

Saint Cecilia

II-III Century

The "Passio Sanctae Ceciliae" narrates that a young Roman noble woman is betrothed to Valerian, he too a patrician. The wedding is celebrated with songs and festivities, but Cecilia, who has vowed herself to the Lord, pleads to be allowed to remain a virgin.

During the first night of their marriage, she asks her spouse not to touch her, because an Angel is protecting her purity and will defend her against him. To believe in her words, Valerian asks to see the Angel, after which he will do whatever she desires. So Cecilia invites him to purify himself and believe in God: only in this way will he become worthy of seeing the Angel. She suggests that he go to

She explains the Christian doctrine to him, in outline, and tells him about the life of Christ and his Passion and about the miracles of the Apostles. Tiburtius is brought to Urban and is baptized. Meanwhile, the Prefect of Rome, who is persecuting Christians, learns through an accusation that Valerian and Tiburtius are burying the bodies of martyrs and doing works of charity. He has them arrested and subjects



the third mile on the Appian Way, where he will meet an old man by the name of Urban, who is the Pope, together with poor people who will be begging for charity. Valerian must find the old man and tell him that Cecilia is sending him and that she had told him: "When he has purified you, he will clothe you in white, and once you have entered this house, you will see the Angel." The young man does what Cecilia has told him to do and, after finding Urban, decides to become a Christian and be baptized. Returning to Cecilia, he finds her absorbed in prayer and sees next to her an Angel with two crowns in his hands: one made of roses that is given to the bride, the other made of lilies that is given to him. Valerian wants his brother Tiburtius also to be converted and baptized. During a visit, Tiburtius finds out about the two crowns and, he, too, wants to see the Angel. Then Cecilia speaks to him of eternal life and of its value compared to earthly life.

them to an interrogation. They are led outside the city by the soldier Maximus so that they could sacrifice to the gods or be killed in case of refusal. Along the way, conversing with the two brothers, Maximus is converted and baptized. Learning about this, the Prefect has Valerian and Tiburtius beheaded. Maximus sees their souls being brought to Heaven by the Angels. Maximus himself is killed and Cecilia arrested. After the interrogation by the Prefect, Cecilia is condemned to be burned alive, but Cecilia does not die. So the executioner tries three times to behead her. After exhorting the brothers to be strong in their faith, Cecilia finally dies and her body is buried in the cemetery of Saint Callistus. Her house is transformed into a church and becomes the present Basilica of Saint Cecilia in Trastevere. In 822, Pope Paschal I finds Cecilia's remains in the Basilica and orders that she be given an honorable burial.