

## **LIFE OF SAINT CASSIAN, BISHOP AND MARTYR**

On August 13, the Church honors the memory of Saint Cassian, one of the most illustrious martyrs of Jesus Christ, who suffered under the pagan Emperors when he was the Bishop of Brescia, a suffragan of the Archdiocese of Milan. Out of zeal for the Catholic religion, he became a schoolteacher in the city of Imola, in Italy, situated in the Romagna, which was in other times called Forum Cornelia after its founder, Cornelius Sylla.

The poet Prudentius, who wrote an account of the saint's life in verse and later composed another in prose, found out about him when out of devotion he visited his tomb. There he saw a picture in which the saint's martyrdom was depicted; he also learned about it from a devout cleric of the locality. Here is a summary of his account.

Saint Cassian, having been driven from his episcopal see during the persecution that occurred under the Emperor Julian the Apostate, withdrew to Imola. He thought that he could not better exercise his zeal than by instructing youth. In order to inspire these children with the principles of the religion and the faith taught by Jesus Christ, he taught them the basic elements of literature, that is, how to read and write. He taught them signs that express several things by a single character, so that one can write as quickly as a person can talk. This was a method widely used in those days.

The saint was reported to the city judge, who was a partisan of the passions of the apostate emperor. The judge had Cassian arrested and brought before him to force him to renounce the worship of the true God and to adore the false divinities. But when Saint Cassian refused to sacrifice to the idols, the judge became angry over his constancy and declared him guilty of sacrilege against the gods and rebellion against the edicts of the emperor. The tyrant thought he could find no means more appropriate to take vengeance on Saint Cassian than to abandon him to his own students, most of whom were still pagans.

He was, therefore, brought back to his school and stripped with his hands tied behind his back. The crowd of his students went against him for fear of offending the judge, and perhaps also to take revenge for the just and necessary punishments they had received from him. Some broke their slates on his head, others pierced his flesh with thousands of blows by their metallic styluses, which were like engraver's tools, or awls. These were used in those days to make marks on wood or on wax. Thus they caused him to die a long, drawn out death. His martyrdom was all the more cruel and painful since his young executioners could not kill him outright. He languished in the midst of torments, which were constantly renewed and did not end until he had lost all his blood, drop by drop. This happened on August 13, around the year 363. All the martyrologies mention Saint Cassian.

Prudentius called upon this saint to obtain for him a fortunate and prosperous journey which he was to make to Rome. His prayer was heard and, when he returned to Spain, his native country, he composed the history of Saint Cassian's martyrdom, as we have related it.

The city of Brescia recognizes him as its bishop, and the Cathedral of Imola still bears the name of Saint Cassian. A very ancient tradition states that his body still rests beneath the high altar.