

*The story of...*

## **Saint Florian, the patron saint of the fire service**

Florian was born in Austria in the 4th century about 250 A.D. in Cetium (now in Austria). The St. Florian commemorated in the Roman Martyrology on May 4th, was an officer of the Roman army. He advanced in the ranks and occupied a high administrative post in Noricum, now part of Austria. The saint suffered "death for the Faith" in the days of Diocletian. Although he became an officer of the Roman army, he didn't observe a "don't ask, don't tell" policy and confessed to his Christianity in anti-Christian times.

His legendary "Acts" state that he gave himself up at Lorch to the soldiers of Aquilinus, and the governor of Lorch, when they were rounding up the Christians. The Emperor Diocletian was shocked to learn that Florian did not carry out his orders to persecute all Christians in the area, and, thus, was sentenced to death by fire. Standing on the funeral pyre, Florian is reputed to have challenged the Roman soldiers to light the fire, saying "If you do, I will climb to heaven on the flames." Apprehensive to his words, instead of burning Florian, he was flogged and flayed after making the bold confession. He was twice scourged, half-flayed alive, set on fire, and finally thrown into the river Enns with a stone around his neck. His body was recovered by a pious woman, and he was buried honorably.

About 600 years later, sometime between 900-955, a monastery was erected near Florian's tomb, and subsequently the village of St. Florian grew up around it. His body, recovered and was eventually removed to the Augustinian Abbey of St. Florian, near Linz. St. Florian was adopted as patron saint of Poland after Pope Lucius III, in 1138, consented to the request of King Casimir of Poland and to the Bishop of Cracow, to send relics of Florian to that country. Since that time, St. Florian has been regarded as a patron of Poland as well as of Linz, Upper Austria and of firemen. Soon after, a person was saved from a fire by invoking St. Florian's name. Since then, Florian has been invoked against fire and has generally been regarded in most countries as the patron saint of the fire service.

Florian is associated with brewers because of a legendary incident in which he miraculously stopped a fire with a single pitcher of water. He is often depicted holding a pitcher. Florian is also the patron of chimney sweeps, Austria, Poland and soap boilers.

There has been popular devotion to St. Florian in many parts of central Europe, and the tradition as to his martyrdom, not far from the spot where the Enns flows into the Danube, is ancient and reliable. Many miracles of healing are attributed to his intercession and he is invoked as a powerful protector in danger from fire, and floods and against drowning. His feast day is May 4th.