Sebastian

(Died c. 288 AD)

St. Sebastian began life in Narbonne, Gaul. Catholics believe he was educated in Milan and became a soldier at Rome in 283 AD. There, St. Sebastian was named a captain in the Praetorian guards by the Roman Emperor Diocletian, and stories say he was well loved by the ruler. We do not know how or when Sebastian became a Christian, but Catholic tradition holds that he converted other soldiers and a governor, and bolstered the sagging spirits of at least two Christian captives who were awaiting their own martyrdom during the time that he served as a soldier in Rome.

Eventually, the Emperor came to hear of Sebastian's faith in Jesus and ordered him to be tied to a post and slain by arrows. Sebastian was left for dead, his body horribly pierced and bleeding, but by virtue of his physical stamina and God's will, he did not die. A widow, whom Catholics call St. Irene, found Sebastian's body and nursed him until he was well.

Sebastian used his recovery to publicly rebuke the Emperor for his cruel treatment of Christians. The Emperor, in response, commanded his soldiers to stone Sebastian to death on January 20, 287 AD, which is now his feast day. Sebastian's body was buried on the Apian way, and in 367 AD a basilica was constructed over his grave.

St. Sebastian is understandably honored as the patron saint of athletes, soldiers, and police, but he is also the patron saint of archers, dying people, enemies of religion, and the Pope's Swiss Guards. All kinds of people look to Sebastian in hopes of attaining like strength and endurance. One prayer to St. Sebastian asks that athletes be as strong in their faith as he was. Another prayer simply asks for strength. St. Sebastian's appeal is universal. In a world that often overwhelms us, Catholics look to him in hope of sharing in the vitality that made him steadfast in life and faith.