

# Once Upon a SAINT

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## St. Tryphon, Great Martyr and Holy Unmercenary Healer



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Dearest children, Tryphon was a young boy who looked after geese in a place called Kampsade which was in Phrygia (now Turkey). Watching geese isn't a particularly fun job. Geese don't do much except squawk and make huge messes. But Tryphon was diligent in his work, and figured that even the most humble job could glorify God. In fact, he spent all his time praying and working for God's sake.

Pretty soon people realized that Tryphon's geese were the healthiest and happiest around. As Tryphon sang hymns in the field, the geese also seemed to praise God with every loud screech and call. One day another young boy approached Tryphon. He carried his pig.

"Tryphon, my pig is sick. Can you help?"

"Of course! Let's take a look at her." Tryphon gently cradled the sow and lifted his eyes to heaven. "O Lord, You made the animals on the earth to show Your beauty and goodness. You asked us to care for them as good stewards. This pig isn't feeling well, and this saddens your servant. I surrender this dear pig into Your hands, O Lord. I trust in Your love, take care of everything. Thank you for Your loving kindness!"

Tryphon handed the pig back to the other boy. "Here she is! Don't worry, she will be fine, and she will have a beautiful litter of piglets in two months!"

"Piglets! I didn't know! Gee, thanks! Can I give you one of the piglets in return for helping me?"

Tryphon smiled. "No need, God doesn't charge for His gifts, and I didn't do anything. God healed your pig. Just be sure to thank the Lord!"

Word spread, and people came from all over with their animals, asking Tryphon for help. Sometimes he told them to give the animal a healing herb in their food. Always he prayed, and God worked through him and healed the animals. People began to come with their own illnesses, and they were also healed. Tryphon cast out demons through his prayer and fasting, most notably once casting out an evil spirit from the daughter of the Roman emperor Gordian. Tryphon refused to take credit for the healings, though, always saying that since it was God who healed, he would take no payment. God being praised through the healing was reward enough! When he was forced to take payment anyway, he would immediately give it away to the poor.

One day there was a dark cloud that came over the town. A woman and her children ran past Tryphon.

"What's wrong?" Tryphon called after them.

"Locusts!" The woman shrieked. "They will soon reach the city! They are eating everything, the fields, the food in our cupboards! They are even biting the children! We will all starve!"

Tryphon ran to the edge of city and raised his arms in prayer: *"O Lord our God, when at the beginning of Your creation You fashioned Heaven and earth, You adorned heaven with the great lights, that they might shine upon the earth, and that, seeing them, we might wonder at the only Creator and Master of creation. You adorned the earth with greenery and grass and all kinds of plants bearing seed according to their kind, and You formed the flowers to give forth fragrance, and blessed them. Look down from Your holy dwelling place, O Master, upon this field and this city. Bless it and protect it from every poison, wrath, evil, sinful curiosity, and wicked workings of malicious men, from locusts and insects, blight, infection, frost, worms and all the rest, and grant it to bear fruit at the proper season, filling it with Your blessing. Drive out from it every beast, reptile, wrath and affliction that attacks it in danger. For blessed and glorified is Your all-precious and magnificent name: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."*

When this prayer had left Tryphon's lips, the locusts departed and drowned themselves in the nearby river.

When Tryphon was 17, he was brought to Nicaea before the emperor Decius, around the year 250.

"I have heard," snorted the emperor, "that you confess this so-called God of the Kosmos, Jesus."

"I do! Would you like to know about Him too?"

"I would not! Jupiter is the mightiest god. How dare you deny him and Juno, and all the other great gods! If you must, call Jupiter "Zeus," but Jesus is not the same as Jupiter at all."

Tryphon nodded. "You are right that Jesus is not Jupiter! Jupiter fights with other gods and is moved by whim and silly disputes. He is not all-powerful because his mood changes as the wind does. The Almighty God is unmovable, unchangeable in every way, and all-powerful. He is good and loving in everything."

Decius stood and shouted angrily: "That's enough of your blasphemy! Let's see if you confess this God after being beaten!"

And so, Tryphon was beaten, raked with iron hooks, burned, and made to walk through the city with nails driven through his feet. It must have caused him great pain, but this teenage boy sang loudly to God:

"Glory to You, O Lord! Please make me worthy of suffering for You, and of entering into Your heavenly kingdom!!"

Decius got tired of torturing this cheerful soul. Too many people were converting to Christianity, thanks to Tryphon's courageous example. He ordered Tryphon beheaded.

Christians collected his body and head, intending to bury him in Nicaea, where he had died. He appeared to them, however, requesting that his body be brought to his native city. Later he was transferred to Constantinople and then to Rome, where his head is still incorrupt. The Nicaeans put an icon and lamp up in the Church to commemorate him. It used to be that when the anniversary of St. Tryphon's death came around every February 1, dry lily bulbs that were placed in the lamp would bloom beautiful flowers to adorn the icon. It was a lovely February miracle.

Interestingly enough, lilies are a medicinal plant (but toxic to cats), and the bulbs are used in eastern cuisine as a root vegetable or prepared as medicine for coughs and respiratory ailments. St. Tryphon is invoked to help with birds, pests in the farm and for the health of plants, especially medicinal or nutritious plants.