

St. Rita of Cascia

May 22



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1386–1456 • Italy

Rita lived in a tumultuous time in Italy. People from rival families would kill each other in cold blood. Even though Rita wanted to be a nun, her parents arranged her marriage into one of these fighting families. Rita's new husband, Paolo, had a short temper and was often unkind to Rita. But the more she prayed for him, the more Paolo changed. He grew kind and took his Faith seriously. He even gave up fighting against a rival family. But even though Paolo tried to live peacefully, those in the rival family did not. Paolo was cruelly murdered, and Rita became a widow.

Sorrowing over her loss, Rita prayed for her husband's soul. Now more than ever, she believed in peace instead of violence. She did not want her sons' lives to be ruined by murder and revenge. But the boys' uncle had other ideas. He took Rita's sons away from her and raised them with thoughts of revenge. When, in a few years' time, both of her sons died of illness, Rita sorrowed over their loss. Her only consolation was that they had escaped lives of violence and murder.

Now that her family was gone, Rita was free to become a nun. But the convent refused to accept her. Even though she had forgiven the rival family that had murdered her husband, that did not mean the fight was over. The nuns were afraid the rival family would harm them if Rita entered their convent. They told Rita that she could become a nun on one condition: she must make peace between her family and the family that had killed her husband.

After much prayer, Rita told her husband's family that they must let God's peace enter their hearts. She pointed to Jesus on the Cross and reminded them that Jesus had forgiven His enemies. Her words touched their souls, and they forgave their enemies for Paulo's murder. The two rival families chose to live in peace.

Now Rita was free to enter the convent. She would pray before her favorite image of the suffering Christ. Because of the sorrows in her own life, she felt deeply in her heart all of Jesus's sorrows. Her heart wept over the crown of thorns pressed into Jesus's head and the cruel nails in Jesus's hands and feet. One day, she felt so sorry for Jesus's wounds that she begged Him to let her share a little in His suffering. A small, open wound, which seemed to have been made by a thorn, miraculously appeared on her forehead. Jesus had shared with her the pain of His crown of thorns, just as she had begged of Him. Rita bore the open wound upon her forehead until she died a holy death.

St. Rita of Cascia, help me to offer my sufferings to Jesus!