

January 31

Marcella (ca. 330-411) nun

Marcella, a Roman noblewoman who is remembered as the founder of women's monastic life in the city of Rome, died at the beginning of the year 411.

The story of her life as told by Jerome, who met her around the year 382 during his stay in Rome, is rich in historical and spiritual details. Marcella, born shortly before the year 330, came from a distinguished family. The decisive events of her life were her early widowhood, after only six months of marriage, and her discovery of the Lives of the desert fathers, which were beginning to circulate in the West thanks to the efforts of Athanasius.

In the quiet of her home on the Aventine, Marcella decided to lead a life of renunciation, in search of the poverty of heart that would allow her to understand Scripture and do God's will. She soon became known and appreciated for her interpretations of Scripture.

In time other young women who had similar intentions joined her. Although they were neither the first nor the only women who attempted to create a monastic nucleus in empire's capital, their acquaintance with Jerome gave them both a reliable spiritual guide and lasting fame.

When her two friends Paola and Eustochio decided to follow their spiritual father to Palestine, Marcella did not want to abandon the solitary refuge she had succeeded in creating in the heart of the city. Not even the arrival of Alaric's goths, whose brutality she experienced firsthand, prevented her from remaining calmly in her small urban monastery until the end, seeking God's will by listening prayerfully to his Word.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

John Bosco (d. 1881), priest, founder of the Salesian order

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

John Bosco, priest (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (22 tubah/terr):

Antony the Great, the star of the wilderness and the father of all the monks

LUTHERANS:

Charles Spurgeon (d. 1892), preacher of the Revival in England

MARONITES:

Trifenia di Cizico (3rd-4th cent.), martyr

Acacio di Tolemaide e compagni (d. ca. 273), martyrs

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Cyrus and John of Alexandria (d. ca. 303), thaumaturges and unmercenaries

Cyril and Mary (14th cent.), parents of St Sergius, monks (Russian Church)

Maxim (d. 1516), archbishop of Wallachia (Serbian Church)

Ephrem Mzire (9th cent.), monk (Georgian Church)