

FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS (F.D. AUGUST 8)

(As used by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russian, Western Rite Vicariate)

A group of saints invoked with special confidence because they have proven themselves efficacious helpers in adversity and difficulties, are known and venerated under the name Fourteen Holy Helpers. Devotion to these fourteen as a group spread in response to the Black Plague which devastated Europe from 1346 to 1349. Among its symptoms were the tongue turning black, a parched throat, violent headache, fever, and boils on the abdomen. It attacked without warning, robbed its victims of reason, and killed within a few hours; many died without the last Sacraments. Brigands roamed the roads, people suspected of contagion were attacked, animals died, people starved, whole villages vanished into the grave, social order and family ties broke down, and the disease appeared incurable. The pious turned to heaven, begging the intervention of the saints, praying to be spared or cured. This group devotion began in Germany. The names of the fourteen Saints varied from place to place, but the primary principle of their selection was the efficacy of their intercession against various diseases—most, but not all, were venerated as Martyrs. Typically named are the following Saints: Achatius (Agathius), Barbara, Blaise, Catherine of Alexandria, Christopher, Cyriacus, Dionysius (Denys), Erasmus (Elmo) of Formia, Eustace (Eustathius), George, Giles, Margaret of Antioch, Panteleimon, & Vitus. For one or other of the above were sometimes named Saints Anthony the Great, Leonard, Nicholas, or Sebastian.

Sts. Christopher and Giles were invoked against the plague itself. St. Dionysius was prayed to for relief from headache, St. Blaise for ills of the throat, Saint Erasmus, for abdominal maladies, St. Barbara for fever, and St. Vitus against epilepsy. Saint Panteleimon was the patron of physicians and the sick, St. Cyriacus invoked against temptation on the deathbed, and Sts. Christopher, Barbara, and Catherine for protection against a sudden and unprovided death. St. Giles was prayed to for a good confession, and St. Eustace as healer of family troubles. St. Margaret of Antioch is the patron of safe childbirth. Domestic animals were also attacked by the plague, and so Sts. George, Erasmus, Panteleimon, and Vitus were invoked for their protection, with Sts. Cosmas & Damian in some places. For one or other of the above were sometimes named Sts. Anthony the Great, Cosmas & Damian (of Asia Minor & of Rome), Leonard, Nicholas, or Sebastian.

Saint George: While little is known definitively about his life, St. George was a fourth-century martyr under the persecution of the emperor Diocletian. A soldier

in Diocletian's army, St. George refused to arrest Christians and offer sacrifices to Roman gods. Despite bribes from Diocletian to change his mind, St. George refused the order and was tortured and eventually executed for his offences. He is invoked against skin diseases and palsy.

St. Blaise: Another 4th-century martyr, St. Blaise's death is very similar to that of St. George. A bishop in Armenia during a time of Christian persecution, St. Blaise was eventually forced to flee to the forest to avoid death. One day a group of hunters found St. Blaise, arrested him and brought him back to the authorities. At some point after his arrest, a mother with a son who had gotten a fishbone perilously stuck in his throat visited St. Blaise, and at his blessing, the bone became dislodged and the boy was saved. St. Blaise was ordered by the governor of Cappadocia to denounce his faith and sacrifice to pagan gods. He refused and was brutally tortured and eventually beheaded for this offence. He is invoked against diseases of the throat.

St. Erasmus: A 4th-century bishop of Formia, St. Erasmus (also known as St. Elmo) faced persecution under the emperor Diocletian. According to legend, he fled to Mount Lebanon for a time to escape persecution, where he was fed by a raven. After he was discovered, he was arrested and imprisoned, but made multiple miraculous escapes with the help of an angel. At one point he was tortured by having part of his intestines pulled out by hot rods. Some accounts say he was miraculously healed of these wounds and died of natural causes, while others say that this was the cause of his martyrdom. St. Erasmus is invoked by those suffering from stomach pains and disorders, and by women in labour.

St. Pantaleimon: Another 4th-century martyr persecuted under Diocletian, St. Pantaleon was the son of a rich pagan, but was instructed in Christianity by his mother and a priest. He worked as a physician to the emperor Maximianus. According to legend, St. Pantaleimon was denounced as a Christian to the emperor by his peers who were jealous of his rich inheritance. When he refused to worship false gods, St. Pantaleimon was tortured and his murder was attempted by various methods - burning torches on his flesh, a bath of liquid lead, being thrown into the sea tied to a stone, and so on. Each time, he was rescued from death by Christ, who appeared in the form of a priest. St. Pantaleimon was only successfully beheaded after he desired his own martyrdom. He is invoked as a patron saint of physicians and midwives.

St. Vitus: Also a 4th-century martyr persecuted by Diocletian, St. Vitus was the son of a senator in Sicily and became Christian under the influence of his nurse.

According to legend, St. Vitus inspired many conversions and performed many miracles, which angered those who hated Christianity. St. Vitus, and his Christian nurse and her husband, were denounced to the emperor, who ordered them to be put to death when they refused to renounce their faith. Like St. Pantaleon, many attempts were made at killing them, including releasing them to lions in the Colosseum, but they were miraculously delivered each time. They were eventually put to death on the rack. St. Vitus is invoked against epilepsy, paralysis, and diseases of the nervous system.

St. Christopher: A 3rd-century martyr originally called Reprobos, he was the son of pagans and had originally pledged his service to a pagan king and to Satan. Eventually, the conversion of a king and the instruction of a monk led Reprobos to convert to Christianity, and he was called on to use his strength and muscles to help carry people across a raging stream where there was no bridge. Once he was carrying a child who announced himself as Christ, and declared that Reprobos would be called “Christopher” - or Christ-bearer. The encounter filled Christopher with missionary zeal, and he returned home to Turkey to convert nearly 50,000. Angered, the Emperor Decius had Christopher arrested, imprisoned and tortured. While he was delivered from many tortures, including being shot with arrows, Christopher was beheaded around the year 250. He is invoked against epilepsy and toothache, and is the patron of a holy death.

St. Dionysius (Denis): There are conflicting accounts of St. Dionysius, with some accounts claiming he was converted to Christianity in Athens by St. Paul, and then became the first Bishop of Paris sometime in the first century. Other accounts claim he was a Bishop of Paris but a martyr of the third century. What is known is that he was a zealous missionary who eventually came to France, where he was beheaded on Montmartre - the Mount of Martyrs - a place where many early Christians were killed for the faith. He is invoked against demonic attacks.

St. Cyriacus: Another 4th century martyr, St. Cyriacus, a deacon, was actually favoured by the emperor Diocletian after he cured the emperor’s daughter in the name of Jesus, and then the friend of the emperor. After Diocletian died, his successor, emperor Maximin, increased the persecution of Christians and imprisoned Cyriacus, who was tortured at the rack and beheaded for refusing to renounce Christianity. He is the patron of those who suffer from eye diseases.

St. Eustace: Little is known about this second-century martyr, persecuted under the Emperor Trajan. According to tradition, Eustace was a general in the army who

converted to Christianity after a vision of a Crucifix that appeared between the antlers of a deer while he was hunting. He converted his family to Christianity, and he and his wife were burned to death after refusing to participate in a pagan ceremony. He is invoked against fires.

St. Achatius: A fourth-century martyr under the emperor Galerius, St. Achatius was a captain in the Roman army when he heard a voice telling him to “Call on the help of the God of Christians,” according to tradition. He obeyed the voice and immediately sought baptism in the Christian faith. He zealously set about converting the soldiers of the army, but was soon denounced to the emperor, tortured, and sent before a tribunal for questioning, before which he again refused to denounce his faith. After many more tortures, from some of which he was miraculously healed, St. Achatius was beheaded in the year 311. He is the patron saint of those who suffer from headaches.

St. Giles: One of the later Holy Helpers and the only one definitively known to not be a martyr, St. Giles became a seventh-century monk in the area of Athens, despite his birth to nobility. He eventually retreated to the wilderness to found a monastery under the rule of St. Benedict, and was renowned for his holiness and the miracles he performed. According to Catholicism.org, he also once counseled Charles Martel, grandfather of Charlemagne, to confess a sin that had been weighing on him. Giles died peacefully around the year of 712, and is invoked against crippling diseases.

St. Margaret of Antioch: Another fourth-century martyr persecuted by Diocletian, St. Margaret, like St. Vitus, converted to Christianity under the influence of her nurse, angering her father and causing him to disown her. A consecrated virgin, Margaret was tending flocks of sheep one day when a Roman spotted her and sought to make her his wife or concubine. When she refused, the Roman had Margaret brought before a court, where she was ordered to denounce her faith or die. She refused, and she was ordered to be burned and boiled alive, and miraculously she was spared from both. Eventually, she was beheaded. She is invoked as a patron of pregnant women and those suffering from kidney diseases.

St. Catherine of Alexandria: A fourth-century martyr, St. Catherine was the daughter of the Queen of Egypt, and converted to Christianity after a vision of Christ and Mary. The Queen also converted to Christianity before her death. When Maximinus started persecuting Christians in Egypt, St. Catherine rebuked him and attempted to prove to him that his gods were false. After debating with the

emperor's best scholars, many of whom converted due to her arguments, Catherine was scourged, imprisoned, and eventually beheaded. She is the patron saint of philosophers and young students.

St. Barbara: While little is known of this third-century martyr, St. Barbara is thought to have been the daughter of a rich and jealous man who sought to keep Barbara from the world. When she confessed to him that she had converted to Christianity, he denounced her and brought her before local authorities, who ordered that she be tortured and beheaded. According to legend, her own father did the beheading, for which he was struck by lightning shortly thereafter. St. Barbara is invoked against fires and lightning storms.

NOVENA TO THE FOURTEEN HOLY HELPERS. *(A 9-day Devotion to the Holy Ones)*

Begin each day of the novena by calling to mind your need, and say:

℣. Pray for us, ye Fourteen Holy Helpers.

℟. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray: YE FOURTEEN Holy Helpers, select friends of God: I honour you as mighty intercessors, and come with filial confidence to you in my needs, for the relief of which I have undertaken to make this novena. Help me by your intercession to placate God's wrath, which I have provoked by my sins, and aid me in amending my life and doing penance. Obtain for me the grace to serve God with a willing heart, to be resigned to his holy will, to be patient in adversity and to persevere unto the end, so that, having finished my earthly course, I may join you in heaven, there to praise for ever God, who is wonderful in his Saints. Amen.

Then, pray the Prayer of the Day— see below; after which, each day say this concluding prayer: ALMIGHTY and eternal God, who hast bestowed extraordinary graces and gifts on thy Saints—George, Blaise, Erasmus, Panteleimon, Vitus, Christopher, Dionysius, Cyriacus, Eustace, Achatius, Giles, Margaret, Catherine, and Barbara—and hast illustrated them by miracles: We beseech thee graciously to hear the petitions of all who invoke their intercession. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 1.

WE BESEECH thee, O Lord, to hear the prayer which we send up to thee in honour of thy glorified servants, the Fourteen Holy Helpers: And as we cannot rely

upon our own justice, grant our petition through the intercession of those whose intercessions have made them especially dear to thee. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 2.

O GOD, who according to the decrees of thy providence hast created man for eternal bliss: Grant, through the intercession of the Holy Helpers, that I may attain to my destiny by being united with thee in this life and loving and praising thee forever in heaven. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 3.

O GOD, I beseech thee, through the faith of the Holy Helpers, grant me the grace to treasure in my heart the doctrines of our Holy Faith, to believe them firmly, to confess them bravely, and to live according to their precepts, that through that same Faith I may become worthy to be admitted to thy beatific vision in heaven. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 4.

ETERNAL God of love and mercy, I thank thee for all the benefits thou hast conferred upon me, and hope to obtain, through the intercession of the Holy Helpers, all the graces necessary for my salvation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 5.

O GOD of mercy and love, I thank thee from all my heart for the countless graces which thy infinite love hath bestowed on me. By the ardent love which the Holy Helpers had for thee, I implore thee to enkindle in my heart the flame of thy love, so that I may remain in thee and thou in me. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 6.

O GOD of love, who dost will that I love my neighbour for thy sake, grant me the grace, through the intercession of the Holy Helpers, to be animated with that spirit of charity which embraces all and excludes none, which— *is patient, kind, envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth, beareth all*

things, believeth all things, endureth all things, and never falleth away (1 Cor. 13:4-8). Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 7.

MERCIFUL God, who gavest the Holy Helpers the grace to fulfil thy will regardless of human respect: Grant that we may obtain through their prayers and intercession the courage to despise the opinion of men, and ever serve thee with a fearless heart. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 8.

O GOD, I implore thee through the prayers and intercession of the Holy Helpers, to grant me the spirit of prayer, that following their example I may walk in thy presence and ever enjoy the consolation of social intercourse with thee. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer, Day 9.

O GOD, whose mercies are infinite and whose goodness is without limit, I beseech thee through the prayers and intercession of the Holy Helpers, grant me the grace of perseverance in thy love and service to the end. Thou, who dost dispense so many favours through the Holy Helpers, despise not my prayer, but graciously hear and grant it. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And on day 9, conclude with the following prayers: O FAITHFUL servants of God and powerful protectors of man, Holy Helpers! Since Our Lord appointed you the heavenly advocates for our needs on earth, I confidently turn to you for help in my distress. Countless numbers praise you for aiding them with counsel in doubt, with consolation in anxiety, with health in illness, with safety in danger, with delivery from prison, and with help and assistance in all tribulations. Therefore I, too, have recourse to you, and implore you not to refuse me your aid.

GIVE thanks to God for me for all the graces he hath granted me during this novena. I ascribe them to your great prayers and powerful intercession. I thank you all together, and each one in particular, for your interest in my favour before the throne of God. I commend myself to your continued protection, that I may one day be united with you in heaven, there to thank the Giver of all good things and to praise him for all eternity. Amen.