



St Philomena - Mackenzie

Feast day: August 11th

Patron of: infants, babies and youth

Birth: c. January 10, 291

Death: c. August 10, 304

Canonized: 1837

Philomena – which means “daughter of light” – was a Greek princess who lived on the Island of Corfu during the fourth century. When Philomena was about 13 years old, her parents (who were of Greek royalty) were called to Rome because the Emperor Diocletian wanted to inflict war on the Island. Having seen Philomena’s beauty and having been impressed with her manners, Diocletian asked for her hand in marriage as a sort of peace treaty. Her parents accepted the offer, but because Philomena had vowed her virginity to God, she refused the marriage proposal.

In an attempt to get Philomena to marry the Emperor, her parents brought her to Diocletian, who tried to win her over. But, she still refused his hand in marriage. As a result, Diocletian put her in jail and ordered her to be executed. While in jail, she had a vision of the Virgin Mary, who warned her about her fate, but promised heavenly glory and protection when she endured tortures.

From that point on, there is very little documented about Philomena’s life. Apparently, after nearly 40 days in prison, Philomena was tied to a post, flogged, and left to die in her jail cell. But angels appeared from heaven and healed her wounds with a miraculous balm. So, the Emperor then ordered to have her drowned with an anchor tied to her neck. That attempt to kill her was also unsuccessful – angels returned her back to dry land completely unharmed. Later, she was ordered to be killed by archers. But, as she was shot, the arrows returned upon the bowmen and killed them instead. Accused of witchcraft, Philomena was finally decapitated and died in Rome, Italy on August 10th.

On May 24, 1802, the remains of a teenage girl were discovered in the Catacombs of Saint Priscilla at the Via Salaria in Rome. An inscription containing the Latin words “pax tecum filumena” (transcribed as “peace be with you, Philomena”) was on the tomb. Also cut on the tomb were emblems of a lily and palm (to indicate virginity and martyrdom); an anchor; scourge; and three arrows pointing in

opposite directions (one with a curved line, signifying fire). Combined with the inscription, these symbols were thought to have symbolized the life of Philomena and the different tortures she endured in testimony of her faith and love of Jesus Christ.

I didn't choose Philomena to be my confirmation saint, it was she that chose me. When I was 4 weeks old, I became very ill with whooping cough and bronchiolitis. My parents were told that it was going to be difficult for me to fight it and pull through, being so little and not having had any of my immunisations as yet. My parents alongside my grandparents, kept a bedside vigil praying to St Philomena, the patron saint of babies, infants and youths to help me and protect me. On the fourth day of being in hospital, I was taken off the oxygen as I could breath for myself and all my other vitals were improving. St Philomena saved me but that's not where the story ends.

At 10 months old, I had an accident where boiling water burned both my legs and feet. I spent over a week in hospital receiving treatment which included 2 minor surgeries, a larger surgery and a blood transfusion. It was told to my parents that I would require skin grafting to my entire left leg and that I would continue to need grafting of that leg till I stopped growing. Again, my parents and grandparents prayed to St Philomena to come to my aid and protect me. On the day of my large surgery, where the skin grafting was to be performed, the doctor was shocked when my bandages were removed as my legs had started to heal on their own and I no longer required to have my entire left leg grafted but just five patches across both legs. I was also only required to wear my burn suit for 6 months even though my parents were told that I would need to wear them for 12 to 18 months. The scarring on my legs is also minimal.

St Philomena has come to my aid when I have needed it most and protected me. She has chosen me and I, in return, have chosen her.

