

# *Saint Rita of Cascia*

## **The Patron Saint of the Impossible and why roses are associated with her**

Saint Rita [1381-1457] has been one of the most popular Saints in the Catholic Church for centuries. She is known as the "Saint of the Impossible" because of her amazing answers to prayers, as well as the remarkable events of her own life.

Rita was born in the year 1381 in the village of Roccaporena near Cascia, Italy. Her parents, Antonio and Amata Lotti, considered her from birth a very special gift from God, for Rita was born to them as they were already advancing in age. As a young girl Rita frequently visited the convent of the Augustinian nuns of Cascia and dreamed of one day joining their community. Her parents, however, promised her in marriage, according to the custom of the day to Paolo Mancini, a good man of strong and impetuous character. Rita accepted her parents' decision, resolved to see this as God's will for her.

The young couple were joined in marriage and soon twin boys were born to them. Rita found herself occupied with the typical concerns of wife, mother, and homemaker of Roccaporena, while Paolo was employed as a watchman for the town. In Cascia, as elsewhere, a great rivalry existed between two popular political factions, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. As a minor official of the town, Paolo often found himself drawn into the conflict and the strain which this caused probably accounts for the tension which he sometimes brought into the Mancini household. By her prayer, patience, and affection, however, Rita was able to ease the stress and worry her husband experienced, but she was not able to shield him altogether from the dangers to which society exposed him.

One day as Paolo was returning home from work he was ambushed and killed. The pain which this unexpected and violent death inflicted upon Rita was only compounded by the fear she felt that her two teenage sons, moved by the unwritten law of the "vendetta," would seek to avenge their father's death. Rita's only recourse was to prayer and persuasion. As it happened, the death of both boys from natural causes a short time later removed them from physical and spiritual danger. Despite the great burden she could still thank God that they had died in peace, free of the poison of murder to which hatred and revenge might have otherwise drawn them.

Now alone in the world and without family responsibilities, Rita once more turned to thoughts of the desired vocation of her youth, that of joining the Augustinian Nuns of Saint Mary Magdalene Monastery. Some of the religious of the community, however, were relatives of the members of the political faction considered responsible for Paolo's death, and so as not to tempt the harmony of the convent. Rita's request for admission was denied. Fortunately, she was not to be easily dissuaded from following what she knew to be God's plan for her life. She implored her three patron saints, - John the Baptist, Augustine, and Nicholas of Tolentino - to assist her, and she set about the task of

establishing peace between the hostile parties of Cascia with such success that her entry into the monastery was assured.

At the age of thirty-six Rita pledged to follow the ancient Rule of Saint Augustine. For the next forty years she gave herself wholeheartedly to prayer, works of charity, striving especially to preserve peace and harmony among the citizens of Cascia. With a pure love she wanted more and more to be intimately joined to the redemptive suffering of Jesus, and this desire of hers was satisfied in an extraordinary way. One day when she was about sixty years of age, she was meditating before the image of Christ crucified as she was long accustomed to doing. Suddenly, a small wound appeared on her forehead, as though a thorn from the crown that encircled Christ's head had loosed itself and penetrated her own flesh. For the next fifteen years she bore this external sign of stigmatization and union with the Lord. In spite of the pain she constantly experienced, she offered herself courageously for the physical and spiritual well being of others.

During the last four years of her life, Rita was confined to bed and was able to eat so little that she was practically sustained by the Eucharist alone. She was nevertheless, an inspiration to her sisters in religion and to all who came to visit her, by her patience and joyful disposition despite her great suffering.

One day in the month of January, a cousin of St. Rita's came to the Maddalena Convent to visit her. The visit was a short one, for that particular day St. Rita was very ill and suffered much. On taking her leave, her relative asked whether she had any special desires, "Yes, Cousin," said the Saint; "bring me a rose from the garden of my old home in Rocca Porrena." St. Rita's request surprised her cousin, who thought that perhaps her mind was affected by her illness, and besides, as it was midwinter and the climate of Rocca Porrena exceedingly cold, her relative and the nuns who were in attendance could not be persuaded that the rose could be found. Nevertheless, to humor the Saint, her cousin told her that she would try to fulfill the errand, though she thought it would be impossible to find what she asked for. St. Rita responded: "My dear cousin, there is nothing impossible to God." The security with which St. Rita spoke these words determined her cousin to set out at once for Rocca Porrena, and to her great astonishment and amazement, on entering the garden she saw, on a sapless and leafless rosebush, a beautiful red rose in full bloom. She plucked the rose, and returned to Cascia as quickly as possible and gave the rose to St. Rita. The Saint received the rose with great joy and gladness, and a heavenly smile lighted up her countenance as she kissed it reverently, while her heart gave thanks to God as she contemplated in that rose her sweet Jesus crowned with thorns. St. Rita then handed the miraculous flower to the superioress, and from her hand it passed into the hands of all the nuns, who, after admiring its marvelous beauty, returned fervent thanks to God, who, to make manifest the sanctity of their beloved sister Rita, had caused a most beautiful rose to grow in the midst of a cold winter.

Shortly after the miracle of the rose, God wrought another miracle at the request of St. Rita. On the occasion of another visit to the convent, in the same month of January, St. Rita asked her cousin to go and bring two figs she would find on a certain frozen fig tree

in the garden of Rocca Porrena. This time, without the least doubt in her mind, the woman hastened to bring the figs. She had no difficulty in finding the tree St. Rita had described, and on it were two ripe and luscious figs. With no less joy than admiration at seeing this second miracle, she picked the figs and brought them to St. Rita. St. Rita received the figs with the greatest joy, and again did the nuns thank and praise God for having qualified, for the second time, the sanctity of their holy and beloved sister. But St. Rita, elevating her spirit to a contemplation of the mysterious, considered the two miracles a warning that the time was near at hand when she would pass from this life, to enjoy for all eternity the incorruptible flowers and seasoned fruits of the Celestial paradise.

Thus the saint of the thorn became the saint of the rose, and she whose impossible requests were granted became the Patron Saint of the Impossible. The advocate of all whose own requests seem impossible as well. As she breathed her last, Rita's final words to the sisters around her were, "Remain in the holy love of Jesus. Remain in obedience to the holy Roman Church. Remain in peace and fraternal charity."

Rita of Cascia died on May 22, 1457. Her body which has remained incorrupt, is venerated today in the shrine at Cascia .

(Some portions taken from St. Rita of Cascia by TAN Books & Publishers, Inc)