

Men of Saint Michael

"Iron sharpens iron, as one man sharpens another"

Proverbs 27:17.



Newsletter



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August 15 — The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary



Assumption and coronation of the Virgin
Raphael (1483-1520)
The Vatican Collection

"Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death." [Vatican II LG 59; cf. Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950): DS 3903; cf. Rev 19:16] The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians:

In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death. [Byzantine Liturgy, *Troparion*, Feast of the Dormition, August 15th] (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §966)

Objections

"This is truly an amazing dogma, yet there is no Scriptural proof for it...."

Says who? Pius XII states the dogma is based on the Sacred Writings (Scripture): "*All these proofs and considerations of the holy Fathers and the theologians are based upon the Sacred*

Writings as their ultimate foundation." (Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*)

And not "amazing" if one considers in Scripture that Enoch and Elijah were "assumed" to heaven, body and soul; and perhaps Moses if we interpret Jude's mention with the apocryphal literature (*Assumption or Testament of Moses*) as an "assumption" of the body of Moses. Jesus ascended to heaven on his own power, body and soul, and it is only fitting that His own Mother, the holy Mother of God, would also not see corruption. All true Christians will eventually be sinless and bodily assumed (resurrected and glorified) in heaven. The Blessed Virgin

Mary, being a type of the Church as all the Fathers taught, is an example of the perfected Christian in heaven (cf. the holy, stainless, blameless Church mentioned in Ephesians 5:25-33; Heb 12:22ff; Rev 21:1ff). Mary received that perfected state (in soul and body) before the rest of Christ's Church by the grace of God.

"Often there are theologians and preachers who, following in the footsteps of the holy Fathers, have been rather free in their use of events and expressions taken from Sacred Scripture to explain their belief in the Assumption. Thus, to mention only a few of the texts rather frequently cited in this fashion, some have employed the words of the psalmist: 'Arise, O Lord, into your resting place: you and the ark, which you have sanctified'; and have looked upon the Ark of the Covenant, built of incorruptible wood and placed in the Lord's temple, as a type of the most pure body of the Virgin Mary, preserved and exempt from all the corruption of the tomb and raised up to such glory in heaven.

"Treating of this subject, they also describe her as the Queen entering triumphantly into the royal halls of heaven and sitting at the right hand of the divine Redeemer. Likewise, they mention the Spouse of the Canticles 'that goes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense' to be crowned. These are proposed as depicting that heavenly Queen and heavenly Spouse who has been lifted up to the courts of heaven with the divine Bridegroom

"Moreover, the scholastic Doctors have recognized the Assumption of the Virgin Mother of God as something signified, not only in various figures of the Old Testament, but also in that woman clothed with the sun whom John the Apostle contemplated on the Island of Patmos. Similarly, they have given special attention to these words of the New Testament: 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women,' since they saw, in the mystery of the Assumption, the fulfillment of that most perfect grace granted to the Blessed Virgin and the special blessing that countered the curse of Eve." (Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*)

As for biblical evidence for the belief, Pius XII refers to several texts and Marian types: the holy Ark of the Covenant; Psalm 132(131):8; Psalm 45(44):10-14; Song of Songs 3:6; 4:8; 6:9; Rev 12:1ff (cf. 11:19); Luke 1:28. If the "Ark" of Psalm 132:8 or the "Woman" of Revelation 12 is the Blessed Mary, then the Scriptures directly "prove" the Assumption. But scholars interpret these texts different ways. As Pius XII explained, the Church Fathers were "rather free in their use of events and expressions" taken from Scripture. But neither Pius XII nor the Fathers ignored the Scriptures when speaking of Mary's Assumption into heaven:

"These [the "Sacred Writings," the Scriptures] set the loving Mother of God as it were before our very eyes as most intimately joined to her divine Son and as always sharing His lot. Consequently, it seems impossible to think of her, the one who conceived Christ, brought Him forth, nursed Him with her milk, held Him in her arms, and clasped Him to her breast, as being apart from Him in body, even though not in soul, after this earthly life. Since our Redeemer is the Son of Mary, He could not do otherwise, as the perfect observer of God's law, than to honor, not only His eternal Father, but also His most beloved Mother. And, since it was within His power to grant her this great honor, to preserve her from the corruption of the tomb, we must believe that He really acted in this way." (Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*)

The Scriptures are the ultimate theological foundation for the dogma, according to Pius XII.

Prayerful Reflections on the Assumption of Mary

St. Alphonsus de Liguori is one among the saints who writes that Mary died for sheer longing and love of the Savior. Below is a quotation from his seventh discourse, "The Assumption of Mary":

"And now death came; not indeed clothed in mourning and grief, as it does to others, but adorned with light and gladness. But what do we say? Why speak of death? Let us rather say that divine love came and cut the thread of that noble life. And as a light, before going out, gives a last and brighter flash than ever, so did this beautiful creature, on hearing her Son's invitation to follow him, wrapped in the flames of love, and in the midst of her loving sighs, give a last sigh of still more ardent love, and breathing forth her soul, expired. Thus, was that great soul, that beautiful dove of the Lord, loosened from the bands of this life; thus, did she enter into the glory of the blessed, where she is now seated, and will be seated, Queen of Paradise, for all eternity." *Glories*, p. 420

Let us now consider how our Savior went forth from heaven to meet his Mother. On first meeting her, and to console her, he said: *Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come, for winter is now past and gone.* (Liguori uses the imagery from the Song of Songs 2:10) Come, my own dear Mother, my pure and beautiful dove; leave that valley of tears, in which, for my love, you have suffered so much. *Come from Lebanon, my spouse, come from Lebanon, come: You shall be crowned.* (Songs of Songs 4:8) Come in, soul and body, to enjoy the reward of your holy life. If your sufferings have been great on earth, far greater is the glory which I have prepared for you in heaven. Enter, then, that kingdom, and take your seat near me; come to receive that crown which I will bestow on you as Queen of the universe. *Glories*, p. 427

The humble and holy Virgin, then kneeling, adored the divine Majesty, and all absorbed in the consciousness of her own nothingness, thanked him for all the graces bestowed upon her by his pure goodness, and especially for having made her the Mother of the Eternal Word. And then let him who can, comprehend with what love the Most Holy Trinity blessed her. Let him comprehend the welcome given to his daughter by the Eternal Father, to his Mother by the Son, to his spouse by the Holy Spirit. The Father crowned her by imparting his power to her; the Son, his wisdom; the Holy Spirit, his love.

Liguori continues by asking us to rejoice with Mary because God exalted her in such a way. But the saint also invites us to rejoice on our own account, "for though our Mother is no longer present with us on earth ... yet in affection she is always with us." (*Glories*, p. 436)

August 14 — Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe

The late Pope John Paul II actively celebrated the gift of martyrdom. During his papacy, he beatified 266 martyrs. In 1982, he canonized Maximilian Kolbe as a martyr of charity. Kolbe was a Polish priest and theologian who, while interned at Auschwitz in 1941, offered his life in exchange for that of another prisoner. The Nazis condemned him to slow death by starvation but seeing that he was lasting longer than expected they terminated him with a poisoned injection. Today Kolbe is considered the protector saint of journalists, families, prisoners and chemically addicted persons.

"Charity, in conformity with the radical demands of the Gospel, can lead the believer to the supreme witness of martyrdom," wrote JP II in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendori*. In so doing, he recognized that those who act -- witness -- on their faith against tyranny are to be considered martyrs. While the definition has been used generally to recognize those who do not fear self-destruction for the sake of affirming the sacredness of human life, in the U.S., anti-abortion bombers and snipers do not hesitate to cloak themselves with the mantle of martyrdom."

Urakami, Japan

Seventy-three years ago, on August 6, 1945, the nuclear weapon "Little Boy" was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, followed on August 9, 1945 by the detonation of the "Fat Man" nuclear bomb over Nagasaki.

Urakami was a suburb of Nagasaki, on Kyushu the southern-most island of Japan. It became famous when the Nagasaki Atom bomb burst above it. Urakami had always held a special place in the heart of Japanese Catholics and was the home of the Oura, a Roman Catholic Church erected in 1864 to commemorate the

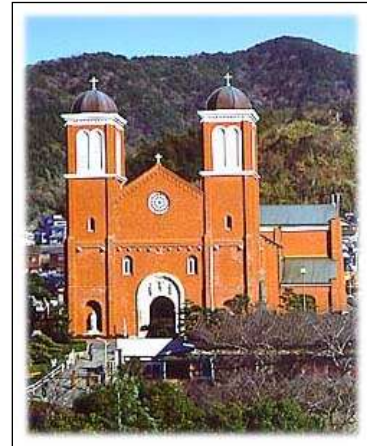
crucifixion of Portuguese and Japanese martyrs in 1597. It was here that Fr. Maximilian Kolbe established a monastery in May 1931. During the long years when Christianity was outlawed in Japan, it was the farming community of Urakami that kept the flame of Catholicism alive. When the Atom bomb burst over Nagasaki at 11 a.m. on August 9, 1945, about 73,000 people were killed as a result of the blast at Nagasaki.

At the time of the bombing, there were approximately 20,000 Catholics living in Nagasaki, 15,000 to 16,000 of whom lived in the Urakami district. It has been estimated that as many as 10,000 Catholics were killed by the atomic bomb.

As of 2013, there were 142 priests serving 62,584 Catholics in 71 parishes in the archdiocese of Nagasaki.



Urakami Cathedral after the atomic bomb blast.



Urakami Cathedral Today

Nagasaki, the City of the Atomic Bomb – And of the Christian Martyrs

by Sandro Magister



Painting of the event by Takayoshi Ezoe on display in the basement crypt of the Takanawa Church not far from the execution site.

There are 188 of them, from four centuries ago, and they will be beatified in one year. In the same city in which, on a single day in 1945, two thirds of the Catholics in Japan were killed. Was this a deliberate decision?

In the volume of Cardinal Giacomo Biffi's memoirs, there is one passage, concerning Japan, that ends with an open question.

It is where Biffi recalls the strong impact he felt in 1945 from the news of the atomic bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima on August 6, and on Nagasaki on August 9.

He writes:

"I had already heard about Nagasaki. I had come across it repeatedly in the 'History manual of the Catholic missions' by Giuseppe Schmidlin, three volumes

published in Milan in 1929. Nagasaki had produced the first substantial Catholic community in Japan, in the sixteenth century. In Nagasaki, on February 5, 1597, thirty-six martyrs (six missionary Franciscans, three Japanese Jesuits, and twenty-seven laymen) gave their lives for Christ. They were canonized by Pius IX in 1862. When the persecution was resumed in 1637, no fewer than thirty-five thousand Christians were killed. After this, the young community lived in the catacombs, so to speak, but it was not extinguished. In 1865, Fr. Petitjean discovered this 'clandestine Church', which revealed itself to him after it had verified that he was celibate, devoted to Mary, and obedient to the pope of Rome; thus, the sacramental life could be resumed as normal. In 1889, complete religious freedom was proclaimed in Japan, and everything began flourishing again. On June 15, 1891, the diocese of Nagasaki was established canonically, and in 1927 it welcomed as its pastor Bishop Hayasaka, whom Pius XI himself had consecrated as the first Japanese bishop. It is from Schmidlin that we learn that in 1929, of the 94,096 Japanese Catholics, fully 63,698 were in Nagasaki."

Having established this, cardinal Biffi concludes with a disturbing question:

"We can certainly assume that the atomic bombs were not dropped at random. So, the question is inevitable: why is it that for the second slaughter, out of all the possibilities, that very city of Japan was chosen where Catholicism, apart from having its most glorious history, was also the most widespread and firmly established?"

In effect, among the victims of the atomic bomb in Nagasaki, two thirds of the small but vibrant Japanese Catholic community disappeared in a single day. It was a community that was nearly wiped out twice in three centuries.

In 1945, this was done through an act of war that was mysteriously focused on this city. Three centuries before, it was by a terrible persecution very similar to that of the Roman empire against the first Christians, with Nagasaki and its "hill of martyrs" again the epicenter.

And yet, the Japanese Catholic community was able to recover from both of these tragedies. After the persecution in the seventeenth century, Christians kept their faith alive by passing it on from parents to children for two centuries, in the absence of bishops, priests, and sacraments. It is recounted that on Good Friday of 1865, ten thousand of these "kakure kirisitan," hidden Christians, streamed from the villages and presented themselves in Nagasaki to the stunned missionaries who had just recently regained access to Japan.

And again, after the second slaughter in Nagasaki, in 1945, the Catholic Church was reborn in Japan. The most recent official data, from 2004, estimate that there are a little more than half a million Japanese Catholics. They are few in relation to a population of 126 million. But they are respected and influential, thanks in part to their solid network of schools and universities.

This background sheds new light on a decree authorized by Benedict XVI on June 1, 2007: the beatification of 188 martyrs from Japan, who join the 42 saints and 395 blessed – all martyrs – already raised to the altars by previous popes.

The beatification – the first one ever held in Japan – was celebrated on November 24, 2008, in Nagasaki, by the prefect of the congregation for the causes of saints, cardinal José Saraiva Martins, as the special envoy of Benedict XVI.

The 188 Japanese martyrs are classified in the documents of the canonical proceedings as "Father Kibe and his 187 companions." They were killed on account of their faith between 1603 and 1639.

Used with permission.



Monument dedicated to the 26 Martyrs

The history of Catholics in Japan is truly a glorious chronicle of perseverance. A small group of dedicated men and women were willing to endure extraordinary hardship in order to keep the Faith alive. That kernel of faith still exists. Roman Catholicism, the first form of Christianity which arrived was spread by Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch missionaries, usually Jesuits. Thousands of Japanese converted from Shinto and Buddhism to Catholic Christianity.

There are about a million Christians in Japan today, or 0.8% of Japan's population, most of them Protestant. Catholics number about 0.3%.

Pope Benedict XVI on Being Missionaries of Christ

“In God’s Field There Is Work for Everyone”

The most vibrant theme of the Holy Father’s pontificate has been the need for evangelization throughout the world. Here is a translation of the address Pope Benedict XVI delivered July 8, 2007 before reciting the midday Angelus with several thousand-people gathered in St. Peter’s Square.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the Gospel (cf. Luke 10:1-12,17-20) presents Jesus sending out 72 disciples to the villages where he is about to arrive so that they will prepare the way.

This is unique to the evangelist Luke, who emphasizes that the mission is not reserved to the Twelve Apostles but is extended to other disciples. In fact, Jesus says that “the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few” (Luke 10:2).

In God’s field there is work for everyone. But Christ does not limit himself to sending out. He also gives the disciples clear and precise rules of conduct.

First of all, he sends them out “two by two,” so that they help each other and give an example of fraternal love. He notes that they will be “like lambs among wolves” – despite everything they must be peaceful and in every situation bring a message of peace; they will not take clothes or money with them, so as to live by what Providence offers them; they will care for the sick, as a sign of God’s mercy; where they are rejected, they will leave, limiting themselves to warning those who reject them that they are responsible for rejecting the kingdom of God.

St. Luke highlights the enthusiasm of the disciples over the good fruits of the mission and records this beautiful expression of Jesus: “Do not rejoice because the demons are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). This Gospel reawakens in all the baptized the awareness of being missionaries of Christ, called to prepare the way for him with words and with the testimony of their lives.

May the Virgin Mary always protect us, whether on mission or in just repose, so that we carry out our task with joy and with fruit in the vineyard of the Lord.



August 6, The Transfiguration of the Lord

All three Synoptic Gospels tell the story of the Transfiguration (*Matthew* 17:1-8; *Mark* 9:2-9; *Luke* 9:28-36). With remarkable agreement, all three place the event shortly after Peter’s confession of faith that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus’ first prediction of his passion and death. Peter’s eagerness to erect tents or booths on the spot suggests it occurred during the week-long Jewish Feast of Booths in the fall.

According to Scripture scholars, in spite of the texts’ agreement it is difficult to reconstruct the disciples’ experience, because the Gospels draw heavily on Old Testament descriptions of the Sinai encounter with God, and prophetic visions of the Son of Man. Certainly Peter, James, and John had a glimpse of Jesus’ divinity strong enough to strike fear into their hearts. Such an experience

defies description, so they drew on familiar religious language to describe it. And certainly, Jesus warned them that his glory and his suffering were to be inextricably connected—a theme John highlights throughout his *Gospel*.

Tradition names Mount Tabor as the site of the revelation. A church first raised there in the fourth century was dedicated on August 6. A feast in honor of the Transfiguration was celebrated in the Eastern Church from about that time. Western observance began in some localities about the eighth century.

August 10 — Feast of St. Lawrence



St. Lawrence pictured with the gridiron on which he is supposed to have been roasted

St. Lawrence, one of the deacons of the Roman Church, was one of the victims of the persecution of Valerian in 258, like Pope Sixtus II and many other members of the Roman clergy. At the beginning of the month of August, 258, the emperor issued an edict, commanding that all bishops, priests, and deacons should immediately be put to death ("episcopi et presbyteriet diacones incontinenti animadvertantur"—Cyprian, Epist. lxxx, 1). This imperial command was immediately carried out in Rome. On 6 August Pope Sixtus II was apprehended in one of the catacombs, and executed forthwith ("Xistum in cimiterio animadversum sciatis VIII id. Augusti et cum eo diacones quattuor." Cyprian, ep. lxxx, 1). Two other deacons, Felicissimus and Agapitus, were put to death the same day. In the Roman Calendar of feasts of the fourth century their feast day is on the same date. Four days later, on the 10th of August of that same year, Lawrence, the last of the seven deacons, also suffered a martyr's death. The anniversary of this holy martyr falls on that day, according to the Almanac of Philocalus for the year 354, the inventory of which contains the principal feasts of the Roman martyrs of the middle of the fourth century; it also mentions the

street where his grave is to be found, the Via Tiburtina ("III id. Aug. Laurentii in Tibertina"; Ruinart, "Acta sincera", Ratisbon, 1859, 632). The itineraries of the graves of the Roman martyrs, as given in the seventh century, mention the burial-place of this celebrated martyr in the Catacomb of Cyriaca in agro Verano (De Rossi, "Roma Sott.", I, 178).

Since the fourth century St. Lawrence has been one of the most honored martyrs of the Roman Church.

August 22, The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

It was "to climax all these manifestations of Our love of the great Mother of God" that Pope Pius XII wrote his encyclical on the queenship, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, October 11, 1954, and therein declared a new liturgical feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen.

Consecration to The Immaculate Heart

Previous to the encyclical of October 11, 1954, the most significant statements of Pope Pius XII about Our Lady's queenship were connected with his consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This great event took place in 1942 at the close of a radio address to Fatima. And it was at the solemn crowning of the miraculous image of Our Lady at Fatima in 1946 that the pope sent the radio message that he has often recalled as his "message of Mary's royal dignity."

On October 31, 1942, the Holy Father, not only as Head of the Church, but "in the role of representative of the human race which Christ redeemed" read the prayer of consecration: As the Church and the entire human race were consecrated to the heart of thy Jesus that through hope in him he might become for all the sign and pledge of victory and salvation, so we in like manner consecrate ourselves forever to thee and to thy Immaculate Heart, O Mother and Queen of the world, so that thy love and protection may hasten the triumph of God's kingdom.

Excerpts from *Ad Caeli Reginam*:



39. Certainly, in the full and strict meaning of the term, only Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is King; but Mary, too, as Mother of the divine Christ, as His associate in the redemption, in his struggle with His enemies and His final victory over them, has a share, though in a limited and analogous way, in His royal dignity. For from her union with Christ she attains a radiant eminence transcending that of any other creature; from her union with Christ she receives the royal right to dispose of the treasures of the Divine Redeemer's Kingdom; from her union with Christ finally is derived the inexhaustible efficacy of her maternal intercession before the Son and His Father.

40. Hence it cannot be doubted that Mary most Holy is far above all other creatures in dignity, and after her Son possesses primacy over all. "You have surpassed every creature," sings St. Sophronius. "What can be more sublime than your joy, O Virgin Mother? What more noble than this grace, which you alone have received from God"? To this St. Germanus adds: "Your honor and dignity surpass the whole of creation; your greatness places you above the angels." And St. John Damascene goes so far as to say: "Limitless is the

difference between God's servants and His Mother."

41. In order to understand better this sublime dignity of the Mother of God over all creatures let us recall that the holy Mother of God was, at the very moment of her Immaculate Conception, so filled with grace as to surpass the grace of all the Saints. Wherefore, as Our Predecessor of happy memory, Pius IX wrote, God "showered her with heavenly gifts and graces from the treasury of His divinity so far beyond what He gave to all the angels and saints that she was ever free from the least stain of sin; she is so beautiful and perfect, and possesses such fullness of innocence and holiness, that under God a greater could not be dreamed, and only God can comprehend the marvel."

42. Besides, the Blessed Virgin possessed, after Christ, not only the highest degree of excellence and perfection, but also a share in that influence by which He, her Son and our Redeemer, is rightly said to reign over the minds and wills of men. For if through His Humanity the divine Word performs miracles and gives graces, if He uses His Sacraments and Saints as instruments for the salvation of men, why should He not make use of the role and work of His most holy Mother in imparting to us the fruits of redemption? "With a heart that is truly a mother's," to quote again Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Pius IX, "does she approach the problem of our salvation, and is solicitous for the whole human race; made Queen of heaven and earth by the Lord, exalted above all choirs of angels and saints, and standing at the right hand of her only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, she intercedes powerfully for us with a mother's prayers, obtains what she seeks, and cannot be refused." [56] On this point another of Our Predecessors of happy memory, Leo XIII, has said that an "almost immeasurable" power has been given Mary in the distribution of graces; St. Pius X adds that she fills this office "as by the right of a mother.

43. Let all Christians, therefore, glory in being subjects of the Virgin Mother of God, who, while wielding royal power, is on fire with a mother's love.

48. Let all, therefore, try to approach with greater trust the throne of grace and mercy of our Queen and Mother, and beg for strength in adversity, light in darkness, consolation in sorrow; above all let them strive to free themselves from the slavery of sin and offer an unceasing homage, filled with filial loyalty, to their Queenly Mother. Let her churches be thronged by the faithful, her feast-days honored; may the beads of the Rosary be in the hands of all; may Christians gather, in small numbers and large, to sing her praises in churches, in homes, in hospitals, in prisons. May Mary's name be held in highest reverence, a name sweeter than honey and more precious than jewels; may none utter blasphemous words, the sign of a defiled soul, against that name graced with such dignity and revered for its motherly goodness; let no one be so bold as to speak a syllable which lacks the respect due to her name.

Given at Rome, from St. Peter's, on the feast of the Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



August 24 — Feast of St Bartholomew

Bartholomew the Apostle was a Galilean, and went to the nearer regions of India, which had fallen to him by lot for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There he preached to those peoples the coming of the Lord Christ according to the Gospel of St. Matthew. But, since he had converted many in that region to Jesus Christ, he had to endure many trials and persecutions; and he went into Greater Armenia.

Here he brought Polymius the king and his wife and twelve cities to the Christian faith. This aroused against him the hatred of the priests of that people. They inflamed Astyages, the brother of King Polymius, against the Apostle so that he commanded that Bartholomew be flayed alive in a most cruel way and beheaded; and in this martyrdom the Apostle gave up his soul to God.

His body was buried at Albanopolis, the city of Greater Armenia where he suffered. It was later taken to the island of Lipari and afterwards was transferred to Benevento. Finally, it was taken to Rome by Emperor Otto III and placed in a church on the island in the Tiber dedicated to God under the title of St. Bartholomew's.

(From the Second Nocturn of Matins of the feast of St. Bartholomew)

August 29, The Passion of St. John the Baptist

The Church, having celebrated the earthly birthday of St. John the Baptist on June 24, today honors the anniversary of his martyrdom. Besides our Lord and our Lady, St. John the Baptist is the only one whose birth and death are thus celebrated. Today's Gospel relates the circumstances of his execution. He had the courage to blame Herod to his face for the scandal of his illegal union with his sister-in-law Herodias, whose husband was still alive. Herodias contrived to make Herod imprison him and took advantage of an unexpected opportunity to obtain through her daughter Salome the beheading of the saint.

According to the 1962 Missal of St. John XXIII the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, today is the feast of St. Sabina. The titular church of St. Sabina of the Aventine is a gem of Christian architecture. It owes its origin to the generosity of a Roman lady of the name of Sabina who gave to the Christian community the house that she possessed in this aristocratic quarter of Rome. The martyrologies also commemorate another St. Sabina who died in Umbria. The identity of name has caused confusion between the two women.

In addition to the feast of the nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24), the Church, since the fourth century, commemorates the martyrdom of Christ's precursor. According to the *Roman Martyrology*, this day marks "the second finding of his most venerable head." The body of the saint was buried in Samaria. In the year 362 pagans desecrated the grave and burned his remains. Only a small portion of his relics were able to be saved by monks and sent to St. Athanasius at Alexandria. The head of the saint is venerated at various places. That in the Church of St. Sylvester in Rome belongs to a martyr-priest John. Also, in the Dominican church at Breslau the Baptist's head is honored. (Excerpted from *The Church's Year of Grace*, Pius Parsch)



Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist

There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Redeemer, whose forerunner he was, and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he should deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. Does Christ not say: "I am the truth"? Therefore, because John shed his blood for the truth, he surely died for Christ.

Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer.

Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of this present life by shedding his blood after the long imprisonment. He preached the freedom of heavenly peace yet was thrown into irons by ungodly men. He was locked away in the darkness of prison, though he

came bearing witness to the Light of life and deserved to be called a bright and shining lamp by that Light itself, which is Christ.

To endure temporal agonies for the sake of the truth was not a heavy burden for such men as John; rather it was easily borne and even desirable, for he knew eternal joy would be his reward.

Since death was ever near at hand, such men considered it a blessing to embrace it and thus gain the reward of eternal life by acknowledging Christ's name. Hence the apostle Paul rightly says: "You have been granted the privilege not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for his sake." He tells us why it is Christ's gift that his chosen ones should suffer for him: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us."

— Saint Bede the Venerable

The Glorification of Mary

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages who was renowned for his love of the Blessed Mother, coined the phrase, *De Maria Nunquam Satis*, translated, "About Mary, one can never say enough." As the mysteries of her life and the graces given to her are wrapped up with the very Incarnation itself, it is impossible to exhaust the richness of her life and destiny. It is important to acknowledge, as the popes do and as the famous Marian saint, Louis de Montfort does, that Marian devotion is not an end in and of itself. Only God is worshiped for His own sake. Mary is venerated as a means of bringing us closer to Christ and making us more Christlike. One may question why one "needs" to go through Mary to get to Jesus; it can be retorted that one does not "need" to so much as one ought to, and that this must be grounded in the larger context of the communion of saints to have a proper understanding of it. The saints and angels are means of grace to us, and Mary in an exemplary way. They do not stand between us and God; rather, they facilitate a more perfect union between us and God by their intercession, and among the members of the Church themselves.
