

161// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. EUSTACE

Eustace, which first was named Placidus, was master of the chivalry of Trajan, the emperor, and was right busy in the works of mercy, but he was a worshipper of idols. And he had a wife of the same rite, and also of the deeds of mercy, of whom he had two sons, which he did do nourish after his estate. And because he was ententive to the works of mercy, he deserved to be enlumined to the way of truth.

THE HART APPEARS TO PLACIDUS

So on a day, as he was on hunting, he found an herd of harts, among whom he saw one more fair and greater than the other, which departed from the company and sprang into the thickest of the forest. And the other knights ran after the other harts, but Placidus siewed him with all his might, and enforced to take him. And when the hart saw that he followed with all his power, at the last he went up on a high rock.

Eustace was named tofore his baptism Placidus, which is as much as to say as pleasant to God. And Eustace is said of eu, that is to say, good, and statics, that is, fortune, therefore Eustace is, as it were, good fortune. He was pleasant to God in his conversation, and after, he held him in good works.

And Placidus, approaching nigh, thought in his mind how he might take him. And as he beheld and considered the hart diligently, he saw between his horns the form of the holy cross shining more clear than the sun, and the image of Christ, which by the mouth of the hart, like as sometime Balaam by the ass, spake to him, saying: Placidus, wherefore followest me hither? I am appeared to thee in this beast for the grace of thee. I am Jesu Christ, whom thou honourest ignorantly, thy alms be ascended up tofore me, and therefore I come hither so that by this hart that thou huntest I may hunt thee.

And some other say that this image of Jesu Christ which appeared between the horns of the hart said these words. And when Placidus heard that, he had great dread, and descended from his horse to the ground. And an hour after he came to himself, and arose from the ground, and said: Rehearse again this that thou hast said, and I shall believe thee.

And then our Lord said: I am Jesu Christ that formed heaven and earth, which made the light to increase, and divided it from darkness, and established time, days, and hours. Which formed men of the slime of the earth, which appeared on earth in flesh for the health of the lineage human, which was crucified, dead, buried, and arose the third day.

And when Placidus heard this, he fell down again to the earth, and said: I believe, Lord, that thou art he that made all things, and convertest them that err.

And our Lord said to him: If thou believest, go to the bishop of the city and do thee be baptized.

And Placidus said to him: Lord, wilt thou that I hide this thing from my wife and my sons?

And our Lord said to him: Tell to them that they also make them clean with thee. And see that thou come again to-morrow hither that I appear again to thee, and may show to thee that which shall come hereafter to thee.

And when he was come home to his house, and had told this thing to his wife in their bed, she cried: My Lord! and said: And I saw him this night that is passed, and he said to me: “To-morn thou, thy husband, and thy sons, shall come to me.” And now I know that it was Christ.

Then they went to the bishop of Rome at midnight, which baptized them with great joy, and named Placidus, Eustace, and his wife, Theospis.

EUSTACE’S SECOND VISION OF THE HART

And on the morn Eustace went to hunt as he did tofore, and when he came nigh to the place he departed his knights as for to find venison. And anon he saw in the place the form of the first vision, and anon he fell to the ground tofore the figure, and said: Lord, I pray thee to show to me that which thou hast promised to me thy servant.

To whom our Lord said: Eustace, thou that art blessed, which hast taken the washing of grace, for now thou hast surmounted the devil, which had deceived thee, and trodden him under foot, now thy faith shall appear. The devil now, because thou hast forsaken him, is armed cruelly against thee, and it behoveth thee to suffer many things and pains. For to have the crown of victory thou must suffer much, because to humble thee from the high vanity of the world, and shalt afterward be enhanced in spiritual riches, thou therefore fail not, ne look not unto thy first glory. For thee behoveth that by temptations thou be another Job, and when thou shalt so be humbled, I shall come to thee, and shall restore thee unto thy first joy. Say to me now whether thou wilt now suffer and take temptations, or in the end of thy life?

And Eustace said to him: Lord, if it so behoveth command that temptation to come now, but I beseech thee to grant to me the virtue of patience. To whom our Lord said: Be thou constant, for my grace shall keep your souls. Then our Lord ascended into heaven, and Eustace returned home and showed all this to his wife.

EUSTACE IS TESTED BY CALAMITIES

He Loses His Estates to Pestilence and Rapine

After this, a few days, the pestilence assailed his servants and his knights, and slew them all, and in a little while after, all his horses and his beasts died suddenly, and after this, some that had been his fellows, seeing his depredation, entered into his house by night and robbed him, and bare away gold and silver, and despoiled him of all other things. And he, his wife, and children thanked God, and fled away by night all naked, and because they doubted shame, they

fled into Egypt. And all his great possessions came to nought by ravin of wicked people. Then the king and all the senators sorrowed much for the master of the chivalry, which was so noble, because they might hear no tidings of him.

His Wife Is Seized by the Master of a Ship

And as they went they approached the sea, and found a ship, and entered into it for to pass, and the master of the ship saw the wife of Eustace was right fair, and desired much for to have her. And when they were passed over, he demanded his reward for their freight, and they had not whereof to pay, so that the master of the ship commanded that the wife should be holden and retained for his hire, and would have her with him. And when Eustace heard that, he gainsaid it long. Then the master of the ship commanded his mariners to cast him in the sea, so that he might have his wife, and when Eustace saw that, he left his wife much sorrowfully, and took his two children and went weeping, and said: Alas! woe am I for you, for your mother is delivered to a strange husband.

His Children Are Taken from Him

And thus sorrowing he and his children came to a river, and for the great abundance of water he durst not pass that river with his both sons at once, which were then young. But at the last he left one of them on the brink of the river, and bare over that other on his shoulders, and when he had passed the river, he set down on the ground the child that he had borne over, and hasted him for to fetch that other that he had left on that other side of the river. And when he was in the midst of the water, there came a wolf and took the child that he had borne over, and fled withal to the woods.

And he then, all despaired of him, went for to fetch that other, and as he went, there came a great lion and bare away that other child, so that he might not retain him, for he was in the middle of the river.

And then he began to weep and draw his hair, and would have drowned himself in the water if the divine purveyance had not letted him.

And the herdmen and ploughmen saw the lion bearing the child all alive, and they followed him with their dogs, so that by divine grace the lion left the child all safe without hurt. And other ploughmen cried and followed the wolf, and with their staves and falchions delivered the child whole and sound from his teeth without hurt. And so both the herdmen and ploughmen were of one village, and nourished these children among them.

And Eustace knew nothing thereof, but weeping and sorrowing, saying to himself: Alas! woe is me! for tofore this mishap I shone in great wealth like a tree, but now I am naked of all things. Alas! I was accustomed to be accompanied with a great multitude of knights, and I am now alone, and am not suffered to have my sons. O Lord, I remember me that thou saidest to me: "Thee behoveth to be tempted as Job was," but I see that in me is more done to than was to Job. For he lost all his possessions, but he had a dunghill to sit on, but to me is nothing left, he had friends which had pity on him, and I have none but wild beasts, which have borne away my sons.

To him was his wife left, and my wife is taken from me and delivered to another. O good Lord, give thou rest to my tribulations, and keep thou so my mouth that mine heart decline not into words of malice, and be cast from thy visage.

And thus saying and wailing, in great weeping, went into a street of the town, and there was hired for to keep the fields of the men of that town, and so kept them fifteen years. His sons were nourished in another town, and knew not that they were brethren; and our Lord kept the wife of Eustace, so that the strange man had not to do with her ne touched her, but died and ended his life.

He Is Brought Back into the Emperor's Service

In that time the emperor and the people were much tormented of their enemies, and then they remembered of Placidus, how he many times had fought nobly against them, for whom the emperor was much sorrowful, and sent out, into divers parts, many knights to seek him, and promised to them that found him much riches and great honour. And two knights, which had been under him in chivalry, came into the same street where he dwelled, and anon as Placidus saw them, he knew them, and then he remembered his first dignity and began to be heavy, and said: Lord, I beseech thee to grant to me that I may sometime see my wife, for as for my sons I know well that they be devoured of wild beasts.

And then a voice came to him and said: Eustace, have thou good affiance, for anon thou shalt recover thine honour, and shalt have thy wife and thy children.

And anon he met with these knights, and they knew him not, but demanded of him if he knew any strange man named Placidus, and had a wife and two children. And he said nay, yet he had these home to his hostel, and he served them.

And when he remembered of his first estate he might not hold him from weeping. Then he went out and washed his face and returned for to serve them. And they considered and said that one to that other, how that this man resembleth much unto him that we seek.

And that other answered: Certainly he is like unto him; now let us see if he have a wound in his head that he gat in a battle.

Then they beheld, and saw the sign of the wound, and then they wist well it was he that they sought. Then they arose and kissed him and demanded of his wife and children, and he said that his sons were dead, and his wife was taken away from him. And then the neighbours ran for to hear this thing, because the knights told and recounted his first glory and his virtue. And they said to him the commandment of the emperor, and clad him with noble vestments. Then after the journey of fifteen days they brought him to the emperor. And when he heard of his coming he ran anon against him, and when he saw him he kissed him. Then Eustace recounted tofore them all by order that which had happened to him. And he was re-established unto the office to be again master of the chivalry, and was constrained to do the office as he did tofore.

He Is Reunited with His Family

And then he counted how many knights there were, and saw there were but few as to the regard of their enemies, and commanded that all the young men should be gathered in the cities and towns, and it happed that the country where his sons were nourished should make and send two men of arms. Then all the inhabitants of that country ordained these two young men, his sons, most convenable above all others for to go with the master of the chivalry; and then when the master saw these young men of noble form and adorned honestly with good manners, they pleased him much and ordained that they should be with the first of his table.

Then he went thus to the battle, and when he had subdued his enemies to him, he made his host to rest three days in a town, where his wife dwelt and kept a poor hostelry. And these two young men, by the purveyance of God were lodged in the habitation of their mother, without knowing what she was.

And on a time about midday, as they spake that one to that other of their infancy, and their mother, which was there, hearkened what they said much attentively, so that the greatest said to the less: When I was a child, I remember none other thing, save that my father which was master of the knights, and my mother, which was right fair, had two sons, that is to say, me and another, younger than I, and was much fair. And they took us and went out of their house by night, and entered into a ship for to go I wot not whither. And when we went out of the ship our mother was left in the ship, I wot not in what manner, but my father bare me and my brother, and sore weeping. And when he came to a water he passed over with my younger brother, and left me on he bank of the water, and when he returned a wolf came and bare away my brother. And ere my father might come to me, a great lion issued out of the forest, and took me up and bare me, to the wood, but the herdmen that saw him took me from the mouth of the lion, and was nourished in such a town as ye know well, ne I could never know what happened to my brother, nor where he is. And when the younger heard this he began to weep and say: Forsooth, like as I hear, I am thy brother, for they that nourished me said that that they had taken me from a wolf. And then they began to embrace and kiss each other, and weep.

And when their mother had heard all this tbing, she considered long in herself if they were her two sons, because they had said by order what was befallen them. And the next day following she went to the master of the chivalry and required him, saying: Sir, I pray thee command that I may be brought again to my country, for I am of the country of the Romans, and here I am a stranger.

And in saying these words she saw in him signs, and knew by them that he was her husband, and then she might no longer forbear, but fell down at his feet and said to him: Sir, I pray thee to tell of thy first estate, for I ween that thou art Placidus, master of the knights, which otherwise art called Eustace, whom the Saviour of the world hath converted, and hast suffered such temptation and such, and I that am thy wife was taken from thee in the sea, which nevertheless have been kept from all corruption, and haddest of me two sons Agapitus and Theospitus.

And Eustace hearing this, and diligently considered and beheld her, anon knew that she was his wife, and wept for joy and kissed her; and glorified much our Lord God, which comforteth the discomfited. And then said his wife: Sir, where be our sons? And he said that they were slain of wild beasts, and recounted to her how he had lost them.

And she said: Let us give thankings to God, for I suppose that like as God hath given to us grace each to find other, so shall he give us grace to recover our sons.

And he said: I have told thee that they be devoured of wild beasts.

And she then said: I sat yesterday in a garden and heard two younglings thus and thus expounding their infancy, and I believe that they be our sons, demand them and they shall tell to thee the truth.

Then Eustace called them, and heard their infancy and knew that they were his sons. Then he embraced them and the mother also, and kissed them also. Then all the host enjoyed strongly of the finding of his wife and children, and for the victory of the barbarians.

MARTYRDOM

And when he was returned, Trajan was then dead, and Adrian succeeded in the empire, which was worst in all felonies. And as well for the victory as for the finding of his wife and children, he received them much honourably and did do make a great dinner and feast. And on the next day after, he went to the temple of the idols, for to sacrifice for the victory of the barbarians. And then the emperor seeing that Eustace would not do sacrifice, neither for the victory, ne for that he had found his wife and children, warned and commanded him that he should do sacrifice.

To whom Eustace said: I adore and do sacrifice to our Lord Jesu Christ, and only serve him. And then the emperor, replenished with ire, put him his wife and his sons in a certain place, and did to go to them a right cruel lion, and the lion ran to them and inclined his head to them, like as he had worshipped them, and departed.

Then the emperor did do make a fire under an ox of brass or copper, and when it was fire-hot he commanded that they should be put therein all quick and alive. And then the saints prayed and commended them unto our Lord, and entered into the ox, and there yielded up their spirits unto Jesu Christ.

And the third day after, they were drawn out tofore the emperor, and were found all whole and not touched of the fire, ne as much as an hair of them was burnt, ne none other thing on them. And then the Christian men took the bodies of them, and laid them in a right noble place honourably, and made over them an oratory. And they suffered death under Adrian the emperor, which began about the year one hundred and twenty in the calends [first day] of November.

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

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

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halsall@fordham.edu

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