

## DE MULIERIBUS FORTIBUS: STRONG WOMEN OF THE ROMAN CANON

In the past, “*mulier fortis*” was a term employed in ecclesial circles to describe a woman of strength and gravity. Latin for “strong woman,” it was really a compliment, a testament to a determined woman of God. *Fortis* has many meanings: strong, powerful, mighty, vigorous, firm, steadfast, courageous, brave, bold. When I was newly ordained, only a handful of parishes still had live-in housekeepers. These women (often widows) cared for rectories that housed at least three priests. They were attuned to all that was happening and absolutely called the shots in the rectory! Those days are long gone— I saw the ending of an era. Today, strong and courageous women are indispensable in the mission of the Church, often comprising upwards of 2/3 of a parish staff. The same ratio holds true in our Archdiocesan chancery, including key positions. The Church readily acknowledges the significant contributions that women make in the life of the Church.

My own experience of priestly ministry includes working alongside many wonderful, intelligent and indeed, strong and courageous women from whom I have learned so much. I recently visited **Calvary Cemetery**, and there one may find the grave markers of countless pioneer religious women from four of our oldest religious communities: Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Sisters of the Visitation, and Little Sisters of the Poor. Each grouping of graves tells a powerful story of intrepid women who often boarded a river boat to begin ministry “upriver” in the newly formed Diocese of Saint Paul. They flourished while making lasting contributions to our local church. Today, we benefit from the outstanding contributions of lay women, whether as parish volunteers or staff, each helping to keep the Church properly focused.

Among the **seven female martyrs** named in Eucharistic Prayer I (the first four of whom were previously covered), we observe a certain geographical alignment: Felicity, Perpetua (African origin), Agatha, Lucy (both from the island of Sicily), Agnes, Cecilia (Roman citizens to the core!) and finally Anastasia, who was from modern day Serbia. Today’s article discusses the remaining female saints. **Agnes** – According to the writings of St. Augustine and Prudentius, this great saint gained the double crown of virginity and martyrdom at the tender age of 13 (age 12 according to St. Ambrose). One account suggests burning, another execution by the sword. Concerning the reality of her martyrdom and the tremendous inspiration that followed, there may be **no doubt**. A century after her death, St. Ambrose wrote: “Even at the present day, many Roman maidens cherish the example of St. Agnes, as though she were still dwelling and living among us, animating themselves thereby to a perpetual preservation of purity.” Her courage in the face of threats powerfully witnesses to the virtue of chastity.

**Cecilia**— Patroness of music (because of the story that she heard heavenly music in her heart when she was married). Often depicted in religious art playing the organ, Cecilia is perhaps the subject of the most embroiled question in all of Roman hagiography. The accounts of her relics, her 2nd century burial in the catacombs of San Callisto, and the rediscovery of her relics in 1599, only add to her mystery, highlighting the difficulty in discerning fact from pious tradition with respect to early saints. St. Cecilia’s *cultus* flourished during the Middle Ages in Europe, and she is the subject of beautiful renaissance art, poetry and music. But it can be said with certitude that the Roman sisters of St. Cecilia are the ones who **shear the lambs’ wool** used to make the *pallium* worn by each metropolitan archbishop. Her carved image may be found in our 2013 organ case in the gallery. Look up!

**Anastasia**— You have to admit it would be difficult to share a feast day with the Christ-child, but Anastasia did just that in the old calendar— she reportedly **died on Christmas Day** 304 A.D. Since the earliest recorded celebration of Christmas on that day was 336 A.D., explaining the calendar anomaly. In the time of Pope St. Gregory (490 AD), the second Mass of Christmas Day was celebrated in the church named in her honor. A widow, she had given herself over to works of charity and mercy. She suffered martyrdom at Sirmium, a 1st century Roman *castrum* (military camp) in **present-day Croatia**, along with many other Christians. On the outskirts of the empire, perhaps it was safer to bring the Christians to a distant locale. Given three days to think about the order to sacrifice to the gods, she quickly replied that it was three days too many! Her answer would not change. Her body was brought to Constantinople, but today her relics lie in the Cathedral of St. Anastasia in Zadar, Croatia. Her name was inserted in the Roman Canon at the end of the 5th century. God

bless the many *mulieres fortes* of the Church, both yesterday and today.

- As St. Cecilia is the patroness of music, I express my gratitude to our choir members (both children and adults) for their hard work this season. I thank Director of Sacred Music **Lawrence Lawyer**, Choirmaster **Sean Vogt** and Children's Chorister Director **Jayne Windnagel** for their dedication to quality music and to our choir volunteers who have assisted behind the scenes. Special recognition goes to Dr. Vogt, who is taking leave of his position as Choirmaster after six seasons. His eclectic motet selections have introduced us all to some **wonderful new composers**, whom we otherwise may not have experienced. We wish Sean all the best in the future.
- Given the periodic **additions and revisions** to the **Catechism** of the Catholic Church over the past 25 years, a theological commentary will soon be published. According to Archbishop Fisichella of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, its purpose is "to offer an instrument to bishops, pastors and catechists by which to better understand the Catechism." With articles from 42 scholars, it will be a valuable resource and I welcome its publication.
- No, I **cannot explain** the success this season of the Minnesota Twins. I have never been so happy to be so wrong! I predicted they would improve, but this is ridiculous! Now that our "busy season" is over, I look forward to going to a few games this summer.
- The **oldest biblical text** ever found dates to the **7th century B.C.**, preserved in the form of two silver amulets. These rolled up pieces of silver contain a treasure—namely the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24-26: "May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause his face to Shine upon you and grant you Peace."
- Four Pinocchio's 🧒🧒🧒🧒 for Planned Parenthood's president. Even the left-leaning Washington Post lambasted Leana Wen's repeated use of a debunked statistic that "Thousands of women died every year pre-Roe" from illegal abortions. The Post issued a detailed article thoroughly debunking the canard.
- As June 30 draws near, we have **fallen behind nearly 5%** in Sunday stewardship. Most parishes in this Archdiocese are in the same boat. If you might consider a special fiscal year-end gift before June 30, it would be greatly appreciated. I am so grateful for your support.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel

Rector