



## **Saint of the Month for November 2023: Saint Cecilia**

### **Teaching Tips for Grades 3-5**

People know St. Cecilia as the Patroness of Music; however, there is no record that she played an instrument! The reason for this seeming disconnection is most interesting.

Saint Cecilia is an Italian saint who lived in the Roman Empire in the early days of the Catholic Church, born around 200 A.D. She was so special in her holiness that she already had her own feast day established by the end of the 400s, and we honor her to this day. St. Cecilia's Feast Day is November 22 of each year. Once a girl or boy reads about this captivating saint, it is understandable why she has been remembered for over 1700 years.

This early saint of the Church was born in Rome during the time when Christians were persecuted for being faithful to Jesus Christ. Romans worshipped man-made gods. They had not yet learned about the One True God, the Holy Trinity. So, Romans were expected to worship the various Roman gods. Sometimes emperors considered themselves gods and commanded worship! In this setting, Cecilia was born into a wealthy family and was raised Christian. What is known about St. Cecilia is a legend. A legend is based on truth, but not all the information can be verified as true. (Today this type of writing is known as "historical fiction.") Cecilia loved the Lord Jesus and prayed often and read the early Gospels about the life of Jesus. Cecilia was so devoted to Jesus that she wanted to give her whole self to Him, not to marry, and offered Him her virginity. Her body and soul would be His.

Unfortunately for Cecilia, she was betrothed to a rich Roman pagan man named Valerian and was forced to marry. The story has been handed down that during the wedding, while the organ music was playing, Cecilia only sang to God; her heart was His. The organ became a symbol representing St. Cecilia and associated her with music. On the wedding night, Cecilia told Valerian that she had an angel of God who watched over her and if his intentions toward her were not good, he would be struck down. Valerian was troubled by this, of course, and Cecilia persuaded Valerian to visit Pope Urban who was close by, in hiding from the Romans. Valerian did speak to Pope Urban about Christ and His teachings and was converted to Christianity, along with his brother Tiburtius. Valerian agreed to live in chastity with Cecilia, so she could keep her virginity for Jesus.



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Valerian and Tiburtius began to devote themselves to preparing Christian burials for those who were being martyred for their faith at this dangerous time. This action was against Roman law and the two brothers were arrested and executed by the Roman prefect (official) Almachius. Almachius planned to confiscate the brothers' riches, so Cecilia began to distribute her husband's goods to the poor. Thereupon, Cecilia was arrested.

Cecilia was commanded to sacrifice to the Roman gods. She refused to do so. Her worship was for the One True God, Jesus Christ! Almachius was furious and ordered Cecilia to be brought back to her home and boiled in her bathtub. The legend describes Cecilia as feeling no pain! Upon this, Almachius demanded that Cecilia be beheaded. The headsman struck her three times, but failed in killing her. Cecilia survived three more days and died on November 22. Pope Urban buried her in the bishops' tomb and consecrated her house, which became a place of pilgrimage.

Saint Cecilia was considered a model of Christian values. Rome was not a place where Christians were free to practice their faith, but Cecilia did, even to the point of death. She demonstrates that a person who loves Jesus above all can do heroic things, because Jesus supplies the grace.

Prayer to St. Cecilia:

Saint Cecilia, pray for us  
to be faithful to Jesus Christ the Lord,  
even when it is hard. Amen