

Saint Margaret of Antioch
(Marina, Marjorie, Pearl, Daisy)
Born 275 Antioch, Pisidia (Turkey)
Died 20 July 290, Antioch, Pisidia (Turkey)

At fifteen, Margaret was brought before Olybrius, the Roman provost, who asked how she could worship a God who had been crucified. Margaret answered that he only knew about Christ's suffering and not the Resurrection. This infuriated Olybrius, who ordered her to be tortured. Even while she was being torn by hooks, Margaret berated him: *"You shameless hound and insatiable lion, you have power over my flesh, but Christ reserves my soul."* Olybrius covered his face because he could not bear the sight of so much blood, and ordered Margaret sent to prison. The devil appeared to her in the form of a dragon and swallowed her. Margaret made the sign of the cross, his belly burst open, and she emerged. Next, the devil took her hand while she prayed, but Margaret caught him and threw him to the ground, setting her right foot on his neck. "Lie still, fiend, under the feet of a woman," she ordered until the earth opened and swallowed him. After a few more such episodes, Olybrius sentenced Margaret to death. In her last moments, she asked God to pardon her tormentors and prayed that any pregnant woman might call on her for a safe delivery. A celestial voice announced that her prayers had been granted. He cut off her head, then collapsed dead at her feet. Margaret is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers and a patron of pregnant women and the terminally ill.

The Genius of Margaret of Antioch:

This is a saint with staying power. A fifth-century pope declared her legend apocryphal, but six hundred years later the Crusaders were still spreading Margaret's story all over Europe. Her cult was officially suppressed in 169, because of a lack of historical evidence, but churches dedicated to Margaret remain and her legend lives on.

Reflection:

"Out of my distress I called to the LORD / and he answered me; / From the midst of the nether world I cried for help, / and you heard my voice."

Jonah 2.3

Gallick, Sarah, The Big Book of Women Saints, p. 217