

Three days after that meeting, while praying in his cell, Benedict had a vision of his sister's soul leaving her body and ascending to heaven in the form of a dove. With joy, and giving thanks to God, he announced her death to his brother monks and immediately sent several of them to retrieve her body. Her remains were brought to the monastery at Monte Cassino, and laid in the tomb which Benedict had prepared for himself. Not long after, within that same year, Benedict also died, and was laid to rest in that same tomb.

Traditions differ about the current location of the siblings' relics. Some believe they were transferred to France, while others maintain they are at Monte Cassino. Opinions also differ about scientific analyses of the Monte Cassino remains which took place in 1950. Nevertheless, at the Abbey, a black marble scroll reads: "St. Benedict and St. Scholastica were never separated in spirit during their life nor are their bodies separated in their death."

Her patronage of convulsive children is thought to have developed by parents who looked upon artistic depictions of her peaceful face and called upon her powerful intercession for their children.

In the Mass of her feast day, we pray:

O God, who to show us the path of innocence did cause the soul of thy Virgin Scholastica to mount up to heaven in the form of a dove: grant that through her merits and prayers, we may so live in innocence that we may be worthy to attain eternal happiness. *Through Our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

Socials with the Saints

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Sources include: Abbey of Montecassino official website, *Butler's Lives of the Saints, Vol. IV* (reprinted 1981); Wikipedia; SaintsInRome.com, *All Saints: daily reflection on Saints, Prophets and Witnesses for our Time* by Robert Ellsberg; *Lives of the Saints for Every Day of the Year*, Hugo Hoever, ed.; *The Book of Saints: The Lives of the Saints According to the Liturgical Calendar* text by Victor Hoagland; "Saint Scholastica" by Esther L. Cuenca, Loyola Marymount; *Blessed Among Us: Day by Day with Sainly Witnesses* by Robert Ellsberg¹



St. Scholastica *Virgin & Nun*

Born: 480 A.D.

Died: 543 A.D.

Feast Day: February 10

Patronage: Benedictine and cloistered nuns; education: school, reading, tests, books; convulsive children. Her intercession is

invoked against storms and rain.

All that we know of St. Scholastica is from the biography of her brother, St. Benedict, the founder of Western monasticism, written by Pope St. Gregory the Great.

Tradition has it that Scholastica was not only the sister of St. Benedict, but his twin. They were members of the Roman Empire's influential Anicii family, whose roots can be traced before the time of Christ. Born of wealthy parents in Nursia, Umbria, in the mountains of central Italy, Scholastica is said to have consecrated her life to God from a very early age.

Scholastica and Benedict were brought up together until he left to study in Rome. Though they had an affectionate relationship, the siblings were somewhat competitive.

To learn about Scholastica, it is necessary that we know something of the life of St. Benedict. He left home to be a hermit, living in a cave on Mount (Monte) Subiaco, near Rome. His reputation for holiness attracted followers, for whom he built monasteries so they could live in community under a prescribed Rule of Life, which he wrote.

The Rule, based on detachment from the world and its cares, silence, obedience, humility, self-conquest, prayer, mortification and rest, provided a balance which contrasted with some religious who had gone into the deserts and caves while performing fasting and mortifications so extreme that they'd shortened their earthly lives. Benedict's evenhanded Rule became the foundation for all Western religious orders & congregations from then on. In 529, Benedict left

Subiaco and went to Monte Cassino, where he founded the great abbey that became the center of religious life in Europe.

The following is from the Prologue of Benedict's Rule of Life:

In founding it we hope to introduce nothing harsh or burdensome. But if a certain strictness results from the dictates of equity for the amendment of vices or the preservation of charity, do not be at once dismayed and fly from the way of salvation, whose entrance cannot but be narrow (Matthew 7:14). For as we advance in the religious life and in faith, our hearts expand and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love. Thus, never departing from His school, but persevering in the monastery according to His teaching until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ (1 Peter 4:13) and deserve to have a share also in His kingdom.

Women of Scholastica's time and social standing typically remained in their parents' homes until they either married or entered consecrated life. At some point following her brother's move to Monte Cassino, Scholastica left Umbria and moved to the town of Plombariola, about five miles from her brother's monastery. It may have been their father's death which prompted her to move closer to her brother.

Scholastica is considered the first Benedictine nun. She founded and governed a convent near her brother's monastery. The convent may have been a hermitage with one or more other consecrated virgins in a cluster of houses at the base of Monte Cassino, where there is an ancient church under her patronage.

Since St. Benedict directed nuns, as well as monks, it is believed Scholastica may have served as abbess under her brother's direction. From their convent could be heard the nuns' beautiful chanting of the Psalms in the early morning into the watches of the night. Scholastica served as a role model and example for her religious sisters.

The Rule's second chapter describes the role of the Abbess:

An Abbess who is worthy to be over a monastery should always remember what she is called, and live up to the name of Superior. For she is believed to hold the place of Christ in the

monastery, being called by a name of His, which is taken from the words of the Apostle:

"You have received a Spirit of adoption ..., by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba – Father'" (Romans 8:15)!

Therefore the Abbess ought not to teach or ordain or command anything which is against the Lord's precepts; on the contrary, her commands and her teaching should be a leaven of divine justice kneaded into the minds of her disciples.

Scholastica and Benedict customarily met once a year to spend the entire day worshipping together and discussing sacred texts and spiritual matters. Because the Rule forbade her from entering Benedict's monastery, the siblings met in a house somewhere between their respective abbeys. Benedict would be accompanied by one or more of his brother monks.

At their last meeting, sometime around 543, having spent the day in prayer and spiritual discussions, as St. Benedict prepared to leave at dusk following dinner, Scholastica begged him to stay the night so they could talk till morning about the joys of life in heaven. Citing the Rule, which forbade spending a night outside the monastery, his own Rule from which he would not deviate, Benedict refused Scholastica's request. Possibly sensing her death was imminent, Scholastica responded by bowing her head in fervent prayer. Immediately, a violent storm began to rage, making it impossible for her brother and his companions to return to their abbey that night.

Benedict cried in alarm: "May Almighty God spare you, sister. What have you done?" to which Scholastica replied: "I asked you, but you were unwilling to listen to me. I asked the Lord and He listened to me." They stayed awake the entire night, discussing spiritual matters.

In his account of the meeting, St. Gregory's comment on Scholastica prevailing in this instance was: "As John says: 'God is love,' and she justly overcame him by the greater strength of her love."

The story of Scholastica and Benedict's last encounter "provides a monastic parable about the power and virtue of love versus a rigid devotion to rules."¹