

141// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. MAURICE

THEBES RESISTS THE PAGAN EMPERORS

Moris or Maurice was duke of the right holy legion of Thebans. They were named Thebans, of Thebes their city. And that region is in the parts of the East beyond the parts of Arabia, and it is full of riches, plenteous of fruit, delectable of trees. The indwellers of that region be of great bodies and noble in arms, strong in battle, subtle in engine, and right abundant in wisdom. And this city had a hundred gates, of which is said this verse: *Ecce vetus Thebea centum jacet obruta portis*; that is to say: "The town of Thebes with a hundred gates right strong is now overthrown." To them James the brother of our Lord preached the gospel of our Lord.

Diocletian and Maximian Demand that the Gods be Worshipped

In that time Diocletian and Maximian, emperors, would have utterly destroyed the faith of our Lord Jesu Christ, and sent such epistles unto all the provinces where Christian men dwelt:

If anything behoved [were] to be determined or to be known, and all the world were assembled on that one party, and Rome alone were of that [other] party, all the world should be as vanquished and overcome, and Rome only should abide in the highness of science. And wherefore then, ye that be not but a little people, and contrary to the commandment of her, refuse ye so follily the establishments of the city of Rome? Wherefore receive ye the faith of the gods immortal, or else sentence irrevocable of damnation shall be pronounced against you.

The Theban Legion is Raised

And then the Christian people received these letters, and sent again their messengers all void without answer. And then Diocletian and Maximian, moved by great ire and wrath, sent unto all the provinces and commanded that they should come to Rome ready in arms of battle for to discomfit all the rebels of the empire of Rome. Then the letters of the emperors were sent and directed to the Thebans, which people after the commandment of God, they rendered to God that was due to him, and to the Cæsar that was longing to him.

Maurice is said of amarus, that is bitter, and cis, that is to say, vomiting odour, or hard, or of us, that is to say, counsellor or hasty. Or it is said of mauron, which, after Isidore, in Greek is said black. He had bitterness for his evil idolatry and dilation of his country; he was vomiting by covetise of things superfluous; hard and firm to suffer torments; counsellor by the admonishment of knights his fellows; hasty by ardour and multiplying of good works; black by despising himself. And the blessed Eucherius wrote and ordained his passion when he was Archbishop of Lyons.

Then assembled this chosen legion of knights, that is to wit six thousand six hundred and sixty-six knights, and were sent to the emperor for to help in their just and lawful battles, and not to bear arms against Christian men, but rather to defend them. And the noble man, Maurice, was duke of this holy legion; and they that governed under him, which bare the banners, were named St. Candidus, St. Innocent, St. Exsuperius, St. Victor, and St. Constantine, all these were captains.

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE THEBAN LEGION

Diocletian then sent against the Frenchmen, Maximian, which he had made fellow with him in the empire, and delivered to him great strength without number, and adjoined to him the legion of Thebans. And they had been exhorted of Marcel, the pope, that they should rather suffer death than to corrupt the faith of Jesu Christ. And when this great host without number had passed the mountains and came beneath, the emperor commanded that all they that were with him should sacrifice to the idols, and on them that would not, they should swear to run upon them as rebels, to be destroyed, and specially on Christian men.

They Refuse to Sacrifice to Idols

And when the holy knights heard that, they departed from the host eight miles farther, and took there a certain place delectable, by the river of Rhone, which was named Aganum. And when Maximian knew it, he sent knights to them, and commanded that they should come hastily unto the sacrifices of the gods with the other; and they answered that they might not so do because they held the faith of Jesu Christ. And then the emperor, embraised with ire, said: The injury celestial is meddled with my despite, and the religion Roman is despised with me. Now shall each contumacious knight feel not only for me, but to avenge my gods.

The Emperor Orders the Legion Decimated; The Reply of St. Maurice

Then Cæsar commended his knights that they should go and constrain them to do sacrifice to the gods, or else they should slay always the tenth man. Then the holy saints stretched their heads with joy, and hasted that one tofore that other to come to the death. And after, St. Maurice arose up and said to his fellows among other things: Enjoy ye with us, and I thank you, for we be all ready for to die for the faith of Jesu Christ. We have suffered our fellow knights to be slain, and I have suffered your fellows to suffer death for Jesu Christ, and I have kept the commandment of God which said to Peter: "Put thy sword into the sheath." But now, because that we be enclosed with the bodies of the knights our fellows, and have our clothes red of their blood, let us then follow them by martyrdom. And if it please you, let us send this answer unto Cæsar: We be thy knights, sir emperor, and have taken arms to the defence of the common weal; in us is no treason ne dread, but in no wise we will forsake the law ne faith of Jesu Christ.

Another Decimation is Ordered; The Reply of St. Exuperius

And when the emperor heard that, he commanded to behead yet the tenth man of them. And when that was done, one of the bannerers, named Exsuperius, took the banner and stood among them and said: Our glorious duke Maurice hath spoken of the glory of our fellow knights; ne

think not that I take arms for to resist such things, but let our right hands cast away such fleshly arms, and let us arm us with virtues. And if it please you, let us remand unto the emperor such words: We be knights of thine empire, but we confess us to be servants of Jesu Christ; we owe unto thee chivalry, and unto him innocence, and of thee we attend the reward of our labour, and of him we have the beginning of life. And we be ready to receive for him all torments, and we shall not depart from his faith.

The Legion is Slaughtered

Then Cæsar commanded that his host should environ all that legion of knights, so that none should escape. Then were environed the knights of Jesu Christ with knights of the devil, that one of them should not escape, and were all to-hewn, and smitten off heads and hands, and trodden under the feet of the horses, and were sacred martyrs of Christ. And they suffered death in the year of our Lord two hundred and eighty.

Nevertheless there escaped some by the will of our Lord, and came into other regions, and preached the name of Jesu Christ, and had in other places victory of martyrdom. And it is said that Solor and Adventor and Octavius went unto Turin, and Alexander to Pergamos, Secundus unto Ventimiglia, and Victor, Constantine, and Ursin and others escaped. And when the butchers divided the prey amongst them, and ate together, they saw an old man named Victor pass forth by, and they bade him come and eat with them, and he began to demand them how they might eat with joy among so many men slain and dead. And when he had heard that they were Christian men, sighing he wailed greatly, and said he had been well blessed if he had been slain with them. And when they apperceived that he was a Christian man, they anon ran upon him and slew him.

After this, Maximian at Milan and Diocletian at Nicomedia in one day forsook their purple clothing and laid it down for to lead a more simple life, and they that were younger, as Constantine, Maximian, and Galerian, whom they had ordained Cæsarians, should govern the empire. And as Maximian would again reign and command as a tyrant, he was pursued of Constantius, his step-son, and finished his life by hanging.

And after this the holy body of Innocent, one of that legion which had been cast in the river of Rhone, was found, and by Domitian of Genanence and Gratus of Autun and Prothase, of the same bishops, in their church is honourably buried.

A MIRACLE OF THE COMPANIONS

And there was a paynim, a workman that wrought to make the church with others, but he wrought not but on the Sundays in the time when men sang and made solemnity of masses in the said church; and there came to him a company of saints which ravished him, and beat him, and also reprovèd him, because he wrought in masonry when others did the divine service and office in the church, and then, he so corrected, ran to the church, to the bishop, and required to be christened.

WHAT ST. AMBROSE SAYS OF THE COMPANIONS

And Ambrose saith thus of these martyrs in his preface:

The company of these true Christian men enlumined with divine light, coming from the farther ends of the world, which were armed with spiritual arms, and hied to their martyrdom with stable faith and diligent constancy, whom the cruel tyrant for to fear them tithed two times by the slaughter of the sword, and after, he seeing them constant in the faith, commanded them all to have their heads smitten off. But they burned in so great charity that they cast and threw away their arms and harness, and kneeling on their knees received sufferably with a joyous heart the swords of them that martyred them, among whom Maurice, embraced in the love and faith of Jesu Christ, received the crown of martyrdom.

Hæc Ambrosius [Thus says Ambrose].

OTHER MIRACLES OF ST. MAURICE AND HIS COMPANIONS

The Grieving Mother

There was a woman which delivered her son, to learn, unto the abbot of the church in which the holy saints lie in. And the son died in short time after, wherefore the mother wept without remedy. Then St. Maurice appeared to her and inquired why she wept so for her son. And she answered that as long as she should live she should weep for him. And he said to her: Weep no more for him as he were dead, for know thou for certain he is with us, and if thou wilt prove it, arise tomorn and every day of thy life, and come to matins, and thou shalt hear his voice among the monks singing.

And ever after, during her life, she came every day, and heard the voice of her son singing among the monks.

The Tempest

When the king Gaturanicus had given all that he had to poor men and to churches, he sent a priest for to fetch to him of the relics of this holy company. And as he returned with the relics, the tempest arose in the lake of Lausanne in such wise that the ship was in peril; he set the chasse [box] with the relics against the waves of water, and anon the tempest ceased and the waves of the water were appeased.

The Translation of St. Maurice's Body to Auxerre

It happed in the year of our Lord nine hundred and sixty-three, that some monks, by the accord of Charles, had impetred [requested] and gotten of Nicholas the pope, the body of St. Urban, pope, and of St. Tiburtius, martyr. And returning, they visited the church of the holy martyrs, and impetred and gat of the abbot and monks that they transported the body of St. Maurice and the

head of St. Innocent unto Auxerre, into the church that St. Germain had dedicated in the name of these martyrs, and brought it thither.

The Proud Cleric

Peter of Amiens rehearseth that in Burgundy was a proud clerk [cleric] and ambitious which had gotten a church of St. Maurice, and usurped it by force against a mighty knight which was contrary and against him. And on a time was sung a mass in the end of the gospel, that they that enhance them shall be meeked, and they that meek them shall be enhanced. This said malerous [unfortunate] and cursed clerk laughed and said: That is false, for if I had humbled and meeked myself I had not had this day so much riches as I have in the church.

And as soon as he had said that, anon came thunder and lightning from heaven in manner of a sword, and entered into his mouth out of which issued the blasphemies, and anon he was extinct and died suddenly.

Then let us devoutly beseech Almighty God that by the merits of this holy martyr St. Maurice and his holy fellowship the legion, which is six thousand six hundred and sixty-six, that suffered martyrdom, as heretofore is rehearsed, we may after this transitory life come unto the everlasting bliss in heaven, where he reigneth, world without end. Amen.

The [iconography of St. Maurice and His Companions](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

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

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