



## *2021 Walk to Bethlehem*



### *Sts. Agatha & Lucy*

Sts. Agatha and Lucy (Lucia) are two of the most renowned virgin martyrs in Catholic history. Each lived in Sicily and are venerated with deep devotion by Catholics throughout Sicily. Agatha and Lucy are both named in the Canon of the Mass and have statues on the Colonnade of 140 Saints in Vatican City.

Like many early saints, it can be difficult to know what aspects of her legend are historically accurate but her witness to the faith is undoubtedly a source of ongoing inspiration for us today.

### *St. Agatha*

Born in the year of 231 in Catania, Sicily, it is said that Agatha was a young, beautiful girl from a rich and well-known family in the early Church. As a young girl, she resolutely declared herself a Christian in the midst of a persecution and promised her life to God.

A Roman official who admired her beauty tried to blackmail her. He threatened to charge her as a Christian unless she consented to sex with him. She refused, so he placed her in a brothel. There, she denied customers, and was thrown into prison, where she was beaten and tortured.

None of this succeeded in turning her from her faith, and she was sent back to her cell without food or drink for four days. There, she was comforted by a vision of St. Peter, who filled her dungeon with heavenly light.

She was further tortured until death in 251. One of the tortures she suffered was to have her breasts cut off, which is why she is patron against breast cancer. She is honored in Sicily because devotion to her has stopped eruptions of the nearby volcano, Mt. Etna. By extension, she is patron saint of guilds of bell makers, either because fire alarms use bells, or because the casting of a bell involves lava-like molten metal.

Her feast day is a major celebration for the people of Sicily (see procession in Catania on the right), where she was martyred, both because of her protection noted above and because she is an emblem of the people's struggle against Roman rule. St. Agatha is said to have inspired the following Sicilian motto: "A Saintly and spontaneous mind, love of God and liberation of the homeland."





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### St. Lucy

Lucy, or Lucia, was born in 283 to a rich official of Roman noble heritage in Syracuse, Sicily. Unfortunately, he died when Lucy was five years old, leaving Lucy and her mother, Eutychia, without a guardian/protector.

As she grew older, Lucy took a vow of chastity and dedicated her life to Jesus. Eutychia, who suffered with a bleeding malady for years, wanted Lucy to marry. Even if she were aware of Lucy's vow, it in all likelihood would not have stopped her from finding a proper arrangement for Lucy. To secure Lucy's future, she made plans with the son of a prominent and wealthy pagan family.

Lucy visited the tomb of St. Agatha with prayers for assistance. In a dream, St. Agatha told Lucy that her mother's malady would be cured because of Lucy's faith and Lucy would be the glory of Syracuse as she was of Catania. Once she was cured, Eutychia was persuaded by Lucy to give some of her dowry to the poor.

The betrothed young man took offense at being spurn by Lucy and her mother and reported that Lucy was Christian to the governor of Syracuse. When Lucy refused to offer sacrifices to the Roman emperor's image, Lucy, like Agatha, was placed in a brothel.

When the guards who came to take her away were unable to move her, even after hitching her to a team of oxen. The guards heaped bundles of wood around her but it wouldn't burn so they finally resorted to their swords, and Lucy met her death with a sword thrust through her throat.

One legend around Lucy and her eyes is that she foretold the governor of his punishment to come along with other calamities to befall more Roman officials. So enraged was the governor that he ordered her eyes to be gouged out. For this reason, Lucy is often shown with a plate of two eye-balls and a palm branch, symbolizing victory over evil.



Lucy, whose name means "light," is the patron saint of those suffering with blindness and eye illnesses.