

## GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: ANCIENT MARTYRS OF THE ROMAN CANON

In our rapidly changing news cycle, including ecclesiastical news, I occasionally drop a ball or two. I wrote some columns in 2016 about the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), but never really finished my thoughts, especially about the saints mentioned therein. To refresh your memory, I was describing each of the many saints listed in that ancient prayer, hoping to shed some light on their significance in the history of the church. Of the **27 saints** mentioned besides the eleven apostles, I covered all but seven, four men and three women. I owe it to their memory to rectify this **egregious oversight!** Due to its solemnity, I typically pray Eucharistic Prayer I at the 10:00 a.m. Sunday Mass, our principal parish Mass each weekend, and occasionally at other Masses, most especially on major feasts.

It was likely at the turn of the sixth century that an expansion occurred in the number of saints listed in the Roman Canon, resulting in a double series of names, one before and the other after the consecration of the bread and wine. After the consecration, a second list of names is included in the Eucharistic prayer, these all being martyrs. John the Baptist holds pride of place, followed by fourteen other martyrs, seven men and seven women. The list begins after the words, “To us, also, your servants, who, though sinners, hope in your abundant mercies, graciously grant some fellowship with your holy apostles and martyrs: with John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, (**Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, Peter**, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, **Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia**) and all your saints.” Those in **bold** were never covered in these pages. Today commences the restoration of their honor! (Today’s cover depicts the martyr St. Ignatius)

The first name to be mentioned today is **Ignatius**— no, not the founder of the Jesuit Order. It refers to **Ignatius of Antioch**, an early 2nd century martyr whose writings provide some of the most useful evidence of the constitution of the early Church found outside of the Scriptures. His writings were compiled in the very earliest years of the second century. When I read them for the first time in college, I became hooked on patristic theology! Seven letters have survived. They are fairly brief and well worth your reading. See [www.ewtn.com/library/patristc/ignatius.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/library/patristc/ignatius.htm).

His letters include detailed discussions of Church order, including the first evidence of the three-tiered hierarchy comprised of deacon, priest (presbyter) and bishop that we take for granted today. The letters speak exaltedly of the role of bishop in the Church, a sentiment certainly not common in today’s climate. For example, nothing can be done apart from him (Letter to the *Trallians* 2,2, *Philadelphians* 7,2, 4,1). Christians were not even to marry without the consent of the bishop (*Phil.* 5,2) representing the first intervention of a church document regulating marriages. He wrote about martyrdom in a manner demonstrating his awareness of its real possibility in time of persecution, but he truly embraced that reality.

**Alexander** follows— but no, this is not a reference to Alexander the Great. Rather, it most likely refers to Pope Alexander I, the fifth successor to St. Peter, the man who became pope while St. Ignatius of Antioch was writing his letters. His relics and those of his companions now rest in the Basilica of Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill in Rome. That is one of my all-time favorite basilicas, including among its treasures the earliest known depiction of the Crucifixion, found carved there in a panel of the wooden door. There is a tradition that he may have been one of seven brothers martyred together. He is credited in tradition with **introducing the use of Holy Water** in blessing houses. But strict historians (and I tend in that direction) are quick to note the paucity of verifiable evidence concerning him. Pope St. John XXIII removed the designation of martyr for St. Alexander’s feast, indicating that it seemed to lack sufficient historical basis. His feast was May 3 in the pre-Vatican II calendar; today he is only commemorated in the Extraordinary Form. Gone, but not forgotten!

It is most appropriate to mention Saints **Marcellinus and Peter**, as their **feast day is today**, June 2. When that date falls on a Sunday, the feast is not observed, as the Sunday celebration always takes precedent. About 7.5 miles southeast of St. Peter’s Basilica, there are catacombs bearing their names. Located on the ancient Via Labicana (known by a different name today), their tombs were adorned with a Latin epitaph from my favorite Church poet, Pope Damasus. He left little to the imagination, describing their martyrdom in perfect hexameter: Marcellinus, (the story of) your grave and likewise Peter’s/an executioner told to me, Damasus,

when I was a boy;/A savage butcher (he said) had given him these orders—/ that he straightaway sever your necks in a wild thicket/so that no one could recognize your tomb.” He goes on to note that the martyrs “cheerfully dug” their graves “with your own hands,” only adding to their bravery.

In 1913, as our own Cathedral was in its final stages of construction, the original marble tablet preserving a few letters from lines 6-9 were discovered during the cleaning of a cistern in the cloister of the ancient church of SS. Quattro Coronati, (the Church of the Four Crowned Martyrs), constructed in the 4th century. When cleaning in Rome, one never knows **what treasures** you will find! Very little is known historically about their lives; Marcellinus was a priest and Peter was an exorcist. Talk about a powerful one-two punch! (Next: Remaining Female Saints of the Canon)

- Cheapest stair climber ever. Now that it is light out early in the morning, I prefer to exercise on the steps (all 187 of them) from the corner of the James J. Hill House, down to the United Hospital. A glutton for punishment, I feel like I **earn my morning coffee** afterwards. Best of all, I **avoid watching** the television news, instead hearing only the sounds of the birds. While surely amongst the earliest exercisers, I am certainly not the only one to utilize the “natural” stair climber for exercise. My altitude app calculates that the steps provide approximately **116 feet of descent and ascent**.
- Speaking of elevation, our north bell tower rises 166 ft. from its base, visible on the Dayton Ave side of the building. The towers appear much taller when viewed from John Ireland Blvd. because of the slope. From that height, on top of the already high elevation of the building site, the sounds of our bells may be heard from quite a distance. I have clearly heard them **from the patio at Cossetta’s** and beyond. Many factors come into play, including the weather, due to the density of the air. Sound travels farther at night, but thankfully we turn off the bells at night!
- The **Catholic Services Appeal** is significantly behind its pace from last year. I am grateful for your support here at the Cathedral. Will you help us achieve our goal once again? Envelopes are in the pews and as mentioned in last week’s bulletin, we will take up a second collection today to assist in this effort. Remember, our parish receives 25% of all we collect, but only **if we make our goal**.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel  
Rector