

Saint Mark of Arethusa

SAINT OF THE DAY

29_03_2021



This saint was bishop of Arethusa, today's Ar Rastan, in Syria. He exercised his episcopal ministry in the fieriest phase of the Arian controversy and for some time was suspected of holding ambiguous positions, perhaps due to his weakness of character. Over the years he overcame his doctrinal hesitations and it appears that around the year 360 he had fully returned to Catholic orthodoxy, thus professing in an open way what had been solemnly defined with the Nicene Creed.

During the brief empire of Julian the Apostate (361-363), who intended to restore paganism, Mark fled from Arethusa fearing for his life, as he had previously had a pagan temple destroyed to replace it with a church. However, when he learned that several of the faithful left in the city had been arrested, he returned to Arethusa to be close to the souls entrusted to him.

He was then imprisoned and tortured. The way he endured his ordeal was such that even his persecutors admired him and it earned him the title of "Confessor of the Faith", as mentioned in the ancient menologies and synassarions. He was finally freed and for the rest of his earthly days - he died in 364 - he devoted himself to the conversion of pagans. The contemporary but younger Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Doctor of the Church, called him "a remarkable man and a very saintly old man".