

St. Roch
Kingdom of Majorca (France) / Italy
1295-1327

*Devoted himself, in Italy, to serve the sick during a raging pestilence
Caused many to be cured by making the Sign of the Cross over them
During the Council held in the city of Constance in 1414, the city was
delivered from the plague by imploring his intercession*



St. Roch of Montpellier at the Church
of St. Pierre-es-Liens in Dussac,
Source: Francetheresadoyle-
nelson.blogspot.com

Saint Roch was born in Montpellier around 1295. His father was a wealthy nobleman and possibly the governor of the town of Montpellier. His birth was in answer to his parents' prayers for a child. He had a birthmark in the form of a cross that deeply marked his breast, a sign that the Blessed Virgin Mary had heard and answered his mother's prayers for her barrenness to be healed. His parents raised him in a devout manner. They all fasted twice a week as had been the custom in the early Church per the Didache c. 60, 100 or 120 A.D.)

Both of Roch's parents died when he was 20 years old. He sold all the personal property he inherited and distributed the proceeds among the poor and then transferred the government of the city to his uncle. He then became a Third Order Franciscan and began a poor mendicant way of life. He went on pilgrimage to Rome.

In 1315, he arrived at Acquapendente near Viterbo in northern Italy and found that an epidemic had broken out. Roch followed the example of Christ and offered his life in the service of his brothers and sisters in Christ. He cared for the sick both in their private homes and in the hospital — at great risk to himself. Roch served the sick without rest day and night. Reportedly, God rewarded his efforts by causing many to be cured at the mere *Sign of the Cross* which St. Roch made over them.

When the plague abated in Acquapendente, Roch continued on his journey to Rome. His miraculous healing powers were displayed in every pestilence-infested town that he passed on this way to Rome. In Rome, he also found that a pestilence had also broken out. So, in addition to visiting the holy places, Saint Roch devoted himself to the care of the sick, many of whom he miraculously cured.

When his travels brought him to the town of Piacenza (Italy), he became sick, contracting the disease in his leg. Instead of burdening anyone with his care, Roch left the house and using a staff dragged himself to a neighboring forest. There he found a dilapidated hut with a bit of straw, where he lay down. Reportedly a dog brought him bread for nourishment. His strength gradually returned.

Roch returned to Montpellier, his place of birth, where the citizens were at war. He was unrecognizable, and was accused of being a spy, arrested and imprisoned. He made no defense, wishing to conceal his true and noble identity. He entrusted himself completely to God's will. He wasted away in jail, forgotten and abandoned for five years. God sent angels to minister to him while he was held in captivity. As he felt death drawing near, he asked for a priest to administer the last sacraments. Following this, he died there on August 16, 1376.

According the Franciscan Book of Saints, when the priest entered his cell, a miraculous light filled the prison cell. Following his death inscribed on the wall, as if by angels, was his name and the prediction that he would intercede for those afflicted by the plague. His uncle, the governor, was called to the cell. After which his mother, Roch's grandmother arrived and recognized Roch's body, due to the red, cross-shaped birthmark on his breast. They gave Roch a magnificent funeral and a church was built in his honor where he was buried. His body was moved from Montpellier to Venice in 1485, reportedly stolen by the Venetians (similar to that of St. Mark the Evangelist which was taken to Venice from Alexandria, Egypt, where St. Mark had served as the bishop). St. Roch's body is in the Chiesa di San Rocco (Church of St. Roch), Campo S. Rocco, 30125, Venice, Italy. His veneration spread throughout Europe. St. Roch was canonized by Pope Urban VIII.

St. Roch is the patron Saint of Montpellier, dogs and dog lovers. (Memorial - August 16).

The following is from *the original* Reverend Alban Butler's *Lives of Saints* (1883) republished in 2020 by Loreto Publications:⁶

We find this eminent servant of God honored, especially in France and Italy, amongst the most illustrious saints in the fourteenth century, soon after his death. Nevertheless, says F. Berthier, we have no authentic history of his life. All that we can affirm concerning him is that he was born of a noble family at Montpellier, and making a pilgrimage of devotion to Rome, he devoted himself in Italy to serve the sick during a raging pestilence. Maldura says this happened at Placentia. Falling himself sick, and unable to assist others, and shunned and abandoned by the whole world, he made a shift to crawl rather than walk into a neighboring forest, where a dog used to lick his sores. He bore incredible pains with patience and holy joy, and God was pleased to restore him to his health. He returned into France, and in the practice of austere penance, and the most fervent piety and charity, he wore out his last years at Montpellier where he died, as it is commonly said, in 1327. Some postpone his death to the decline of the century, and think he went into Italy only in 1348, when historians mention that a pestilence made dreadful havoc in that country. Many cities have been speedily delivered from the plague by imploring his intercession, in particular that of Constance during the general council held there in 1414. His body was translated from Montpellier to Venice in 1485, where it is kept with great honor in a beautiful church; but certain portions of his relics are shown at Rome, Arles and many other places. *See Pinius the Bollandist, r. 3. Augusti, p. 380. F. Berthier, the last continuator of F. Longueva's Hist, de l'Eglise de France, r. 13, l. 37, ad an. 1327, and the life of St. Roch by Maldura, translated into French by D'Andilly. Also Pagi the Younger: Bened. XIV. etc.*

References:

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- 2) New Advent. (60-80 A.D.). *The Didache (The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles)*. Chapter 8. Accessed 11 May 2022. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>
- 3) Marion A. Habig, O.F.M. (1979). *The Franciscan Book of Saints*. Franciscan Herald Press: Chicago, 613-616.

4) Roman Catholic. Saint Roch. Accessed 27 May 2022. <https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/saint-roch.html>

5) Gretchen Filz (16 Aug 2017). The Story of St. Roch, Patron Saint of Dogs and Dog Lovers. <https://www.catholiccompany.com/magazine/st-roch-patron-of-dogs-6114#>

6) Reverend Alban Butler (1883). *The Lives of the Saints* as republished by Loreto Publications: Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, 2020. Book Five, Vol. VIII & IX, 199.

Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses (www.ciciams.org / www.nacn-usa.org): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka