

Once Upon a SAINT

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Sophia, Faith, Hope, and Charity, Martyrs



St. Sophia and her daughters:
Faith, Hope and Charity

Picture by Eleanora Denzer age 13, from
St. Nicholas Melkite Greek Catholic Church

My Dearest Children,

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian (117-138 AD), in a quiet town in Italy, there lived a young Greek-Christian widow named Sophia. She had three young daughters. Pistis (Faith in English!) was 12, Elpis (Hope!) was 10, and Agape (Charity!) was 9. The girls worked hard to keep the house tidy, and they studied the Bible. They were hospitable to everyone they met and shared everything they had. People began to come to them from all over the country because they were so well known for their generosity and uplifting and holy conversation.

It wasn't long before Emperor Hadrian heard of the holy women too! He sent soldiers to bring them to him. Sophia knew about Emperor Hadrian and his hatred for Christians.

Sophia told her girls: "Pistis, Elpis, and Agape, we have been training our hearts and souls for martyrdom. We know that because of our outspoken love for Christ and for Truth that our lives might be asked for, as a final sacrifice. This day is here, my dear girls. There will be pain, yes, but it counts for nothing compared to the joy that is coming soon! Don't be afraid!

Be strong in your Faith! For God is a God of Truth and Goodness!

Be strong in your Hope! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near!

Be strong in your Love! For by your own witness of love, many will enter the Kingdom of God!"

With these words in their hearts, the mother and daughters entered Hadrian's palace. He put on a great show for them. Giant stone gods were decorated in more finery and gold than they'd ever imagined! Dancers performed great feats and beautiful performances. Musicians played music that filled their hearts with longing. There was a table set with the most delectable foods of the time: roast pig, grapes, olives, nuts, wines and fresh baked bread.

Emperor Hadrian gestured at the incredible display.

"Beautiful ladies," announced Hadrian proudly, "come, share in this party I have planned for you! To start with, light the incense before the great goddess Diana, who you see before you, and then, let the festival begin!"

The girls looked at each other with alarm.

"We want no part in this idolatry!"

Hadrian stroked his beard and looked at them indulgently: "Silly girls! It's just a party! Word has come to me that you hate Rome, that you hate her gods, and you consider her parties immoral! But this is just for fun. Surely you can't hate fun?! Surely you can't despise those of us who just want to get along and enjoy life?!"

Pistis stepped forward, and making the Sign of the Cross, bravely announced: "Emperor Hadrian, we see little value in your offer, only harm. Why should we choose music, riches, food and the other pleasures you've offered us, when they will only distract us from our dearest Lord Jesus and even offend Him?"

Elpis likewise made the Sign of the Cross: "Emperor, the riches you offer are only dust in comparison to the riches of Heaven and eternal bliss with our Sweet Jesus."

Agape smiled sweetly, and blessing herself prayed loudly with her hands raised toward Heaven: "Jesus! We love You with all our hearts! You are All we desire!"

Sophia was so proud of her daughters in that moment that she beamed with happiness. Hadrian saw her joyful face and his own face turned black with anger.

Hadrian spat out his enraged words: "You three will all die then! And you, stupid mother, you will watch them die, and then you will suffer, knowing that if you hadn't taught them to spurn the gods of Rome, that they would be living with full enjoyment of Rome's riches and pleasures."

The girls replied with one voice: "God is Everything to us! We are not afraid!"

Hadrian was spooked out by the three young girls' firm faith, but decided to try to kill them and sway them one by one. First he tried to boil Pistis, but when that didn't work, he had her beheaded.

He turned to Elpis: "will you offer incense to the gods, or join your sister?"

Elpis smiled: "join my sister in Heaven, of course!"

Hadrian threw Elpis into a furnace, but when she walked out unharmed, he had her beheaded as well. Turning to

Agape, Hadrian growled: "Well?! Do you join your sisters?!" "Of course, I am very eager to meet my Beloved Lord today!" And so she did.

All three sisters were buried. Witnesses who saw the miracles and their holy courage became Christian. Hadrian hoped to stamp out Christianity, but instead, many hundreds of people turned to Christ, and we are still honoring these holy women and telling their story today.

Sophia, meanwhile, knelt that night on the grave of her daughters. Other Christians who were with her told others what happened next.

The heavens opened: Pistis, Elpis and Agape stood before Sophia, martyrs' crowns on each of their heads. Agape held a fourth crown, made of exquisite and most fragrant flowers.

"Mother!" Agape said: "You were not physically martyred with us today, but you have gone through a martyrdom that only a mother can know. Here is your crown! Now you will enter the Kingdom with us and enjoy the happiness of Paradise!"

With that, the crown was placed on Sophia's head and she was so full of joy at the blessed sight of Heaven that her body could not hold back her spirit! A heavenly fragrance from her martyr's crown lingered for the Christians at the grave. The burial place of Sophia, Pistis, Elpis, and Agape became a place of pilgrimage. In Rome you will see their names like this: Ss. Sophia, Fides, Spes, et Caritas. In 777 AD, their relics were transferred to St. Trophimus Church in Eshau, France. We celebrate the feast of Sophia and her daughters on the 17th of September.

Sophia, Faith, Hope, and Charity Eggs

- 6 eggs (for Sophia, as a reminder of her motherhood)
- ¼ tsp mustard/to taste (because if you have Faith the size of a mustard seed...Mt. 17:20)
- ½ Tbs chopped chives (green is the color of Hope/new life)
- 1 Tbs mayo or vegenaïse (Love holds everything together!)
- 3 slices of bacon (Love overflows)

Place 6 unbroken eggs for 30 minutes in the oven preheated to 350°. No water is needed. It may help to place eggs in a muffin tray. After cooking, place the eggs in a bowl of ice water, and let them sit for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, fry up three slices of bacon. When the bacon is crisp, chop up and mix together with a tablespoon of mayonnaïse/vegenaïse, the chives, and about ¼ tsp mustard depending on personal taste. Peel eggs and cut them in half. Mix the egg yolks of the cooled eggs into the bowl. Spoon mixture into halved egg whites. Enjoy!