

St Andrew

November 30th

Life: (d.60-)

One of the 12 apostles, the brother of Simon Peter. A fisherman, he was converted by John the Baptist. Tradition says he preached the Gospel in Asia Minor and Scythia, and was crucified in Achaia (Greece) by order of the Roman governor. He is the patron saint of Scotland and of Russia. Feast day 30 November.

On 30 November, Scotsmen all over the world celebrate St Andrew's Day. According to tradition, it is the day on which, in A.D. 70, the saint suffered martyrdom. Lively parties, celebrated in typical Scottish fashion, honor his memory. The men wear kilts, haggis is eaten and plenty of drink enjoyed. Dancing reels and the stirring sounds of the bagpipes contribute further to the festive atmosphere.

Paradoxically, the saint so revered by the Scots had never been to Scotland. He never even knew of its existence! His only association with the country was the burial of his bones in Scottish soil.

Accounts of his life and death are indeed scant, though through the centuries they have been embroidered by many a legend. A Galilean fisherman and early follower of Jesus, Andrew had been one of the twelve Apostles. After the crucifixion, he left the Holy Land to travel abroad and spread the Christian message wherever he went. It was a dangerous task, and one frowned upon by the Romans who were then ruling that part of the world and who regarded Andrew's activities as undermining the authority and divinity of their emperor.

They arrested Andrew two days after his arrival in Patras in the Peloponnese and, after flogging him, put him to death. He was crucified on the X-shaped cross now known by his name.

Its choice has been explained in diverse ways. Andrew himself had requested it, one version tells. He is said to have asked for a cross of diagonal beams because he considered himself unworthy to die on an upright one, as Christ had done.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that it was the Romans who purposely and cruelly used this method of execution. It was bound to prolong his agony, and for this reason, too, they fixed him to the cross

by cords instead of the usual nails. They had not reckoned on Andrew's extraordinary power of endurance, which enabled him to withstand even the worst of tortures. Indeed, he welcomed the extra time, which gave him the opportunity to go on preaching to the crowd that had gathered around him. He did so to the very last moment.

For almost 300 years the Saint's bones were kept in Patras. One night, in A.D. 368, the monk who was looking after his grave had a vision. An angel, appearing to him in a dream, told him to gather St Andrew's relics and take them by boat to an unknown destination. The monk did as instructed.

After many weeks of sailing, he was shipwrecked at Fife, on the eastern coast of Scotland. He interpreted this as an indication that God willed the saint's remains to be left there. He laid them to rest in a sanctuary he built for this purpose. It is the site of the present-day city and cathedral of St Andrew's.

The Scots, convinced that divine providence had brought St Andrew's bones to their country, made him their patron saint. They believed that he helped them in their battles and took good care of their country. As a Bible-loving people, they may have been influenced in their choice by the traditional representation of the Saint, in which he is shown holding a Bible in his right hand.