

Feast of St. Blaise, Bishop and Martyr

3rd February

Blessing of Throats



Background

Saint Blaise was originally born in Sebastea, Western Armenia in the fourth century. He preached Christianity in his hometown and was well-known as a righteous man and a physician.

During the fourth century, the Roman Empire was separated between Emperor Constantine in the West and Emperor Licinius in the East. While frequently at odds, they came together in February 313 at Milan, Italy, to sign the Edict of Milan, intended to end all religious persecution. While this document always has been heralded as essential to Christian history, it did not end a long-

simmering tension between the two emperors. Indeed, historians have recorded that Licinius was filled with greed and only signed the agreement for political purposes. There would be repeated conflicts between the East and West, mostly caused by Licinius, who was quick to continue the persecutions of Christ's followers despite signing the Edict of Milan. In the year 316, St. Blaise would become a victim of Licinius's hostility against Christians.

At first, Blaise avoided being arrested by escaping into the hill country near Sebaste, where he hid in a cave. Eventually, Bishop Blaise was found out, arrested and brought before Agricolaus, the local Roman governor. He was scourged for his Christian beliefs and thrown into prison. Legend holds that either en route to prison or after he was incarcerated, two miracles attributed to Blaise occurred. A woman came to the bishop upset that a wolf had carried off her pig. Blaise offered up prayers, and the wolf returned the pig. Another incident, one for which he is most known, occurred when a mother pleaded for Blaise to cure her son who was dying from a fish bone lodged in his throat. Blaise prayed over the boy, and the child was healed.

Agricolaus soon confronted Blaise, demanding he deny Jesus or be tortured. Blaise refused, and one of the instruments of torture was an iron comb used to painfully scrape his skin. No amount of torture brought a denial of Christ, so in 316 Blaise was beheaded.

Cult of St. Blaise

The miraculous cure of the boy suffering from the fish bone — and because Blaise had been a physician — created the belief that St. Blaise could cure most illnesses but especially those of the throat. As early as the ninth century in the Western Church, he was invoked for ailments of the throat.

The Crossed Candles

Crossed candles are an important part of Saint Blaise Day, they commemorate the mother of the boy who choked on the fishbone. According to tradition, she presented Saint Blaise with crossed candles to light his way while suffering persecution for his faith in a prison cell.

Blessing Throats

Using crossed candles, the minister touches the throat of each person, saying.

‘Through the intercession of St Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from all ailments of the throat and from every other evil (or from every disease of the throat and from every other illness). In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’