

# St. Ephigenia of Ethiopia



*Commemorated on November 16 (also on September 21)*

The Holy Apostle St. Matthew evangelized Ethiopia, where he disclosed as agents of the Devil the various magicians who misled the King and the people. He resurrected the son of the King, and the admiring people wanted to adore him as a god. But St. Matthew did not permit it, and used the gold and silver they brought in his homage to build a great church. He resided there under the protection of the sovereign for 33 years. The king's daughter, St. Ephigenia, consecrated herself to God and founded a convent where she was the superior of more than 200 virgins.

After the King died, his successor, Hirtacus, wanted to marry St. Ephigenia since he considered her the only woman worthy of him. The new King asked St. Matthew to convince her to marry and promised him half of his kingdom. The Apostle told him to come to church on Sunday, and that there he would find a response to his request. The King thought that the Apostle would persuade Ephigenia to marry him. With the virgins and whole populace present, St. Matthew preached at great length on the excellence of the sacrament of marriage.

Hirtacus was pleased believing that the sermon would make Ephigenia consent to marriage with him. However, at a certain moment, St. Matthew said, "Since marriage is good as long as the union is kept inviolate, all of you here present know that if a servant dared to usurp the king's spouse, he would deserve not only the king's anger, but death as a penalty." Then he turned to the king and addressed him, "So it is with you, O King! You know that Ephigenia has become the spouse of the Eternal King and is consecrated with the sacred veil. How can you take the spouse of One who is more powerful than you and make her your wife?"

Filled with rage and hatred, the King left the church. When the liturgy was concluded, he sent a swordsman with orders to kill St. Matthew. Finding St. Matthew standing before the altar with his hands raised to Heaven in prayer, he stabbed the Apostle in the back, killing him and making him a martyr.

Learning this, the indignant people ran to the royal palace to take revenge, but the priests restrained them and advised them to follow the funeral procession of St. Matthew instead. Hirtacus then had a huge fire ignited around the convent of St. Ephigenia to kill her and the virgins. But St. Matthew appeared to them and turned the fire away from the convent and towards the royal palace, which was completely consumed along with all in it. Only the King and his son managed to escape.

The Prince immediately ran to the tomb of St. Matthew confessing his father's crimes and asking forgiveness. The King was stricken with leprosy and took his life with his own sword. The people chose as king the brother of St. Ephigenia. He reigned for 70 years spreading the word of Christ and building churches throughout Ethiopia.

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