

PATRON SAINTS

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PATRON Saint is one who has been assigned by a venerable tradition or chosen by election as a special intercessor with God for a particular locality, and is honored by the clergy and people with a special form of religious veneration. Any popular saint might be called a patron in the broad sense of the term but strictly speaking a patron is one who is singled out by venerable tradition or by authorized choice and is approved by ecclesiastical authority. The notion of a patron should not be confused with that of a titular saint. The term "patron," being wider in its meaning than that of "titular," may be applied to a church, a district, a country, or a corporation. The word "titular," is applied only to the patron of a church or institution. Both, however, according to the legislation of the Church now in force, must have the rank of a canonized saint. A study of titular saints is not within the scope of the present article.

As in the history of beatification and canonization there has been an evolution and development of these processes, so also there has been a similar development in the choice of patrons. Previous to the time when the processes of beatification and canonization were definitely determined by ecclesiastical law, the enrolling of a saint in the official calendar of the Church, took place when their names were inserted in a recognized Martyrology. Later an elaborate procedure of beatification and canonization was formulated. Similarly the selection of patrons depended in the early days to a great extent on popular choice. It was only later, as will be seen below, that this choice was regulated by an ecclesiastical legislation, that was not so rigorous a process as that involving the official recognition of the sanctity of a servant of God.

From the earliest days of the Church it was a pious custom for towns, cities, provinces, and countries to choose one or more patrons. In the early ages of faith the people were so imbued with the spirit of their religion that each little village and hamlet had its own particular patron or guardian. They strove to

emulate the virtues of their favorite protector's life, and not infrequently his feast day was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony. The saints were the heavenly heroes of the people and as such the good folk besought them to use their powerful intercession with God to obtain His blessing and protection.

Before the decree of Pope Urban VIII, March 13, 1625, not only saints but also blessed were chosen as patrons. Blessed Osanna of Mantua, was chosen tutelar of Mantua. Blessed Gregory X, was the special protector of the city of Arezzo. In the year 1630 the Sacred Congregation of Rites decreed only those were to be chosen patrons who enjoyed the honors of sainthood, excluding those who were but beatified. It was also decreed that a method in the choice of patrons should be adopted. The substance of the legislation was the following: that the choice of patrons of a city should be effected by the votes of the people, through the medium of a general assembly of that city or locality. This was to be done by the officials only with the consent of the Bishop and clergy of the place. The same was to be observed in the choice of a patron for a country. It was to be brought about by the secret votes of the people from the various cities of that region. This could not be done by representatives unless they had a special authorization and the consent of the ecclesiastical superiors. The reason for the choice of new patrons was to be brought before the Sacred Congregation for its approval and confirmation. This decree was confirmed by Alexander VII, in a document on the cult of the blessed, September 27, 1659.

Though the beatified were not regularly accorded the distinction of patronage, there were, however, exceptions. St. Rose of Lima, a Dominican, while still a Blessed was approved by Clement IX, as principal Patroness of Lima and the Kingdom of Persia, enjoying the full cult of a regularly constituted patron saint. Later Clement X, chose and declared her the principal Patroness of all the Provinces, Kingdoms, and regions of the whole American Continent, the Philippines and the Indies.

In the new code of Canon Law, (Can. 1278), the Church declares that no saint may become a patron of a diocese, province or nation without the confirmation of the Holy See and that a special approbation of the Holy See is necessary for a blessed to become a patron.

Previous to the Middle Ages patrons were not spoken of in as strict a sense as later in the history of the Church. There were indeed titulars. And the people had their preferences for certain classes of saints as well as for individual saints. Accordingly they invoked as a consequence their patronage. The popular saints of the first centuries of the Christian era were the Apostles and Martyrs. The reason for this is found in the fact that the Apostles were the immediate associates of Christ and the blood of Martyrs was the seed of the Church. As the mystical body of Christ grew, there were produced models of sanctity not only by martyrdom but also by confessorship, virginity and holy widowhood. These members of the Church also received the veneration and devotion of the Church Militant. It would be as difficult to give a catalogue of the preferred saints of the earliest days of the Church, as it would be impossible to give a complete list of patrons for any other era; yet a few examples might be cited. It goes without saying that the Catholic people always paid a supreme adoration and devotion to the most High God. The Mother of God also received at all times a special devotion from the faithful. But we are concerned here not so much with God and His mother as with a few of the saints whose cult sprang up in pristine times. St. John the Baptist and St. Stephen the Proto-Martyr were honored throughout the whole Christian Church from the beginning. During the first centuries of the Church's existence it was only the Martyrs who enjoyed religious veneration and it is probably due to this fact that no cult was paid to those persons who were closely related to Our Lord during His life. A striking instance of this, is the case of St. Joseph. Although designated a just man in Holy Scripture and the object of occasional eulogies in the works of the Fathers, he received universal veneration only at a later date. St. Martin of Tours is one of the early instances of popular veneration outside the division of Martyrs and Apostles.

The saints were the popular paragons of the Middle Ages. Their places of abode in life, their monasteries, their hermitages, the localities where they exercised their ministry; in a word any place sanctified by their presence was regarded by the faithful as hallowed. In fact knowledge of these places and pilgrimages to them was a source of much of the geographical information possessed by the people at large. Naturally the people chose

from among the great number of saints, those patrons that illustrated the ages of faith. In their veneration they chose particular intercessors in their peculiar needs, they placed their countries, cities and towns under saintly tutelage. The different professions sought a saint's protection in their various activities. Their children were given the names of saints not chosen at random, but carefully selected from the popular heroes of the locality. A number of examples of patron saints of the Middle Ages will throw further light on this very interesting tendency. The foster-father of Jesus Christ was the patron of carpenters. The fishermen called upon St. Andrew the Apostle. The physicians invoked Saints Cosmos and Damian, the cobblers St. Crispian, metal workers St. Eloi and the artists St. Luke. In all these instances the saints had worked in these fields of labor. St. Bartholomew the Apostle, became the heavenly intercessor of tanners, because he was flayed alive. The oil merchants prayed to St. John the Evangelist who had been cast into boiling oil. Stone masons chose St. Stephen for he met his death by stoning. In the various dioceses the people sought cures and relief from the heavenly citizens. St. Blaise became the patron against throat disorders, due to the fact that in the Saint's life he performed a miracle on a boy who was in danger of death from a fishbone caught in his throat. St. Appollonia aided those afflicted with toothache, because the persecutors of this holy virgin began her torture by violently removing all her teeth. St. Lucy healed those afflicted with diseases of the eye, for she had her eyes torn out as one of the episodes of her martyrdom. St. Roch was called upon during the plague because during his life he went about plague stricken towns and cities and by the sign of the Cross the plague was abated.

In order to appreciate thoroughly, the holy fire and zeal enkindled in the hearts of the early followers of the Lamb of God it is necessary to understand the spirit of the days in which they lived. Their religion was not merely a Sunday affair. They kept themselves always in the presence of God and His saints and made the heavenly family a part of every day life. Hence it is not surprising that these people in their pious devotions invoked various saints in favor of God's lesser creatures. St. Saturninus was the heavenly guardian of sheep, St. Cornelius protected the oxen and St. Anthony the hermit warded off harm

from the pigs. Various saints were invoked against the vicissitudes of the elements. St. Cesarius of Arles was impetrated against windstorms, St. Barbara against lightning, the tempest tossed mariner called upon Blessed Peter Gonazales, O. P., better known as St. Elmo or Pelmo and St. Medard was called upon for good weather.

Among the patrons of cities might be mentioned Sts. Peter and Paul and St. Catherine of Sienna for Rome; St. Zenobius and St. Antoninus for Florence; St. Rufinus and St. Francis for Assisi; St. Petronius and St. Dominic for Bologna. Not only were the saints chosen as patrons but certain feasts and mysteries became the title under which the people looked for heavenly aid. To cite but two examples: the pin-makers chose the Nativity because when the Virgin Mary cradled the Infant Jesus she fastened his swaddling clothes with pins. The sawyers honored the Visitation because Mary and Elizabeth bent towards each other in salutation, in the manner in which sawyers incline when exercising their craft.

Holy Mother Church ever true to her divine mission and watching over the needs of her children in their spiritual and temporal welfare has always encouraged her children to choose patrons. From time to time the Church through her mouth-piece, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, has proclaimed special patrons for her children. Any attempt to give a complete list of the patrons declared by the Church would be futile; however, a list of the most important patrons is interesting. St. Aloysius Gonzaga proclaimed Patron of Youth by Benedict XIII, in 1729; St. Joseph was declared Patron of the Universal Church by Pius IX, December 8, 1870; St. Francis De Sales, Patron of the Press; St. Thomas Aquinas declared the Patron of all Universities, Colleges, and Schools by Leo XIII, Aug. 4, 1880; St. Vincent De Paul proclaimed Patron of all Charitable Societies, by Leo XIII, May 1, 1885; St. Christopher, Patron of Travellers; St. Camillus of Lellis, declared Patron of the Sick and those who attend on them, by Leo XIII, 1886; St. Leonard of Port Maurice, Patron of Missionary Work among Catholics; St. John of God proclaimed the Patron of Hospitals by Leo XIII, 1886; St. Peter Claver, was declared the special Patron of Missions to the Negroes by Leo XIII, 1896; St. Francis Xavier proclaimed the Patron of the Propagation of the faith by Leo XIII, March 25,

1904; St. John Chrysostom was declared the Patron of Sacred Orators by Pius X, 1908; St. Ignatius Loyola proclaimed Patron of Retreats by Pius XI; Our Lady of Loretta was proclaimed the Patroness of Aviators by Benedict XV, March 24, 1920.

In regard to the duration of the popularity of different patrons, we might state that many whom we honor today have been honored as such from the earliest days of the Church. Others have been honored as patrons from the time of their canonization. Still the cult of other saints whose patronage was invoked with remarkable devotion at one time, lapsed after a while, into ordinary veneration. Many causes might be assigned why a saint who enjoyed such popularity for a time was later comparatively forgotten by the people at large. It is worthy of note that while the process of canonizing a saint is in progress, devotion to the servant of God is usually pronounced, and if the saint has been known for a great number of miracles the honor accorded will be more perennial. This is also the case with patrons whose favor rests on the popular choice of the people. In the case of patrons assigned by ecclesiastical decree, veneration is assured within the scope for which the patronage was declared. When the reason for invoking a particular saint is some public calamity obviously the veneration decreases when the crisis has passed unless a grateful people keeps the memory of that saint in benediction for favors received.

The patronage of the servants of God offers a striking example of the faith of God's people in the doctrine of the communion of saints. The loving fidelity with which they honor them, proves that theirs is a living faith. The confidence that the faithful place in the patronage of their chosen intercessors attests that they have an abiding trust in the Providence of God, Who is wonderful in His Saints.