

January 20

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Fabian (d. 250), pastor, and **Sebastian** (d. ca. 287) martyrs

Since antiquity the Western Church has commemorated two of its most famous and beloved martyrs on January 20: Fabian, bishop of Rome, and Sebastian, a Roman army official.

Fabian was elected pastor of the city of Rome around the year 236. During his pontificate he made a significant contribution to the organization of the Capitoline diocese by dividing the city into seven deaconships, so that the growing needs of the Church and the marginalized sectors of the population could be better met.

A defender of the orthodoxy of Origen, Fabian quickly became popular well beyond the Western churches, as his funeral oration, written by Cyprian of Carthage, attests. He died a martyr, a high-profile victim of the persecutions ordered by the emperor Decius in the middle of the third century in an attempt to check the Church's growth and independence.

On the same day several decades later, Sebastian made his own martyrdom the culminating event of his life. A native of Milan, at least according to Ambrose, Sebastian was a high-ranking official in the imperial army. Taking advantage of his position at court, he managed to save many Christians from persecution, and he spread the Gospel among the ranks of the Roman army.

According to his famous *Passio*, written in the fifth century by Arnobius the Younger, the emperor Diocletian cut short Sebastian's brilliant career with a death sentence. He died - so the iconographic tradition has always depicted him - pierced by dozens of arrows. On the site of his tomb a basilica was built, and in the ninth century it was named after the young soldier and martyr.

BIBLICAL READINGS

1 Pet 4:12-19; Jn 17:11b-19 (Fabian)

Heb 10:32-36; Mt 10:17-22 (Sebastian)

Eutimius the Great (377-473) monk

On January 20 of the year 473, Eutimius the Great, a monk from Melitene, Armenia, died in the *lavra* he had founded.

Eutimius lost his father at a very young age and was brought up by the bishop of Melitene. He grew up listening to and meditating Scripture, and acquired a strong *sensus fidei* that accompanied him for the rest of his life and in every situation.

His love of silence and his reluctance to accept the ecclesiastical career he knew awaited him drove him to seek solitude in Palestine, where he went with the desire to imitate Christ's life in the desert.

There he gave such convincing witness with his life to the beauty of the Gospel that he led many of his neighbors in the desert to Christian faith, most of them Arabic-speaking nomads. A *lavra* gradually formed around him, and disciples began coming from great distances to join it.

Eutimius played an important role in church events of those years, and it was partly due to his efforts that the church of Jerusalem accepted the Council of Chalcedon.

The form of monastic life in Eutimius' *lavra* - balanced, human and far from the excesses and eccentricities into which monks often drifted in this era - inspired the *typikón* that Eutimius' disciple Saba wrote for his own monastery. This *typikón* became, in turn, the basis for the monastic regulations for anchorite life used throughout Palestine.

BIBLICAL READINGS

2 Cor 4:6-15; Lk 6:17-23a

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Richard Rolle of Hampole (d. 1349), spiritual writer

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Fabian, pope and martyr

Sebastian, martyr (Roman calendar)

Sebastian, martyr (Ambrosian calendar)

Agnes (3rd cent.), virgin and martyr (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (11 tubah/terr):

Holy Theophany or Glorious Baptism of Jesus

LUTHERANS:

Sebastian, martyr at Rome

MARONITES:

Euthimius the Great, monk

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Euthimius the Great, monk

Euthimius of Tarnovo (14th-15th cent.), patriarch (Bulgarian church)

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Sebastian, martyr (Malabar Church)

OLD CATHOLICS:

Sebastian, martyr