

25// HERE BEGINNETH THE LIFE OF ST. VINCENT

Vincent was noble of lineage, but he was more noble by faith and religion, and was deacon to St. Valerian bishop. He was in his childhood set to study, where by divine providence he flowered in double science most profoundly, that is to say in divinity and humanity; to whom St. Valerian, because he was empeshed [hindered] in his tongue, committed to him the faits [duties] and works of charge, and himself entended to prayer and contemplation.

VINCENT AND VALERIAN ARE ARRESTED

And by the commandment of Dacian the provost, Vincent and Valerian were drawn to Valence and there cast in prison. And when the provost had supposed they had been almost perished for hunger and pain, he commanded them to come tofore him. And when he saw them whole and joyful he, being wroth, began to cry much strongly and said: What sayest thou Valerian which under the name of thy religion dost against the decrees of princes?

And as the blessed Valerian answered lightly, St. Vincent said to him: Worshipful father answer him not so with a timorous heart, but put out thy voice and escry him freely, and father, if thou wilt command me, I shall go answer to the judge.

To whom Valerian said: Right dear son, it is long since I have committed to thee the charge of speaking, and now it behoveth thee to answer for the faith for which we be here.

Then St. Vincent turned to the judge, and said to Dacian: Thou hast holden unto now words to reny our faith, but know thou that it is great felony to the wisdom of Christian men to blame and reny our Christian faith.

VINCENT IS TORTURED TO DEATH

Then Dacian, being wroth, commanded that the bishop should be put in exile, and Vincent as a man presumptuous and despitous should be put to be tormented in the place named *eculeus* [i.e. he was put on the rack]. And it was made like a cross thwart of which the two ends were fixed in the earth, and that his members should thereon be broken, for to fear the other. And when he was all thus tobroken, Dacian said to him: Say Vincent now seest thou thy body unhappy?

Vincent is as much to say as burning vices, or overcoming burnings and keeping victory, for he burnt and destroyed vices by mortification of his flesh, he vanquished the burnings of torments by stedfast sufferance, he held the victory of the world by despising of the same. He vanquished three things in the world, that is to wit, false errors, foul loves, and worldly dreads, which things he overcame by wisdom, by cleanness, and by constancy. Of whom St. Austin saith that the martyrdoms of saints have enseigned that the world is overcome with all errors, loves and dreads. And some affirm that St. Austin wrote and compiled his passion, which Prudentius set right clearly in verses.

And Vincent smiling said to him: This is all that I have desired.

Then the provost being wroth began to say and menace with many torments, and Vincent said to him: O unhappy man, how weenest thou to anger me? the more grievously that thou tormentest me, so much more pity shall God have on me. Arise up thou unhappy man and cursed, and by thy wicked spirit thou shalt be vanquished, for thou shalt find me more stronger by the virtue of God to suffer thy torments, than thou hast power to torment me.

Then the provost was angry and began to cry, and the butchers took scourges and rods, and began to smite and beat him with rods of iron. And St. Vincent said: What sayest thou, Dacian? thou thyself avengest me of my torments.

Then the provost was wood [angry], and said to the butchers: Ye wretches what do ye, why fail and wax faint your hands? Ye have overcome murderers and adulterers, so that they could hide nothing among your torments, and this Vincent only shall more surmount your torments.

Then the butchers took combs of iron, and began to comb him on the sides within the flesh, that the blood ran down over all his body and that the entrails and guts appeared by the jointures of his sides. And Dacian said to him: Vincent have pity on thyself in such wise that thou mayst recover thy fair youth, and win to spare the torments that be yet to come.

And Vincent said to him: O venomous tongue of the devil, I doubt nothing of thy torments, but I fear sore that thou wilt fain to have mercy on me, for so much more as I see thee angry, so much more am I rejoiced, I will that thou in no wise minish ne lessen thy torments, so that thou know that thou be vanquished in all things.

Then was he taken out of the torment, and was brought into a torment of fire, and he blamed and reproved the butchers of their long tarrying. Then with his goodwill he mounted upon the gridiron and there was roasted, broiled and burnt in all his members, and was slicked with small nails of iron, and pricked with burning poinlers [hooks] of iron. And when the blood ran into the fire and made wounds upon wounds, then they cast salt into the fire, that it should sparkle and spring in the wounds of his body, on all parts of the wounds that it should more cruelly burn, and do him more pain on his body by the flames, in such wise that the pricks of iron might not hold on his members, but on his entrails which hung out of his body, so that he might not move him.

And for all this he was unmovable, but he prayed our Lord Jesu Christ with joined hands up to heaven. And when the ministers had said this to Dacian, he said: Alas! we be all vanquished; and he liveth yet, and because he may yet live longer, shut ye him in a much dark prison, and gather together all the sharp shells and prick them in his feet, and let him be stretched on them without any human comfort, and when he shall be dead come and tell me.

And these right cruel ministers obeyed him as to their lord right cruel, but the king for whom he suffered the pain so inhuman, changed to him all this into joy, for the darknesses were all chased away out of the prison by great light, and the sharpness of the shells were turned into

softness and sweetness of all manner of flowers, his feet were unbound, and he used the comfort of the honour of angels, and like as he had gone on the flowers singing with angels, the sweet sound of the song, and the sweetness and odour of the flowers, which was marvellous, was smelled out of the prison. And when the keepers had seen through the crevices of the prison this that they saw within, they were converted and turned to the faith.

And when Dacian heard this he was wroth, and said: What shall we do to him more? we will overcome. Now then let him be borne into a right soft bed, with soft clothes, so that he be not made more glorious, and to the end that he die not yet, but that he be made strong again, and be kempt [combed] again in new torments.

And when he was brought in a soft bed, and had therein rested a while he rendered and gave up his spirit unto God in the year of our Lord two hundred and eighty eight under Diocletian and Maximian Emperors.

And when Dacian heard say that he was dead, he was much sorrowful, and said that in that wise he was also vanquished: But sith I might not overcome him living I shall punish him dead, and if I may not have victory I shall be fulfilled of the pain.

HIS BODY IS PRESERVED

Then the body of St. Vincent was cast in a field for to be devoured of the beasts and fowls, by the commandment of Dacian, but it was kept by angels from touching of any beasts, and after came a raven which drove away all other birds and fowls, greater than he was, and chased away also a wolf with his bill and beak, and then turned his head towards the body as he that marvelled of the keeping of the angels.

And when Dacian heard this thing: I trow, said he, that I may not surmount him when he is dead. Then commanded he that he should be cast into the sea with a mill stone bound to his neck, to the end that he that might not be destroyed upon the earth of beasts, should be devoured in the sea of belues and great fishes.

Then the mariners that led the body in to the sea, cast it therein, but the body was sooner arrived aland than the mariners were, and was found of a lady and of some others by the revelation of Jesu Christ, and was honourably buried of them.

COMMENTS OF THE FATHERS ON ST. VINCENT

And St. Austin saith of this holy blessed martyr, St. Vincent, that he vanquished so in words, he vanquished in pains, he vanquished in confession, he vanquished in tribulation, he overcame the fire, he overcame the water, he vanquished death and vanquished life. This Vincent was tormented for to dwell with God, he was scourged for to be introduced, he was beaten for to be enstrengthened, he burnt to be purged, he was gladder of the dread of God than of the world, and had liefer die to the world than to God.

Also St. Austin saith in another place that a marvellous thing is set tofore our eyes, that is: a wicked judge, a cruel tormentor, and a martyr not overcome.

And Prudentius wrote of cruelty and pity, saying that Vincent said to Dacian, “The torments of the prison, the nails, the ongles, the straining combs of iron, with the flames of fire, and death which is last end of the pains, all these be plays and japes to Christian men.” Then Dacian said as overcome, “Bind him and draw his arms out of their joints, and break ye all the bones in such wise that all the members be departed, to the end that the breath of him spring out by the holes of his members so torn.” And the knight of God laughed at these things, and blamed the bloody hands because they put not the hooks and nails deeper in his members. And when he was in the prison the angel of God said to him, “Arise up noble martyr, surely arise up, for thou shalt be our fellow, and be accompanied with saints. O knight invincible, strongest of all strong, now these aspre [bitter] torments and cruel, doubt thee now a vanquisher.” And Prudentius saith, “Thou art only noble of the world, thou bearest only the victory of double battle, thou hast deserved two crowns together.”

Pray we then to him that he impetre [beseech] grace of our Lord Jesu Christ that we may deserve to come unto his bliss and joy in heaven where he reigneth. Amen.

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

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

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