

Pope St. Sylvester I
December 31



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d. 335 • Rome

St. Sylvester was pope in Rome when the Roman emperor Constantine declared Christians were free to practice their religion in the Roman Empire. This was a time for great rejoicing among Christians. All the blood the early martyrs shed had sown the seeds for the conversion of Rome. Now all Christians could share the love of Jesus with the whole world and practice their Faith in peace.

A wondrous legend is told of Pope St. Sylvester's works in this joyous time.

Two pagan priests sought an audience with Constantine. They tore their hair and wept over the fact that ever since Constantine had made the empire Christian, a terrible dragon in a cave had spewed a poisonous breath, and every day, three hundred people died from the dragon's noxious fumes. Emperor Constantine called Pope Sylvester and told him about the evil dragon, and Pope Sylvester promised that he would put an end to the dragon's terror. Trembling, the pagan priests declared that they would become Christian if Sylvester succeeded.

That night, St. Peter appeared to Sylvester in a dream and told him what he must do. The following morning, Sylvester entered the dark mouth of the dragon's cave. The pagan priests waited by the entrance of the cave, overwhelmed by the dragon's breath escaping from underground. But the pope descended unharmed until he reached the dragon, an evil glint in its snakelike eyes. Poisoned breath spouted from its lizard's snout and charred the stones and dried the underground pools.

Pope Sylvester cried out in a loud voice the words St. Peter had told him: "Satan, remain here until the Second Coming of Christ!" At the pope's words, the dragon was immobilized by the power of God, and Pope Sylvester bound and sealed the dragon's snout so that its breath could no longer poison those in the world above. Pope Sylvester returned to the daylight of the cavern entrance, where he found the pagan priests recovering from their faints. They were converted to Christianity on the spot, and countless pagans in Rome were baptized because Pope Sylvester had sealed away the dragon.

Magnificent churches were built in Rome during Pope Sylvester's papacy, and the Roman martyrs were honored. He defended the Church against the attacks of the Evil One and welcomed many souls to the Church until he died a holy death.

Pope St. Sylvester I, please watch over the Church and defend her against the Evil One!