



Verena Gorge and Hermitage Solothurn

Legend

The Verena Gorge is an idyllic spot full of legend, grottos, chapels, streams and paths, set in the forest on the edge of Solothurn. The gorge is named after the saintly Verena who lived there in solitude for many years after the death of the Solothurn martyrs, Urs and Victor.

The story begins long ago in ancient Egypt. The martyrs of Solothurn, Urs and Victor were part of the Theban legion ordered back to Rome on command of the Emperors Diokletian and Maximian. Having lived among the Christians in Thebes, they believed in only one God and refused Maximian's orders to worship the gods of Rome. As a result Maximian ordered the execution of every 10th man and when this had no effect, the massacre of the entire legion.



However, 66 men under the leadership of Urs and Victor managed to escape to Salodurum (now Solothurn). Here they were taken prisoner by the governor Hirtakus and put to torture. When they still refused to renounce the faith, Hirtakus had wooden stakes erected in the "Hermesbühlplatz" and gave the prisoners the choice of either paying Homage to the gods Jupiter and Mercury or burning at the stake. The Thebans still remained true to their God and legend says that as they were led to the fires, threatening black clouds appeared and before the first legionnaire could be pushed into the fire, heavy rain poured down and put out the flames. The terrified onlookers fled into the town.

Hirtakus, however, was not afraid and ordered the Thebans to be beheaded by the bridge. Head after head and body after body fell into the river Aare. In the town, the horrified onlookers watched the waves carry the bodies into a bay below the Castrum, known today as the "Klosterplatz". There Urs and Victor rose from the water with their head on their arms and lied down in a grave right in the middle of the Roman cemetery.

Verena had followed the legion to Italy out of affection for the legionnaire Victor. On the march north, she had stayed in Milan to help the sick but when the terrible news of the beheading reached her, she hurried to Salodurum and found lodging in a cave in the narrow gorge near to the town and lived there for many years. During the days, she tended the sick with herbal remedies and advice. Often children would visit her and before telling them stories, she would always wash their hands and faces and brush their unruly hair and this is why pictures often depict her with water jug and wooden comb.

When Hirtakus, who had believed all Christians were dead, heard of this pious woman, he immediately had her arrested and as with the Thebans before her, she was given the choice of worshipping the gods of Rome or being put to death. However, Hirtakus was taken ill and no doctor could



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find a cure. Verena succeeded in helping him and was rewarded by being allowed to return to her cave.

One day, returning home through the dark, wet gorge after a tiring day treating the sick, she slipped and fell. At the last minute, her outstretched hand managed to find a hold in a tiny crack in the rock face, which saved her life. To this day, many people still place their hand in this crack believing it to have healing powers.

Verena was still hounded by many evil and envious people and could not bear to remain in the area any longer so said goodbye to the graves of the Thebans and sitting on a millstone, sailed down the river to the point where the Aare flows into the Rhine. Legend says that until her death in 344 she lived in Zurzach and was buried there.

