

January 20 **Fabian** Bishop and Martyr of Rome, 250

In 236, an assembly was held at Rome to elect a pope as successor to Antherus. In the throng was Fabian, a layman from another part of Italy. Suddenly, according to the historian Eusebius, a dove flew over the crowd and lighted on Fabian's head. In spite of the fact that he was both a total stranger and not even a candidate for election, the people unanimously chose Fabian to be pope, shouting, "He is worthy! He is worthy!" Fabian was ordained to the episcopate without opposition. During his fourteen years as pontiff, Fabian made numerous administrative reforms. He developed the parochial structure of the Church in Rome, and established the custom of venerating martyrs at their shrines in the catacombs. He appointed seven deacons and seven sub-deacons to write the lives of the martyrs, so that their deeds should not be forgotten in times to come. When Privatus, in Africa, stirred up a new heresy, Fabian vigorously opposed and condemned his actions. He also brought back to Rome, for proper burial, the remains of Pontian, a pope whom the emperor had exiled in 235 to a certain and rapid death in the mines of Sardinia. The Emperor Decius ordered a general persecution of the Church in 239 and 240, probably the first persecution to be carried out in all parts of the empire. Fabian was one of the earliest of those martyred, setting a courageous example for his followers, many of whom died in great torment. Cyprian of Carthage, in a letter to Cornelius, Fabian's successor, wrote that Fabian was an incomparable man. "The glory of his death," Cyprian commented, "befitted the purity and holiness of his life." Fabian's tombstone, the slab which covered his gravesite, still exists. It is in fragments, but the words "Fabian . . . bishop . . . martyr" are still dimly visible.

Collect Almighty God, you called Fabian to be a faithful pastor and servant of your people, and to lay down his life in witness to your Son: Grant that we, strengthened by his example and aided by his prayers, may in times of trial and persecution remain steadfast in faith and endurance, for the sake of him who laid down his life for us all, Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Lessons

1 Corinthians 15:31–36, 44b–49

I die every day! That is as certain, brothers and sisters, as my boasting of you—a boast that I make in Christ Jesus our Lord. If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised,

"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Psalm 126

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream.

2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
and our tongue with shouts of joy.

3 Then they said among the nations, *
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

4 The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.

5 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.

6 Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.

7 Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

Luke 21:20–24

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress on the earth and wrath against this people; they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.