

**Art and reflection on the Saints:
St Bartholomew 24th August.**

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Matthew, Mark and Luke all include a man named Bartholomaios as one of the twelve apostles selected by Jesus, as in Matthew

Matthew 10

1 Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

In addition, Acts 1 mentions him as among those who witnessed Jesus' Ascension and *12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. 13 When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer*

After that the earliest mentions we have of Bartholomew belong to the 4th century, describing him as a missionary to India. In Armenia, however, he is regarded as having founded the Armenian Apostolic Church, and having been martyred there.



St Bartholomew's Monastery, Albanopolis, Armenia, photographed in 1913 (now a ruin)

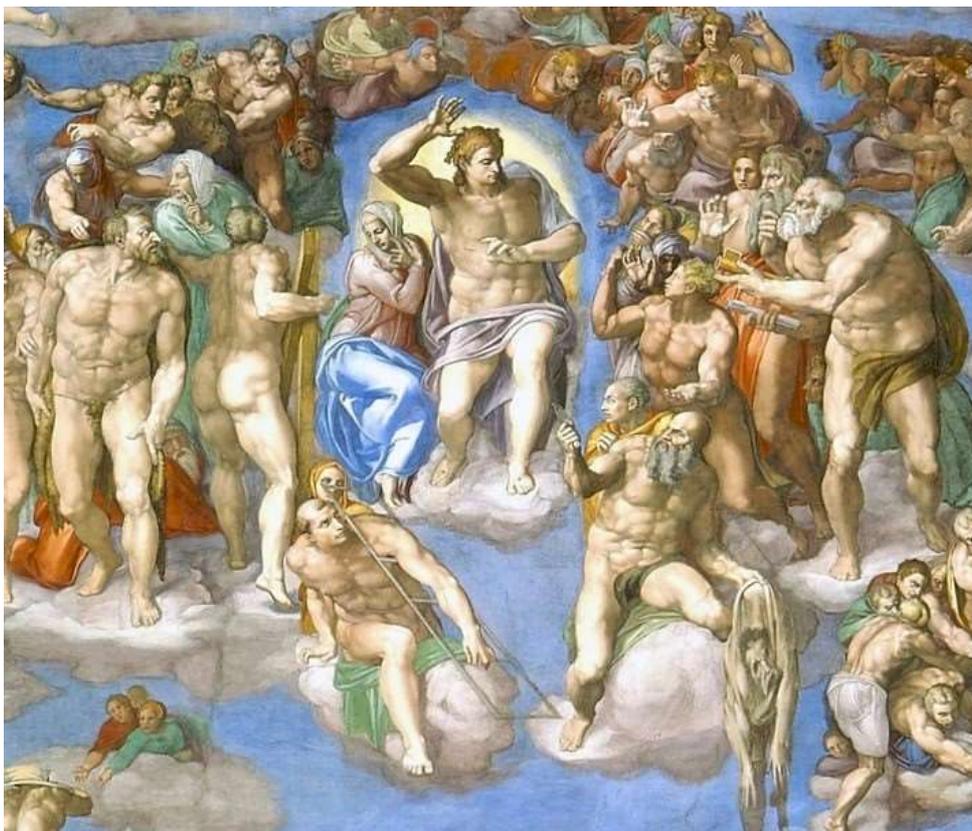
He is described as having been martyred by flaying – having the skin stripped from his body while still alive.

While this is represented rarely in earlier art, it became a popular subject in the 16th c – just at the time when anatomical studies were developing. Vesalius' "On the Fabric of the Human Body" was first published in 1543 and later editions featured flayed bodies to demonstrate musculature etc. as in the 1579 version below.



Marco D'Agrate – Milan Cathedral 1562

However, it is likely that both of these works drew on the extraordinary painting of St Batholomew by Michelangelo in the Last Judgement on the end wall of the Sistine Chapel. Here the saint occupies a prominent position, immediately below the figure of Christ, gesturing toward Him with one hand, and holding his own skin in the other. The face on the skin is that of Michelangelo himself.



Having been educated in the Neoplatonic circles of Florence, for much of his life Michelangelo thought of the soul as being trapped in flesh – stripping off the physical body alone enabled the rise to heaven. This idea features in a number of his poems, and helps to explain this astonishing signature image.

161 What file's incessant bite
left this old hide so shrunken, frayed away,
my poor sick soul? When is it due, the day
that sloughs it off, and heaven receives you, where
in primal joy and light
you lived, unvexed by the perilous flesh you wear?

(Translation by John Nims)

St Monica (330 – 387) 27th August and St Augustine (354-430) 28th August

In the *Confessions*, his hymn of praise to God for the ways in which he was led to true faith in Christ, Augustine tells us quite a lot about his mother, Monica. The family came from Tagaste (Algeria), in Roman North Africa and were not particularly well off. Monica was a Christian, and longed above all things for her son to be also. However, when he fell ill as a child and she asked to have him baptized her husband would not agree, and she became increasingly disturbed by Augustine's adherence to a sect in his twenties. When, after deciding to pursue his career as an orator and teacher in Italy, Augustine deliberately avoided letting her know about his departure she went in tears to beg her bishop to intervene. He refused, but told her "the son of these tears will never perish." Following her move to Milan to be near her son Monica became a firm follower of St Ambrose, the current Bishop, who in 387 baptized Augustine. Monica received the news of his conversion with the utmost joy, and mother and son became very close as they set out to return to Africa. Yet, as they waited to embark, Monica fell ill. While she had always expressed a wish to be buried next to her husband she told her sons to bury her there where she would die, asking only that they always remember her "at the altar of the Lord". Monica is regarded as a wonderful example of patience, faithfulness and faith. She lived to see her mother-in-law and all her household, her husband, and her three sons become strong Christians. Yet partly because of the overwhelmingly powerful influence of Augustine's writings she was for many centuries regarded as a footnote to his story. However, this began to change in the 13th century, and particularly after 1430, when her remains were transferred from a church in Ostia to Rome, and, as Meredith Gill writes "the female community and the clerical elite joined forces over the patronage of the relics." The church of Sant'Agostino, near the Piazza Navona, the mother church of the Augustinian order, was renovated as a result in classic Quattrocento style.



Interestingly, this church also contains a shrine of the Madonna del Parto (Childbirth) and one of the most beautiful of Caravaggio's early paintings, the so-called Madonna di Loreto (Madonna of the Pilgrims) (1604-6) in which the artist's innovative – and controversial- realism is very obvious.

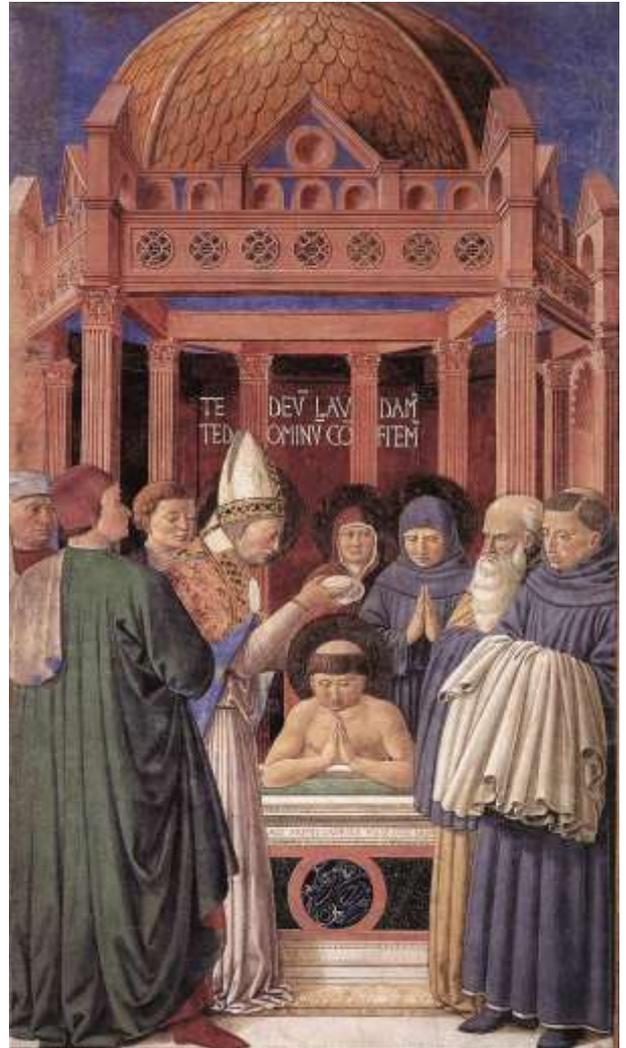




Benozzo Gozzoli's rather subdued Monica (above) is part of the elaborate series of wall paintings he executed between 1464 and 1468 at Sant' Agostino in the hilltop town of San Gimignano in Tuscany. The fresco cycle in the choir there is unique, representing the saint's life in 21 scenes – a third of which in fact include St Monica. The emphasis is very much on Augustine's intellectual journey, portraying him as student (though brilliant he tells us that he was lazy as a schoolboy), teacher and scholar/writer. The iconography was developed by Fra Domenico Strambi, who had been called in to reform the monastery, and lead it back to the Order's goals of spirituality and scholarship. The costumes and settings are all of the mid 15th c, not the 4th c, emphasizing the contemporary relevance of Augustine's life and teaching. Here he is as a teacher of rhetoric in Rome before his conversion.



And here is the scene so vividly evoked in the *Confessions* when Augustine, in a state of anguish, wrestling with himself to try and force his capitulation to God and hearing a child apparently chanting "Take and read! Take and read!" opens the Letter to the Romans and on reading Ch. 13 13-14 finds all his doubts relieved, and certainty take their place. Again, Gozzoli's image is particularly serene, in comparison to the emotional distress in Augustine's account. Here his friend Alypius reaches out his hand for the book, by which he too will be given assurance a moment later – a pointed illustration of God's use of the power of writing to effect change.



According to the *Golden Legend* the *Te Deum* was composed for Augustine's baptism by Ambrose. We can see the first words of this hymn between the columns above.

In the Book of Common Prayer version it begins

We praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
 All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting.
 To thee all Angels cry aloud : the Heavens, and all the Powers therein.
 To thee Cherubim and Seraphim : continually do cry,
 Holy, Holy, Holy : Lord God of Sabaoth;
 Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty : of thy glory.