



Saint Cecilia, virgin and martyr - brief history
by E. Balthazar

Cecilia, the Roman, one of seven women specifically named in the ancient order of the Catholic Latin Mass, was a third century Christian born to pagan parents who were part of the social elite during the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. She was introduced to Christianity at a very young age. In learning about Jesus' life, Cecilia decided early on to devote herself to works of charity serving the poor and less fortunate. She fell in Love with Jesus so much she dedicated her virginity to the Lord. Despite this, she was betrothed to Valerian, a fellow Roman aristocrat. On the night of her wedding, Cecilia explained to Valerian her devotion to Jesus and her desire to remain pure. After a lengthy discussion, Valerian agreed to her wishes and was later converted to Christianity. Wanting to share the *Good News*, Valerian explained his new found devotion to Christianity to his beloved brother Tibertius, and he too was converted. Valerian and Tibertius served the Lord by secretly providing a proper burial for Christians who were persecuted. When their actions were discovered, they were arrested and sentenced to death. Undeterred, Cecilia continued preaching and ended up converting as many as 400 to Christianity before she too was arrested and sentenced to death by suffocation from steam in her private bath. Legend says she was protected by the Angel of the Lord and was heard to be singing hymns of praise. After three days in the bath and showing no signs of struggle, a Roman executioner was ordered to enter the bath and behead Cecilia but was unsuccessful after three blows to the neck. She bled for three days during which she bequeathed her entire estate to the *Christian movement* before finally succumbing to her injuries. Since the third century, Christians including the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran Churches and the Church of Sweden have regarded Cecilia as the Patroness of Musicians.

Art: *Saint Cecilia* - oil painting by artist Simon Vouet, c.1626; The Suida-Manning Collection