



HISTORY OF LA FESTA DI SAN GENNARO

ST. JANUARIUS, also known as SAN GENNARO, born in Naples, Italy was the bishop of Benevento during the persecution of Christians spearheaded by the Emperor Diocletian around 300 A.D. A deacon named Sossio, believed to be a relative of Gennaro, along with another deacon, Procolo, and two laymen, Eutichete and Acunzio, were imprisoned for their Christian beliefs. Gennaro, hearing of their arrest, went to visit them in jail to comfort them and provide spiritual support, without the slightest concern for the danger in which he may be placing himself. When the prelate of the region, named Timoteo, heard about Gennaro's visits to the imprisoned Christians, he ordered the arrest of Gennaro, along with his deacon Festo and his lecturer Desiderio. Timoteo had Gennaro and his associates transferred to his own city's prison in the city of Nola, where he lived and could have complete control over the fate of Gennaro. Timoteo tortured Gennaro. He threw

him in a blazing furnace, but Gennaro came out unhurt. Infuriated, Timoteo ordered Gennaro to be placed on a torture rack. The executioner turned the rack's iron wheels, trying to snap Gennaro's limbs apart by pulling his arms and legs away from his torso. Even this form of torture did not have any effect on Gennaro. Then, Timoteo tied Gennaro, Festo and Desiderio to his chariot and dragged them to the city of Pozzuoli. He placed them in the same prison as the two deacons and the two laymen, and condemned them all to be fed to wild beasts. The next day, they were all thrown into an amphitheater to be preyed upon by the wild beasts, most likely lions and tigers. However, instead of ripping Gennaro to shreds, the beasts crouched in submission at his feet. Timoteo, attributing Gennaro's miraculous survival to some type of black magical spell, condemned all of the survivors to capital punishment. But as soon as Timoteo made this declaration, he was struck blind, hardening even more his desperation toward the Christians. Seeing this, Gennaro turned to God and called upon Him to restore Timoteo's vision, and immediately, his sight was restored.

Even after having experienced the grace of God firsthand, Timoteo's cruelty was still intact. In his final act of injustice toward Gennaro and his Christian associates, Timoteo ordered that they all be decapitated. Their martyrdom came in 305 A.D., on the 19th day of September in Pozzuoli, near Naples. They say that a woman named Eusebia, who once breastfed Gennaro, along with other Christians collected Gennaro's blood in glass vials, similar to those used for oil and vinegar. Legend also states that an old man gathered up Gennaro's body and severed head and placed them in a special cloth. The body of Gennaro was buried in a secret location and moved often, so that the pagans could not find it. He was buried somewhere in Marciano, in the proximity of Naples between Fuorigrotta and Agnano.

Under the rule of the Emperor Constantine, in 313 A.D., the persecution of Christians came to an end. At this time the Neapolitans exhumed the glorious remains of their martyred Saint and they were transferred to the catacombs of Naples. On this occasion, Eusebia displayed the glass vials of San Gennaro's blood and it is believed that this day was the first his dried blood became liquid. Through the

centuries, both vials of blood, his skull and his skeletal remains were moved between various cities, for both political reasons and the prestige that came with their possession. Finally in May of 1497, Cardinal Alessandro Carafa had San Gennaro's remains moved to Naples. San Gennaro's skull and vials of blood were placed in the Royal Treasure Chapel of San Gennaro, a.k.a. the "Real Cappella del Tesoro di San Gennaro," located near Pozzuoli, where he was beheaded. The skeletal remains of his body, without the skull, were placed in the main altar of the Cathedral of Naples, a.k.a. the "Cattedrale di Napoli."

The very first official written testimony of the liquefaction of San Gennaro's blood was recorded on August 17, 1389. The text can be found in a book called the "Chronicon Siculum." Originally written in Latin, the passage is accompanied by an Italian translation. Benedetto Croce is the man credited as being the author of the testimony. An excerpt of that text stated, "...and on the 17th day there was a huge procession on commemoration of the miracle that Our Lord Jesus Christ showed us through the blood of the blessed Gennaro, kept in a vial which liquefied as if it had just come out of the blessed body of Gennaro..."

The Annual Feast Day Activities Of San Gennaro, 19 September, Naples, Italy: At 9:00 a.m., at the Treasure Chapel of San Gennaro, there is a novena, nine consecutive prayers which consist of three "Our Father's," three "Hail Mary's" and three "Glory Be's," during which the shrine to San Gennaro, in the form of a gold ring with a cross on top, containing the martyred Saint's vials of blood, is brought out of its vault, and placed on the altar for people to see during the day. At this time everybody prays for the prodigious miracle of the liquefaction of San Gennaro's blood.

When the blood liquefies, the miracle is announced with the firing of a 21 cannon salute and the people of Naples cheer and cry as if they had just scored the World Cup goal. After the first hour, as is customary, the Sacred Relic is transported by a procession, to the main altar of the Cathedral of Naples, where it remains until it is returned to the Treasure Chapel of San Gennaro that evening. It is tradition to kiss the bottles for good luck. For the next 8 days the people of Naples celebrate the Feast of San Gennaro. On the eighth day they close the ceremony with the song "Te Deum" and with the blessing of the sacred relic of the blood of San Gennaro. When the vials are returned to their safe, it is said that once it is reopened you will find San Gennaro's blood in the same solid physical state in which it is normally found.

The Los Angeles Procession of St. Gennaro on Hollywood Blvd. is held on the Saturday of the Feast weekend at 12:00pm, immediately followed by a Mass on the main stage, presided by Msgr. Antonio Cacciapuoti, Msgr. Paul Montoya, Fr. Raniero Alessandrini and visiting clergy in Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles shrine of St. Gennaro may be visited throughout the year at:

Christ the King Roman Catholic Church

624 N. Rossmore Ave.

Los Angeles, CA 90004

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