

The following text is an extract of the book "WITH TRUE FAITH – CON VERA FEDE".

The book was written in honour of the three Saints – Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino. The book was published by the Saint Alfio Society in 1998 in Lawrence, Massachusetts in the United States of America. Lawrence is another of the numerous cities around the world in which the annual Feast of the Three Saints is celebrated, just as we celebrate it here at Holy Cross, Woolloowin, Brisbane.

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THE LIVES OF THE THREE SAINTS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE FEAST IN SICILY

The story of the Three Saints and how they came to be martyred has been handed down for centuries in the small villages of eastern Sicily. It is part of the oral tradition of that area but in modern times the story has been well researched and documented.

During the time of the Roman Empire, a noble couple, Vitale and Benedicta, had converted to Christianity. Their three sons: Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino were privately educated in the Christian faith by their parents and by Onesimus, a Greek scholar.

In the year 250 AD, the Emperor issued an edict demanding that all Christians renounce their faith and demonstrate allegiance to the State by worshipping him and the Roman gods. Failure to obey the edict was considered treason and the penalty was death. Benedicta refused to obey the edict and she was martyred. Vitale escaped to a monastic community, leaving his sons in the care of their tutor. At the time, Alfio was twenty-one, Filadelfo was twenty and Cirino was nineteen years old.

Because the brothers were so young and came from a highly regarded noble family, the Roman authorities hoped to convince them or force them into a public renunciation of their Christian faith so that others would follow. However, a succession of officials failed to get the boys to yield. Finally, they were sent to Sicily where a young Roman patriot named Tertullo had already gained fame for ruthless interrogation and torture of Christians.

The brothers were taken to Messina on August 25, 252 AD. They were marched from there to Taormina with a heavy beam strapped to their shoulders. The brothers arrived in the village which is now known as Trecastagni on September 1, where they rested for the night. While many assume that the name of this village can be literally translated as "Three Chestnuts", the name was actually derived from the Latin, *Tres-Casti-Agni* or "Three Chaste Lambs", referring to the Three Saints. The brothers were then marched south to Catania and on the 3rd of September they entered Lentini.

Wherever Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino went, miracles were attributed to them. Their suffering and their refusal to give in to the power of the Roman authorities inspired more people to convert to Christianity.

On May 10, 253 the three young men refused for the last time to renounce their faith. Before his death, Alfio spoke these words to Tertullo: "... I will never cease to give thanks and praise to God in my heart, for the eternal truth for which I die." Led by the eldest, each brother went to his death, a martyrdom which earned them the everlasting love and respect of all who had

witnessed their bravery and devotion. Their tombs remain in Lentini to this day, beneath the Church of Sant'Alfio.

Seventeen centuries later, in the towns of Lentini and Trecastrini, there are still feasts held on May 10 each year in honour of St Alfio and his brothers. Faith in the intercession of the Saints is strong and miracles continue to be attributed to them.