

Saint Agnes Martyr

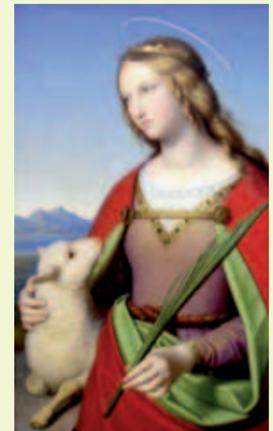
Circa III Century

Agnes was born in Rome of Christian parents from an illustrious patrician family in the third century. When she was twelve years of age, a fierce persecution took place and many of the faithful defected. Because of this she is often pictured with a lamb, a sacrificial symbol of truth. Her date of death is not certain; some place it between 249 and 251, others in 304.

During her actual martyrdom, an Angel often intervened to help her.

Procopius, the son of the Roman Prefect, fell in love with Agnes and asked for her hand in marriage. Agnes refused. The young man then brought the matter to his own

The soldiers and the crowd waited outside while the young girl was led to a bleak and dark place. The Angel of the Lord was already there and was vigilant in watching over this bride of Christ. The whole area shone with the light of the Angel's presence.



father in his official capacity as the Prefect of Rome. In his official capacity, the Prefect ordered the young girl brought to him, whereupon he asked her: "Why is it that you do not wish to be my son's bride?"

Agnes replied: "I have another lover to whom I have promised fidelity."

The Prefect replied: "No other young man can offer you the advantages that my son can. Who, then, is this lover?"

"It is He who is obeyed by the Heavens and the Earth: it is Jesus Christ!"

"So you are a Christian? ...because I regard you so highly and for my son's happiness, forsake your religion! In return you will have all the benefits and pleasures that Rome can offer."

"I have no desire for any of them!"

The Prefect then ordered that she be taken to a place of ill repute.

Agnes was calm as she thought: "I am in God's hands and my Guardian Angel will safeguard, my body."

Agnes gave thanks to God for having sent her such generous assistance.

"Have no fear", said the Angel, "I am here to protect you."

Procopius, the Prefect's son, wished to be the first to enter. He should not have wished it! The Angel struck him with a mortal blow!

When the young man's father was notified, he was beside himself with grief: but Agnes prayed to God and Procopius was restored to life. The Prefect then came to believe in the true God of the Christians.

Since the crowd now was clamoring, he appointed Aspasio, the vice-Prefect, to carry on.

As a result, Agnes was condemned to be burned at the stake; but even here the Angel caused the flames to turn into two separate pillars of fire with the maiden between them as if encircled by flowers. As martyrdom proceeded, Agnes ascended to the Heavens.