



St Phoebe Center
FOR THE DEACONESS

List of Deaconess Saints

St Tatiana of Rome: Feast is Jan. 12. The Holy Virgin Martyr Tatiana was born into an illustrious Roman family in the third Century. Her father was secretly a Christian and raised his daughter to be devoted to God and the Church. When she reached the age of maturity, Tatiana decided to remain a virgin, betrothing herself to Christ. Disdaining earthly riches, she sought instead the imperishable wealth of Heaven. She was made a deaconess in one of the Roman churches and served God in fasting and prayer, tending the sick and helping the needy. During the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus (222-235), she was arrested and brutally tortured for several days, each day miraculously being healed, and each day suffering new, even crueler tortures. Several people were converted due to her miracles, some even suffering the baptism of blood as they witnessed the faith of this heroic woman, and were converted. She was finally beheaded, along with her father.

St Xenia (or Xene) of Rome: Feast is Jan. 24. St. Xenia of Rome, whose given name was Eusebia, lived in the 5th century and was the only daughter of an eminent Roman senator. From her youth she loved God, and wished to avoid a marriage that had been arranged for her. She secretly left her parent's home with two servants, and set sail upon a ship. She settled in Milassa in Asia Minor, bought land, built a Church dedicated to St Stephen, founded a woman's monastery, and changed her name, calling herself Xenia (which means "stranger" or "foreigner" in Greek). Bishop Paul of Milassa ordained her to the diaconate because of her virtuous life. She helped the destitute, comforted the grief-stricken, and guided sinners to repentance. She possessed a deep humility, accounting herself the worst and most sinful of all. The holy virgin died in 450 while she was praying. During her funeral, a luminous wreath of stars surrounding a radiant cross appeared over the monastery in the heavens. This sign accompanied the body of the saint when it was carried into the city, and remained there until her burial. Many of the sick received healing after touching St. Xenia's relics.

St Platonis (Platonida) of Nisibis: Feast is April 6. Saint Platonis was a Syrian deaconess, nun, and abbess of the fifth century. Ordained and serving in the office of the female diaconate for several years, she desired a life closer to God in holy solitude and withdrew into the desert near Nisibis. She established a community of holy virgins there, over which she presided as abbess. She led by holy example as much as by a monastic rule. However, the rule she set out for her sisters was particularly strict. Nuns would eat only once per day. The rest of their time they would spend in prayer or in studies of the writings of the Church Fathers, or in work. Though her rule was strict and exacting,

Saint Platonis was gentle with her sisters and did not ask them to do anything she was unwilling to do herself. She taught her nuns primarily by example, striving every day to please God with a blameless life of love and generosity. She reposed peacefully in the year 308.

St Olympias of Constantinople: Feast is July 25. St. Olympias was born in 361 AD to a very wealthy and noble family. When Saint Olympias was still very young, her parents betrothed her to a nobleman. The marriage was supposed to take place when Saint Olympias reached the age of maturity. The bridegroom soon died, however, and Saint Olympias did not wish to enter into another marriage, preferring a life of virginity. After the death of her parents she became the heir to great wealth, which she began to distribute to all the needy: the poor, the orphaned and the widowed. She also gave generously to the churches, monasteries, hospices and shelters for the downtrodden and the homeless. Holy Patriarch Nectarius (381-397) appointed Saint Olympias as a deaconess. The saint fulfilled her service honorably and without reproach. She provided great assistance to hierarchs coming to Constantinople, and was friends with many of the holy great fathers of the church, especially St. John Chrysostom. She did not regard her wealth as her own but rather God's, and she distributed not only to good people, but also to their enemies. When St John Chrysostom was unjustly exiled, Olympias suffered terribly because of her support for him, was forced from her home, and sent into exile, where she died on July 25, 408.

St Irene Chrysovalantou: Feast day is July 28. Born in the 9th century, Irene was from an aristocratic and wealthy family in Cappadocia, connected to the imperial family. She was chosen to marry the son of the Empress, and as she traveled to Constantinople to be engaged she stopped to receive the blessing of the holy hermit St Joannicus. He prophesied that she would join the convent of Chrysovalantou, which was in need of her. When she arrived in the city, she discovered that the young man had been engaged to another, and she was free. She determined to follow the monastic way at the monastery of Chrysovalantou, freed her slaves and distributed her wealth, and began to serve the sister with humility and obedience. She devoted herself to ascetic and spiritual struggles, grew in holiness, and led many into the monastery through her example. She was made abbess and ordained to the diaconate by the Patriarch Methodius. Progressing through pious struggles to a place of great spiritual maturity, St Irene developed gifts of foresight and exorcism. Her prayer through the night continued in the courtyard of the monastery, and caused herself to levitate and the cypress trees to bend towards her. She was granted three apples from St. John the Theologian, visions of angels, and appeared in a vision to the Emperor to release an unjustly convicted man. After her death at 102 years, she continued to be a wonderworker.

St Nonna of Nazianzus (of Cappadocia): Feast day is Aug. 5. Nonna was a model wife and mother, and, later, also an ordained deaconess. Her three children, which include St. Gregory the Theologian, are all recognized as saints. As a Christian, she possessed powerful and miracle-working prayer. By her prayer to God, she converted her husband from heathen stupidity to the Christian Faith. Her husband Gregory later became a bishop in the town of Nazianzus. By prayer Nonna saved her son Gregory the Theologian from a storm. She died peacefully as a deaconess in the year 374 A.D.

St Bryene (Brienna) of Nisibis (or of Sivapolis): Feast day is Aug. 30. Bryene was the elderly abbess (and aunt) of the martyr St. Febronia of Nisibis. St. Brienna's teacher and abbess had been a deaconess named Platonis. What we know of St Bryene comes from the life of St Febronia. The elderly Abbess and her niece suffered during the reign of Diocletian (284-305). Being concerned with her beautiful niece's salvation, she assigned her a stricter form of life than the other nuns. When persecution came to their monastery, most of the nuns were able to flee, but the elderly Bryene, her companion Thomais, and her niece Febronia, who was ill, remained. The beautiful Febronia was arrested and suffered the cruelest of tortures, so inhuman that the people began to demand an end to the torture. Eventually the people were unable to bear such a horrid spectacle and left the scene of the torture, cursing Diocletian and his gods. When the body of her niece was returned to the convent, Abbess Bryene fell senseless, seeing the mutilated remains of Saint Febronia. Later, she recovered her senses and gave orders to open the convent gates so that all would be able to come and venerate the holy martyr and glorify God Who had given her such endurance in suffering for Christ. St Bryene reposed two years later, on the anniversary of the death of St Febronia.

St Phoebe (of Cenchreae): Feast day is Sept. 3. Although we know little about her life, St Phoebe is recognized as the first female deacon, and is honored in prayers and writings as the prototype for female deacons just as St. Stephen is the prototype for male deacons. St. Phoebe came from a very busy port area called Cenchreae, a popular stop for people traveling from Syria or Asia Minor. St. Paul clearly valued St. Phoebe's service, thanking her in public for her hospitality and for meeting the needs of the people in Cenchreae, and urging others to help her with her ministry as "a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae." Centuries later, St. John Chrysostom praised St. Phoebe's work for the Church as an inspiration and model for both men and women to imitate. He calls her a saint – a holy person and a woman who served the Church through the office of deacon.

St Justina of Antioch of Pisidia: Feast Day is Oct. 2. Justina the virgin was of the city of Antioch, daughter of pagans devoted to the Roman gods. However, she became convinced of the truth and spiritual power of Jesus's message, and was instructed in the Christian faith by the deacon Praylios. Soon after her conversion her parents also became Christians. She chose to remain a virgin and began monastic observance in her home. Her faithfulness came to the attention of a notorious sorcerer, Cyprian, who sought to turn her from Christ, but instead she converted him to Christianity. He later became a bishop and ordained her a deaconess, and she became the abbess of a monastery in Carthage. Cyprian and Justina were both arrested and suffered torture, eventually being beheaded in 268.

St Poplia (also called Publia) the Confessor of Antioch; Feast day is Oct. 9. St Poplia/Publia lived in Antioch in the 4th century. Married, with children, she became known for her faith and spiritual discipline. Widowed at a young age, she did not remarry, but continued to raise her children faithfully. Her son became a priest, and she herself was ordained a deacon, and she converted her home into a monastery. In her later years, in the reign of the apostate Emperor Julian, Poplia

confronted the Emperor by having her nuns loudly chant Psalm 113/114 denouncing idol worship as his entourage passed by. Julian demanded that they stop, but Poplia instructed them to sing even louder. The emperor's soldiers fiercely beat Poplia, and shortly afterward she fell asleep in the Lord.

St Susanna of Palestine: Feast day is Dec. 15. Susanna was born in Palestine in the latter part of the third century. Her father was a rich pagan priest, but her mother brought her up in the Jewish faith. When her parents died, she was placed under guardianship until she married. She came to know the Christian faith, was baptized, distributed her entire inheritance to the poor, and freed her slaves. She cropped her hair, donned men's clothing, called herself John, and was received into a men's monastery in Jerusalem (they assumed she was a eunuch). She grew in virtue and spiritual wisdom and eventually became superior of this monastery. After twenty years faithful service she was falsely accused by a woman of sexual seduction. At first she accepted the accusation and asked forgiveness, but the Bishop of Eleutheropolis came to examine the case. Susanna revealed her gender to the deaconesses that accompanied him, and her name was cleared. Impressed with Susannah, and brought her back to his cathedral, ordained her deaconess, and appointed her abbess of a convent. She served as spiritual elder for many years, served the poor, and cared for the sick, and was known to work miracles. Under the reign of Julian the Apostate she was arrested for refusing to sacrifice to the gods, tortured, suffered martyrdom.