

Fourteen Holy Helpers Empowerment



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The **Fourteen Holy Helpers** are a group of Saints traditionally venerated together in the Roman Catholic tradition because their intercession is believed to be particularly effective, especially against various diseases and conditions.

This group of *Nothelfer* ("helpers in need") originated in the 14th century at first in the Rhineland, largely as a result of the outbreak of bubonic plague that became known as the Black Death.

At the heart of the fourteen were three virgin martyrs, Margaret of Antioch, Barbara and Catherine of Alexandria.

As other saints began to be invoked along with these three virgin martyrs, they were represented together in works of art. Popular veneration of these saints often began in a monastery that held their relics. All of the saints except Giles are counted as martyrs.

Christopher and Giles were invoked against the plague itself. Denis was prayed to for relief from headache, Blaise for ills of the throat, Elmo, for abdominal maladies, Barbara for fever, and Vitus against epilepsy. Pantaleon was the patron of physicians, Cyriacus invoked against temptation on the deathbed, and Christopher, Barbara, and Catherine for protection against a sudden and unexpected death. Saint Giles was prayed to for a good confession and Saint Eustace as healer of family troubles. Domestic animals were also attacked by the plague and George, Elmo, Pantaleon, and Vitus were invoked for their protection. Saint Margaret of Antioch is the patron of safe childbirth.

As the saints' joint cult spread in the fifteenth century, Pope Nicholas V attached indulgences to devotion of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, though this is no longer relevant. While each had a separate feast day, the Fourteen Holy Helpers were in some places celebrated as a group on August 8.

The Fourteen Holy Helpers are (in alphabetical order):

- Agathius (against headache)
- Barbara (against fever and sudden death)
- Blaise (against illness of the throat and for protection of domestic animals)
- Catherine of Alexandria (against sudden death)
- Christopher (against bubonic plague, sudden death and dangers while travelling)
- Cyriacus (against temptation on the death-bed)
- Denis (against headache)
- Elmo (against intestinal ailments and for the health of domestic animals)
- Eustace (against family discord)
- George of England (for the health of domestic animals)
- Giles (against plague, for a good confession, and for cripples, beggars and blacksmiths)
- Margaret of Antioch (during childbirth)
- Pantaleon (for physicians, for the health of domestic animals and against cancer and tuberculosis)
- Vitus (against epilepsy, lightning and for protection of domestic animals)

For one or another of the saints in the original set, Anthony the Anchorite, Leonard of Noblac, Nicholas, Sebastian, Oswald the King of Northumbria, Pope Sixtus II, Apollonia, Dorothea of Caesarea, Wolfgang of Regensburg or Roch were sometimes substituted. In France an extra "helper" is added, the Virgin Mary.

The Fourteen Holy Helpers are particularly honored in Bavaria. Devotion to these saints began in that region in 1445 when Hermann Leicht, a young shepherd, saw a crying child in a field that belonged to the nearby Cistercian monastery of Langheim. As he bent down to pick up the child, he abruptly disappeared. A short time later, the child reappeared in the same spot. This time, two candles were burning next to him. In June 1446, Leicht saw the child for a third time. This time, the child bore a red cross on his chest and was

accompanied by thirteen other children. The child said: *We are the fourteen helpers and wish to erect a chapel here, where we can rest. If you will be our servant, we will be yours!* Shortly afterwards, Leicht saw two burning candles descending to this same place. It was alleged that miraculous healings soon began, through the intervention of the fourteen saints.

The Cistercian brothers to whom the land belonged erected a chapel, which immediately attracted pilgrims. An altar was consecrated as early as 1448. Pilgrimages continue to the present day between May and October.

The *Fourteen Angels* of the lost children's prayer in Engelbert Humperdinck's fairy opera, '**Hansel and Gretel**', are, in fact, the Fourteen Holy Helpers. The English words are familiar:

When at night I go to sleep,
Fourteen angels watch do keep,
Two my head are guarding,
Two my feet are guiding;
Two upon my right hand,
Two upon my left hand.
Two who warmly cover
Two who o'er me hover,
Two to whom 'tis given
To guide my steps to heaven.

This Empowerment is of a reflective, inspirational and self-empowering nature. It does not constitute medical or psychological treatment and should be used with common sense.

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