

SAINT CORNELIUS, OUR PATRON

Saint Cornelius, was born in Rome. He came from an aristocratic background and became a member of the Roman clergy. Very little else is known of his early life. In March 251 A.D. Cornelius was elected Pope, successor to St. Fabian, who had been martyred during the terrible persecutions of Emperor Decius. There had been no pope for more than a year owing to the decision of the clergy in Rome to wait until the oppression subsided and because their favorite candidate, Moses, was in prison. By March 251, the terror had ceased, but Moses was dead. Novatian, Bishop of Rome, was the expected choice for Pope, but to everyone's surprise, the clergy decided in favor of Cornelius.

Novatian immediately contested the results and entered into schism over the heated issue of whether to readmit those Christians who had given up the faith during the persecution. Novatian led the rigorists in calling for their exclusion from the Christian community. Cornelius favored a more moderate view. He gained the support of most of the bishops of the East and most importantly, the support of St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage. Cyprian's words on Cornelius's behalf did much to cement the pope's position in Rome and the wider Church. Several letters between Cornelius and Cyprian have survived and are interesting reading.

Cornelius' reign was not long. In the middle of 252, a new wave of persecution was launched. Cornelius was arrested and shipped off to Centumcellae (modern Civitavecchia, Italy), where he was tortured and beheaded, dying for the Faith in 253 AD. His body was taken back to Rome and placed in the cemetery of Callistus where many other early popes were buried.

St. Cornelius is often pictured with a broken cup because someone tried to poison him. As he reached to drink from the cup, it shattered. His feast day is September 16th.

