

23// OF ST. SEBASTIAN

St. Sebastian was a man of great faith, a good Christian man, and was born in Narbonne, and after taught and endoctrined in the city of Milan, and was so well beloved of Diocletian and Maximian, emperors of Rome, that they made him master and duke of their meiny [household] and power, and always would have him in their presence. And he was always with them in habit of a knight, and was girded with a girdle of gold above like as was used. And all this did he not for jollity, ne for cause that he dreaded death, or to die for the love of Jesu Christ, but he did it for to comfort the Christian men in their belief when they were in distress for to reny [deny] the faith for dread of tormenting their body.

SEBASTIAN'S COUNSEL GIVES FORTITUDE TO TWO CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

It happed that two brethren german [brothers having the same parents], very Christian men and noble of lineage named Marcus and Marcellianus, were taken and constrained by the emperor for to worship and do sacrifice unto the idols, and there was given to them thirty days to be in prison without to receive death for their Christian faith, within which time they might counsel and advise themselves whether they would do sacrifice to the idols or to leave, and their friends were suffered in this time of respite to come to them in prison, for to entreat and revoke them from their faith for to save their lives.

Sebastian is said of sequens and beatitudo, and astim and ana, that is to say following the blessedness of the heavenly city, and this he gat five manner wises, after St. Austin, that is to say he gat by poverty the kingdom, with sorrow joy, with labour rest, with trouble glory, and with death life. Or Sebastianus is said of basto, for by the help of Christ he flourished in the church, and had a custom to comfort the martyrs in their torments

Then came their parents and friends to them, and began to say: Whence cometh this hardness of heart that ye despise the old age of your father and mother which be now old? Ye get unto them new sorrows. The great pain that they had in your birth was not so great as the sorrow that they have now, and the sorrow that your mother suffereth is not to rehearse, wherefore right dear friends we pray you that ye will to these sorrows put some remedy, and depart you and leave the error of the Christian men.

And anon, after these words, their mother came, and entered in, in crying and tearing the hair of her head and in showing her paps, and said all weeping: Alas! I am mechant [miserable] and unhappy that lose my two sons that I have given suck and nourished so sweetly. Thou, fair son, thou wert sweet and debonair to me.

And to that other she said: Thou wert like and semblest well thy father. Alas! to what mischief and sorrow am I delivered for you my fair sons; I lose my sons which by their own will go for to die. My most dear children, have ye mercy on your sorrowful mother, that am in so great misease and in so great weepings for you; O poor caitiff that I am, what shall I do that lose

my two sons? and to the death I see them go by their free will. Alas! this is a new manner of death, for to desire the death tofore it come.

The mother had unnethe [hardly] said her complaint but that their father was brought between two servants, which at the entry showed to his sons dust upon the poverty of his hoar head and cried: Alas I sorrowful caitiff come to the death of my two sons, which by their own agreement will die. O my over dearest sons that were the sustenance and staff of mine old age, sweetly nourished and taught and learned in science, what is this open foolishness and rage that is come on you and causeth you to love and desire so the death? There was never such a folly ne rage seen in the world. O ye my friends come forth and help me to bewep my children, ye that have hearts of pity, and ye old and young, weep ye, and I will weep so much that I see not the death of my sons.

In the while that the father thus wept and said, came the two wives of these two sons, which bare in their arms their children, which weeping and crying said: Say ye now that be our dear husbands, in what ward leave ye us and your children! Alas, what shall become of us, our children, and our goods, that for your sake shall be lost? Alas caitiffs that we be, what thing is to us happened? how have ye hearts of iron? in what manner may ye so be hardened, so out of nature, and so cruel, that also despise your father and mother and refuse all your friends, chase away your wives, and reny and forsake your children, and with your will deliver yourselves for to die shamefully?

Of these lamentable words tofore written, the two said sons Marcus and Marcellianus were so abashed and their hearts mollified, that almost they were returned from the Christian faith, and would for the favour of their parents and friends have done sacrifice unto the idols. But at these words was St. Sebastian as a knight; when he saw them thus travailed, and so amollished [softened] anon came to them and said: O right noble knights of Jesu Christ, wise and hardy, which be come to the victory and now go aback, and for a few blandishing words vain and miserable, ye will lose the victory permanable, lose ye not the everlasting life for the blandishing words of women, be ye example to other Christian men for to be strong in the faith. Address ye your hearts above the world, and lose ye not your crown for the weepings of your wives and your children. They that now weep, certes should this day be glad and joyous if they knew that ye know. They ween that there be none other life but this which they see tofore their eyes, which after this shall come to nought: if they knew what is that other life without death and without heaviness, in which is joy permanable and everlasting, without doubt they would haste them for to go with you unto that life and should repute this life as vain. For it is full of misery and also false, and sith [since] the beginning of the world hath deceived all his friends and conquered all them that have affiance [trust] in him, for she hath lied in her promise, yet doth she daily in this life more harm. For she maketh gluttons, and other she maketh lecherous, she maketh thieves for to slay, and the angry cruel, and the liars false and deceivable. She putteth discord among wedded and married people, and debate among the peaceable. By the world cometh all malice and also felony. This evil do they that in this life put their desires and ween long to live therein, and when they that thus serve the world have used their life in doing this evil aforesaid, then giveth she to them her daughter, that is the death perpetual — that is the reward that the life of this world giveth to her servants that depart from this world dispurveyed [destitute], and bear nothing with them but their sins.

After this St. Sebastian turned him to their parents and friends and said to them in this manner: O ye my friends, lo, here the life of this world which deceiveth you in such wise that ye discourse your friends from the everlasting life, ye distrouble your children that they should not come to the company of heaven, and to the honour permanable and to the amity of the emperor celestial, by your foolish words and your false weepings; if they should assent to your repeal, they should but a while dwell with you, and after should depart from your company where ye should see them in torments that should never end, whereas cruel flame devoureth the souls of miscreants and worshippers of idols, and the dragons eat the lips of cursed men, and the serpents destroy them that be evil; there where is heard nothing but wailings, weepings, and horrible cries of souls which burn continually in the fire of hell, and ever shall burn without dying. Suffer ye that your sons escape these torments, and think how ye may escape and let them suffer death for the love of Jesu Christ. Think not but they, when they shall be thus departed from you, go for to make ready your place and your mansion in heaven, where ye and your children may be in joy perpetual.

In this hour and time that St. Sebastian, that was in habit of a knight clad with a mantle and girt with a girdle of gold, and had said these words, anon came a great light, in the which appeared a youngling clad with a white mantle among seven angels, and gave to St. Sebastian the peace saying: Thou shalt be alway with me.

This saw the wife of Nicostratus named Zoe in whose house Marcus and Marcellianus were in prison, which had been mute and dumb six years by a sickness that she had; but she had understood that which St. Sebastian had said and had seen the light about him, and she fell down to his feet, and by signs of her hands made prayers to him.

And after when St. Sebastian knew that she had lost her speech, anon he said to her: If I be the servant of Jesu Christ and if all that I have said be true, then I pray him that he will render to thee thy speech again that opened the mouth of Zacharias the prophet. And anon escried [exclaimed] this woman much high, and said: The word that thou hast said is very true, and blessed be thou and the word of thy mouth, and blessed be all they that by thee believe in Jesu Christ the son of God, for I have seen certainly seven angels tofore thee holding a book, in which was written all that which thou hast said, and cursed be they that believe thee not.

And Nicostratus husband of this woman, and the father and mother, and all the friends of Marcellianus and Marcus received the Christian faith and were all baptized by Polycarpus the priest unto the number of seventy-eight persons, men, women, and children. And ten days during they abode together in orisons and prayers, and thanked God of his benefits.

Among them was Tranquillinus, father unto the holy martyrs aforesaid, which had eleven year during, the gout in his feet and hands, and as soon as Polycarp had baptized him he became as whole and sound in his feet and hands as a child.

THE CHRISTIANS CONVERT THE PROVOST CHROMATIUS AND HIS SON

After the ten days, Agrestin and Chromatius, provosts of Rome, made Tranquillinus their father to come tofore them, and demanded of him how his sons were advised and

counselled, and he answered: Much well did ye when ye gave to them respite, for in the meantime they that should have died have found life and joy.

And the provost supposed that his sons had been turned, and said: To-morn I shall see how thy sons shall make sacrifice to the idols, by whom thou and they may dwell in peace.

And Tranquillinus said: Gentle man, if thou wilt justly adore and work about me and my sons thou shalt find that the name of Christian men is of great virtue.

And the provost said: Tranquillinus, art thou wood [mad]?

And he answered: I have been out of my wit, but as soon as I believed in Jesu Christ I received health of body and of soul.

The provost said: I see well that the respite of thy sons hath brought thee in error.

Tranquillinus said: Know you of what works come error?

The provost bade him say, and he said: The first error is to leave the way of life and go by the way of death for to dispute that men which be dead for to be gods, and to adore their images, made of wood or of stone.

The provost said: Then they be no gods that we adore?

Tranquillinus said: It is read in our books what men they were that ye adore for gods, how evil they lived, and how mechantly they died. Saturnus whom ye worship for god was lord of Crete, and ate the flesh of his children. How, is not he one of your gods? And Jupiter his son, whom ye adore, which slew his father, and took his sister to his wife, what evil was this? How art thou in great error that adorest this cursed man, and sayest to the image of stone, "Thou art my god," and to the stock of tree, "Help me"?

The provost said: If there be none but one God invisible that ye adore, wherefore then adore ye Jesu Christ whom the Jews crucified?

Tranquillinus answered: If thou knewest of a ring of gold in which were a precious stone, lying in the mire of a valley, thou wouldst send thy servants for to take up this ring and if they might not lift it up, thou wouldst unclthe thyself of thy clothes of silk and do on a coarse coat and wouldst help to take up this ring and make a great feast.

The provost said: Wherefore hast thou put forth this proposition now?

Tranquillinus answered: For to show to thee that we adore one only God.

The provost said: What understandest thou by this ring?

Tranquillinus said. the gold of the ring is the body human, and the precious stone signifieth the soul which is enclosed in the body. The body and the soul make a man, like as the gold and the precious stone make a ring, and much more precious is the man to Jesu Christ than the ring is to thee. Thou sendest thy servants for to take up this ring out of the dirt or mire, and they may not. Thus sent God into this world the prophets for to draw the human lineage out of the ordure [dung] of sins, and they might not do it. And like as thou shouldst leave thy rich clothes and clothe thee with a coarse coat, and wouldst descend into the privy, and put thy hands into foul ordure to take up the ring, right so the majesty of God hid the light of his divinity by a carnal vestment, which he took of our nature human, and clad him therewith and descended from heaven, and came here beneath into the privy of this world, and put his hands in the ordure of our miseries in suffering hunger and thirst, and took us up out of the filth and washed us from our sins by the water of baptism. And thus he which despiseth thee because thou shouldst descend in a foul habit to take up the ring, thou mightest well put him to death. Thus all they that reny or despise Jesu Christ because he humbled himself for to save man, may in no wise escape from the death of hell.

The provost said: I see well that these be but fables; thou hast taken respite for thy sons, knowest thou not well that the emperor our lord is cruel against Christian men?

Tranquillinus said: It is folly to doubt more human puissance [power] than the puissance divine, they that be cruel against us may well torment our bodies but they may not take from our heart Jesu Christ.

Then the provost put Tranquillinus in the hands of the sergeants saying: Show to me the medicine by which thou art healed of thy gout, and I shall give to thee gold without number.

Tranquillinus said: Know thou that much evil shall come to them that sell and buy the grace of God, but if thou wilt be whole of the malady of the gout, believe in Jesu Christ and thou shalt be whole as I am.

The provost said: Bring him to me that hath healed thee.

Tranquillinus went to Polycarp and said to him all this, and brought him with St. Sebastian unto the provost and informed him in the faith, and he prayed them that he might have his health, and St. Sebastian said that he should first reny his idols and give him licence to break them, and then he should have his health.

Then Chromatius the provost said that his servants should break them . St. Sebastian said: They be afear'd and dare not break them, and if the fiends hurt any of them by any occasion, the misbelievers would say that they were hurt because they brake their gods.

And then Polycarp and St. Sebastian destroyed more than two hundred idols. Then said they to the provost: Why hast thou not received the health whilst we brake the idols? Thou keepest yet thy misbelief or else keepest yet some idols.

Then he showed them a chamber which was light as had been of stars, whereupon his father had dispended two hundred pods of gold, by which he knew things for to come. Then said St. Sebastian: As long as thou keepest this whole thou mayst never have health.

And then he agreed it should be broken. Tiburtius, his son, which was a noble young man, said plainly that so noble a work should not be destroyed: How well I will not be against my father's health, this will I well, that there be ordained two furnaces of fire burning, and then I will that ye destroy this work, and if my father have his health I shall be content, and if he receive not his health, then I will that ye two shall be burnt in these two furnaces of fire all quick.

And St. Sebastian said: Be it as thou hast said.

And forthwith they went and brake the chamber. And in the meanwhile the angel of our Lord appeared to the provost and said his health was given to him, and anon he was all whole, and ran after him for to have kissed his feet, but he denied him for he had not received baptism. And then he and Tiburtius his son with one thousand four hundred of their family were baptized.

THE MARTYRDOM OF ZOE, TIBURTIUS, MARCUS, AND MARCELLIANUS

Then Zoe was taken of the miscreants and tormented so long that she gave up the spirit. And when Tranquillinus heard that, he came forth and said: Alas! why live we so long? Women go tofore us to the crown of martyrdom.

And within a few days after he was stoned to death. And Tiburtius was commanded that he should go barefoot upon burning coals or else do sacrifice to the idols, and then he made the sign of the cross upon the coals and went on them barefoot, and he said: Me thinketh I go upon rose flowers in the name of our Lord Jesu Christ.

To whom Fabian the provost said: It is not unknown to us that your Jesu Christ is a teacher of sorcery.

To whom Tiburtius said: Hold thy peace thou cursed wretch, for thou art not worthy to name so worthy, so holy ne so sweet a name.

Then the provost was wroth and commanded to smite off his head, and so he was martyred. And then Marcellianus and Marcus were sore tormented and bound to a pillar, and as they were so bound they said: Lo! how good and joyful it is brethren to dwell together.

To whom the provost said: Ye wretches, do away your madness and deliver yourselves.

And they said: We were never so well fed, we would that thou wouldest let us stand here till that the spirits should depart out of our bodies.

And then the provost commanded that they should be pierced through the body with spears, and so they fulfilled their martyrdom.

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. SEBASTIAN

After this St. Sebastian was accused to the emperor that he was Christian, wherefore Diocletian, the emperor of Rome, made him come tofore him, and said to him: I have always loved thee well, and have made thee master of my palace; how then hast thou been Christian privily against my health, and in despite of our gods?

St. Sebastian said: Always I have worshipped Jesu Christ for thy health and for the state of Rome, and I think for to pray and demand help of the idols of stone is a great folly.

With these words Diocletian was much angry and wrath, and commanded him to be led to the field and there to be bounden to a stake for to be shot at. And the archers shot at him till he was as full of arrows as an urchin [hedgehog] is full of pricks, and thus left him there for dead.

The night after came a Christian woman for to take his body and to bury it, but she found him alive and brought him to her house, and took charge of him till he was all whole. Many Christian men came to him which counselled him to void the place, but he was comforted and stood upon a step where the emperor should pass by, and said to him: The bishops of the idols deceive you evilly which accuse the Christian men to be contrary to the common profit of the city, that pray for your estate and for the health of Rome.

Diocletian said: Art thou not Sebastian whom we commanded to be shot to death.

And St. Sebastian said: Therefore our Lord hath rendered to me life to the end that I should tell you that evilly and cruelly ye do persecutions unto Christian men.

Then Diocletian made him to be brought into prison into his palace, and to beat him so sore with stones till he died. And the tyrants threw his body into a great privy, because the Christian men should make no feast to bury his body, ne of his martyrdom. But St. Sebastian appeared after to St. Lucy, a glorious widow, and said to her: In such a privy shalt thou find my body hanging at an hook, which is not defouled with none ordure, when thou hast washed it thou shalt bury it at the catacombs by the apostles.

And the same night she and her servants accomplished all that Sebastian had commanded her. He was martyred the year of our Lord two hundred and eighty seven.

MIRACLES OF ST. SEBASTIAN

The Woman Who Might Not Abstain from Her Husband

And St. Gregory telleth in the first book of his *Dialogues* that a woman of Tuscany which was new wedded was prayed for to go with other women to the dedication of the church of Sebastian, and the night tofore she was so moved in her flesh that she might not abstain from her husband, and on the morn, she having greater shame of men than of God, went thither, and anon as she was entered into the oratory where the relics of St. Sebastian were, the fiend took her and tormented her before all the people. And then the priest took the coverture of the altar and

covered her, and then the devil assailed the priest. Her friends led her to the enchanters that they should enchant the fiend, but as soon as they began the enchantment, by the judgment of God a legion of devils entered into her, that is six thousand six hundred and sixty six, and vexed her more sharply than tofore, and an holy man named Fortunatus by his prayers healed her.

The Great Plague in Italy

It is read in the gestes of the Lombards that, in the time of King Gumbert all Italy was smitten with so great a pestilence that unnethe they that were alive might bury the dead, and this pestilence was most at Rome and Pavia. Then the good angel was seen visibly of many, and an evil angel following bearing a staff whom he bade smite and slay, and as many strokes as he smote an house, so many dead persons were borne out of it. Then at last it was shewed to one by God's grace that this pestilence should not cease till that they had made an altar to St. Sebastian at Pavia, which then was made in the church of St. Peter, and anon the pestilence ceased, and thither from Rome relics of St. Sebastian were brought.

CONCLUSION

And St. Ambrose in his preface saith thus: O Lord, the blood of thy blessed martyr St. Sebastian was shed for the confession of thy name, he hath showed thy marvels that they profit in infirmity virtue, and giveth to our studies profit, and to them not steadfast to thee it giveth aid and help. Then let us pray to this holy martyr St. Sebastian that he pray unto our Lord that we may be delivered from all pestilence and from sudden death, and so depart advisedly hence, that we may come to everlasting joy and glory in heaven.

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

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

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