

Daily Saints - 30 September



Feast of Saint Jerome

He is the patron saint of archaeologists; archivists; Bible scholars; librarians; libraries; schoolchildren; students; translators.

Jerome was born of Christian parents at Stridon in Dalmatia around the year 345. He was named Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus. The young Jerome was educated by Aelius Donatus, who was a famous Roman grammarian. From him, the young Jerome learned Latin and Greek. Little else is known of his childhood other than his parents were probably well-to-do and Christian. Despite their efforts to raise Jerome properly, the young man behaved as he chose.

Around the age of 12 or so, Jerome traveled to Rome to study grammar, philosophy, and rhetoric. It is likely that due to his training in rhetoric, he may have considered a career in law. By his own admission, he quickly forgot his morals. While he was not studying, Jerome pursued pleasure. In particular, he pursued women, even though he knew his behavior was wrong. He engaged in the superficial escapades and homosexual behavior of students there, which he indulged in quite casually but for which he suffered terrible bouts of guilt afterward. To appease his conscience, he would visit on Sundays the sepulchers of the martyrs and the Apostles in the catacombs. He did so every Sunday, even though he was not a Christian. This experience would remind him of the terrors of hell. Jerome succeeded in frightening himself, but not in changing his ways.

Fortunately, Jerome had as a companion, Bonosus, who was a Christian influence. His influence is part of what persuaded Jerome to become a Christian and change his ways for the better. Although initially skeptical of Christianity, he was eventually converted. In or around the year 366, Jerome decided to become a Christian and was baptized by Pope Liberius.

Now interested in theological matters, Jerome set aside secular matters to pursue matters of the faith. He traveled with Bonosus to Trier where there were schools for him to gain ecclesiastical training.

In 370, he traveled close to home, ending up in a monastery at Aquileia. The monastery was overseen by Bishop St. Valerian, who had attracted some of the greatest minds in Christendom. While in Aquileia, Jerome met Rufinus and the two men became friends. At Antioch, where he stayed the longest, two of his companions died and he himself was seriously ill more than once. During one of these illnesses, he had a vision that led him to lay aside his secular studies and devote himself to God. He seems to have abstained for a considerable time from the study of the classics and to have plunged deeply into that of the Bible.

Seized with a desire for a life of ascetic penance, he went for a time to the desert of Chalcis. During this period, he seems to have found time for studying and writing. He made his first attempt to learn Hebrew under the guidance of a converted Jew; and he seems to have been in correspondence with Jewish Christians in Antioch. Around this time he had copied for him a Hebrew Gospel, of which fragments are preserved in his notes, and is known today as the Gospel of the Hebrews, and which the Nazarenes considered being the true Gospel of Matthew. Jerome translated parts of this Hebrew Gospel into Greek.

Returning to Antioch in 378 or 379, he was ordained by Bishop Paulinus, apparently unwillingly and on condition that he continue his ascetic life. Soon afterward, he went to Constantinople to pursue a study of Scripture under Gregory Nazianzen. He seems to have spent two years there, then left, and the next three (382–385) he was in Rome again, as secretary to Pope Damasus I and the leading Roman Christians. He was given duties in Rome, and he undertook a revision of the Latin Bible, to be based on the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. He also updated the Psalter containing the Book of Psalms then at use in Rome based on the Septuagint. Though he did not realize it yet, translating much of what became the Latin Vulgate Bible would take many years and be his most important achievement.

In August 385, he left Rome for good and returned to Antioch, accompanied by his brother Paulinian and several friends, and followed a little later by Paula and Eustochium, who had resolved to end their days in the Holy Land. In the winter of 385, Jerome acted as their spiritual adviser. The pilgrims, joined by Bishop Paulinus of Antioch, visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the holy places of Galilee, and then went to Egypt, the home of the great heroes of the ascetic life.

Jerome had a violent temper and was very strong-willed. He made a lot of enemies because of his temperament. Jerome was easily upset, and even the venerable St. Augustine exchanged words with him. Eventually, Jerome and Augustine repaired their relationship and were able to correspond as friends and colleagues. To overcome these faults, he prayed and did penance.

It is recorded that Jerome died near Bethlehem on 30 September 420.

Quotes of St. Jerome

- "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."
- "The friendship that can cease has never been real."
- "When we pray we speak to God; but when we read, God speaks to us."
- "Make knowledge of the Scripture your love ... Live with them, meditate on them, make them the sole object of your knowledge and inquiries."
- "Begin now to be what you will be hereafter."
- "The face is the mirror of the mind, and eyes without speaking confess the secrets of the heart."
- "A friend is long sought, hardly found, and with difficulty kept."
- "It is idle to play the lyre for an ass."
- "Everything must have in it a sharp seasoning of truth."
- "Do not let your deeds belie your words, lest when you speak in church someone may say to himself, 'Why do you not practice what you preach?'"
- "A clergyman who engages in business, and who rises from poverty to wealth, and from obscurity to a high position, avoid as you would the plague."
- "It is worse still to be ignorant of your ignorance."
- "When the stomach is full, it is easy to talk of fasting."