

## **105// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. MARTHA**

**S**t. Martha, hostess of our Lord Jesu Christ, was born of a royal kindred. Her father was named Syro and her mother Encharia. The father of her was duke of Syria and places maritime, and Martha with her sister possessed by the heritage of their mother three places, that was, the castle Magdalen, and Bethany and a part of Jerusalem.

It is nowhere read that Martha had ever any husband ne fellowship of man, but she as a noble hostess ministered and served our Lord, and would also that her sister should serve him and help her, for she thought that all the world was not sufficient to serve such a guest.

### **THE VOYAGE TO MARSEILLES IN A RUDDERLESS SHIP**

**A**fter the ascension of our Lord, when the disciples were departed, she with her brother Lazarus and her sister Mary, also St. Maximin which baptized them, and to whom they were committed of the Holy Ghost, and many others, were put into a ship without sail, oars, or rudder governail, of the paynims [pagans], which by the conduct of our Lord they came all to Marseilles, and after came to the territory of Aquense or Aix, and there converted the people to the faith. Martha was right facound [eloquent] of speech, and courteous and gracious to the sight of the people.

### **THE GREAT DRAGON TARASCONUS**

**T**here was that time upon the river of Rhone, in a certain wood between Arles and Avignon, a great dragon, half beast and half fish, greater than an ox, longer than an horse, having teeth sharp as a sword, and horned on either side, head like a lion, tail like a serpent, and defended him with two wings on either side, and could not be beaten with cast of stones ne with other armour, and was as strong as twelve lions or bears; which dragon lay hiding and lurking in the river, and perished them that passed by and drowned ships. He came thither by sea from Galicia, and was engendered of Leviathan, which is a serpent of the water and is much wood [mad], and of a beast called Bonacho, that is engendered in Galicia. And when he is pursued he casts out of his belly behind, his ordure, the space of an acre of land on them that follow him, and it is bright as glass, and what it toucheth it burneth as fire.

To whom Martha, at the prayer of the people, came into the wood, and found him eating a man. And she cast on him holy water, and showed to him the cross, which anon was overcome, and standing still as a sheep, she bound him with her own girdle, and then was slain with spears and glaives [lances] of the people.

The dragon was called of them that dwelled in the country Tarasconus, whereof, in remembrance of him that place is called Tarasconus, which tofore was called Nerluc, and the Black Lake, because there be woods shadowous and black.

## ST. MARTHA'S CONVENT

And there the blessed Martha, by licence of Maximin her master, and of her sister, dwelled and abode in the same place after, and daily occupied in prayers and in fastings, and thereafter assembled and were gathered together a great convent of sisters, and builded a fair church at the honour of the blessed Mary virgin, where she led a hard and a sharp life. She eschewed flesh and all fat meat, eggs, cheese and wine; she ate but once a day. An hundred times a day and an hundred times a night she kneeled down and bowed her knees.

## THE DROWNED MAN OF AVIGNON

On a time, at Avignon, when she preached between the town and the river of Rhone, there was a young man on that other side of the river desiring to hear her words, and had no boat to pass over. He began to swim naked, but he was suddenly taken by the strength of the water, and anon suffocate and drowned, whose body unnethe [not easily] was found the next day. And when it was taken up, it was presented at the feet of Martha for to be raised to life. She then, in manner of a cross, fell down to the ground and prayed in this manner: O Adonay, Lord Jesu Christ, which raisedst sometime my well-beloved brother, behold my most dear guest to the faith of them that stand here, and raise this child.

And she took him by the hand, and forthwith he arose living and received the holy baptism.

## THE MIRACULOUS IMAGE

Eusebius telleth in the book of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that a woman named Emorissa, after that she was healed of our Lord, she made in her court an image like unto Jesu Christ, with cloth and hem, like as she saw him when she was healed, and worshipped him much devoutly. The herbs that grew under the image tofore that she had touched the hem, were of no virtue, but, after that she had touched it, they were of so much virtue that many sick people by them were healed. That woman Emorissa, whom our Lord healed, Ambrose saith that it was Martha. St. Jerome saith, and it is had in *Historia Tripartita*, that Julianus Apostata took away that image that Emorissa made, and set his own there, which, with the stroke of thunder, was all tobroken.

## THE DEATH OF ST. MARTHA

Our Lord came to her a year tofore her death, and showed to her that she should depart out of this world, and all that year she was sick and laboured in the fevers, and eight days tofore her death she heard the heavenly fellowship of angels bearing her sister's soul into heaven, and anon did do come all the convent of brethren and of sisters, and said to them: My friends and most sweet fellows, I pray you to rejoice and enjoy with me, for I see the fellowship of angels bear the soul of my sister Mary unto heaven. O most fair and sweet sister, thou livest now with thy master and my guest in the blessed seat in heaven.

### She is Comforted by Christ and by St. Mary Magdalene

And then anon Martha said to them that were present, that her death was nigh, and bade to light the tapers about her, and that they should wake unto her death. And about midnight tofore the day of her death, they that should watch her were heavy of sleep and slept, and there came a great wind and extinguished and did out the lights. She then, seeing a great tourbe [throng] of wicked spirits, began to pray and said: My father Eli, my dear guest, these deceivers be gathered for to devour me, bringing written, all the evil deeds that ever I did. O blessed Eli be not withdrawn from me, but intend in to mine help.

And forthwith she saw her sister coming to her, holding a brand in her hand, and lighted the tapers and lamps, and as each of them called other by their name, Christ came to them saying: Come, my well-beloved hostess, for where I am thou shalt be with me. Thou hast received me in thine harbour and I shall receive thee in mine heaven, and all them that call upon thee, I shall hear them for thy love.

### *In Manus Tuas*

Then the hour of her death approaching, she commanded that she should be borne out of the house that she might behold and look up into heaven, and to lay her on the earth, and to hold the sign of the cross tofore her, and saying these words, she prayed: My sweet guest, I beseech thee to keep me, thy poor creature, and like as thou hast vouchsafed to be lodged with me, so I beseech thee to receive me into thine heavenly harbour.

And then she bade that the passion after Luke should be read tofore her, and when this was said: *Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum* [Father, into your hands I commend my spirit], she gave up her spirit and died in our Lord.

### Our Lord and Bishop Frontonius Sing the Office of the Dead

The next day following, that was the Sunday, whiles they said lauds about her body, and did her obsequies, and about the hour of tierce, at Petrogoricke, our Lord appeared to the blessed Frontonius singing mass, which after the epistle slept in his chair, and said to him: My wellbeloved Frontonius, if thou wilt fulfil that thou behightest [promised] long sith [ago] to my hostess Martha, arise anon and follow me.

Whose commandment he obeyed, and suddenly both came to Tarascona, and singing the office about the body and the other answering, they with their own hands laid the body into the sepulchre.

And troth it was that at Petrogoricke, when they had sung in the choir and the deacon should go read the gospel and receive the benediction, they awoke the bishop, demanding the benediction. Then the bishop awoke and said: Why have ye awakened me, my brethren? Our Lord Jesu Christ hath led me to his hostess Martha, and we have laid her in her sepulchre. Now send thither messengers for to fetch our ring of gold and our gloves, which whiles I made me

ready to bury her, I delivered them to the sexton, and I have forgotten them there because ye awoke me so soon.

Then were messengers sent forth, and as the bishop said, they found his ring and one glove which they brought again, and that other the sexton retained for a witness and memory.

### **THE CONVERSION OF KING CLOVIS**

**A**nd the blessed Frontonius added thereto, saying that after her sepulture [burial], a brother of the same place, a learned man in the law, demanded of our Lord what was his name? To whom he answered not, but showed a book open in his hand in which was written this versicle: In everlasting memory shall be my rightful hostess, and she shall dread none evil in the last day.

And when he should turn the leaves of the book, in every leaf he found that same written, where afterward many miracles were showed and done at her tomb. Then Clovis, king of France, was after this made a Christian man, and baptized of St. Remigius, and suffering great pain in his reins [kidneys], came to her tomb and there received very health. For which cause he enriched that place, and the space of three miles way about on both sides of the river of Rhone, as well towns as castles, he gave to the same place, and that place he made free.

### **ST. MARTHA'S BIOGRAPHER**

**M**artilla, her servant, wrote her life, which afterward went into Sclavonia, and there preached the gospel of Christ, and after ten years, from the death of Martha, she rested in our Lord.

Then let us pray to this blessed Martha, hostess of our Lord, that after this short life we may be harboured in heaven with our blessed Lord Jesu Christ, to whom be given joy, laud and praising, world without end. Amen.

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The [iconography of this saint](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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