

## **9// AND NEXT FOLLOWETH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST**

St. John the apostle and evangelist was son of Zebedee, which had married the third sister of our Lady to wife, and that was brother to St. James of Galicia. This said “John” signifieth as much as “the grace of God,” and well might he have such a name, for he had of our Lord four graces above the other apostles. The first is that he was beloved of our Lord. The second was, that our Lord kept to him his virginity like as St. Jerome saith, for he was at his wedding, and he abode a clean virgin. The third is that our Lord made him to have much great revelation and knowledge of his divinity, and of the finishing of the world, like as it appeareth in the beginnings of his evangel, and in the Apocalypse. The fourth grace is that our Lord committed to him in especial the keeping of his sweet mother.

He was, after the ascension of our Lord, in Jerusalem with the apostles and others, and after that they were, by the ordinance of the Holy Ghost, confirmed in the Christian faith by the universal world, St. John came into Greece where he conversed and converted much people and founded many churches in the Christian faith as well by miracles as by doctrine.

### **PERSECUTED FOR HIS FAITH BY DOMITIAN**

In this time Domitian was Emperor of Rome, which made right great persecutions unto Christian men, and did do take St. John, and did him to be brought to Rome and made him to be cast into a vat or a ton full of hot oil in the presence of the senators, of which he issued out, by the help of God, more pure and more fair, without feeling of any more heat or chauffing, than he entered in.

After this that emperor saw that he ceased not to preach the Christian faith, he sent him into exile unto an isle called Patmos. There was St. John alone, and was visited of angels and governed; there wrote he by the revelation of our Lord the Apocalypse, which contained the secrets of holy church and of the world to come.

*John is expounded the grace of God, or he in whom grace is, or to whom it is given of our Lord, and therefore been understood four privileges that be in the blessed St. John. The first was the noble love of Jesu Christ, for he loved him more than the other and showed to him of greater love, and therefore he is said the grace of God, also as gracious God. And to him he was more gracious than to Peter, for he loved him much, but he is love of courage and of sign, and this that is of signs is double. That one is for to show familiarity and that other is in giving benefices. As to the first he loved that one and the other equally, as to the second he loved more John, and as to the third, he loved more Peter. The second was virginity when he was chosen virgin of God, and therefore it is said in what is that grace, for grace of virginity is in a virgin, and when he would marry he was called of God. The third is the revelation of the secrets of our Lord, therefore it is said to whom grace is given, for to him was given to know many secrets and profound, as of the divinity of the Son of God, and of the end of the world. The fourth is the recommendation of the mother of God, which gift of grace was given of our Lord, for this gift was given to him when the mother was given to him into keeping. And Miletus, Bishop of Liege, wrote his life, the which Isidore abridged and set it in the book of nativities of the life and the death of holy fathers.*

## **THE RAISING OF DRUSIANA**

In this same year was Domitian the emperor, for his evils, put to death, and all that he had done was revoked by the senators and defeated, and thus was St. John brought again from his exile with great honour into Ephesus; and all the people of Ephesus came against him singing and saying: Blessed be he that cometh in the name of our Lord.

In that way he raised a woman which was named Drusiana, which had much loved St. John and well kept his commandments. And her friends brought her tofore St. John all weeping and saying to him: Lo! here is Drusiana which much loved thee and did thy commandments, and is dead, and desired nothing so much as thy return, and that she might see thee tofore her death. Now thou art come hither and she may not see thee.

St. John had great pity on her that was dead, and of the people that wept for her, and commanded that they should set down the bier, and unbind and take away the clothes from her. And when they had so done he said, hearing all, with a loud voice, Drusiana, my Lord God Jesu Christ ariseth thee; Drusiana arise, and go into thy house, and make ready for me some refecton.

Anon she arose and went in to her house for to do the commandment of St. John, and the people made three hours long a great noise and cry, saying there is but one God, and that is he whom St. John preacheth.

## **ST. JOHN'S SERMONS AGAINST MATERIAL WEALTH**

### **The Sermon to Crato**

It happed on another day that Crato the philosopher made a great assembly of people in the midst of the city, for to show to them how they ought to despise the world. And he had ordained two young men brethren which were much rich, and had made them to sell their patrimony and therewith to buy precious stones, the which these two young men brake in the presence of the people, for to show how these precious and great riches of the world be soon destroyed.

That same time St. John passed by, and said to Crato the philosopher: This manner for to despise the world that thou showest is vain and foolish demonstrance, for it seeketh to have the praising of the world, and God reproveth it. My good master Jesu Christ said to a man that demanded of him how he might come to everlasting life, that he should go and sell his goods and give it, and great dread to lose that which he hath so dear and with great pain gotten. . . .

### **The Sermon to the Two Backsliders**

[Here there is a lacuna in the text. In Voragine, after John concludes the example of the rich man in the Gospel, he puts the gems back together again. The philosopher and the young men thereupon become believers, sell the gems, and give the proceeds to the poor. Their example leads two other rich young men to do the same with their own wealth, but later they regret having done so, because their former slaves are now wearing rich garments while they themselves are in rags. St. John responds to their attitude by turning some sticks and stones into

gold and gems and he bids the young men to restore themselves to their former status: “since you have lost the treasures of heaven, flourish, but only to wither.” Then he gives a second sermon against riches, with six reasons we should eschew them. The lacuna ends as St. John addresses the final reason.]

. . . “Sixthly, avaunting and praising: for the riches give occasion to be vainglorious and to praise and glorify himself. And by this it appeareth that presently is lost the weal of humility, without which the grace of God may not be had, and thus is gotten, for the world to come, pain and torment by over-great pride.

“Scripture then, nature, creature, fortune, business and care, avaunting and praising, ought to make us withdraw for to love riches.”

St. John approved to these two men his doctrine, with his miracles, to be true, [continuing with these words:] “And ye in the name of him did miracles tofore that ye were sorry and repented you of that ye had given your riches to poor people. Now is that grace from you departed and ye become meschant [wicked] and wretches, which were in the faith strong and mighty. And tofore, the evil spirits had fear and dread of you, and by your commandment they issued out of bodies human, now have ye fear and dread of them and be become their servants.

“For whoso loveth the riches of this world, he is servant unto a devil named Mammon, and is bond and serf in keeping the riches in which he setteth his affiance. And hereof saith the Holy Ghost by the prophet David: *In imagine pertransit homo, etc.*: “Vainly is the man distroubled which assembleth treasure in this world, and knoweth not for whom it is,” [Ps. 38:6] for when he shall die he shall bear nothing with him, and he wotteth not who shall dispend it, for naked we came upon the earth and all naked shall we re-enter into it.

“And to a meschant [wicked] man it sufficeth not when he hath enough, but he is busy day and night to get more without rest. For the riches make him fearful to lose that he hath gotten, and bringeth to him many businesses and evil rest in making worldly delights. And he, dispurveyed [rendered destitute], death cometh which taketh all from him, and beareth nothing with him save his proper sins.”

### St. John Raises Satheus, Who Affirms the Truth of What He Has Said

When St. John had said all this there was brought tofore him a young man dead, which only had been in marriage thirty days. And his mother and friends wept sore, which tofore St. John kneeled down on their knees, praying him that he would raise him to life. St. John had great pity, and when he had long wept he bade to loose and unbind the body and said: O Satheus, which wert blinded with fleshly love, soon thou hast lost thy soul, and because thou knewest not thy maker Jesu Christ, thou art fallen ignorantly into the leash of the right evil fiends, wherefore I weep and pray that thou mayst be releved from death to life, and show thou to these twain, Actius and Eugenius, what great glory they have lost and what pain they have deserved.

Anon Satheus releved him in yielding thankings to St. John, and blamed much the two disciples in saying: I saw your two angels weep and the devils demene joy of your perdition, also

I saw the realm of heaven made ready for you and full of all delights, and ye have follily gotten for you the place of hell, dark and tenebrous [full of darkness], full of dragons and of all pains, and therefore it behoveth you to pray to the apostle of God that he remise [restore] and bring you again to your salvation, like as he hath revived me goodly. And among all other pains, this Satheus reciteth these that be contained in two verses following:

*Vermes et umbrae, flagellum, frigus et ignis, Dæmonis aspectus, scelerum confusio, luctus* – that is to say: worms, darkness, scourges, cold, heat, sight of devil, confusion of sins, and wailing.

### **The Repentance of the Young Backsliders**

Anon then these two men by right great repentance prayed St. John that he would pray for them, to whom St. John answered that they should do penance thirty days long, and pray to God that the rods of gold and the precious stones might return to their first proper natures.

After these thirty days they came to St. John and said to him: Fair father, ye have always preached misericord [mercy] and mercy, and commanded that one should pardon another his trespass, we be contrite and repentant of our sins and weep with our eyes for this evil worldly covetise, the which we have by them received, and therefore we pray you that ye have mercy on us.

And St. John answered: Our Lord God when he made mention of the sinner he said, “I will not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live, for great joy is in Heaven of a sinner repentant.” And therefore know ye that he hath received your repentance, go ye forth and bear the rods and stones thither where ye took them, for they be returned to their first nature. Thus received they the grace that they had lost, so that after they did great miracles in the name of our Lord Jesu Christ.

### **THE DESTRUCTION OF DIANA’S TEMPLE**

And then after this when the blessed apostle St. John had preached through all Asia [i.e., Asia Minor], and sown the word of Christ, they that worshipped idols moved the people against St. John, and came and drove him into the temple of Diana for to constrain him to do sacrifice unto that idol. To whom St. John said: Sith ye believe that your goddess Diana hath so great power, call ye upon her and require her by her power she subvert and overthrow the Church of Christ, and if she so do, I shall do sacrifice to her, and if she do it not, then let me pray unto my God Jesu Christ that he overthrow her temple, and if he so do then believe ye in him.

To this sentence the most part of the people consented, and so they. . . .

### **THE CUP OF POISON**

[Another lacuna. The temple does collapse, and Diana’s statue resolves to dust. Next, the high priest Aristodemus puts a proposal to St. John: Aristodemus will convert if St. John will drink poison and survive. First, to prove the poison is real, John has two criminals drink it; they die.

John then drinks the poison himself, lives, and revives the two criminals. Caxton's text continues with what John then said to Aristodemus:]

. . . for I shall yield account for thee to Jesu Christ, and truly I shall gladly die for thee like as Jesu Christ died for us. Turn again my son, turn again, Jesu Christ hath sent me to thee.

And when he [Aristodemus] heard him thus speak he abode with a heavy cheer and wept, repenting him bitterly, and fell down to the feet of the apostle, and for penance kissed his hand. And the apostle fasted and prayed to God for him, and gat for him remission of his sins and forgiveness, and he lived so virtuously after, that St. John ordained him to be a bishop.

### **THE BATH HOUSE**

Also it is read in the same history that St. John on a time entered into a bath for to wash him, and there he found Cerinthus an heretic, whom as soon as he saw he eschewed [avoided], and went out of it saying: Let us flee and go hence lest the bath fall upon us in which Cerinthus the enemy of truth washeth him, and as soon as he was out the bath fell down.

### **THE PARTRIDGE**

Cassiodorus saith that a man had given to St. John a partridge living, and he held it in his hand stroking and playing with it otherwhile for his recreation. And on a time a young man passed by with his fellowship and saw him play with his bird, which said to his fellows, laughing: See how the yonder old man playeth with a bird like a child.

Which St. John knew anon, by the Holy Ghost, what he had said, and called the young man to him and demanded him what he held in his hand, and he said "a bow."

What dost thou withal? said St. John.

And the young man said: We shoot birds and beasts therewith.

To whom the apostle demanded how and in what manner. Then the young man bent his bow and held it in his hand bent, and when the apostle said no more to him he unbent his bow again.

Then said the apostle to him: Why hast thou unbent thy bow? And he said: Because if it should be long bent it should be the weaker for to shoot with it.

Then said the apostle, So son, it fareth by mankind and by frailty in contemplation, if it should alway be bent it should be too weak, and therefor otherwhile it is expedient to have recreation. The eagle is the bird that flyeth highest, and most clearly beholdeth the sun, and yet by necessity of nature him behoveth to descend low. Right so when mankind withdraweth him a little from contemplation, he after putteth himself higher by a renewed strength, and he burneth then more fervently in heavenly things.

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

St. John wrote his gospels after the other Evangelists, the year after the ascension of our Lord sixty-six, after this that the venerable Bede saith. And when he was required and prayed of the bishops of the country of Ephesus to write them, St. John prayed also to them, that they should fast and pray in their dioceses three days for him to the end that he might truly write them.

## HIS DEATH

St. Jerome saith of this glorious apostle St. John, that, when he was so old, so feeble and so unmighty that his disciples sustained and bare him in going to church, and as of times he rested, he said to his disciples: Fair children, love ye together, and each of you love other.

And then his disciples demanded why and wherefore he said to them so oft such words.

He answered to them and said: Our Lord had so commanded, and whosoever accomplished well this commandment it should suffice him for to be saved.

And finally after that he had founded many churches and had ordained bishops and priests in them, and confirmed them by his predication [preaching] in the Christian faith, the year sixty-eight after the resurrection of Jesu Christ (for he was thirty-one years old when our Lord was crucified, and lived after sixty-eight years, and thus was all his age ninety-nine years), then came our Lord with his disciples to him and said: Come my friend to me, for it is time that thou come, eat and be fed at my table with thy brethren.

Then St. John arose up and said to our Lord Jesu Christ that he had desired it long time, and began to go. Then said our Lord to him: On Sunday next coming thou shalt come to me.

That Sunday the people came all to the church, which was founded in his name and consecrate on that one side of Ephesus, and from midnight forth he ceased not to preach to the people that they should establish them and be stedfast in the Christian faith and obeissant [obedient] to the commandments of God. And after this he said the mass, and houseled and communed [administered Holy Communion to] the people. And after that the mass was finished he bade and did do make a pit or a sepulture [sepulchre] tofore the altar; and after that he had taken his leave and commended the people to God, he descended down into the pit or sepulture tofore the altar, and held up his hands to heaven and said: Sweet Lord Jesu Christ, I yield me unto thy desire, and thank thee that thou hast vouchsafed to call me to thee. If it please thee, receive me for to be with my brethren, with whom thou hast summoned me; open to me the gate of the life permanable [eternal], and lead me to the feast of thy well and best dressed meats. Thou art Christ the son of the living God, which by the commandment of the father hast saved the world. To thee I render and yield grace and thankings, world without end, thou knowest well that I have desired thee with all my heart.

After that he had made his prayer much amorously [lovingly] and piteously, anon came upon him great clearness and light, and so great brightness that none might see him, and when this light and brightness was gone and departed, there was nothing found in the pit or grave but

manna, which came springing from under upward, like as sand in a fountain or springing well, where much people have been delivered of many diseases and sicknesses by the merits and prayers of this glorious saint.

Some say and affirm that he died without pain of death, and that he was in that clearness borne into heaven body and soul, whereof God knoweth the certainty. And we, that be yet here beneath in this misery, ought to pray devoutly to him that he would impetrate [request] and get to us the grace of our Lord which is blessed *in secula seculorum* [forever and ever]. Amen.

### **A MIRACLE OF ST. JOHN AND ST. EDWARD THE CONFESSOR**

There was a king, a holy confessor and virgin, named St. Edward, which had a special devotion unto St. John Evangelist, and it happened that this holy king was at the hallowing of a church dedicate in the honour of God and of this holy apostle; and it was that St. John in likeness of a pilgrim came to this king and demanded his alms in the name of St. John, and the king not having his almoner by him, ne his chamberlain, of whom he might have somewhat to give him, took his ring which he bare on his finger and gave it to the pilgrim.

After these many days, it happened two pilgrims of England for to be in the Holy Land, and St. John appeared to them and bade them to bear this ring to their king and to greet him well in his name, and to tell him that he gave it to St. John in likeness of a pilgrim, and that he should make him ready to depart out of this world, for he should not long abide here but come into everlasting bliss, and so vanished from them.

And anon as he was gone they had great lust [desire] to sleep, and laid them down and slept, and this was in the Holy Land, and when they awoke they looked about them and knew not where they were. And they saw flocks of sheep and shepherds keeping them, to whom they went to know the way, and to demand where they were, and when they asked them they spake English and said that they were in England, in Kent on Barham Down.

And then they thanked God and St. John for their good speed, and came to this holy king St. Edward on Christmas day, and delivered to him the ring and did their errand, whereof the king was abashed [surprised], and thanked God and the holy saint that he had warning for to depart. And on the vigil of the Epiphany next after he died and departed holily out of this world, and is buried in the Abbey of Westminster by London where is yet to this day the same ring.

### **ISIDORE'S REMARK ON ST. JOHN**

Isidore, in the book of the life and death of holy saints and fathers, saith this: St. John the Evangelist transformed and turned rods of trees into fine gold, the stones and gravel of the sea into precious gems and ouches [brooches], the small broken pieces of gems he reformed into their first nature, he raised a widow from death, and brought again the soul a young man into his body, he drank venom without hurt or peril, and them that had been dead by the same he recovered into the state of life.

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The [iconography of St. John the Evangelist](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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