

The Holy Virgin-Martyr Greca (Hellenís) of Sardinia

Commemorated on January 12



St. Greca was born on October 12, 284 (A.D.) to Christian parents, probably of Greek lineage, who were exiled to Sardinia, having refused to change their religion.

We do not have even rudimentary details about her birth, since there are various published versions of her life, and many of these are contradictory. Tradition tells us that her parents gave their daughter the name “Greca” as a reminder of their ancestry.

She lived, from childhood, in the village of Decimomannu, northwest of Cagliari. The name of the village derives from the fact that it is ten [hence “deci..”] Roman miles from the city of Cagliari.

Her parents gave Greca an exemplary Christian upbringing. The young girl, growing up with innocence of heart and purity in body, resolved to become a worthy Bride of Christ.

In 304, during the beastly persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian, some came to suspect that the twenty-year-old Greca was a Christian, and she was thus taken before the Roman Prefect, Flavian. At first he tried to persuade her to deny her Faith by cajolery and enticements.

However, this was to no avail, as the young girl, strengthened by God, was without fear, confessing unswervingly her love for Christ the Bridegroom.

The Prefect thus ordered that she be flogged mercilessly, convinced that her desire to be set free, because of her age, would oblige her to set aside her fantasy. But Greca remained implacable in her resolve and withstood this frightful punishment. The harsh Prefect, exceeding everything lawful, subjected her to another inhumane torture; he ordered that three large spikes be driven into her head with a hammer. But this, too, was all in vain.

Those in attendance looked on with amazement at the steadfastness of Greca, who was all the more strengthened.

The Prefect, wholly defeated and filled with wrath, gave the command that she be decapitated by the sword on January 12, 304.

Her sacred Relics remained hidden for centuries. Then around 1600, a tomb was discovered under an ancient Holy Table [Altar], bearing her Holy Body.

On her tombstone was written: “The Blessed Martyr Greca was laid here to rest in peace. She lived twenty years, two months, and two days. She was entombed on January 12.”

Over the Saint’s tomb a memorial chapel (“*cella memoriae*”) was built, in the era of St. Constantine the Great, in the place where a Church dedicated in her name can be found today.

With the spread of Orthodoxy on the island of Sardinia, owing to the apostolic effort of St. Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe [d. 533], who was exiled to Sardinia by the [Arian] Vandal King [of North Africa], Trasamodo [or Thrasamund (d. 523), not to be confused with the later Lombard ruler of a similar name: “Thrasimund” (or Transamund)], a monastic community was founded in Decimomannu, following the Byzantine rule, to which there are extant attestations from the ninth century.

To the ancient monastery was connected the first Church dedicated to the Saint. The existence of the monastic community is also witnessed to by a marble sarcophagus, preserved today in the Archaeological Museum at Cagliari, on which the following inscription appears: “Remember, O Lord, Thy servant Greca the nun (this may have been the name of the convent’s Abbess). Amen. May there befall anyone who dares to open this tomb the anathema of the 318 Fathers [of the Nicene Synod], for it contains neither gold nor silver.”

The Holy Relics of the Saint, the Church, and the crypt (or the place of her imprisonment, according to certain oral traditions) are the honor and glory of the island of Sardinia. All of its citizens have profound veneration for the young girl who, with fervent love for God, was martyred for the purity of her Faith.

As an inexhaustible wellspring, there flow forth from her Holy Relics countless miracles and healings for all who take refuge in her intercession with faith and reverence.

St. Greca is commemorated with a great Celebration by the [Roman] Catholics on September 23 (New Style)/October 6 (Old Style) (the day of her birth), while the Orthodox celebrate her holy memory on January 12.

