



THE CRACO SOCIETY

120TH FEAST OF SAN VINCENZO IN NEW YORK

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This year we mark the 120th time Cracotans will be celebrating the feast of San Vincenzo in New York City.

We are extremely thankful to the Rev. Fr. Brian Graebe, the pastor at the Most Precious Blood Church for allowing us to hold our celebratory Mass on Oct. 24th at 11:30am. The Rev. Fr. Nicholas Mormando, O.F.M., Cap., will travel to New York to celebrate this historic event.

In view of everything going on in today's world this feast day celebration takes on special meaning.

Since 1792 the people of Craco have marked the fourth Sunday in October by honoring their martyred protector. Regardless of famine, disease, banditry, war, or other calamities there is an unbroken string that connects us to our ancestors and relatives in Italy. The continuum stretches back centuries and thousands of miles distance.

The New York City feast this year take a step closer to our normal celebration. After the Mass we are planning and informal feast day luncheon for members who are interested to meet. Please let us know if you anticipate attending so we can make arrangements.

For those unable to attend please consider making a donation honoring this long standing tradition and supporting the Most Precious Blood Church that is the home for San Vincenzo in New York. Gifts can be sent to:

The Craco Society
San Vincenzo Feast
14 Earl Road
East Sandwich, MA 02537

Or made by PayPal to our account at: member-services@theCracoSociety.org

VIVA SAN VINCENZO!



Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAN VINCENZO

Among the feast days for saints in the Roman Catholic Church there is one not mentioned in the Universal Calendar but which is of importance to the small hill top town of Craco in the province of Matera, Basilicata Region, Italy. This is the feast of San Vincenzo, Martire di Craco which is celebrated on the fourth Sunday of October.

After the Roman Emperor Aurelian died, Diocletian succeeded him and selected Massmiliano (Maximinianus in Latin and Maximilian in English) to rule over part of the empire. In 286AD while Maximilian was on his way to Gaul (France) to quell a revolt of the Bagauds, a peasantry of Belgium, he stopped at the village of Otteduro (which today bears the name of Martigny, Valais, Switzerland) to rest his army.

There he was joined by the Theban Legion, which was summoned by Diocletian to reinforce the militia. The Theban Legion was recruited in Egypt which was then under Roman rule. They camped near Agauno, at the foot of a mountain, which has a pass called Great St. Bernard, connecting Italy and Switzerland.

The Theban Legion was made up of 6,600 Christian legionnaires. San Maurizio was an officer in command of the Legion and San Vincenzo was among the soldiers in the legion. While camped there Maximilian issued an order for the entire army to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods for the success of the expedition.

The Theban Legion refused to obey Maximilian's order on the grounds that it was a religious and not a military command. Because of this refusal Maximilian commanded that they be decimated, that is, every tenth man would be put to death. The troops filed into ranks and every tenth man was put to the sword. As a result of this slaughter, 660 men were killed.

Maximilian grieved at the useless loss of so many legionnaires and sent a very complaisant message asking the remaining soldiers to sacrifice to the gods. But they replied, "We are soldiers, but we are also servants of the true God. We owe you military service and obedience; but we cannot renounce Him who is our creator and Master. We have taken an oath to God before we took one to you; you can place no confidence in our second oath if we violate the first. We have arms in our hands, but we do not resist, because we would rather die innocent than live in shame."

Maximilian, amazed at this bold reply, again issued orders for every tenth man to be killed and yet even after this second slaughter the legionnaires remained constant. Finally, realizing that any threat or punishment of his was useless, he ordered the complete extermination of the Legion.

San Vincenzo was among those who were slaughtered and given the status of martyr for his faith.

SAN VINCENZO COMES TO CRACO

In the village of Craco is the site of a former Franciscan Friary that was started on April 3, 1620 by a Friar named Robert, the Bishop of Tricarico, and was completed ten years later. It bore the name of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and was entrusted to the care of Franciscan Friars until the Italian Government suppressed it in 1866.

Next to the Friary was a beautiful church and to the left of it was a large chapel built in 1777. This chapel would become dedicated to San Vincenzo, Martire.

The connection of Craco and San Vincenzo started in 1769 when a reliquary with

bones of San Vincenzo was sent from Rome to Craco.

Then in 1792, Fr. Prospero, a Franciscan from the Friary in Craco, while in Rome, and wishing to return with a relic, obtained from Pope Pius VI, through the Sacred Congregation of Rites, the full relic of a Roman soldier and a glorious martyr, Vincenzo – a name signifying "winner" or "conqueror."

The "sacred body with a flask of blood" of San Vincenzo Martire was exhumed at the cemetery of St. Ciriaca, in Rome. Fr. Prospero enclosed the precious relic in an artistic crystal-sided wood casket with a crystal side. Inside the casket the bones were covered in a waxen body, dressed as a Roman soldier and set in a reclining position.

Stopping at various places during the course of its journey, the remains were carried from Rome to Craco where it was received with great pomp and honor. The devotion of the faithful in the region rendered great honor to the soldier martyr, San Vincenzo. In large measure, this was due to many miracles reportedly performed by the Saint on the multitudes that sought his help.

The clergy and the people of Craco decided to choose San Vincenzo as their protector of the town. The religious and civil festival of San Vincenzo was fixed for the fourth Sunday of October to coincide with an important annual fair which takes place after the harvest and continues to be celebrated to this day.

On April 4, 1793 the relic of San Vincenzo was installed in the chapel at the Friary and remained there until the late 1980s when structural instability required the relic to be relocated to a small chapel in the Sant' Angelo section of Craco where it now resides.

SAN VINCENZO IN NEW YORK

With immigration to America at the turn of the 20th century the Crachesi brought the devotion of their patron saint with them. They formed a mutual aid society that was called the Società San Vincenzo Martire di Craco and made arrangements with St. Joachim's Church on Roosevelt St., Manhattan, NY to display a statue of San Vincenzo there.

Pasquale Marrese, a tailor from Craco who had a shop at 23 Spring St. in Manhattan and his staff created a statue sewing the clothing on it from a woodcut image of the relic in Craco. Meanwhile, the 1769 bone relic from Craco was sent to America so the Crachesi here would have a part of the patron saint with them.

The New York Times recorded the first feast celebrated in 1901 on a bandstand erected outside the Church of the Most Precious Blood while it was undergoing reconstruction.

The Società San Vincenzo Martire di Craco maintained the traditional feast until WWII when the procession was curtailed but maintained the feast day celebrations there. In 1957 when St. Joachim's was closed the statue was relocated to the Church of St. Joseph.

In 2015, when St. Joseph's Church closed, the statue was moved to the Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood.

In the display case with the statue is the reliquary with bone fragments of San Vincenzo Martire that was brought from Craco in 1901. This is the only primary relic that is permanently on display at the Most Precious Blood Church.



Bone relic of San Vincenzo Martire brought to Craco in 1769, now at the Shrine Church of the Most Precious Blood.



Image of San Vincenzo in Craco

SAN VINCENZO'S VICTORY

Over the years much has emerged about San Vincenzo Martire di Craco that fills in details about his legend and makes connections to us today.

The initial story of him and his cohorts in the Theban Legion were disputed for centuries. However, the existence of the Theban Legion is now accepted and the remaining controversy surrounds the extent of the decimation of the Legion after they refused to make sacrifice to the Roman Emperor. The original legend holds that all 6,600 members of the Legion were executed.

Historians now believe the decimation that took place did not wipe out the entire Legion. The Legion was brought from Egypt because the Romans needed soldiers to fill in their ranks as they battled in Gaul (now France) and they would not have wanted to waste all that manpower.

After the two decimations of the Legion took place and the soldiers were not swayed to make a sacrifice, probably one more decimation took place killing all the leaders of the Theban Legion. The remaining cohort of soldiers were then dispersed to other Roman units.

Regardless of the extent of the number of Theban soldiers killed we know that San Vincenzo was one of those who was martyred in 286AD at the order of [Emperor Maximilianus](#).

Prior to this event, in 249AD, a Roman widow, named Ciriaca, who had become a Christian sheltered many in her home including San Lorenzo (St. Lawrence). St. Lawrence is attributed to having cured her of severe head pains.

In 249 she donated a field in Rome on Via Tiburtina that became the graveyard named after her. (The catacombs of Santa Ciriaca are now within the municipal cemetery of [Campo Verano](#) in Rome's San Lorenzo District.)

It was in the catacombs there that San Vincenzo's remains were interred until 1792 when they were brought to Craco.

But the Theban Legion would make another historic visit to the Roman stage that played out with a much different outcome.

A complicated series of events and turmoil followed the decimations that took place in 249AD with various factions contending for the position of Roman Emperor.

The Roman Senate, unhappy with Maximianus' rule forced him to renounce his imperial position in favor of his son. Perhaps hedging his bets, Maximianus then had his youngest daughter Fausta, marry Constantine one of the contenders for Emperor. Afterwards, Maximianus returned to Gaul (where he had ordered the destruction of the Theban Legion) and began hatching schemes against his son-in-law Constantine in an attempt to regain his imperial position. In a confrontation with Constantine, Maximianus' soldiers surrendered him to his rival but Constantine generously pardoned him. Soon after, Maximianus returned to scheming against his son-in-law, and finally was compelled to take his own life in 310AD by "falling on his sword," an ironic ending to someone who put the Theban troops to the sword two decades before.

As the factions contending for control of the Empire Constantine and his brother-in-law Marcus Aurelius Maxentius, the son of Maximianus were battling for control. Maximianus

was drowned in the Tiber River during the battle with Constantine at the Milvian Bridge. His body was taken from the river, decapitated, and his head was paraded through the streets of Rome, another ironic connection to the decimation of the Theban Legion by his father.

Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312AD gave him total control of the Western Roman Empire. When he issued the Edict of Milan, making Christianity officially recognized in the Roman Empire he paved the way for Christianity to become the dominant religion throughout in Europe in the ensuing centuries.

Participating in the victory at the Milvian Bridge was a reconstituted Theban Legion. In the years after the decimation of the Legion by Maximianus the remnant remained in the service the Romans. It was probably no coincidence they chose to join Constantine in the struggle for control of the Empire over Maximianus' son, who they knew was responsible for the death of their predecessors.

Commemorating the victory, the Arch of Constantine was erected, outside the Colosseum in Rome. On the Arch is recognition of the role of the Theban Legion with images of the soldiers.

The Thebans were an auxiliary unit in the Roman Legions. Although they are usually thought of as infantry they were actually specialists - archers. Historically, we know they were Berbers from North Africa, serving the Egyptian Pharaohs for generations in their role as proficient and accomplished archers. In the Roman Empire they were a valuable commodity that fit the strategy and tactics supporting the Roman Legions at a time when extra manpower was needed.

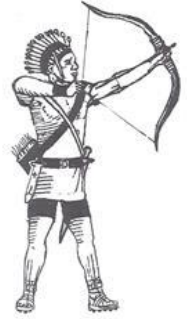
Constantine's Arch gives us an insight into their specialty and dress. Visible is the unique way they placed arrows in their head dress making them more quickly accessible during battle.

It is ironic that the descendants of the Theban Legion end up defeating the pagans who had massacred their ancestors and contributed to Constantine opening the world to Christianity.

Today, a continuing and active connection to that era exists. The Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George, traces their origin to Emperor Constantine who founded the Order following the miraculous appearance of the Cross at Saxa Rubra. The Constantinian Order has been considered one of the most ancient among the Orders of Knighthood.

The Order undertakes many good deeds and support for charitable endeavors. Among them is their participation with a delegation at the annual San Vincenzo Mass.

They, along with the relic, and the story of San Vincenzo serve to remind us of the meaning of the events seventeen hundred years ago that are celebrated by Crachesi every year on the fourth Sunday in October.



Theban archer as on Constantine's Arch, Rome.

Theban Soldier on Constantine's Arch

VIVA SAN VINCENZO!

The Craco Society
invites you to join us in celebrating the 120th Feast of

SAN VINCENZO MARTIRE DI CRACO



SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2021

Mass at 11:30 AM

Most Precious Blood Church, 113 Baxter Street, Manhattan NY

Anyone interested in participating should contact
The Craco Society

memberservices@thecracosociety.org

774-269-6611

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