

Real Life Stories
The Slave Girl Called Blandina

It was in the second century that Christianity came to Lyons and established the church of Christ in nearby Viennes. As in the days of the Acts, persecution soon arose when the believers were afflicted with every kind of shame and personal injuries. Some were forced out of their homes and businesses so that nothing belonging to them could appear in public. Mobs were formed to beat, stone and rob them. Due to fear, unbelieving servants sought to protect themselves by charging their Christian masters with gross crimes such as cannibalism, incest, and other shameful practices.

It was during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (177) the most dreadful persecution within the city of Lyons reached its apex. When Christians were imprisoned they were placed in the worst part of the dark cramped prison. The “fortunate” ones suffocated there. At one point forty-eight Christians, who already had been tortured, were taken to the amphitheater to “entertain” the crowd during a Roman holiday by being thrown to wild beasts.

The saints were given the option of denying their faith and living or being put to death. It was not the quick death of beheading or being shot, but deaths sought for as the most excruciating long lasting durations.

Among the forty-eight were Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina and Attalus. Of the forty-eight Blandina was a concern to many for she was a very frail girl. There was concern that she would recant under the torture. However, through her God would show His sustaining grace.

Maturus and Sanctus suffered every torture not as dreadful afflictions but as those who were striving for the crown of life. Great was their torture as they were subjected to the violence of the wild beasts, until at last, the iron chair was brought in. Lashed to it with the fire under it they were roasted alive as the respiratory system was afflicted with the fumes of their own burning flesh. Despite such afflictions the only word heard from Sanctus was his confession of faith in Christ. After some time of unspeakable agony, the door to eternal life swung open wide, and having made a good confession, they entered the joy of their Lord.

When it was time for Blandina, she was tied to a stake and wild beasts were set on her. Although she was tortured in a horrible manner, this frail girl proved the truth of the words of scripture, “His strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). By divine enabling she remained faithful and repeated to every question, “I am a Christian and we committed no wrongdoing.”

Her tormentors, seeing they could not break her and at that time none of the wild beasts touched her, she was taken down from the stake and cast again into prison to be kept for another day. One of the ways her tormentors sought to weaken her was by forcing her to watch the sufferings of her companions, but still she remained steadfast.

It was on the last day of the contests she and Ponticus, who was a lad of about fifteen years, were brought into the theater. For the previous days they had been made to witness the sufferings, torturing and deaths of other saints, all the while being pressed to deny their faith. They were noble saints who refused to deny their Christ and swear by the idols.

Ponticus died first, and Blandina remained facing death rejoicing, as if being called to a marriage feast rather than wild beasts. Finally, as the last of the martyrs, she was scourged, placed on a red-hot grate, enclosed in a net and thrown before a wild steer who tossed her into the air with his horns, and at last killed with a dagger. One cannot help but stand and acknowledge this young lady was outstanding and I wonder what would I have done.

After the bodies of the witnesses were exposed for six days, they were burned to ashes and thrown into the river Rhone. The bodies of those who had suffocated in prison were thrown to the dogs, and guards were stationed to prevent the remaining Christians from burying them. The pagans hoped to prevent even the hope of resurrection for the Christians.

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Blandina honored her God by her faithfulness and courage in the face of danger and ultimately death. Today there is in Lyons a marker at the place of their martyrdom in the ancient amphitheater. However, she and those other noble believers have entered into their eternal rest, never again to suffer, be humiliated, or shed another tear. For them it is at home with the Lord which is very far better.

To such saints we can utter nothing better than the divine commentary:

“Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance . . . others had a trial of cruel mocking and scourging, yea moreover bonds and imprisonment . . . They were slain with the sword . . . destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy.” (Heb.11:35-39)