

**Sacred Heart Advent Mission: Homily 2**  
**Saint Lucy**  
**December 13, 2011**

Today is St. Lucy's birthday. However, it's not her birthday in the way we normally mark such occasions. In the Collect (the opening prayer in which the Church "collects" the intentions of the faithful and presents them to the Lord), we prayed: "May the glorious intercession of the Virgin and Martyr Saint Lucy give us new heart, we pray, O Lord, so that we may celebrate her *heavenly* birthday in this present age and so behold things eternal." Tonight we celebrate the *dies natalis* of St. Lucy, her birth unto eternal life through martyrdom, her heavenly birthday. The earliest extant account we have of celebrating this kind of birthday was written around the year 156 AD in the Acts of the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp of Smyrna, the successor of St. John the Apostle. After he was burned at the stake for refusing to deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ, his bones were collected and placed in a worthy depository. Each year in commemoration of the day of his martyrdom, the faithful gathered at the spot where was buried to celebrate the (quote) "birthday of his martyrdom" (unquote). (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, vol. 9, 313; vol. 12, 235).

"The very name *Lucy* pulsates with light, a living symbol amid the

season's darkness." In fact, the name Lucy comes from the Latin word for "light." Before the Gregorian calendar reform and the Julian calendar was still used, today was the shortest day of the year. The life of St. Lucy shines with a brilliant light as a witness to the Lord in the darkness of this world. Images of St. Lucy often portray her holding a golden plate with her two eyes placed upon it. She is also the patron saint of the blind. Both derive from the meaning of her name.

Father Pius Parsch wrote, "As a wise virgin Lucy advances with a burning lamp to meet the Bridegroom. She typifies the Church and the soul now preparing their bridal robes for a Christian marriage." (Pius Parsch, *The Church's Year of Grace*, vol. 1, 172).

Little is actually known about her life. We know that her heavenly birthday occurred on this day around the year 304 in Syracuse, Sicily. We know that she really lived from the ancient devotion to her cult there. We know that her relics have been in Venice since 1204. And we also have a legendary description of her martyrdom written much later, probably in the 500's.

We also know this: Pope Gregory the Gregory the Great introduced her name and Agatha's into the Canon of the Mass. (NCE, 1967, vol. 8, 1062).

**Why? Why are there saints listed by name in the First Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman Canon? Our Holy Father, Benedict XVI, in his exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Sacrament of Charity) wrote, "...I would like to reflect on a notion dear to the early Christians, which also speaks eloquently to us today: namely, witness even to the offering of one's own life, to the point of martyrdom. Throughout the history of the Church, this has always been seen as the culmination of the new spiritual worship: "Offer your bodies" (*Rom 12:1*). One thinks, for example, of the account of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, a disciple of Saint John: the entire drama is described as a liturgy, with the martyr himself becoming [the] Eucharist. We might also recall the Eucharistic imagery with which Saint Ignatius of Antioch describes his own imminent martyrdom: he sees himself as "God's wheat" and desires to become in martyrdom "Christ's pure bread." The Christian who offers his life in martyrdom enters into full communion with the Pasch of Jesus Christ and thus becomes Eucharist with him. Today too, the Church does not lack martyrs who offer the supreme witness to God's love. Even if the test of martyrdom is not asked of us, we know that worship pleasing to God demands that we should be inwardly prepared for it. Such worship culminates in the joyful and convincing**

testimony of a consistent Christian life, wherever the Lord calls us to be his witnesses.” (Sacramentum Caritatis, 85).

St. Augustine, preaching on the life of another famous martyr, St. Lawrence said, “...as you have regularly been told, he performed the office of deacon; it was there that he administered the sacred chalice of Christ’s blood; there that he shed his own blood for the name of Christ. The blessed apostle John clearly explained the mystery of the Lord’s supper when he said *Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* St. Lawrence understood this, my brethren, and he did it; and he undoubtedly prepared things similar to what he received at that table. He loved Christ in his life, he imitated him in his death.

And we too, brethren, if we truly love him, let us imitate him. After all, we shall not be able to give a better proof of love than by imitating his example; *for Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his footsteps...* The holy martyrs followed him, to the shedding of their blood, to the similarity of their sufferings. The martyrs followed, but they were not the only ones. It is not the case, I mean to say, that after they crossed, the bridge was cut; or that after they had drunk, the fountain dried up.” (Sermon 304,

[http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library\\_article/181/st.\\_lawrence\\_deacon\\_and\\_martyr\\_st.\\_augustine.html](http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/181/st._lawrence_deacon_and_martyr_st._augustine.html) Accessed 5 December 2011).

In a homily to neophytes, he also said, “I promised you, who have now been baptized, I promised you a sermon in which I would explain the Sacrament of the Lord’s Table, which you now look upon, and where you last night were made participants. You ought to know what you have received, what you are going to receive, and what you ought to receive daily. That Bread which you see on the altar, being blessed by the Word of God, is the Body of Christ. That chalice, or rather, what is in that chalice, being blessed by the Word of God, is the Blood of Christ. Through that bread and wine, the Lord Christ gives to you His Body and Blood, which He poured out for us unto the forgiveness of sins. *If you receive worthily, you are what you receive.*” (Sermon 227, <http://saintj.com/sermons/2009/2009-4-09.pdf> Accessed 5 December 2011).

You are what you receive. The martyrs understood this and followed our Lord to the end. Thus in the Roman Canon, before the Consecration there is a list of the twelve Apostles and twelve martyrs: five popes, a bishop, a deacon, and five laymen. After the Consecration there is a list of fifteen martyrs, including St. Lucy. They lived the

**sacred liturgy to the full and now they wait for us!**

**The Church has traditionally seen the first list of saints in the Canon as corresponding to St. John's vision of the heavenly liturgy in Revelation, chapter 4: "At once I was caught up in spirit. A throne was there in heaven, and on the throne sat one whose appearance sparkled like jasper and carnelian. Around the throne was a halo as brilliant as an emerald. Surrounding the throne I saw twenty-four other thrones on which twenty-four elders sat, dressed in white garments and with gold crowns on their heads." (Rev. 4: 2-4).**

**Later St. John relates, "When he broke open the fifth seal, *I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God.* They cried out in a loud voice, "How long will it be, holy and true master, before you sit in judgment and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" Each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to be patient a little while longer until the number was filled of their fellow servants and brothers who were going to be killed as they had been." (Rev. 6: 9-11). Just as the early Christians celebrated Polycarp's "birthday" at his grave, Christians began celebrating the Holy Eucharist over the tombs of martyrs. After the persecutions ceased, relics of martyrs were placed**

**in the altars of Churches. Nowadays most altars still have relics. Here at Sacred Heart we have relics of St. Thomas A Becket, St. Barnabas, St. Fulgentius, and many others. That is how intimate the connection is between the martyrs and the liturgy.**

**In the Extraordinary Form of Holy Mass, as the priest kisses the altar at the beginning of Mass, he prays, “We implore you, Lord, by the merits of your saints, whose relics are here, and of all the saints, that you would deign to forgive me all my sins.” The martyrs won the palm of victory and now they intercede for us, spurring us on to win the victory as well. On this “birthday” of St. Lucy, the Light, may she guide us safely through the darkness to the Light of Glory. Amen.**