Saint Blaise

For other uses, see Saint Blaise (disambiguation).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hieromartyr, Holy Helper</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Born</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Died</strong></td>
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| **Honored in**           | Roman Catholic Church  
Eastern Orthodox Churches  
Armenian Apostolic Church  
Eastern Catholic Churches |
| **Feast**                | January 16 (Armenian Apostolic)  
February 3 (Roman Catholic)  
February 11 (Eastern Orthodox and Greek Catholic) |
| **Attributes**           | Wool comb, candles, tending a choking boy or animals |
| **Patronage**            | Animals, builders, choking, veterinarians, throats, infants, Maratea, Italy, Sicily, Dalmatia, Dubrovnik, Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, Rubiera, stonecutters, carvers, wool workers |

**Saint Blaise** (Armenian: Սուրբ Բարսեղ, Sourb Barsegh; Greek: Ἅγιος Βλάσιος, Agios Vlasios), also known as **Saint Blase**, was a physician, and bishop of Sebastea in historical Armenia (modern Sivas, Turkey).\(^1\) According to the *Acta Sanctorum*, he was martyred by being beaten, attacked with iron combs, and beheaded. He is the patron saint of wool combers. In the Latin Church his feast falls on 3 February, in the Eastern Churches on 11 February.

**Sources**

The first reference we have to him is in manuscripts of the medical writings of Aëtius Amidenus, a court physician of the very end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century; there his aid is invoked in treating objects stuck in the throat.

Marco Polo reported the place where "Meesser Saint Blaise obtained the glorious crown of martyrdom", Sebastea;\(^2\) the shrine near the citadel mount was mentioned by William of Rubruck in 1253.\(^3\) However, it appears to no longer exist. He healed animals (who came to the saint on their own for his assistance) and have been assistance by animals.
Life
From being a healer of bodily ailments, Saint Blaise became a physician of souls, then retired for a time, by divine inspiration, to a cavern where he remained in prayer. As bishop of Sebastea Blaise instructed his people, as much by his example as by his words, and the great virtues and sanctity of the servant of God were attested by many miracles. From all parts, the people came flocking to him for the cure of bodily and spiritual ills.[4]

In 316 the governor of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, Agricolaus, began a persecution by order of the Emperor Licinius, Saint Blaise was seized. After interrogation and a severe scourging, he was hurried off to prison, and subsequently beheaded.

The Acts of St. Blaise

The legendary Acts of St. Blaise were written 400 years later.[5] The Acts of St. Blaise, written in Greek, are medieval.

The legend as given in the Grande Encyclopédie is as follows:

Blaise, who had studied philosophy in his youth, was a doctor in Sebaste in Armenia, the city of his birth, who exercised his art with miraculous ability, good-will, and piety. When the bishop of the city died, he was chosen to succeed him, with the acclamation of all the people. His holiness was manifest through many miracles: from all around, people came to him to find cures for their spirit and their body; even wild animals came in herds to receive his blessing. In 316, Agricola, the governor of Cappadocia and of Lesser Armenia, having arrived in Sebastia at the order of the emperor Licinius to kill the Christians, arrested the bishop. As he was being led to prison, a mother set her only son, choking to death of a fish-bone, at his feet, and the child was cured straight away. Regardless, the governor, unable to make Blaise renounce his faith, beat him with a stick, ripped his flesh with iron combs, and beheaded him.[6]

The blessing of St. Blaise

Main article: Blessing of the Throats

According to the Acts, while Blaise was being taken into custody, a distraught mother, whose only child was choking on a fishbone, threw herself at his feet and implored his intercession. Touched at her grief, he offered up his prayers, and the child was cured. Consequently, Saint Blaise is invoked for protection against injuries and illnesses of the throat.

In many places on the day of his feast the blessing of St. Blaisius is given: two candles are consecrated, generally by a prayer, these are then held in a crossed position by a priest over the heads of the faithful or the people are touched on the throat with them. At the same time the following blessing is given: "May Almighty God at the intercession of St. Blaise, Bishop and Martyr, preserve you from infections of the throat and from all other afflictions". Then the priest makes the sign of the cross over the faithful.
Legend
As the governor's hunters led Blaise back to Sabastea, on the way, the story goes, they met a poor woman whose pig had been seized by a wolf. At the command of Blaise, the wolf restored the pig to its owner, alive and unhurt. When he had reached the capital and was in prison awaiting execution, the old woman whose pig he had saved came to see him, bringing two fine wax candles to dispel the gloom of his dark cell. In the West there was no cult honoring St. Blaise prior to the eighth century. [7]

Cult of Saint Blaise
One of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, Blaise became one of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages. His cult became widespread in Europe in the 11th and 12th centuries and his legend is recounted in the 14th-century *Legenda Aurea*. Saint Blaise is the saint of the wild beast.

He is the patron of the Armenian Order of Saint Blaise. In Italy he is known as *San Biagio*. In Spanish-speaking countries, he is known as San Blas, and has lent his name to many places (see San Blas).

In Italy, Saint Blaise's remains rest at the Basilica over the town of Maratea, shipwrecked there during Leo III the Isaurian's iconoclastic persecutions.

Many German churches, including the former Abbey of St. Blasius in the Black Forest and the church of Balve are dedicated to Saint Blaise/Blasius.

In Great Britain
In Cornwall the village of St Blazey derives from his name, where the parish church is still dedicated to Saint Blaise. Indeed, the council of Oxford in 1222 forbade all work on his festival. [8]

There is a church dedicated to Saint Blaise in the Devon hamlet of Haccombe, near Newton Abbot (Also one at Shanklin on the Isle of Wight and another at Milton near Abingdon in Oxfordshire), one of the country's smallest churches. It is located next to Haccombe house which is the family home of the Carew family, descendants of the vice admiral on board the Mary Rose at the time of her sinking. One curious fact associated with this church is that its "vicar" goes by the title of "archpriest".

There is a St. Blaise's Well In Bromley, Kent [9] where the water was considered to have medicinal virtues. St Blaise is also associated with Stretford in Lancashire. A Blessing of the Throats ceremony is held on February 3 at St Etheldreda's Church in London and in Balve, Germany.

In Bradford, West Yorkshire a Roman Catholic middle school named after St Blaise was operated by the Diocese of Leeds from 1961 to 1995. The name was chosen due to the connections of Bradford to the woollen industry and the method that St Blaise was martyred, with the woolcomb. Due to reorganisation the school closed down when Catholic middle schools were phased out, and the building was sold to Bradford Council to provide replacement accommodation for another local middle school which had burned down. Within a few months, St Blaise school was also severely damaged in a fire, and the remains of the building were demolished. A new primary school was built on the land, and most of the extensive grounds were sold off for housing.
**In Croatia**

Saint Blaise (Croatian: *Sveti Vlaho* or *Sveti Blaž*) is the patron saint of the city of Dubrovnik and formerly the protector of the independent Republic of Ragusa. At Dubrovnik his feast is celebrated yearly on 3 February, when relics of the saint, his head, a bit of bone from his throat, his right hand and his left, are paraded in reliquaries. The festivities begin the previous day, Candlemas, when white doves are released. Chroniclers of Dubrovnik such as Rastic and Ranjina attribute his veneration there to a vision in 971 to warn the inhabitants of an impending attack by the Venetians, whose galleys had dropped anchor in Gruž and near Lokrum, ostensibly to resupply their water but furtively to spy out the city's defenses. St. Blaise (Blasius) revealed their pernicious plan to Stojko, a canon of St. Stephen's Cathedral. The Senate summoned Stojko, who told them in detail how St. Blaise had appeared before him as an old man with a long beard and a bishop's mitre and staff. In this form the effigy of Blaise remained on Dubrovnik's state seal and coinage until the Napoleonic era.

**Blaise and Blasius of Jersey**

In England in the 18th and 19th centuries Blaise was adopted as mascot of woolworkers' pageants, particularly in Essex, Yorkshire, Wiltshire and Norwich. The popular enthusiasm for the saint is explained by the belief that Blaise had brought prosperity (as symbolised by the Woolsack) to England by teaching the English to comb wool. According to the tradition as recorded in printed broadsheets, Blaise came from Jersey, Channel Islands. Jersey was certainly a centre of export of woollen goods (as witnessed by the name *jersey* for the woollen textile). However, this legend is probably the result of confusion with a different saint, Blasius of Caesarea (*Caesarea* being also the Latin name of Jersey).

**Iconography**

In iconography, Blaise is represented holding two crossed candles in his hand (the Blessing of St. Blaise), or in a cave surrounded by wild beasts, as he was found by the hunters of the governor. He is often shown with the instruments of his martyrdom, steel combs. The similarity of these instruments of torture to wool combs led to his adoption as the patron saint of wool combers in particular, and the wool trade in general. He may also be depicted with crossed candles. Such crossed candles are used for the blessing of throats on his feast day, which falls on 3 February, the day after Candlemas on the General Roman Calendar. Blaise is traditionally believed to intercede in cases of throat illnesses, especially for fish-bones stuck in the throat.[10]

**References**

[8] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911: "Blaise".
The formula for the blessing of throats is: "Per intercessionem Sancti Blasii, episcopi et martyris, liberet te Deus a malo gutturis, et a quolibet alio malo. In nomine Patris, et Fili, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen." ("Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God free you from illness of the throat and from any other sort of ill. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.)

**External links**

- Saint Blaise (http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=28) article from Catholic.org
- Hieromartyr Blaise of Caesarea in Cappadocia (http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?FSID=100418) Orthodox icon and synaxarion
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