Daily Saints - 30 June.

Feast of the First Martyrs of Rome.

The First Martyrs of the Church of Rome were Christians martyred in the city of Rome during Nero's persecution in 64. The event is recorded by both Tacitus and Pope Clement I, among others. They are celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church as an optional memorial on 30 June.

In July of 64 AD, Rome was devastated by fire. Largely made up of wooden tenements, fire was a frequent occurrence in the city. Rumor blamed the tragedy on the unpopular emperor Nero, who wanted to enlarge his palace. He accused the Christians.

The pagan historian Tacitus and St. Clement of Rome describe August 15, 64 AD as a night of horror with the various tortures and killings. Christians were put into animal skins and hunted by dogs and killed in the imperial parks. Others were nailed to crosses, covered with tar, and made into living torches at night to light the road for Nero's chariot. The total number is unknown, but estimates are in the upper hundreds to a couple thousand. The persecution continued over some time, not just this one night. It is these martyrs that are honored as the First or Protomartyrs of Rome.

"Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed."