

Saint Patrick's Parish Presents Saints for Today

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St. George | Feast Day April 23

Have you met St. George the Dragon slayer?

Have you met St. George the Dragon slayer? Let me introduce him to you. His Feast Day is on April 23.

He is England's patron saint. St. George is also the patron saint of Portugal, Venice, Beirut, Malta, Ethiopia, Georgia, the Palestinian territories, Serbia and Lithuania!

St. George was born around 280 AD and died around 303. This would make him around 23 when he was martyred. We don't know very much about the early life of St. George but it is believed that he was born into a wealthy Christian noble family. He was born in what is now modern-day Turkey. He became a soldier when he grew up and joined the followers of Emperor Diocletian. Eventually he was promoted to the rank of tribune which gave him direct command over many men.

In 303 Diocletian, as part of the attack on the growing influence of the Christian community, ordered that all Christian soldiers in the army should be expelled and all Roman soldiers be forced to make the traditional pagan sacrifices to gods. St. George refused, denouncing the decree in front of his fellow soldiers, and declared that he was a Christian. Diocletian tried to convert him with offers of wealth and land but St. George refused. Foreseeing his death, St. George distributed his wealth and clothing to the poor. He was beheaded on April 23, 303.

But what about the dragon? Legend has it that St. George was a fearless knight slaying a fearsome monster to save an innocent princess. A town in Libya had a small lake where a plague-infested dragon was living in the waters. The townspeople were gradually being killed by the dragon so they started feeding it two sheep a day to keep it happy. Then one day, they ran out of sheep so the king developed a lottery system to feed local children to the dragon. Soon the king's own daughter was chosen to be devoured by the dragon. As the princess, dressed in a wedding gown, stood near the pond weeping and waiting for the dragon, St. George passed by on horseback. He asked the princess why she was weeping. She responded by telling him that he could not save her. Then the dragon arrived. It began running toward St. George and the princess, so St. George drew his sword, made the sign of the cross and charged at the dragon. George struck the dragon with his spear and threw him to the ground. St. George then asked the princess for her girdle and when she gave it to him he bound the dragon with it and had the princess lead the dragon back to the village. When the people saw the dragon approaching they became frightened and began to panic, but St. George assured them that it was no threat to them anymore. St. George told them to be baptized and to believe in Jesus Christ and that he would slay the dragon for them; so 15,000 citizens, including the king, were baptized and St. George slew the dragon by cutting off its head with his sword.



St. George possessed many virtues, but it is his example of the virtues of bravery, courage and fortitude that are especially apparent in his story. He continued to proclaim his faith in Christ even while enduring excruciating pain and suffering and his Christian witness resulted in the conversion of many unbelievers to the Christian faith.

...and for today?

Although the dragon slaying is clearly a myth, we can look upon the "dragon" today as representing sin, temptation, all evils of today that attack our human weakness causing us to struggle with our faith. What are some of these dragons that we face today? Dragons of human trafficking, assisted suicide, euthanasia, addictions, abortion clinics, pornography, sickness and disease, pandemic, family problems, job loss. St. George overcame the "dragon" of his day by his faith and practice of Christian virtues. He did not surrender to the emperor or the dragon. Can we call ourselves dragon-slayers? When we come face-to-face with our dragons, do we surrender ourselves to God in faith and trust, or do we surrender ourselves to the dragon? God is always with us; we need only turn to Him to receive His grace of faith, courage and fortitude to slay our dragons.

As we celebrate Saint George's feast day on April 23 during this Eastertide, let us think about the many ways we might slay the dragons that invade our own lives and become courageous heroes for Christ.

St. George, the great dragon slayer;
you gave your life rather than
denounce your heavenly Father.

Your faith was strong
and you feared nothing.
You knew God was with you.

Stand with me as my dragon slayer
in times of adversity.

When I am overcome with fear,
help me to be as brave as you.

Be my courage
to overcome the dragons I face today
that lead to sin and destruction.

Through your intercession,
grant me the grace of fortitude
that I may love God above all,
love my neighbour,
and follow God's Holy Will
for my life.

St. George, pray for us!

Sources:

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