

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

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St George

Saint George the Martyr

We can be certain of only a few facts about the life and martyrdom of Saint George and there is much disagreement about details. What we do know for sure is what matters most and makes him relevant still for us today: that he was martyred for his Christian faith during the persecutions of Diocletian, which began in the year 303. His cultus was established early on and spread rapidly. It is widely accepted that he was born of Christian parents around 280, probably in Cappadocia, and was, like his father, a soldier of high rank in the Roman army.

Eusebius (260-339), the learned bishop of Caesarea, wrote about the Diocletian persecutions (*The History of the Church*, Books 8 and 9). The Roman empire had become unstable and difficult to control in the time leading up to the reign of Diocletian. The emperor was concerned about the spread of the Christian religion, particularly within the ranks of the army. He resented its exclusive monotheism and unwillingness to accept the deity of Roman emperors. Christianity was seen as a source of instability and it had to be eliminated. He decided to ban devotion to any but the old Roman gods. Thus began the worst persecutions (though the last) of the Roman period.

Eusebius tells us about the situation of Christians just before the persecution: *How great how unique were the honour, and liberty too, which before the persecution of my time were granted by all men; Greeks and non-Greeks alike, to the message given through*



Saint George, Shrewsbury Cathedral



28 April
2019

SHREWSBURY BULLETIN



Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest in Shrewsbury

Weekly Schedule *

	Ordo	Cathedral	St Winefride's	Mass Intention
Sun	28 th April Low Sunday		11.45 Confession & Rosary 12.15 Mass * No Vespers/Benediction	Novena for a Special Intention
Mon	29 th April St. George, I class (Transferred).	7.30am Mass	* No Vespers	Private Intention
Tue	30 th April St. Catherine of Siena, III class.	7.30am Mass	5.30pm Confession & Rosary 6pm Mass	Private Intention Private Intention
Wed	1 st May St. Joseph the Worker, I class.	7.30am Mass	* No Vespers	For the Priests in Shrewsbury
Thu	2 nd May Votive Mass Christ the High Priest	7.30am Mass *No Holy Hour	* No Vespers	Nora Bennis RIP
Fri	3 rd May Votive Mass Sacred Heart	7.30am Mass	5.30pm Confession & Rosary 6pm Mass and Benediction	Margaret Kept RIP Private Intention
Sat	4 th May Votive Mass Immaculate Heart		11am Confession & Rosary 11.30 am Mass 6pm Vespers & Compline	Private Intention
Sun	5 th May II Sunday after Easter		11.45 Confession & Rosary 12.15 Mass 6pm Vespers/Benediction	Fr. Peter Graffery

* Changes from the usual schedule

Christ to the world, of true reverence for the God of the universe! It is beyond me to describe it as it deserves. Witness the goodwill so often shown by potentates to our people; they even put into their hands the government of the provinces, releasing them from the agonizing question of sacrificing [to the pagan gods], in view of the friendliness with which they regarded their teaching. What need I say about those in the imperial palaces and about the supreme rulers? Did they not permit the members of their households — consorts, children, and servants — to embrace boldly before their eyes the divine message and way of life, hardly minding even if they boasted of the liberty granted to the Faith? Did they not hold them in special esteem and favour them more than their fellow servants?

However, these happy conditions did not last: *But increasing freedom transformed our character to arrogance and sloth - we began envying and abusing each other, cutting our own throats, as occasion offered, with weapons of sharp-edged words; At last, while the gatherings were still crowded, divine judgement with its wonted mercy, gently and gradually began to order things its own way, and with the Christians in the army the persecution began.*

Then came the destruction: *I saw with my own eyes the places of worship thrown down from top to bottom, to the very foundations, the inspired holy Scriptures committed to the flames in the middle of the public square... It was the nineteenth year of Diocletian 's reign and the month Dystrus, called March by the Romans, and the festival of the Saviour's Passion was approaching, when an imperial decree was published everywhere, ordering the churches to be razed to the ground and the Scriptures destroyed by fire, giving notice that those in places of honour would lose their places, and domestic staff, if they continued to profess Christianity, would be deprived of their liberty. Such was the first edict against us. Soon afterwards other decrees arrived in rapid succession, ordering that the presidents of the churches in every place should all be first committed to prison and then coerced by every possible means into offering sacrifice. Then it was that many rulers of the churches bore up heroically*

under horrible torments (which Eusebius describes in great detail). But a great many soldiers of Christ's kingdom without hesitation or question chose to confess Him rather than cling to the outward glory and prosperity they enjoyed. When the persecution reached its height, Eusebius says that ...words are inadequate to depict the host of God's noble martyrs whom the people of every city and every region were privileged to see with their own eyes.



Statue of St George, Shrewsbury Cathedral

Then the edict was issued at Nicomedia (Izmit in present-day Turkey): *When the edict against the churches was issued at Nicomedia and posted up in a conspicuous public place, a well-known person, by worldly standards of pre-eminence a man of the greatest distinction, was so stirred by religious enthusiasm and carried away by burning faith that he promptly seized it and tore it to shreds,*

as something unholy and utterly ... But he was only the first of many who at that time distinguished themselves in this way ... Of all those who have at any time been praised in song for their virtues and lauded for their courage, among Greeks and non-Greeks alike, none was ever more remarkable than the divine martyrs produced by this occasion.

It was in this place that the martyrdom of Saint George took place. Eusebius's account supports the descriptions that have come down to us concerning the faith and witness of Saint George and the extreme torment he was put through. It is said that the emperor offered him lands and wealth if he would but offer sacrifice to the gods.

A Saint for England, a Saint for Our Time

Such details also recall the suffering of the English martyrs that began in the reign of Henry VIII and rose to a great height of cruelty under Elizabeth I. Churches and sacred things were destroyed. It was demanded that all attend the services of the new religion. Many were offered pardon, wealth and position if they would conform. Those who refused faced imprisonment, torture and many were cruelly put to death. Today Christians are the most persecuted of any religion and there are more Christians dying for their faith than ever - in many countries, all over the world - even in the West. Therefore, Saint George is very much a saint for our time, an inspiring model of faith and courage in the face of evil and persecution. Within a short time of his death, the persecution ended and the Church grew and spread faster and further than ever. Tertullian wrote that the blood of Christians is seed, increasing our numbers. (Plures efficitur, quotiens metimur a vobis: semen est sanguis Christianorum. *Apologeticum*, L,13) As in George's day, there were many who gave in, but also many who became the seeds of the Church.

Saint George is one of the most honoured saints, venerated throughout the Christian world as a holy martyr and brave defender of the faith. He is the patron of many places and organisations and a great number of churches are dedicated to him. He is the patron of soldiers. During the great struggle to regain Christian lands seized by Muslims,

Crusaders wore his red cross on a white background and carried it as a standard. He came to be regarded as a special protector of the English and became our patron saint in 1415. The flag of England, the Union flag and the Navy ensign all bear his symbol. His image is used for the Order of the Garter and the George Cross.

Saint George and the Dragon



Saint George and the Dragon, manuscript. of the Golden Legend, dated 1348 (BNF Français 241, fol. 101v.)

And there was a great battle in heaven...And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan...(Apocalypse 12:7,9) The portrayal of the devil as a dragon is ancient. Images of Saint George in armour, slaying a dragon, are meant to convey that he armed himself with faith and courageously confronted evil.

In a famous tale recounted in The Golden Legend (a 13th century collection of lives of the saints by Jacobus de Voragine), a terrible plague-breathing dragon was threatening a town. When Saint George arrived on the scene, he made the sign of the Cross, exhorted the people to believe in Christ, and slew the dragon. The legend tells us: *On that day twenty thousand were baptized, not counting the women and children.*

The New Website is at:
<https://icksp.org.uk/shrewsbury/>