



# MARRIAGE

*On their wedding night Tobiah arose from bed and said to his wife, “Sister, get up. Let us pray and beg our Lord to have mercy on us and to grant us deliverance.” Sarah got up, and they started to pray and beg that deliverance might be theirs.*

*They began with these words: “Blessed are you, O God of our fathers; praised be your name forever and ever. Let the heavens and all your creation praise you forever. You made Adam and you gave him his wife Eve to be his help and support; and from these two the human race descended. You said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a partner like himself.’ Now, Lord, you know that I take this wife of mine not because of lust, but for a noble purpose. Call down your mercy on me and on her, and allow us to live together to a happy old age.”*

*They said together, “Amen, amen.”*

- TOBIT 8:4B-8 <sup>[1]</sup>

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## READING

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### STS. HADRIAN AND NATALIA (C. 306) <sup>[2]</sup>

The story of this married couple is very ancient and is preserved in medieval collections of saint stories to this day. The basic historical facts are these: that Hadrian died in Emperor Diocletian’s persecution around 306 in Nicomedia <sup>[3]</sup> and that his remains were transferred to the site of the Ancient Roman forum where the church of S. Adriano al Foro still stands. This is the story that has been handed down through the centuries.

Natalia was a secret Christian during the Diocletian persecution. Her husband, Hadrian, was a non-Christian and a soldier in the Herculian Guard (bodyguard) of the emperor Galerius Maximian. One day he was overseeing the torture and execution of some Christians. He was amazed by their courage, and asked them what they hoped to gain by such suffering. They told him, “eye has not seen nor has ear heard what things God has prepared for those who love him.” <sup>[4]</sup> Hadrian was struck to the heart; he announced then and there that he, too, wanted to become Christian. He was immediately imprisoned.

When Nathalia heard the news, she was overwhelmed partly by sorrow at his imprisonment, but mostly with joy at his conversion. She had never expected this! It can be very hard for someone not to be able to share the Catholic Faith and love of

God with a spouse. Nathalia went to visit Hadrian in jail and told him her secret, and how proud and happy she was about his conversion. She encouraged him to stay strong.

When it came time for Hadrian to be executed, he was permitted to return home under house arrest to say goodbye to his wife. A servant ran ahead to tell Natalia that Hadrian was coming, but she could not think why he would be returning except that he had renounced his conversion. She began to weep with sadness; and when Hadrian came, she was so disappointed, she actually locked the door. He was pretty shocked, crying out, “Natalia, what are you doing this for?”

Natalia said, “How could you give up so much good? What did I do to deserve being married to a traitor?” When Hadrian realized what Natalia was thinking, it was almost kind of funny—and he had to explain to her. In fact, he had to explain to her several times; she didn’t believe him at first. “No, Natalia, I’m going to my execution!”

“Go away,” she said, “I want to die!” And he kept trying to convince her (through the door!) until finally he said, “Woman, you better let me in, because this is the last time you’re going to see me!” Then Natalia realized what was really going on. With surprise, tears, embarrassment, apology, tenderness—

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[1] Scripture taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition, available at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible>.

[2] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 531-535. See also <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07105a.htm>.

While the Church does not ascribe any historical authenticity to these legends, there has never been any determination that these stories and others like them are false. Suffice it to say, the Church still honors St. Hadrian, and his stories were collected and transcribed as worthy of imitation by Jacobus de Voragine sometime before 1298. Jacobus de Voragine was a Dominican and a bishop and beatified by Pius VII in 1816. Certainly, this is one of the best stories in the collection, and remains worthy of imitation. And it gives a wonderful sample of what the Middle Ages thought a good marriage looked like—ardent, romantic, courageous, risk-taking, encouraging, focused on God to the end.

[3] Modern day Izmit, Turkey.

[4] This is a line from 1 Corinthians 2:9.



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READING *continued*



*The Martyrdom of St. Hadrian*

*Painting by Adrien Sacquespée, 1659*

she opened the door to him, embraced him, and kissed him. It is hard to describe this parting. Never had she loved him so much, though her love was about to see greater trials.

Hadrian returned to prison and a terrible period of daily torture began for him and his companions. Natalia nursed him every day. Daily the prisoners were racked and beaten, and asked if they would renounce their faith. But Hadrian held strong and Natalia kept encouraging him.

On the 7th day, Hadrian was beaten so badly that “his bowels spilled out.” (Medical conditions do exist like this; if someone is beaten too badly, the muscles which support the internal organs will not function any more—the body starts to disintegrate. This is a truly painful and horrific condition.)

The story also preserves for us that Hadrian was about 28 at that time. He had been a handsome man, active and physically fit. Now consider him, unable to walk, his body falling apart, his face disfigured. He had been a soldier, one of the highest and closest to the emperor, a dependable and trustworthy man with a stable career before him, respected by the most powerful empire the world had ever seen. Now he was lying in a heap on the floor, a cripple who could not even feed himself.

Natalia got down on the ground, and put her hand under his head, whispering, “Blessed are you. You are my lord. My light. My sweet. God take you now, and deliver you from your sufferings.”

Natalia was the only consolation Hadrian had in that hell. When the authorities realized that the wives of the prisoners were visiting, this was immediately forbidden. Natalia was totally devastated.

Picture her being roughly escorted out of the prison. Picture her thinking, “I will never see Hadrian again. What will happen to him? How will he stay strong to the end?” Picture her passing by and suddenly noticing a young slave boy. He is on his way to take food and water to the prisoners. She sees the slave boy’s shaved head and baggy loose clothing.

Natalia got an idea. It began with a disguise. She dressed herself in baggy clothes and shaved her head. She began to visit the prison, passing herself off as one of the slave boy workers. Soon other wives were joining her, disguising themselves to care for the prisoners. We don’t know how long Natalia did this dangerous thing, bringing food, water, healing and her deep love to Hadrian. You can imagine how each time Natalia had to pass through the checkpoints her heart must have been pounding.



*The Church of S. Adriano al Foro in Rome, where the remains of St. Hadrian are finally said to have been buried.*

*Image from [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Curia\\_Iulia\\_front.jpg](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Curia_Iulia_front.jpg)*



# MARRIAGE

## READING *continued*

According to the story, this request was the last thing Natalia said to her husband: “When you go, pray for me, that I be safe from evil, and ask God to let you call me to come and join you as soon as possible.”

Soon after, Natalia was discovered; she and some of the other women were hauled before the court and their husbands dragged out to be killed once and for all. The authorities were extremely angry at Natalia’s disguise, so they did not choose a method of death that was quick and painless. The women’s punishment was to watch their husbands die. They were not allowed to speak to their husbands.

Natalia watched as guards broke her husband’s legs and then tossed him into a fire. She tried to follow Hadrian, but the guards held her back.

*“When you go, pray for me, that I be safe from evil, and ask God to let you call me to come and join you as soon as possible.”*

Though she was still young, Natalia never remarried. She used to dream about Hadrian and beg him to call her home. A few years after Hadrian’s death, a government official begged Natalia to marry him, but she refused. When he tried to force her to accept, she fled with some fellow Christians, taking her husband’s remains to bury in a church at Constantinople.

On the voyage to Constantinople, a terrible storm came upon their ship. In a dream, Natalia saw Hadrian saving them and telling her it would not be long. They remained safe in the storm, and arrived in Constantinople. She buried Hadrian’s remains properly, and soon after, Natalia had another dream. Hadrian was well and handsome again and told her it was time to join him in “eternal peace.” She told friends about this dream, and the morning, they found that she had quietly passed away.

The Church reveres this heroic couple, and celebrates St. Hadrian and his Companions’ feast on September 8.

## ST. PHILIP HOWARD (1557 -1595)

*This great story shows how the priesthood and marriage help each other.*

Philip Howard was baptized Catholic, but his family later decided to join the Church of England. While Philip was still young, his mother died and his father remarried a widow who had a daughter named Anne. When Philip grew up, he married Anne.

Although she was devoted to him, Philip cheated on her, at one point left her, and generally failed to practice any kind of religion.



*Philip In The Tower*

One day, Philip witnessed a brilliant debate between Fr. Edmund Campion, S.J. and some other scholars over issues of the Catholic Faith. Fr. Campion, a gifted scholar, had been imprisoned for his faith. He would eventually be executed by being hung, drawn, and quartered, simply for being a priest.

(Catholics were under a severe persecution from the protestant churches in England during this period. Catholicism was illegal. Refusing to attend Anglican services would result in huge fines. Many Catholics had their property taken unless they renounced the Faith; many were tortured and killed, especially priests, when they were discovered practicing the Faith.)

Over the next three years, Philip thought more and more about returning to the Catholic Faith. Finally he decided. His wife Anne converted just before he did. Converting sparked a new love between them. Philip and Anne fell deeply in love and conceived their first and only son. Philip, though, would never be able to see this child.

After their conversion, they were discovered to be practicing the Catholic Faith, and both were placed under house arrest. Anne lived more than a year under house arrest. When Philip was placed under house arrest, he attempted to flee, but was betrayed, caught, and imprisoned.



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Philip Howard lived under threat of death for the next ten years in the Tower of London. He was forbidden to see his wife or their child, whom she bore shortly after his imprisonment, unless he agreed to attend an Anglican service. Anne absolutely supported Philip in his refusal. Philip eventually contracted a disease and died alone.

On the wall of the prison, it is said he scratched these words in Latin: “Quanto plus afflictiones pro Christo in hoc saeculo, tanto plus gloriae cum Christo in futuro,” which, translated into English, means “The more affliction we endure for Christ in this world, the more glory we shall obtain with Christ in the next.”

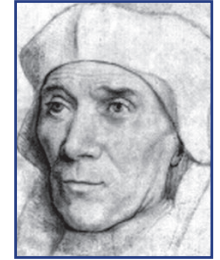
Philip Howard was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1970. <sup>[5]</sup> His wife Anne would go on to found a Jesuit House and support many priests in their clandestine work for God in England.

## CLOSING

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### SAINTS THOMAS MORE AND JOHN FISHER

Thomas More (1478-1535) was a husband, father, scholar, translator, lawyer, and served as the King’s Chancellor for several years—the second highest position in government. John



Fisher (1469-1535) was Bishop of Rochester, also a scholar, a great preacher and author. Both had strong prayer lives. Both did penance quietly—rising early in the morning, or doing without extreme luxuries, although both could easily have used their positions to live in luxury.

In the 1530s, King Henry VIII decided he no longer wanted to be married to his wife Catherine of Aragon because she was unable to have a boy that could take his place as king. He wanted to take a new wife, a woman named Anne Boleyn. In fact, he had already been committing adultery with her. He was hoping that the Catholic Church would grant him an annulment. But the Church ruled that Henry was truly married to Catherine, and therefore, could not take a second wife. So King Henry founded his own church, divorced Catherine, married Anne Boleyn, and demanded that everyone recognize his new marriage. Over the next few years, Bishop John Fisher and Thomas More firmly opposed the king.

These two men faced danger, poverty, imprisonment, and eventually death. And both were defending a different vocation than his own. Hilaire Belloc tells us that Thomas More died to defend the authority of the Pope, a celibate man, to judge in spiritual matters: “he did not die for the real presence, as did many another after him. He did not die, as many another might have done, out of loyalty to Queen Catherine. He did not die as a protest against a doctrine generally held heretical... He did not die for the mass or for the sanctity of the clerical order. He died only for that one point of the papal supremacy.” <sup>[8]</sup> Of course, he might have willingly died for any of those things, had they been in question; but the issue at stake was the authority of the Pope over the Church, and More died in defense of this.

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[5] See New Advent at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07503a.htm>

[8] Hilaire Belloc, “Saint Thomas More,” *Characters of the Reformation* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books & Publishers, 1992), 63.



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On the other hand, Bishop John Fisher, a celibate priest, made his martyrdom in defense of the vocation of marriage. He was Catherine of Aragon's confessor; she feared for his life and told him he did not need to take such a risk for her. But Fisher had already said in public that he was greatly inspired by the example of St. John the Baptist. That forerunner of Christ, said Fisher, had died in the cause of marriage. Even further, that hero had been willing to die for marriage before the time when Christ made marriage holy by the shedding of his blood. [9] Bishop John Fisher decided he could do no less than his patron saint.

Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher were both beheaded in 1535. They witnessed to the fact that we are called, whatever our vocation, to serve and defend other vocations.

### MARIA GORETTI (1890-1902) [10]

Maria Goretti was born to an Italian farming family. When her mother was widowed, the family moved to share life and work with another family called the Serenellis. This family had a son named Alessandro, older than Maria by seven years.

When Maria was younger she was remembered for being responsible in her chores, always ready to share or even give away her treats to her siblings, and for being so overjoyed at her First Communion, that the priest allowed her to receive more frequently than was usually allowed in that era.



One day, when Maria was twelve, while she was babysitting, Alessandro attacked her. He tried to rape her. She resisted his attack, screaming that God would never want him to do such a terrible thing. Alessandro was unable to overpower her; he ended by stabbing her 11 times with a nine-and-a-half inch knife and leaving her for dead.

The story is truly terrible. Maria was dragging herself to the door to call for help. Alessandro heard her, returned and stabbed her three more times to finish her off. Maria's screams this time finally attracted the attention of the family off working in the fields.

It took Maria twenty-four hours to die and she couldn't have a drink of water because her internal injuries were so bad. As a minor, Alessandro was sentenced to 30 years in prison. For the first eight years in prison he wasn't sorry at all. But then he had a dream of Maria, who came to him with lilies in her arms. She told him, "Alessandro, as I have promised, your soul shall someday reach me in heaven."

Alessandro became a model prisoner. He was released three years early, shortly before 1929. In 1937 Alessandro went to beg forgiveness from Maria's mother. They went to Mass together that night; it was Christmas. Alessandro was asked to give testimony when Maria's cause for canonization was begun. In the time that had passed more than forty miracles had been credited to her intercession. Both Maria's mother and Alessandro were there for Maria's canonization in 1950.

*A wonderful documentary about this saint by the Mercy Foundation can be viewed online. Her whole story is beautiful, but you can view the passion and death of the saint by starting at Part III: <http://youtu.be/5Vf0Mb6Ga38?t=3m> and then viewing Part IV, or play all at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z5HJ51Ycic8&list=PL11C6E0CCCEd11C1E>*

[9] Stanley L. Jaki, "Introduction," in John Fisher, *The Defense of the Priesthood* (Port Huron, MI: American Council on Economics and Society, 1996), 18-19.

[10] A great version of the story of Maria Goretti is available with photographs in Ann Ball's *Modern Saints* (Tan Books, 2009).