

## Thecla, First Girl-Martyr

**T**HE great apostle bowed his head. He had spoken with burning zeal of the glory of following Jesus Christ and being His alone, and now he was praying for the young virgin who was standing before him.

Thecla, too, was praying. At last she spoke. "I shall follow my King where-soever He leads," she said softly, "and no home will be mine save His."

Saint Paul rejoiced and bade her watch and pray, that she might be ready when the hour of trial came. When he left Iconium it was with a strong prayer in his heart for her, that she might indeed stand firm.

Her position was difficult. Before she had known of the glory of virginity, she had been betrothed to a young man famed for his riches and generosity. Now her only hope lay in flight, away from the

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anger of her parents, and the disappointment of her lover. For Jesus Christ had chosen her for His own.

In Rome she was brought before the tribunal and condemned to be the prey of wild beasts in the arena. Perhaps it was on the very day that the Church honors her, September twenty-third, that the ordeal took place. It was only a little while after the death of our Lord, and Thecla was the first girl to suffer for His love.

The first! For those who came later there would be the sweet memory of other virgin martyrs, who had gone before, and now slept with Christ. But Thecla was the first!

Alone and perhaps afraid, she stood in the great arena. Far, so far away, gleamed the blue skies. But God was not only in heaven, the world was His. And His, wholly His, was the heart of the little maid.

## THECLA, FIRST GIRL-MARTYR

A dark sea of faces surrounded her, the sands of the circus were red with the blood of gladiators, and the great cages, now being lifted from their underground keeps, revealed hungry beasts. The iron bars were dropped, and the lions rushed out.

Thecla saw them come, and closed her eyes. In an instant they were upon her,—but not to do her harm. Trembling, as though struck by an invisible power, they crouched at her feet. God was near indeed to His first little martyr.

In other ways men sought her death, but God willed that she should live, and man was powerless. At last the hour came when God, having protected her so well, called her home, to bless her with the glorious title that was hers,—first virgin martyr after His own Mother, the Queen of Martyrs.

*Feast, September twenty-third.*