



## History of Saints Sergius and Bacchus

Sergius and Bacchus were soldiers in the Roman army, attached to the household of the Emperor Maximilian. They were Christians. Moreover, they were lovers. However, it was not for their sexuality these young men were canonized. It was for their faith -- one of history's most poignant ironies, given the church's unflinching campaign against gay love. When ordered to enter the Temple of Jupiter to participate in a sacrificial ceremony to the god, they refused. For this act of defiance, the lovers were stripped of their arms and badges of rank, dressed in women's clothing and led through the streets of Arabissus (near Comana in Cappadocia) -- for a Roman soldier, an abject humiliation. Then they were sent to Resapha in Syria (Augusta Euphratesiae in Mesopotamia), where they were tortured. Bacchus was whipped until his flesh was raw; he died October 1st AD290, confessing his faith in Christ.

Sergius's faith faltered with the death of his lover, but was reinforced when Bacchus appeared to him in a vision saying, "I am still with you in the bond of our union." Sergius kept the faith; after torture, he was beheaded on October 7 AD290. Like his lover, he died a martyr to the new religion.

The tomb of S. Sergius at Resapha became a famous shrine and was honored by great gatherings of Christians because of the frequent miracles there. Sergius and Bacchus became the heavenly protectors of the Byzantine army, with the two Theodores, Demetrius, Procopius and George. Their "acts" are preserved in Latin, Greek and Syria. In AD431, Bishop Alexander of Hierapolis built a magnificent church in his honor. In 434, the town of Resapha was raised to the rank of an episcopal see, was named Sergiopolis, and soon became one of the greatest pilgrimage centers of the East. Many churches in many towns bore the name of Sergius (sometimes with Bacchus) and in the seventh century, a church was dedicated to them in Rome.

During the Middle Ages, the relationship of Sergius and Bacchus was considered an exemplar of passionate union, and possibly even marriage, based on agape (brotherly love) and mutual respect. In the East, Sergius and Bacchus were universally honored. Since the seventh century they have had a celebrated church in Rome. Christian Art represents the two saints as soldiers in military garb with branches of palm in their hands. Their feast is observed on 7 October.

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