St Apollonia (died about AD 249)

During an Alexandrian riot against the Christians, Apollonia, an elderly deaconess, was repeatedly struck in the face. Her teeth were torn out and her jaws were broken but she refused to renounce her Christian faith. A bonfire was built. Apollonia, threatened with being burnt alive, was asked once more to return to the Roman gods. Instead, she uttered a short prayer and walked into the flames. Apollonia was canonised about 50 years after her death. She became the patron saint of toothache and the patroness of the dental profession.

A stump issued in 1979 by San Marino for the 13th stomatological conference (Stanley Gibbons 1114, Scott 959) reproduces a 14th century wood carving which is part of the Wessler Collection at the Royal School of Dentistry in Stockholm. St Apollonia is shown with one hand laid on the swollen cheek of a toothache sufferer. Her insignia, a tooth held by forceps, is shown in her other hand.

L F HAAS
St Apollonia (died about AD 249).

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