

## **155// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. LEONARD**

**I**t is said that Leonard was about the year of our Lord five hundred. And he was baptized in the holy font of St. Remigius, archbishop of Rheims, and was instructed of him and induced in holy discipline of [spiritual] health. And the parents and kinsmen of St. Leonard were chief and highest in the palace of the king of France. This Leonard gat so much grace of the king, that all the prisoners that he visited were anon delivered.

And when the renomee of his holiness grew and increased, the king constrained him for to dwell with him long time, till that he had time convenable, and gave to him a bishopric. And he refused it and left all, desiring to be in desert, and went to Orleans, preaching there with his brother Lifardus, and there lived a little while in a convent.

And then Lifardus had desire to dwell alone in a desert upon the river of Loire, and Leonard was warned by the Holy Ghost to preach in Guienne, and then they kissed together and departed. Then Leonard preached there and did many miracles, and dwelled in a forest nigh to the city of Limoges.

In which forest the king had do make a hall or a lodge, which was ordained for him when he should go hunt. And it happed on a day that the king went for to hunt in that forest, and the queen, which was gone thither with him for her recreation, which then was great with child, began to travail of child. And the travail endured long, and she was in point to perish, so that the king and all the meiny [household retinue] wept for the peril of the queen.

And then Leonard passed through the forest and heard the voice of them that wept, and was moved with pity and went thither. And the king called him, and demanded him what he was, and he said that he was a disciple of St. Remigius. And then the king had good hope because he had been informed of a good master, and brought him to the queen, and prayed him that he would pray for her, and for the fruit that she bare, that she might get of God double joy. And anon as he had made his prayer, he gat of God that he required.

Then the king offered to him much gold and silver, but he refused all, and desired him to give it to poor men, and said: I have no need of such things, it sufficeth me to despise the riches of the world and to serve God in this wood, and that is that I desire.

And then the king would have given to him all the wood. I will not have all, but as much as I may go about with mine ass in a night, I desire, which the king gladly granted to him. And there was made a monastery in which he lived long in abstinence, and two monks with him. And their water was a mile from them, wherefore he did do make a pit all dry, the which he filled with water by his prayers, and called that place noble, because he had received it of a noble king. And he shone there by so great miracles, that who that was in prison and called his name in aid, anon his bonds and fetters were broken, and went away without any gainsaying freely, and came

presenting to him their chains or irons. And many of them that were so delivered dwelled still with him and served there our Lord.

And there were seven of his noble lineage which sold away all their goods and dwelled with him, and he delivered to each of them a part of that wood. And by his holy example he drew many to him. And at the last this holy man, being endowed with many virtues, the eighth ides of November [i.e., November 6<sup>th</sup>] departed out of this world, and slept in our Lord.

### THE BUILDING OF ST. LEONARD'S CHURCH

Whereafterward for the many miracles that God showed there, it was showed to the clerks of the church that because that place was over little [too little] for the great multitude of people that came thither, that they should do make in another place another church, and bear therein the body of St. Leonard honourably.

And then the clerks and the people were all three days in fastings and in prayers. And on the third day they saw all the country covered with snow, save only the place wherein St. Leonard would rest, which was all void. And thither was the body transported, and the church made. And the great multitude of irons of diverse manners witness well how many miracles our Lord hath showed for him, and specially to prisoners, of whom the fetters and irons hang tofore his tomb.

### MIRACLES OF ST. LEONARD

#### The Prisoner Chained to the Pillar

The viscount of Limoges had do make a great chain for to fear withal the malefactors, and commanded that it should be fastened unto a trunk [shaft of a pillar] in his tower. And whosomever was bounden with this chain to that trunk thereas it was set, he might see no light. And it was a place right dark, and whoso died there, died not of one death only, but more than of a thousand torments.

And it happed that one of the servants of St. Leonard was bounden with this chain without deserving, so that almost he gave over his spirit. And then as he might, in his courage [heart] he avowed to St. Leonard, and prayed him that sith he delivered other that he would have pity on his servant. And anon St. Leonard appeared to him in a white vesture and said: Fear thee nothing, for thou shalt not die. Arise up, and bear thou this chain with thee to my church; follow me, for I go tofore.

*Leonard is as much to say as the odour of the people. And it is said of leos, that is, people, and of nardus, that is, a herb sweet smelling, for by the odour of good fame he drew the people to him, and by the odour of good renomee. Or Leonard may be said as gathering high things. Or it is said of lion. The lion hath in himself four things. The first is force or strength, and as Isidore saith, it is in the breast and in the head. And so the blessed Leonard had strength in his breast by the refraining of evil thoughts, in the head by the contemplation of sovereign things. Secondly, the lion hath subtlety in two things, for he hath his eyes open when he sleepeth, and defaceth his traces when he fleeth. And thus Leonard waked by labour of good works, and in waking he sleepeth by rest of contemplation, and defaceth in himself the trace of all worldly affection. Thirdly, the lion hath might in his voice, for by his voice he raiseth the third day his whelp that is dead born, and maketh all other beasts by him to be in peace and rest. And in like wise Leonard raiseth many that were dead in sin, and many that lied bestially he fixed them in good works and profitable. Fourthly, the lion hath dread in his heart after that Isidore saith: He doubteth[fears] two things, that is, the noise of wheels of chariots or carts, and fire burning. In like wise Leonard doubted, and in doubting he eschewed all the noise of the world, and therefore he fled into the desert. And he eschewed the fire of covetise, and therefore he refused the treasures that were offered him.*

Then he arose and took the chain and followed St. Leonard, which went tofore him till he came to the church. And anon, as he was tofore the gates, St. Leonard left him there, and he then entered into the church and recounted to all the people what St. Leonard had done. And he hung that great chain tofore his tomb.

### The Prisoner in the Pit

There was a certain man which dwelled in the place of St. Leonard, and was much faithful and devout to St. Leonard. And it happed that this good man was taken of [by] a tyrant, which began to think in himself that “St. Leonard unbindeth and looseth all them that be bounden in irons, and the might of iron hath no more might against him than wax hath against the fire. If I set this man in irons Leonard shall anon deliver him, and if I may keep him I shall make him pay for his ransom a thousand shillings. I wot well what I shall do. I shall go make a right great and deep pit under the earth in my tower, and I shall cast him therein bounden with many bonds. And after I shall do make a chest of tree upon the mouth of the pit, and shall make my knights to lie therein all armed. And how be it that if Leonard break the irons, yet shall he not enter into it under the earth.”

And when he had made all this that he thought, this man which was enclosed therein cried oft to St. Leonard, so that on a night St. Leonard came and turned the chest wherein the knights lay armed, and closed them therein like as dead men be in a tomb. And after entered into the fosse or pit with great light, and took the hand of his true servant, and said to him: Sleepest thou or wakest, lo here is Leonard whom thou so much desirest.

And he, sore marvelling, said, “Lord help me!” And anon his chains were broken, and took him in his arms and bare him out of the tower, and then spake to him as a friend doth to a friend, and set him at home in his house.

### The Pilgrim Held for Ransom

There was a pilgrim which returned from the visiting of St. Leonard, and was taken in Almaine [Germany] and put in a pit or fosse, and fast closed therein. And this pilgrim prayed strongly St. Leonard and also them that took him, that they would for the love of St. Leonard let him go, for he had never trespassed to them. And they answered, but if he would pay much money he should not depart.

And he said: Be it between you and St. Leonard, to whom I remit the matter.

And the night following St. Leonard appeared to the lord of the castle and commanded him that he should deliver his pilgrim, and on the morn he supposed he had dreamed, and would not deliver him. The next night he appeared to him again, and commanded him to let him go, but yet he would not obey. The third night St. Leonard took this pilgrim and brought him out of the castle, and anon the tower and half the castle fell, and oppressed [crush] many of them that were therein, and the prince only was left, to his confusion, alive, and had his thighs broken. et cetera.

## The Knight of Brittany

There was a knight in prison in Brittany which oft called on St. Leonard, which anon appeared to him in the sight of all men, and knowing him, and they being sore abashed [amazed], entered into the prison and brake his bonds and put them in the man's hand, and brought him forth before them all, being sore afeard.

## ST. LEONARD THE ABBOT

There was another Leonard, which was of the same profession and of one virtue, of whom the body resteth at Corbigny. And when this Leonard was prelate [abbot] in a monastery he was of so great humility that he was seen to be lowest of all. And much people came to him, so fast and so many, that they that were envious said to the king Clothair that, if he took not good heed to the realm of France he should suffer damage, and that great, by Leonard, which gathered to him much people under the shadow of religion.

And then this cruel king commanded that he should be chased away, but the knights that came for to chase him were so converted by his words that, they were compunct [conscience-stricken], and promised to be his disciples. And then the king repented him, and required [asked] pardon of him, and put them from him that had so missaid of him, and from their goods and honours, and loved much St. Leonard, so that unneth [hardly] the king would not re-establish them again to their estate at the prayers of the holy saint. And this holy saint impetred [beseeched] and had grant of God, that whosomever were holden in prison and prayed in his name that he should anon be delivered.

And on a day, as he was in his prayers, a right great serpent stretched him from the foot of St. Leonard along upward unto his breast, and he never therefore left his orison. And when he had accomplished his orisons, he said to the serpent: I know well that sith the beginning of thy creation thou tormentest men as much as thou mayst, but thy might is given to me now, do to me now that which I have deserved.

And when he had said thus the serpent sprang out of his hood and fell down dead at his feet. After this, on a time when he had appeased two bishops that had been in discord, he said that he should on the morn finish his life. And so he did, and that was about the year of our Lord five hundred and seventy.

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

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

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