Roman Empire was greater than their God. Lucy's public humiliation was designed to discredit the power of Christ and His Church.

And so Lucy, a beautiful young woman, noted for her eyes that shined with a glow of inner beauty and goodness was hauled before the governor. Lucy seemed to just emanate from her whole being her love of Jesus. It was more than her outer beauty or her joy of life. To all, she radiated her faith in Jesus Christ.

The governor, aware of Lucy's vow of chastity, was not content to just kill Lucy's body. He desperately wanted to destroy the beauty of her soul as well. Lucy would be forced to renounce her faith and worship the pagan gods. If Lucy could be forced to renounce her faith, than other Catholics would follow suit.

Pascasio order a public spectacle in the magnificent amphitheater of Syracuse. Looking down on the helpless Lucy was the governor sitting in the royal box, surrounded by politician and generals in their splendid Roman armor and vibrant red cloaks. The might of Rome pitted against Lucy.

The governor's plan was to plunge Lucy into the darkness and degradation of sin. She was first condemned to suffer the shame of prostitution; but when the soldiers came take her to a brothel, in the strength of God, she stood immovable. No matter how they tried, they could not drag her away to that place of shame.

In a desperate effort, a team of oxen was used, but to no avail. Frustrated, the governor demanded of Lucy, "How are you doing this." Lucy could only respond that it was not she, but Jesus Christ. Infuriated, he governor then ordered Lucy to be burned alive if she didn't deny Jesus and worship the pagan gods. Lucy refused. Bundles of twigs were placed around her. When the soldiers tried to ignite the bundles, they would not burn. The governor ordered the wood to be soaked with oil, but the oil would not ignite. When asked how she was doing all this, Lucy could only answer once again that it was not her but the power of Jesus Christ. The pagans in the crowd were being won over by this hapless girl.

Sensing that his demonstration of Roman might was becoming undone, in desperation; Pascasio ordered Lucy's eyes to be gouged out. Still, Lucy stood there refusing to deny Christ.

Sensing that her time of witness and martyrdom was near and moved by the Holy Spirit, Lucy prophesized to the crowd. She told them the persecution would not last much longer and the emperor would lose his throne. In a panic to stop Lucy from continuing, lest he be next, Pascasio ordered a soldier to stab Lucy in the neck with his sword. Strengthened by her Savior, she won her crown of virginity and martyrdom. On December 13, 304 Lucy gained victory and entrance into eternal life.

If the governor thought that it was now over, little did he know? In death, Lucy became an even greater example of Christian witness. Miracles started immediately. Lucy was carried to the cemetery and in Roman tradition her body was prepared for burial in the family mausoleum. Here, they discovered that her eyes had been miraculously restored. To mark this miracle, Lucy is often pictured with a dish on which is a set of eyes. She also holds the palm branch, symbol of victory over evil.

Lucy's predictions came true. The persecution had the opposite effect on the Empire. As Catholics in the government and army were banished the Empire grew even weaker and more chaotic. The cost of murdering so many citizens drained the treasury. The persecution had done more damage to the Empire than any foreign enemy. Plagued with failure, and worn out with wars and the persecution, the aged Diocletian abdicated five months later on May 1, 305. The persecution ended in the West but continued under Galerius for several more years until a new Augustus Caesar would arise.

Constantine the Great would defeat Maximian and Galerius with the Christian cross emblazoned on his army's shields and become Augustus Caesar of the Roman Empire in 306. Constantine would sign the Edit of Milan granting religious freedom to the Catholic Church in 313.

We do not know what happened to the young man to whom Lucy was betrothed. He has vanished from history. His name was never recorded. As for the governor, he too vanished into history. Since failure was not tolerated in the Roman Empire, one can only surmise what happened to the governor. The usual punishment was to "fall on one's sword." In return, the family would retain their social rank and estates.

Once again, the devil lost. He had marked out the saintly Lucy for darkness and defeat but Jesus would give her unprecedented victory. Lucy's very name means "light." Her witness to the faith gave hope to the Catholics of Syracuse and all of Sicily. They would emerge victorious from the persecution and begin to rebuild the Church. The pagans, who at first laughed and cried out for Lucy's death, would be so touched by her willingness to die for her faith that many converted. Within decades Lucy's name would be added next to Agatha's name in the Roman Canon or First Eucharist Prayer said in Rome by the pope. In less than three centuries the story of Lucy would be told throughout the universal Church.

The earliest surviving written story of Lucy is found in the *Acts*, compiled in the fifth century (400's) showing the great veneration that was already shown to St. Lucy by the early church. Her veneration spread so that by the sixth century the whole Church recognized her courage in defense of the faith. She is one of those few female saints whose names occur in the canon of Pope St. Gregory the Great (died in 604), and there

are special prayers and antiphons for her in his "Sacramentary" and "Antiphony". She is also commemorated in the ancient Roman Martyrology. St. Aldhelm (English, died in 709) and later the Venerable Bede (English, died in 735) attest to her popularity that had already spread to England. Her festival was kept in England till the Protestant Reformation, as a holy day of the second rank, in which no work but tillage or the like was allowed.

Wheat is often carried in the procession of St. Lucy to commemorate a miracle during the famine of 1582 in Syracuse. While gathered in the churches to pray to their patron saint, a flotilla of grain-bearing ships were blown off course and appeared unexpectedly in the harbor. The people were so hungry they didn't take time to grind the wheat into flour but boiled it into porridge and ate it that way. Today, Sicilians don't eat anything made with wheat flour on Lucy's feast day. Instead they eat potatoes or rice in the form of arancine, golden croquettes shaped and fried to the color of oranges and filled with chopped meats. In Palermo, everyone eats cuccia; a dessert of whole-wheat cooked in water; then mixed with sweet ricotta.

The beloved remains of St. Lucy rest in the Basilica of St. Lucy in Syracuse, Sicily

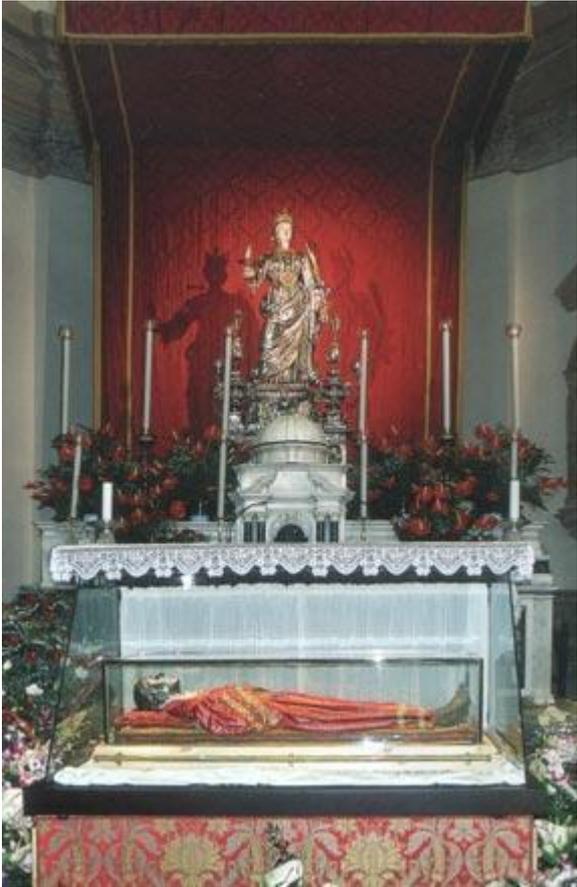
In the Roman Martyrology, Saint Lucy is called both virgin and martyr, and in both titles lies the secret of her sanctity in the Roman Empire of the fourth century. Recent excavations in Syracuse, the ancient capital of Sicily, revealed both her tomb and an inscription dating from the end of the fourth century that mentions her feast day. She is known to have been honored in Rome in the sixth century and she is mentioned in the Canon of the Mass. Lucy, whose name means "light" was invoked by the devout of the Middle Ages as the patroness of those afflicted with any eye disease. In art she is often shown carrying a dish with two eyeballs on it.

The poet Dante prayed to Saint Lucy for the relief of an eye ailment, and in his Divine Comedy he gave this saint one of the most honored places in heaven, next to that of Saint John the Baptist.

Lucy means "light" and she is the patron of eye troubles and blindness. As mentioned above, she is often portrayed holding her eyeballs on a dish, although in the painting above by Francesco del Cossa has the eyes held in a more unique way. Her feast originally coincided with the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year before calendar reforms, so her feastday has become a feast of light...of course, not The Light, but pointing to Christ our Light.. There are so many approaches to thinking of light — Christ the Light of the World comes at Christmas; Christ our Light in the Paschal Candle at Easter; we see light through the gift of eyesight; we are enlightened by our Faith and grace; light comes through sunlight, fire, electricity; scientific analysis of the speed of light and the light spectrum, the rainbow colors...and this merely scratches the surface. All over the world we remember this virgin-martyr saint less than 2 weeks before Christmas. Whether you embrace the Lucia Child of Sweden, the Sicilian customs or particular family traditions, light should play a prominent role in the feast!

<http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com/category/saints/saint-lucia-or-lucy/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpP7heFjr0g> Lanzo



St. Lucy's Tomb



The Body of St. Lucy



St. Lucy and sword



Novena to St. Lucy

O God, our Creator and Redeemer, mercifully hear our prayers as we venerate Your servant, St. Lucy, for the

light also in our souls, that we may be able to avoid evil, to do good, and abhor nothing so much as the blindness and the darkness of evil and of sin. Relying on Your goodness, O God, we humbly ask You by intercession of Your servant, St. Lucy, to give perfect vision to our eyes, that they may serve for Your greater honor and glory, for our salvation and that of others, and that we may come to the

enjoyment of the unfailing light of the Lamb of God in paradise. St Lucy, virgin and martyr, hear our prayer

and obtain our petitions. Amen.

Prayer to Saint Lucy

Saint Lucy, you did not hide your light under a basket, but let it shine for the whole world, for all the centuries to see. We may not suffer torture in our lives the way you did, but we are still called to let the light of our Christianity illumine our daily lives. Please help us to have the courage to bring our Christianity into our work, our recreation, our relationships, our conversation -- every corner of our day. Amen.

To see the Basilica of St. Lucy in Syracuse follow these links:

<http://www.basilicasantalucia.it/santa%20lucia%20torna%20a%20siracusa/Santa%20Lucia%20torna%20a%20Siracusa.htm>

<http://www.basilicasantalucia.it/>

To see the devotion to St. Lucy in Belpasso, Sicily follow this link:

<http://www.santaluciabelpasso.com/home.htm>

To send an ecard on St. Lucy's Feast Day follow this link:

http://www.123greetings.com/events/santa_lucia_day/

If you would like to read some of the dialogue between St. Lucy and Governor Paschasius go to:

<http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/stl01001.htm>

(This story of St. Lucy was compiled from various web resources)

Ref.: <http://www.stlucy-church.org/stlucy.html>

Look also here: www.st.lucy.catholicchurch.ph