

November 25

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Catherine of Alexandria (4th cent.) martyr

Today the Orthodox churches commemorate Catherine of Alexandria, a martyr and witness to God's wisdom. The Catholic church discontinued its liturgical commemoration of the saint when it last revised its calendar in 1969, and the Anglican church has retained a simplified form of Catherine's memorial.

Catherine's story is one of the clearest examples of how a saint's life can strongly touch entire generations of Christians when hagiographers, using their faith and imagination, manage to write an account that conveys a powerful message despite an almost total lack of historical information.

According to tradition, Catherine was a young woman from a noble family of Alexandria who was tried by the Roman emperor Maximinus Darius because she was a Christian. When she refused to deny her faith, the emperor told her that she could save her life by marrying him, but Catherine refused. During her trial, her wisdom so impressed her prosecutors that most of them converted to Christianity, including the emperor's wife.

The traditional story goes on to say that after Catherine's martyrdom, which she faced together with those she had led to the faith, her body was carried to Mount Sinai by an angel. Her mortal remains are still kept there today, in the monastery that was built on the site and dedicated to her. This legend arose in the Middle Ages, probably as an attempt to explain how the saint's relics came to be transferred from Alexandria to Mount Sinai. It is not known in what era the relics were transferred.

There are many literary versions of Catherine's story. In the West, the best known are her Latin *Passio* and the Life Jacob of Varazze included in his *Golden Legend*. In the Middle Ages, the missionary work of the mendicant Orders ensured that Catherine was venerated throughout the Christian world.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Eph 6:10-17; Lk 21:12-19

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Catherine of Alexandria, martyr

Isaac Watts (d. 1748), hymnographer

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (16 hatur/hedar):

Dedication of the church of St Onophrius (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Catherine, martyr in Egypt

MARONITES:

Clement (1st-2nd cent.), pope

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Catherine of Alexandria, megalomartyr

Mercurius of Caesarea (3rd cent.), megalomartyr

OLD CATHOLICS:

Catherine of Alexandria, virgin and martyr