

relics, calling those who revered them idolaters and worshipers of ashes. In defending celibacy Jerome said that a monk should purchase security by flying from temptations and dangers when he distrusted his own strength. As to the veneration of relics, he stated that Christians do not worship the relic of the martyrs, but honor them in our worship of Him whose martyrs they are. We honor the servants in order that the respect paid to them may be reflected back to the Lord. Honoring them was not idolatry because no Christian had ever adored the martyrs as gods; on the other hand, they pray for us.

From 395 to 400 Jerome was engaged in a war against Origenism, which created a breach in his long friendship with Rufinus. Finding that some Eastern monks had been led into error by the authority of Rufinus' name and learning, Jerome attacked him. Rufinus had translated many of Origen's works into Latin and upheld the scholarship and not the heresies in Origen's writings. Augustine, bishop of Hippo, became an unwilling participant in the controversy with Jerome.

Already revising the Latin New Testament, Jerome undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate as the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

After an illness that lasted nearly two years, Jerome died peacefully on September 30, 420, and was buried under the church of the nativity at Bethlehem. In the thirteenth century his body was translated and now lies somewhere in the Sistine Chapel of the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome. The Church owes much to St. Jerome. While his great work was the Vulgate, his achievements in other fields are valuable; to him we owe the distinction between canonical and apocryphal writings; he was a pioneer in the field of Biblical archeology, his commentaries are important; his letters, published in three volumes, are one of our best sources of knowledge of the times.

\*(excerpted from: [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org))

**COMMENT:** Jerome was a strong, outspoken man. He had the virtues and the unpleasant fruits of being a fearless critic and all the usual moral problems of a man. He was, as someone had said, no admirer of moderation whether in virtue or against evil. He was swift to anger, but also swift to feel remorse, even more severe on his own shortcomings than on those of others. A pope is said to have remarked, on seeing a picture of Jerome striking his breast with a stone, "You do well to carry that stone, for without it the Church would never have canonized you."

## ***Saint Jerome*** ***Doctor of the Church***

**Feast Day: September 30th**



***"... I threw myself in spirit at the feet of Jesus, watering them with my tears, and I tamed my flesh by fasting whole weeks. I am not ashamed to disclose my temptations, but I grieve that I am not now what I then was"...***

(excerpted from a Letter St. Jerome wrote to St. Estochium)

## Saint Jerome

\*Saint Jerome who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, was the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. He was born about the year 342 at Stridonius, a small town at the head of the Adriatic, near the episcopal city of Aquileia. His father, a Christian, sent him to Rome to be educated, and beside his native tongue which was the Illyrian dialect, he became fluent in Latin and Greek. His aptitude for oratory was such that he may have considered law as a career. He acquired many worldly ideas, made little effort to check his pleasure-loving instincts, and lost much of the piety that had been instilled in him at home. Yet in spite of the pagan and hedonistic influences around him, Jerome was baptized by Pope Liberius in 360. On Sundays he would visit the tombs of the martyrs and Apostles, where he enjoyed deciphering the inscriptions on the walls where the relics of the dead were preserved.

After three years at Rome, Jerome's intellectual curiosity led him to explore other parts of the world. He visited his home and then, accompanied by his boyhood friend Bonosus, went to Aquileia, where he made friends among the monks of the monastery there, notably Rufinus. Still accompanied by Bonosus, he traveled to Treves, in Gaul, where Jerome renounced all secular pursuits to dedicate himself wholeheartedly to God. He returned to Stridonius, and later settled in Aquileia, where Jerome formed friendships with Chromatius (later canonized), to whom Jerome dedicated several of his works, Heliodorus (also to become a saint), and his nephew Nepotian. The famous theologian Rufinus, at first his close friend, later became his bitter opponent. By nature an irascible man with a sharp tongue, Jerome made enemies as well as friends. He spent some years in scholarly studies in Aquileia, then, in search of more perfect solitude, he turned towards the East. With his friends, Innocent, Heliodorus, and Hylas, a freed slave, he started overland for Syria. On the way they visited Athens, Bithynia, Galatia, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Cilicia.

The party arrived at Antioch about the year 373. There Jerome at first attended the lectures of the famous Apollinaris, bishop of Laodicea, who had not yet put forth his heresy. With his companions he left the city for the desert of Chalcis, about fifty miles southeast of Antioch. Innocent and Hylas soon died there, and Heliodorus left to return to the West, but Jerome stayed for four years, which were passed in study and in the practice of austerity. He had many attacks of illness but suffered still more from temptation, thinking of the delights and crowds of Rome, alone in the desert with the enemy, he threw himself in spirit at the feet of Jesus, watering them with his tears, and tamed his flesh by fasting whole weeks. Adding to these trials, Jerome began to study Hebrew, a discipline which he hoped would help him in winning a victory over himself.

The church at Antioch was greatly disturbed at this time by party and doctrinal disputes. Jerome the most learned of the anchorites in the desert was called upon to give his opinions on the subjects at issue. He wrote to Pope Damasus at Rome on several occasions and received no reply concerning the Arian fury that

was raging at that time. When no reply was forthcoming, Jerome acknowledged Paulinus as bishop of Antioch, and that when he left the desert of Chalcis, Jerome received from Paulinus' hands his ordination to the priesthood. Jerome consented on the condition that he should not be obliged to serve in any church, knowing that his true vocation to be a monk and recluse.

About 380 Jerome went to Constantinople to study the Scriptures under the Greek, Gregory of Nazianzus, then bishop of that city. Two years later he went back to Rome with Paulinus of Antioch to attend a council which Pope Damasus was holding to deal with the Antioch schism. Appointed secretary of the council, Jerome acquitted himself so well that at its completion, Damasus kept him there as his own secretary. At the Pope's request he prepared a revised text, based on the Greek, of the Latin New Testament. He also revised the Latin psalter. He also fostered a new movement of Christian asceticism among a group of noble Roman ladies, several of whom would eventually be canonized.

When Pope Damasus died in 384, he was succeeded by Siricius, who was less friendly to Jerome. Jerome had impressed all by his personal holiness, learning, and integrity. But he had also managed to get himself widely disliked by pagans and evil-doers whom he had condemned. Although Jerome's indignation was usually justified, his manner of expressing it—both verbally and in letters—aroused resentment. Affronted at the calumnies that were circulated, Jerome decided to return to the East. With some others, he embarked in August, 385, arriving at Cyprus on the way, where he was received with joy by Bishop Epiphanius. Eventually he settled in the Holy Land where with financial help from the widow Paula one of the noble women who was a member of the Christian asceticism Jerome started while in Rome, a monastery for men was built near the basilica of The Nativity at Bethlehem. Jerome opened a free school and a hospice for pilgrims there and he had some years of peaceful activity.

While at Rome in the time of Pope Damasus, Jerome had composed a book on the perpetual virginity of the Virgin Mary against one Helvidius, who had maintained that Mary had not remained always a virgin but had had other children by Saint Joseph, after the birth of Christ. This and similar ideas were now again put forth by a certain Jovinian, who had been a monk. While in the Holy Land, in 393, Jerome wrote two books against Jovinian and his vehement style offended many in Rome. He thereupon composed his third book against Jovinian, in which he showed by quoting from his own earlier works that he regarded marriage as a good and honorable state.

A few years later he turned his attention to one Vigilantius, a Gallic priest, who was denouncing both celibacy and the veneration of saints'