

SAINT ROCCO – PATRON OF THE SICK

St. Rocco was born in Montpellier, France, towards the end of the 13th century, son of the Governor and his wife who had prayed for a child for many years. When Rocco was born, with the mark of a red cross on his breast, it was thought of as a miracle. Rocco was twenty years old when his parents died and left their great wealth to him. This he quickly disposed of and set out as a pilgrim with Rome as his destination. When he arrived at Acquapendente, in Italy, Rocco learned that a plague was raging violently and that many had died as a result of it. Moved by such misery, Rocco offered his services at the local hospital where he went from bed to bed touching each sufferer with his right hand and making the sign of the cross on them. Everyone without exception was returned to good health. This was the first evidence of miracles in the life of Saint Rocco.

Rocco found many others suffering from the plague, all of whom through his intercession were restored to health, in Cesena, Rome, and Placentia. In Rome, Rocco was befriended by Cardinal Britonicus, who was inspired by God to realize that Rocco was one of God's most cherished servants. When Rocco made the sign of the cross on the Cardinal's forehead as a preservative against the plague, the sign remained deeply imprinted. When the Cardinal implied that he was embarrassed by wearing such a sign, St. Rocco reminded him of the words of the Gospel: "He who will enter into Life must take up his cross and follow Me." For three years Rocco remained in Rome praying and delivering Rome itself, as well as nearby cities and towns, from the plague and its ravages; his only medicine being the use of the sign of the cross. After the death of Cardinal Britonicus, Rocco left Rome and carrying health and benediction with him, he saved many more cities in Italy – Milan, Monferrat, Mantua, Parma, etc. – from the epidemic.

While working with the sick in Placentia, St. Rocco became ill himself, suffering from high fever and an almost unendurable pain in his left leg. St. Rocco thanked the Lord for His visitation and for the sufferings imposed on him. Because his pain was so intense, St. Rocco left the hospital so as not to disturb the other patients and for fear of being too troublesome. Rocco dragged himself to a nearby forest where he lived in a hut. Rocco was miraculously served by a faithful dog who brought him bread daily from the table of a Gothard Pallastrelli who lived nearby. Rocco's prayers for help from the Lord were

answered by a miracle. A cloud descended from heaven and formed a spring of water near Rocco's hut. He drank the water and his fever and pain were greatly relieved.

Guided by the spirit of God, Rocco then returned to his birthplace where he led a hidden life and suffered greatly, being taken as a spy and put into prison. Rocco imposed even greater sufferings on himself, and fearing that he might not have the strength to endure the suffering, he prayed to the Blessed Mother to intercede for him. After five years, God made known to Rocco that his death was near. Rocco confessed his sins to a priest and asked to receive Holy Communion. He fell into a deep sleep and on August 16, 1327, he died.

The story is told that while Rocco was in this deep sleep, a voice said to him: "The time has come . . . to bear thy soul to the bosom of the Father. If you have any favor to ask for yourself or others, ask for it now and it shall be granted." Conscious that it was Our Lord who spoke, Rocco thanked Him for the promise, begged pardon for all his sins, asked to be admitted into the celestial dwellings forever for himself; and for others the grace to be preserved from the plague for all who would ask for his assistance. Our Lord made known to him that these requests would be granted.

Devotion to Saint Rocco continued to increase after his death. For example, in 1414, a General Council of Bishops had assembled in Constance, Germany. At this time, the plague had broken out in the surrounding country and was spreading rapidly. A general fast was ordered by the Bishops; the image of Saint Rocco was carried in procession throughout the city, and the people prayed fervently for Saint Rocco's help. Immediately, the plague disappeared and the people were even more thoroughly convinced of the saintliness of Saint Rocco.

PRAY TO ST. ROCCO IN ALL OF YOUR AFFLICTIONS!