

Virginmartyr Febronia of Nisibis

Commemorated on June 25

The Virgin Martyr Febronia suffered during the reign of Diocletian (284-305). She was raised at a monastery in the city of Sivapolis (Assyria). The head of the women's monastery was the abbess Bryaena, the aunt of Saint Febronia. Being concerned about her niece's salvation, she assigned her a stricter form of life than the other nuns. According to their monastic rule, on Fridays the sisters put aside their other duties and spent the whole day in prayer and the reading of Holy Scripture. The abbess usually assigned the reading to Saint Febronia.

News of her pious life spread throughout the city. The illustrious young widow Hieria, a pagan, began to visit her, and under the influence of her guidance and prayer she accepted holy Baptism, bringing her parents and kinsfolk to the Christian Faith.

Diocletian sent a detachment of soldiers to Assyria under the command of Lysimachus, Selinus and Primus for the destruction of Christians. Selenos, the uncle of Lysimachus, was noted for his fierce attitude against Christians, but Lysimachus was of a different frame of mind from him, since his mother had sought to inspire love for the Christian faith in her son, and she had died a Christian. Lysimachus had discussed with his kinsman Primus how it would be possible to deliver Christians from the hands of the torturer. When the detachment of soldiers approached the convent, its inhabitants hid. There remained only the abbess Bryaena, her helper Thomais and Saint Febronia, who was seriously ill at the time.

It grieved the abbess terribly that her niece might fall into the hands of the torturers, who might defile her. She prayed fervently that the Lord would preserve her and strengthen her in the confession of Christ the Savior. Selinus gave orders to bring him all the nuns of the convent. Primus with the detachment of soldiers found no one, except the two old women and Saint Febronia. He regretted that they had not hidden, and he suggested to the nuns that they flee. But the nuns decided not to leave the place of their labors and they entrusted themselves to the will of the Lord.

Primus told Lysimachus about the particular beauty of Saint Febronia and advised him to take her for himself. Lysimachus said that he would not seduce a virgin dedicated to God, and he asked Primus to hide the other nuns somewhere so that they would not fall into the hands of Selinus. One of the soldiers overheard the conversation and told Selinus. They led Saint Febronia off to the military commander with her hands bound and a chain

around her neck. Selinus urged her to deny Christ, promising her honors, rewards, and marriage with Lysimachus. The holy virgin firmly and fearlessly answered that she had an Immortal Bridegroom, and she would not exchange Him for any mortal man. Selinus subjected her to fierce torture. The saint prayed, "My Savior, do not abandon me in this terrible hour!"

They beat the martyr for a long time, and blood flowed from her wounds. In order to intensify the suffering of Saint Febronia, they tied her to a tree and set a fire under it. The tortures were so inhuman, that the people began to demand an end to the torture, since there was no confession of guilt by the girl. Selinus continued to mock and jeer at the martyr, but Saint Febronia became silent. Because of weakness she was unable to utter a word. In a rage Selinus gave orders to tear out her tongue, smash her teeth, and finally, to cut off both hands and feet. The people were unable to bear such a horrid spectacle and they left the scene of the torture, cursing Diocletian and his gods.

Among the crowd was the nun Thomais, who afterwards recorded Saint Febronia's martyrdom in detail, and also her student Hieria. She came forth out of the crowd and in the hearing of all reproached Selinus for his boundless cruelty. He gave orders to arrest her, but learning that Hieria was of illustrious standing whom he could not readily subject to torture, he said, "By your speech you have brought on Febronia even greater torment." Finally, they beheaded the holy Martyr Febronia.

Departing the place of execution, Lysimachus wept and withdrew to his quarters. Selinus made ready to eat, but he was not able to take food, and went off to the quiet of his own chambers. Suddenly, he became like one deranged. Looking up to the heavens, he raved and bellowed like a bull, then fell down and struck his head on a marble column and died. When Lysimachus learned of this, he said, "Great is the God of the Christians, Who has avenged Febronia's blood, so unrighteously shed!" He prepared a coffin, placed the martyr's body in it, and took it to the convent.

Abbess Bryaena fell senseless, seeing the mutilated remains of Saint Febronia. Later, she recovered her senses and gave orders to open the convent gates so that all would be able to come and venerate the holy martyr and glorify God Who had given her such endurance in suffering for Christ. Lysimachus and Primus renounced their idol worship and accepted both Baptism and monasticism. Hieria gave her wealth to the convent and petitioned Abbess Bryaena to accept her at the convent in place of Saint Febronia.

Every year, on the day of the martyr's

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death of Saint Febronia, a solemn feast was celebrated at the convent. During the time of the all-night Vigil the nuns always saw Saint Febronia, at her usual place in church. From the relics of Saint Febronia occurred numerous miracles and healings. The Life of Saint Febronia was recorded by the nun Thomais, an eyewitness to her deeds.

In the year 363 the relics of Saint Febronia were transferred to Constantinople.

Soon after the death of Saint Febronia, Saint James the Bishop of Nisibis (January 13) built a church and transferred into it a portion of the of the holy martyr's relics.

A continuously happy life produces extremely unhappy consequences. In nature we see that there are not always pleasant springs and fruitful summers, and sometimes autumn is rainy and winter cold and snowy, and there is flooding and wind and storms, and moreover the crops fail and there are famine, troubles, sicknesses and many other misfortunes. All of this is beneficial so that man might learn through prudence, patience and humility. For the most part, in times of plenty he forgets himself, but in times of various sorrows he becomes more attentive to his salvation.

~ St. Ambrose of Optina ~

A Meditation from St. John Chrysostom: Make Your Wife Beautiful

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. From these words of Paul you sense how open-hearted should be your wife's subjection. But now listen to what Paul requires of you. Follow the same example, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church. You see how much obedience is asked of you. Now hear how much love is required.

You want your wife to obey you as the Church obeys Christ? Then you must care for her as much as Christ cares for the Church. Should it be necessary to die for her, to be cut into a thousand pieces, to bear any sort of suffering, you should not say no; and if you have indeed suffered like that, you still have done nothing compared with what Christ has done. In point of fact, you would be doing these things for one to whom you are already united, while he has done them for one who opposed him and hated him, despised him, spat on him, rejected him. With all the tenderness of his soul he prevailed upon her to kneel at his feet without insulting her, without humiliating her, without making her afraid.

You, too, must behave in the same way with your wife. Even if you see that she despises you, even if she rejects and humiliates you, you can bring her back to you if you take trouble over her, if you care for her, if you are fond of her, if you love her.

Nothing is stronger than these bonds, particularly between husband and wife. By resorting to intimidation you might be able to keep a domestic servant attached to you—but not even him, for probably the servant will leave you and escape. The companion of your life, the mother of your children, the basis of all your joy, ought not to be tied to you by threats and fear, rather by love and the warmth of emotion. What sort of union would that be in which the wife is afraid of her husband? And what pleasure could her husband find in staying with her as if she were a servant?

Whatever kind of woman you have chosen, you cannot have chosen anyone like the spouse Christ has chosen in marrying the Church. And if she is different from you, it is not so different as the Church is from Christ. Even so, he has not hated her, or loathed her for her terrible deformity. You want to know the extent of her deformity? Then listen to Paul, You were one time darkness. (Ephesians 5:8) Do you see how obscure she was? What is more obscure than darkness?

See too how brazen faced she was. We were passing our days in malice and iniquity. (Titus 3:3) and how unclean, We were foolish and disobedient. What I mean to say is, she was a fool and a blasphemer, and yet, despite that, he sacrificed himself for that deformed spouse as if she had been beautiful, most deserving of love, marvelous. Full of admiration, Paul exclaims, One will hardly die for a righteous man, yet Christ died for us while we were still sinners. (Romans 5:7-8)

After taking a spouse like that, he made her beautiful and he washed her. He did not shrink even from that. He did it that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present her to himself in splendor. With water he washed her uncleanness away, water accompanied with a word. What word was it, In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He not only adorned her, he made her resplendent without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

We too in our spouse seek this beauty. It could be that we are in a position to create this beauty ourselves. Do not ask of your wife what is not in her power. Note carefully that the Church received everything from the Lord. It was he who made her resplendent without spot or wrinkle.

~ St. John Chrysostom ~
(On the Letter to the Ephesians)