



# St. Photini

February 26th

St. Photini lived in first century Palestine. She was the Samaritan woman who Christ visited at the well asking her for water. It was she who accepted the "living water" offered her by Christ Himself after repenting from her many sins (John. 4:5-42). She went and told her townspeople that she had met the Christ. For this, she is sometimes recognized as the first to proclaim the Gospel of Christ. She converted her five sisters (Sts. Anatole, Photo, Photis, Paraskeve, and Kyriake) and her two sons (Victor and Joses). They all became tireless evangelists for Christ.

The apostles of Christ baptized her and gave her the name of Photini which means "the enlightened one." She is remembered by the Church as a Holy Martyr and Equal to the Apostles. After Sts. Peter and Paul were martyred, St. Photini and her family left their homeland of Sychar, in Samaria, to travel to Carthage to proclaim the Gospel of Christ there.

During the reign of Emperor Nero in the first century, excessive cruelty was displayed against the Christians, St. Photini lived in Carthage with her younger son, Joses. Her eldest son, Victor, fought bravely in the Roman army against the barbarians, and was appointed military commander in the city of Attalia (Asia Minor). Later, Nero called him to Italy to arrest and punish Christians.

Sebastian, an official in Italy, said to Victor, "I know that you, your mother and your brother, are followers of Christ. As a friend I advise you to submit to the will of the emperor. If you inform on any Christians, you will receive their wealth. I shall write to your mother and brother, asking them not to preach Christ in public. Let them practice their faith in secret."

Victor replied, "I want to be a preacher of Christianity like my mother and brother." Sebastian said, "O Victor, we all know what woes await you, your mother and brother." Then Sebastian suddenly felt a sharp pain in his eyes. He was dumbfounded, and his face was somber.

For three days Sebastian lay there blind, without uttering a word. On the fourth day he declared, "The God of the Christians is the only true God." St. Victor asked why Sebastian had suddenly changed his mind. Sebastian replied, "Because Christ is calling me." Soon he was baptized, and immediately regained his sight. St. Sebastian's servants, after witnessing the miracle, were also baptized.

Reports of this reached Nero, and he commanded that the Christians be brought to him at Rome. The Lord Himself appeared to the confessors and said, "Fear not, for I am with you. Nero, and all who serve him, will be vanquished." The Lord said to Victor, "From this day forward, your name will be Photinus, because through you, many will be enlightened and will believe in Me." The

Lord then told the Christians to strengthen and encourage Sebastian to persevere until the end.

All these things, and even future events, were revealed to St. Photini. She left Carthage in the company of several Christians and joined the confessors in Rome. At Rome, Emperor Nero ordered the saints to be brought before him, and he asked them whether they truly believed in Christ. All the confessors refused to renounce the Savior. The emperor then gave orders to smash the martyrs' finger joints. During the torture, the confessors felt no pain, and their hands remained unharmed. Nero ordered that Sts. Sebastian, Photinus and Joses be blinded and locked up in prison, and St. Photini and her five sisters, Anatola, Phota, Photis, Paraskeva and Kyriake, were sent to the imperial court under the supervision of Nero's daughter, Domnina. St. Photini converted both Domnina and her servants to Christ. She also converted a sorcerer, who had brought her poisoned food that was meant to kill her.

Three years passed, and Nero sent to the prison for one of his servants, who had been locked up. The messengers reported to him that Sts. Sebastian, Photinus and Joses, who had been blinded, had completely recovered, and that people were visiting them to hear their preaching. Indeed, the whole prison had been transformed into a bright and fragrant place where God was glorified.

Nero then gave orders to crucify the saints, and to beat their naked bodies with straps. On the fourth day, the emperor sent servants to see whether the martyrs were still alive. Approaching the place of the tortures, the servants fell blind. An angel of the Lord freed the martyrs from their crosses and healed them. The saints took pity on the blinded servants, and restored their sight by their prayers to the Lord. Those who were healed came to believe in Christ and were soon baptized.

In a rage, Nero gave orders to flay the skin from St. Photini and to throw her down a well. Sebastian, Photinus and Joses had their legs cut off, and they were thrown to dogs, and then had their skin flayed off. The sisters of St. Photini also suffered terrible torments. Nero gave orders to cut off their breasts and to flay their skin. An expert in cruelty, the emperor readied the fiercest execution for St. Photis: they tied her by the feet to the tops of two bent-over trees. When the ropes were cut, the trees sprang upright and tore the martyr apart. The emperor ordered the others beheaded. St. Photini was removed from the well and locked up in prison for twenty days. After this, Nero had St. Photini brought to him and asked if she would now relent and offer sacrifice to the idols. St. Photini spat in his face, and laughing at him, said, "O most impious of the blind, you profligate and stupid man! Do you think me so deluded that I would consent to renounce my Lord Christ and instead offer sacrifice to idols as blind as you?"

Hearing such words, Nero gave orders to throw St. Photini down a well, where she surrendered her soul to God in the year 66.