

## SAINT CYPRIAN of CARTHAGE – BISHOP & MARTYR



Saint Cyprian's full name was Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus. He was an African nobleman born in Carthage, North Africa, about 200 A.D. Cyprian was born of a wealthy noble family. He was a skilled master of rhetoric and had taken up a career in law before his conversion to the Christian faith from paganism. Despite his high social rank and seemingly carefree life, he was besieged by a feeling of emptiness and, as he described it, a "hidden desperation." It was in these circumstances that, at the age of 35, he embraced the faith and was baptized on Easter Day of 246 A.D. He marveled over the dramatic change the faith brought about in his life and so impressed the Christians of Carthage that a mere three years later, when their Bishop Donatus died, they requested Cyprian as his successor. No sooner was he elected than a savage persecution broke out against the Christians all throughout the Roman Empire and Carthage was no exception.

Nevertheless, Cyprian took the helm and held his community together. From a self-imposed exile he wrote hundreds of encouraging letters to those enduring the ordeals and gave them a shepherd's care. Within two years Cyprian was able to return to Carthage where he zealously and pastorally led his Church. Cyprian was a dedicated student of the Scriptures and read closely the works of the theologians and philosophers of his time. Cyprian himself was a writer and addressed some extremely important issues in the early Church. Many of his works were very influential on the teachings of the Catholic Church and his Treatise on the "Our Father," was considered by many to be a work of genius. He is numbered among the "Father's of the Church." This term describes those, who, through the exercise of their pastoral office and by their teaching and preaching, decisively influenced the development of Christian doctrine and the understanding of Sacred Scripture in the first centuries of the Church.

In the year 257 A.D. persecutions once again broke out against the Church. Cyprian was arrested and then exiled. Refusing to recant his faith, Cyprian knew his time had come to make his supreme witness to Christ. When the death sentence was pronounced he cried out "Thanks be to God!" and that same day September 14, 258, he was beheaded. He was the first African Bishop to be martyred for the faith.

*All Christ did, all he taught, was the will of God. Humility in our daily lives, an unwavering faith, a moral sense of modesty in conversation, justice in acts, mercy in deed, discipline, refusal to harm others, a readiness to suffer harm, peaceableness with our brothers, a whole-hearted love of the Lord, loving in him what is of the Father, fearing him because he is God, preferring nothing to him who preferred nothing to us, clinging tenaciously to his love, standing by his cross with loyalty and courage when there is any conflict involving his honor and his name, manifesting in our speech the constancy of our profession and under torture confidence for the fight, and in dying the endurance for which we will be crowned – this is what it means to wish to be a co-heir with Christ, to keep God's command; this is what it means to do the will of the Father.*

From a Treatise on the Lord's Prayer by Saint Cyprian of Carthage