

FEMALE MARTYRS: EXAMPLES OF WONDERFUL CHRISTIANS!

Martyr Sophia and her three daughters at Rome

The Holy Martyrs Saint Sophia and her Daughters Faith, Hope and Love were born in Italy. Their mother was a pious Christian widow who named her daughters for the three Christian virtues. Faith was twelve, Hope was ten, and Love was nine. St Sophia raised them in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. St Sophia and her daughters did not hide their faith in Christ, but openly confessed it before everyone.

An official named Antiochus denounced them to the emperor Hadrian (117-138), who ordered that they be brought to Rome. Realizing that they would be taken before the emperor, the holy virgins prayed fervently to the Lord Jesus Christ, asking that He give them the strength not to fear torture and death. When the holy virgins and their mother came before the emperor, everyone present was amazed at their composure. They looked as though they had been brought to some happy festival, rather than to torture. Summoning each of the sisters in turn, Hadrian urged them to offer sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. The young girls remained unyielding.

Then the emperor ordered them to be tortured. They burned the holy virgins over an iron grating, then threw them into a red-hot oven, and finally into a cauldron with boiling tar, but the Lord preserved them.

The youngest child, Love, was tied to a wheel and they beat her with rods until her body was covered all over with bloody welts. After undergoing unspeakable torments, the holy virgins glorified their Heavenly Bridegroom and remained steadfast in the Faith.

They subjected St Sophia to another grievous torture: the mother was forced to watch the suffering of her daughters. She displayed adamant courage, and urged her daughters to endure their torments for the sake of the Heavenly Bridegroom. All three maidens were beheaded, and joyfully bent their necks beneath the sword.

In order to intensify St Sophia's inner suffering, the emperor permitted her to take

the bodies of her daughters. She placed their remains in coffins and loaded them on a wagon. She drove beyond the city limits and reverently buried them on a high hill. St Sophia sat there by the graves of her daughters for three days, and finally she gave up her soul to the Lord. Even though she did not suffer for Christ in the flesh, she was not deprived of a martyr's crown. Instead, she suffered in her heart. Believers buried her body there beside her daughters.

The relics of the holy martyrs have rested at El'zasa, in the church of Esho since the year 777.

Martyr Theodota at Nicea

The Holy Martyr Theodota, a native of Cappadocia, suffered in the city of Nicea during the reign of the emperor Alexander Severus (222-235). At this time the governor of Cappadocia was a certain Symblicius. They told him that a rich woman named Theodota was confessing Christ. The governor summoned Theodota and for a long time urged her to turn from the true Faith.

Seeing the futility of his attempts, he gave Theodota over to torture. They suspended her and began to rake her with iron hooks, but she did not feel any pain. Then they put her in chains and led her away to a prison cell.

After eight days, when they led the saint out for new tortures, only faint traces of the tortures already endured remained on her body. The governor was amazed and asked, "Who are you?" The saint answered: "Your mind is darkened, but if you were sober, then you would have realized that I am Theodota."

Symblicius commanded the martyr to be cast into a red-hot furnace. Flames shot out from the furnace and scorched those standing nearby, while those remaining unharmed shut the furnace and scattered in fright. After a certain while, pagan priests came and opened the furnace to scatter the ashes of the martyr, but they too were burned by the flames. Those remaining unharmed saw St Theodota unharmed. She stood in the midst of the flames between two youths in white raiment, and was glorifying the Lord. This apparition so terrified the pagans that they fell down as if dead. Later, they returned the saint to prison.

The invincibility of the martyr gave Symblicius no peace. He made a journey to Byzantium, on the return trip he stopped over at Ancyra and tried to get the better of Theodota. He gave orders to throw her all at once onto red-hot iron, but again the martyr remained unharmed.

Then Symblicius gave orders that the saint be taken to Nicea. There, in a pagan temple he wanted to compel her to offer sacrifice to the idols, but through the prayer of the saint, the idols fell and were shattered. The outraged governor gave orders to stretch the martyr out and saw through her body, but here also the power of God preserved the saint. The saw caused Theodota no harm, and the

servants became exhausted. Finally, they beheaded the saint. Bishop Sophronius of Nicea buried her body.

Martyr Agathocleia

The Holy martyr Agathocleia was a servant in the home of a certain Christian named Nicholas. His wife Paulina was a pagan. For eight years Agathocleia underwent abuse from her mistress because of her faith. Paulina fiercely beat the servant, and made her walk barefoot over sharp stones.

Once in a fit of nastiness, Paulina broke her rib with a blow from a hammer, and then cut out her tongue. Nothing could make the saint give in to the demand of her mistress to worship idols. Then Paulina locked the martyr in prison and exhausted her with hunger. But Agathocleia did not perish: birds brought her food each day. Finally, in a fit of evil, Paulina went to the prison and murdered the holy martyr.