

## Saint Agnes

(Martyred c. 304;  
Feast day: January 21)

Agnes beatæ virginis  
natalis est, quo spiritum  
cælo refudit debitum  
pio sacrata sanguine.

*This is the day of Agnes' birth,  
when that virgin blest gave back to God  
the life she had been loaned on earth  
and hallowed by her loyal blood.*

Matura martyrio fuit,  
matura nondum nuptiis;  
nutabat in viris fides  
cedebat et fessus senex.

*Though still too young to be a bride  
but not too young to be a martyr,  
while many a weary elder denied  
the Faith, she clung to it all the harder.*

Metu parentes territi  
claustrum pudoris auxerant;  
solvit fores custodiae  
fides teneri nescia.

*Her anxious parents, sick with fear,  
protected her and her purity;  
but her faith, becoming ever more dear,  
spurned all such means of security.*

Prodire quis nuptum putet,  
sic læta vultu ducitur,  
novas viro ferens opes,  
dotata censu sanguinis.

*So happy she looked when led away  
that she seemed as if about to wed  
and dower a groom that very day.  
Her dowry? The blood she would soon shed.*

Aras nefandi numinis  
adolere tædis cogitur;  
respondet: 'Haud tales faces  
sumpsere Christi virgines;

*Dragged before an idol's altar  
and handed a torch to make it bright,  
she answered bravely and did not falter:  
'We maids of Christ use no such light,*

'hic ignis exstinguit fidem,  
hæc flamma lumen eripit.  
Hic, hic ferite, ut profluo  
cruore restinguam focos!'

*'for its flame extinguishes true faith  
and drives away the light of God.  
So strike me here—yes, here—that my death  
may drown your flames in my very blood!'*

Percussa quam pompam tulit!  
Nam veste se totam tegens  
curam pudoris præstitit  
ne quis relectam cerneret.

*When they struck, what majesty she showed!  
With the modesty so dear to her,  
lest anyone see her flesh unclothed,  
she clasped her garments near to her.*

In morte vivebat pudor,  
vultumque texerat manu.  
Terram genu flexo petit,  
lapsu verecundo cadens.

*Came death. Her virtue firmed by grace,  
as she sank to the ground on bended knee,  
with trembling hand she veiled her face  
and forever enshrined her purity.*

—St. Ambrose,  
Archbishop of Milan,  
c. 340–April 4, 397

—Edmond Bonin,  
translator