

Saint Blandina of Lyons

died c. 177, Lyons, France

Of the forty-nine Christians arrested in Lyons in the summer 177, the slave Blandina was considered the most fragile. Her mistress feared that she would die of exhaustion or be terrified into apostasy (abandoning her faith). In the end, however, Blandina set an example of courage that inspired Christians for generations.

Twenty-four of Blandina's companions were beheaded, the "dignified" execution reserved for Roman citizens. Eighteen others died in prison, and two men were roasted to death in iron chairs. The executioners then tortured Blandina, demanding that she make up fantastic stories as some of the other frightened slaves had done. She held fast, repeating "*I am a Christian, and we commit no wrongdoing.*"

During the gladiatorial games, they tied Blandina to a wooden cross in the arena. As she hung there, she encouraged her companions, and when none of the wild beasts would touch her, she was cut down and sent back to prison. By the last day of the games, Blandina and Ponticus, a boy of fifteen, were the only survivors from their original group. Once again, they were ordered to swear by the idols. Ponticus refused and was immediately put to death. Blandina was scourged and made to sit in a burning chair, after which she was wrapped in a net and thrown down before a wild cow that tore her limb from limb. The bodies of Blandina and the others were fed to dogs. What remained was burned and the ashes were thrown into the Rhone River. Today, a post at the center of the ruined Roman amphitheatre commemorates Blandina and her companions.

The Genius of Blandina:

One eyewitness wrote: The child was filled with such strength that the torturers ... acknowledged that they were beaten and that there was nothing more that they could do to her."

Reflection:

"You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust."

Matthew 5.43-45