



Jacobus de Voragine

The Golden Legend

Readings on the Saints

TRANSLATED BY

William Granger Ryan

VOLUME I



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INTRODUCTION

The *Golden Legend* is a thirteenth-century work, dated about 1260, whose author is commonly called and cataloged as Jacobus de Voragine. The author was a native of the town of Varazze on the Genoese Riviera. His name was Jacopo (Jacobus in Latin, James in English); in these pages he will be called Jacobus. He was born about A.D. 1230, entered the Dominican Order (O.P., the Order of Friars Preachers) in 1244, and, in the course of four decades, held high offices in the Order as teacher and administrator. In 1292 he became archbishop of Genoa, where he was esteemed as a peacemaker and a father to the poor. He died in 1298, was beatified (whence the title "Blessed") by Pope Pius VII in 1816, and is venerated as a saint by the Dominican Order and the city and province of Genoa.¹

Jacobus left several volumes of sermons and a *Chronicle of Genoa* and other minor writings, as well as the present work, which originally was called simply *Legenda Sanctorum* (Readings on the saints).² The lasting popularity of the work caused it to be called *Legenda Aurea*, the *Golden Legend*. (It also acquired a subtitle, "The History of the Lombards," because in his penultimate chapter, "Saint Pelagius, Pope," Jacobus followed a one-line acknowledgment of the pope's career with an account, in some ten thousand words, of the "history of the Lombards" from mid-sixth century to shortly before 1250.) The popularity of the *Legend* was such that some one thousand manuscripts have survived, and, with the advent of printing in the 1450s, editions both in the original Latin and in every Western European language multiplied into the hundreds. It has been said that in the late Middle Ages the only book more widely read was the Bible.

The version here offered is the first complete modern translation in English. It is based on the Latin text published by Th. Graesse in 1845. The second edition (the one used for this translation) was published in 1850,³ and a third in Dresden-Leipzig in 1890. The second and third editions are identical, and a photo-offset reproduction came out at Osnabrück in 1969. Graesse says in his brief preface (signed and dated *Scripsi Dresdae Kal. Novembr. MDCCCXLV*) that his text is based on an edition (Lexic. Bibliogr. T.I, p. 872, sq. nr. 10672^b),

¹ For information about Jacobus, see E. C. Richardson, *Materials for a Life of Jacopo da Voragine* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1935).

² The headline over the Prologue reads "*Incipit prologus super legenda sanctorum*": here *legenda* is neuter plural and means "readings."

³ Jacobi a Voragine, *Legenda aurea vulgo historia lombardica dicta*, recensuit Dr. Th. Graesse, editio secunda (Leipzig, 1850).

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preserved in the Royal Public Library in Dresden, giving no further information about the source edition itself. Graesse accepted 182 chapters or legends as Jacobus's work, and added 61 by authors other than Jacobus. These added chapters are not included in the present translation.

The *Golden Legend* is basically the work of a compiler. Abbé Roze⁴ identifies some 130 sources quoted or referred to in the *Legend*, grouping them by centuries from the second to the thirteenth. The lists include the Latin and Greek Fathers (the latter known from Latin anthologies and encyclopedias like Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*) and most of the authors then regarded as reliable authorities. Some of Jacobus's sources were known to be apocryphal and not trustworthy, and Jacobus says so, but does not hesitate to repeat some of their statements and stories. He was concerned about differences regarding dates, places, and persons occurring in his sources, and tried repeatedly to reconcile them; but the accuracy of a number or a date or a fact was less important to him than its doctrinal or moral or mystical significance. His overall subject was the dealings of God with humankind—with *salvation history* as it revealed itself in God's agents and instruments, the saints. The "History of the Lombards" mentioned above, for instance, contains little of the history we would expect, but gives attention to developments in Church doctrine and liturgy, to heresies, to saints and miracles.

The *Legend* was translated, as has been mentioned, into every Western European language. The only surviving early translation in English was made and published by William Caxton, man of letters and printer-publisher, in 1483.⁵ He mentions as his sources an earlier English translation, now unknown, a French version, and a Latin edition. Caxton omitted some of Jacobus's saints and added some sixty not in Jacobus, many of the latter being English or Irish. Caxton's is the only English translation undertaken, so far as I know, until 1941, when, with the assistance of the late Helmut Ripperger, I made a new "translation and adaptation,"⁶ omitting material that at the time was considered expendable. The present translation is entirely new and includes every line of each of the 182 chapters offered by Graesse as authentic. I should note that while scholars have in recent years turned their attention to Jacobus's work,⁷ much remains to be done on the *Legend*—for example, to establish a *textus receptus* by collating the manuscript material, to locate Jacobus's quotations from other authors, and to evaluate the use he made of his sources. The present work does not include any such research. It is not a study of the *Golden Legend*: it is the *Golden Legend*.

⁴ J.-B. M. Roze, in the preface of his translation of the *Legend*, *La légende dorée*, 3 vols. (Paris: Ed. Rouveyre, 1902), 1:xiv-xvii.

⁵ *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints as Englished by William Caxton*, 7 vols. (London: Dent & Sons, 1931).

⁶ *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co.), 1941.

⁷ Two interesting and informative recent studies are by A. Boureau, *La légende dorée* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1984), and by S. L. Reames, *The Legenda aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 1.

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But why a new and complete English translation? In a word, to provide a ready tool for study in the fields of myth and legend, of hagiography and folklore, of medieval history, literature, art, and religion. Let us quote Emile Mâle, historian of medieval art:

[The *Golden Legend* remains one of the most interesting books of its time for those who seek in medieval literature for the spirit of the age to which it belonged. Its fidelity in reproducing earlier stories, and its very absence of originality, make it of special value to us. . . . Nearly all the bas-reliefs and windows which deal with legends can be interpreted with its help, and in re-editing it Graesse rendered a valuable service to the history of art, if not also to the history of religion.⁸]

The *Golden Legend* is, first and foremost, a religious work, but students of medieval history can see in it how "scientific" history, as distinguished from "sacred" or "salvation" history, was interpreted, misinterpreted, or simply ignored by Jacobus and the authors he consulted, notably Vincent of Beauvais in his *Mirror of History*. Students of the late medieval mystery plays and miracle plays will see that many of these plays may well have drawn upon the *Legend* for setting, characters, action, dialogue, and "business."⁹ The book has long been used as an aid in the study of medieval statuary and stained glass.

[A preliminary question: who are the saints about whom Jacobus compiled his readings? The answer is that they are, so to speak, the "official" saints, whom the Church, up to Jacobus's time, had declared to be worthy of public veneration, and particularly those whose feast days were celebrated in the Church's liturgy. There were already official readings about these saints in the existing martyrologies and legends. To these readings or "legends" Jacobus added new material gleaned from his sources, and assembled them within the framework of the Church's liturgical calendar. Then he distributed the readings on the saints according to the dates of their feast days within the several seasons of the liturgical year—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and the time after Pentecost.¹⁰ As for the myriad other saints—the martyrs, the confessors and virgins, and all the good men and good women who by God's grace are with him in heaven—Jacobus devoted to them his chapter for the Feast of All Saints.]

The chapter on All Saints is a typical example of Jacobus's way of developing his argument. One feature of his method meets the reader from the first sentence on: there were four "causes" (reasons, purposes) for the institution of the feast; each of the four will be studied under three, four, five subdivisions, and each subdivision under a number of sub-subdivisions. This structuring by numbers is typical, but the numbers are not the method, which essentially includes three

⁸ Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*, trans. Dora Nussey (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 273.

⁹ As one among a number of examples, see the account of Christ's visit to hell in the chapter of the Lord's resurrection.

¹⁰ No dates are attached to the saints' legends in the Graesse edition or in this translation. Some of the feasts included by Jacobus have been suppressed and the dates of others changed.

elements, namely, Scripture, authorities, and narrative. As a general rule Jacobus supports each point he is making with one or several texts from Scripture—texts of which frequently only the first few words are quoted.¹¹ To the scriptural proofs he usually adds one or more references to, or quotations from, his authorities. But the authorities are interpreting and explaining the biblical texts. The whole foundation of Jacobus's argumentation in the *Golden Legend* is scriptural. He does not philosophize or theologize in the scholastic manner. Instead he accumulates texts and authorities, sometimes by the dozen: the greater the number, the stronger the argument itself.

Narrative is the third essential element in the method. Jacobus interlards his argument with narrative, most frequently stories of miracles. That most of these narratives were at least partially fictional—or better, the product of generations of oral retelling—in no way diminished their effectiveness. They served an important purpose: they humanized and dramatized the doctrinal point to be made. In them men and women were seen as *living* the doctrine. The saints the people heard about in church, and talked about and prayed to, are alive in the *Legend*, and they move and talk and act like the men and women Jacobus saw passing by his window on the road to heaven. A primary purpose of these narratives was to prove that the person concerned was truly a saint. Very little was known about the actual lives of most of the saints memorialized in the *Legend*. Martyrdom was an ipso facto proof of sainthood. For nonmartyrs, the practice of heroic virtue and the performance of miracles, all graphically narrated, showed that God was working through the individual, thus proving that he or she was indeed a saint. Miracles were *expected* of the saint, and the saint's miracle was the work of God.)

The miracle stories, if they are to make any sense to modern readers, require a special effort, which consists in trying to see life and the world the way medieval Christians did. For these people in general, God was not a philosophical abstraction but a living, ever-present, caring *actor*, the creator and giver of life. Their life was a pilgrimage through a world that was passing, to which they were not to become attached, since the reason for their being was to be united with God in heaven; meanwhile they grubbed a hard living from the reluctant earth. The world was a scene of warfare between good and evil, a world peopled with demons and angels. The demons, in order to deceive and mislead God's children, resorted to a marvelous bag of tricks but always wound up looking foolish. The angels protected God's people. The Church, the sacraments, the mysteries of Christ celebrated in the liturgy, formed a milieu for the Christian's progress from birth to death, from earthly life to eternal life. "If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth" (Col. 3:1-2).

To people who saw the hand of God working in the world and in the miracles of the saints, the miracles, the "wonderworks"—cures, control of natural

¹¹ In this translation enough of the quoted text has been added to make its relevancy clear.

forces, foreknowledge—while astonishing, were unquestionably believable. To the modern reader the multiplication of these events in Jacobus's stories may seem excessive and boring. The multiplication itself, however, like the accumulation of authorities already referred to, was used to confirm the saint's sanctity and/or the truth to which he or she bore witness; and, to judge by the "popular" literature of the Middle Ages, the wonderful, of which the miraculous is a sub-category, was never boring. Of course some of the stories are ridiculous as well as occasionally vulgar. Some are so preposterous that Jacobus pointed out the likelihood that they were "apocryphal," but kept them in nonetheless. They are part of the stuff of medieval hagiography, and they tell us something about the habits and manners, as well as about the piety, of medieval Christians—even, perhaps, about their sense of humor.

A note may be made here about the "etymologies" that preface most of the legends of the saints. The humanist critics of the sixteenth and later centuries scoffed at them, and Graesse calls them "those most perverse etymologies, in which more than anywhere else our Jacobus limps."¹² In fact they are admirable examples of Jacobus's whole method. To him, a name is the symbol of the person who bears it, and in its letters and syllables can be found the indication of what the person's life, with its virtues and its triumphs, is to be. So he dissolves the compound of the name, so to speak, into its component elements; and he shows—frequently by recourse to Greek, of which he obviously knew little,¹³ and at times to Hebrew, of which he knew less—what the name meant when by the providence of God it was conferred on the future saint.¹⁴ As with numbers and facts and dates and places, therefore, so also with names: it is the hidden meaning and the spiritual message which things convey that must be sought.

Scholars do not agree on Jacobus's purpose in composing the *Golden Legend*, nor on the audience he had in mind. The work was written in Latin and therefore would seem to have had clerics as its primary audience. Jacobus was a Friar Preacher, and A. Boureau, in his *La légende dorée*,¹⁵ makes a case for the likelihood that the book's first purpose was to serve as material for preachers and teachers of preaching, particularly in the houses of study of the Dominican Order. Boureau also notes that the trend in the thirteenth-century Church was to direct the faithful to the Book and to books, perhaps in order to bring about a more binding contact between laity and clergy. This would suppose, for one thing, that the ability to read was becoming more common, and, for another, that the multiplication of copies and translations of the *Legend* and books like it occurred in response to an existing demand. The chapters bearing directly on Jesus Christ—Advent (which includes the Last Judgment), Christmas, Circum-

¹² . . . *etymologias illas perversissimas, quibus maxime claudicat Jacobus noster*. . . . *Legenda aurea*, iv.

¹³ Knowledge of the Greek language did not spread in Western Europe, even among the literati, until the fifteenth century.

¹⁴ His "analysis" of the name varies when the name belongs to different persons and must conform to the personality of each one.

¹⁵ Boureau, *La légende dorée*, 21–25.

cision, Epiphany, Annunciation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost, and on Blessed Mary's Nativity and Assumption and her ubiquitous activity throughout the whole story—besides being heavy with doctrine and spiritual inspiration, are crowded with fascinating and instructive anecdotes. That the *Legend* became a book for private reading and devotion seems indisputable.

The probability that Jacobus intended the book to be primarily a manual for preachers would help to explain not only what it contained or did, but what it lacked or did not do. There is no systematic attempt in the *Legend* to expound or to outline a pattern of sainthood for the laity, nor even a pattern for a happy and holy family life, such as is prescribed by Saint Paul in Col. 3:17–25, or caroled in more down-to-earth terms in Psalm 127 (128). In the *Legend*, marriage is obviously a second-class way of life: Saint Jerome is quoted as saying that there is as much difference between wedlock and virginity as there is between not sinning and being a saint. Women are simply presumed to occupy the same status in the Church and in society as Saint Paul assigned to them. Of the approximately two hundred saints celebrated by name in the *Legend*, only forty-one were women and only five had been married. The ideal of the holy Christian life, as it emerges from the various legends, turns out to be a monastic and ascetical pattern, based on “contempt for the things of earth” and on the practice of humility, chastity, obedience to God and the Church, and patience with the trials of this life (not specified existentially), in view of the hope of heaven and the gaining of merit toward that end. The vast majority of Christians will be saved by obeying the laws of God and the Church, and, as we have seen, they will be honored on the Feast of All Saints.

There is none of what is now called “social doctrine” in the *Legend*. No attention was directed to what would have to have been radical solutions of problems of civil government and law and order, of slavery and serfdom, of labor and just compensation, of poverty and famine, of the equitable sharing of natural resources. Jacobus and his time saw these problems not as problems to be solved but as trials to be borne. Furthermore, there is no evidence in the *Legend* of what is now called ecumenism, that is, any outreach toward non-Christian religions and their followers, or toward “heretical” Christians. Difference begot hostility. Toward Muslim men and women and children, hostility then took the form of the Crusades. For Jewish men and women and children, hostility meant the ghetto. The Inquisition dealt with recalcitrant heretics.

Jacobus was a man of his time and wrote for his time. He was no radical and does not seem to have thought of his preachers as reformers of the earthly society in which they lived. The reforms he envisaged were in preparation for the Last Judgment.

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2. Saint Andrew, Apostle

Andrew is interpreted beautiful, or responding, or manly, from *ander*, which means male, a man; or Andrew, Andreas, is like *anthropos*, i.e., man, from *ana*, above, and *tropos*, a turning. So Andrew was one who turned upward toward heavenly things and was lifted up to his Creator. He was beautiful in his life, responding in wise doctrine, manly in suffering, and raised up in glory. The presbyters and deacons of Achaia wrote an account of his martyrdom, which they had witnessed with their own eyes.

Andrew and several other disciples were called by our Lord three times. The first time he called them to know him. That was the day when Andrew, standing with John his teacher and another disciple, heard John say: "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Immediately he and the other disciple went and saw where Jesus lived, and they stayed with him all day; and later Andrew found his brother Simon and led him to Jesus. The next day they returned to fishing, their regular occupation. Later Jesus called them a second time, this time to his friendship. Coming with a great crowd to the shore of the lake of Genesareth, which is also called the sea of Galilee, he went into the boat that belonged to Simon and Andrew, and at his bidding they made a large haul of fish. Then Andrew called James and John, who were in another boat, and they followed the Lord, after which they again returned to their work. But soon Jesus called them again, this time to be his disciples. Walking one day beside the same lake, he signaled them to throw aside their nets, and said: "Follow me, I will make you fishers of men." And they followed him and did not go back to their usual work. Still a fourth time, moreover, the Lord called Andrew, on this occasion to be his apostle, as Mark reports in his third chapter: "He called those he had chosen for himself and they came to him, and he saw to it that they were twelve in number."

After the Lord's ascension into heaven the apostles separated, and Andrew went to Scythia, while Matthew went to Murgundia, also called Ethiopia. But the Ethiopians, refusing to heed Matthew's preaching, put out his eyes, bound him with chains, and threw him into prison, intending to put him to death in a few days. Meanwhile the angel of the Lord appeared to Andrew and commanded him to go to Ethiopia to be with blessed Matthew. Andrew answered that he did not know the way there, whereupon the angel ordered him to go to the seacoast, and there to board the first ship he encountered. This Andrew promptly did, and the ship, aided by a favorable wind, swiftly carried him to the town where Matthew was. Then, the angel guiding him, he made his way into

the evangelist's prison, which he found open. Seeing Matthew he wept much and prayed; and the Lord, in answer to his prayer, restored to Matthew the sight of his eyes, which the cruelty of the unbelievers had taken from him.

Matthew then departed and went to Antioch. Andrew stayed in Murgundia, where the inhabitants, furious at their prisoner's escape, seized the apostle and dragged him from place to place with his hands bound. His blood flowed freely, but he prayed to God unceasingly for his tormentors and in the end converted them. Then he set out for Achaia. This, at any rate, is what we are told; but I find the story very hard to believe, because Matthew's deliverance and cure by Andrew would imply—and this is very unlikely—that the great evangelist was unable to obtain for himself what Andrew secured for him so easily.

A young man of noble family had been converted by Saint Andrew and joined his company against the will of his parents, whereupon they set fire to the house where he lived with the apostle. When the flames were at their height, the young man sprinkled a vial of water on them and the fire died out. Then the parents said: "Our son has been turned into a sorcerer." They brought a ladder and tried to climb up and rescue their son; but God struck them blind, so that they could no longer see the rungs of the ladder. A man who was passing called up to them: "Why go to so much trouble? Do you not see that God is fighting for them? Stop now, or God's wrath may fall upon you!" Many, witnessing this, believed in the Lord. As for the youth's parents, they died after fifty days and were buried in a tomb.

A woman who had married a murderer was brought to bed but could not give birth. She said to her sister: "Go and pray to our mistress Diana for me." The sister prayed, but it was the devil, not Diana, who answered: "It is useless to invoke me, for I can do nothing for you. Go instead and find Andrew the apostle: he can help your sister." She went therefore and sought out Saint Andrew, and brought him to the bedside of her ailing sister. "You deserve your suffering," he said to her; "you married badly, conceived badly, and called upon the devil. But repent, believe in Christ, and you will be delivered." The woman made an act of faith and brought forth a stillborn child; and her pangs ceased.

An old man named Nicholas came to Andrew and told him: "Master, I am now seventy years old and have always been given to sins of lust. Yet I have read the gospel and have prayed to God to grant me the gift of continence, but I cannot resist concupiscence, and I fall back into my evil ways. Now it has happened that driven by lust and forgetting that I carried the gospel on my person, I went to a brothel; but the harlot, when she saw me, cried out: 'Get out, old man, get out! Don't touch me or try to come near me. I see marvelous things about you, and I know you are an angel of God!' Astonished by what she said, I remembered that I was carrying the gospel. Now, holy man of God, let your prayer obtain my salvation!" Hearing all this the saint began to weep and remained in prayer for hours; and then he refused to eat, saying: "I will eat nothing

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until I know that the Lord will take pity on this old man." After he had fasted for five days, a voice came to him: "Andrew, your prayer is granted. But just as you have mortified your body by fasting for him, so likewise he must fast in order to win salvation." The old man did so. For six months he fasted on bread and water, and then fell asleep in peace, full of good works. And again Andrew heard the voice, this time saying to him: "Your prayer has restored to me Nicholas whom I had lost."

A certain Christian youth told Saint Andrew in secret: "My mother, seeing my good figure, tried to make me do wrong with her; and when I absolutely refused, she went to the judge and accused me of that very crime. Pray for me and save me from an unjust death, because I will not defend myself. I would rather die than expose my mother to such shame." So the young man was summoned before the judge, and Andrew went with him. The mother insistently charged her son with wanting to violate her, and the son, despite being asked several times whether this was true, said not a word. Then Andrew spoke to the mother: "O cruelest of women, your own lust makes you willing to send your only son to death!" The woman said to the judge: "Sir, my son attached himself to this man after failing to have his way with me." This made the judge very angry, so he ordered the young man to be put in a sack smeared with pitch and tar and thrown into the river, and Andrew to be kept in jail until he, the judge, decided on a form of torture that would kill him. But Andrew prayed, whereupon a stupendous clap of thunder terrified them all, a huge earthquake threw them to the ground, and the woman, struck by lightning, shriveled up and crumbled to ashes. The others begged the apostle to pray that they might be spared. Andrew prayed for them, and the storm fell calm. At this the judge believed, as did his whole household.

When the apostle came to the city of Nicaea, the townspeople told him that seven devils had stationed themselves along the road outside the city gate and were killing anyone who passed that way. The saint, with all the people looking on, commanded the demons to come to him, and at once they came in the shape of dogs. The apostle ordered them to be off to some place where they could not harm anyone. The devils vanished, and those who had witnessed the miracle accepted the faith of Christ. But when Andrew arrived at the gate of another town, he came upon the body of a young man being carried out for burial. Asking what had happened to the youth, he was told that seven dogs had come and killed him in his bed. The apostle, in tears, cried out: "I know, Lord, that these were the seven demons I chased out of Nicaea!" Then he said to the father: "What will you give me if I restore your son to life?" "I have nothing dearer to me than my son," the father answered, "so I will give him to you." And when Andrew had prayed to the Lord, the young man rose and followed him.

Some men, to the number of forty, were on their way by sea to receive the word of faith from Andrew, when the devil raised a storm and all were drowned. But their bodies were cast up on the shore by the waves. The apostle quickly

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brought them back to life, and they all told what had befallen them. Whence it is that we read in a hymn from the saint's office:

Quaterdenos juvenes,
Submersos maris fluctibus,
Vitae reddidit usibus.¹

Then blessed Andrew settled in Achaia, filled the whole region with churches, and led a great number of people to the Christian faith. Among others, he converted the wife of the proconsul Aegeus and baptized her. As soon as the proconsul heard of this, he came to the town of Patras and commanded the Christians to sacrifice to the idols. Then Andrew came to meet him and said: "You have earned the right to judge men on earth. Now what you ought to do is to recognize your judge who is in heaven, worship him, and turn completely away from false gods." Aegeus spoke: "So you are that Andrew who preaches the superstitious sect which the princes of Rome recently ordered us to exterminate." Andrew: "That is because the Roman rulers have not yet known that the Son of God has come on earth, and has taught that your idols are demons and their teaching an offense to God. So God, being offended, turns away from those who worship them and does not hear their prayers; and they, no longer heard by God, are made captive by the devil and deluded by him until their naked souls leave their bodies, carrying nothing with them but their sins." "Yes," Aegeus retorted, "and because your Jesus was teaching this nonsense, they nailed him to a cross." Andrew replied: "It was to give us salvation, and not to expiate any misdeeds of his own, that he freely accepted the agony of the cross." Then said Aegeus: "How can you say that he freely suffered death, when we know that he was handed over by one of his disciples, imprisoned by the Jews, and crucified by the soldiers?"

Andrew thereupon set out to prove, by five arguments, that the passion of Christ was voluntary. Christ had foreseen his passion and had foretold it to his disciples, saying: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed."² When Peter tried to dissuade him, Jesus said: "Go behind me, Satan!"³ He made it plain that he had the power both to suffer death and to rise again, saying: "I have the power to lay it (my life) down, and I have power to take it up again."⁴ He knew in advance the man who would betray him, since he dipped bread and gave it to him, and still made no attempt to avoid him. Finally, he had chosen the place where he knew the traitor would come to betray him. Andrew also declared that he himself had been present at all these moments; and he added that the cross was a great mystery. "It is not a mystery

¹ Forty young men, / who had been drowned in the waves of the sea, / he restored to the uses of life.

² Matt. 20:18.

³ Matt. 16:23.

⁴ John 10:17-18.

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at all," Aegeus replied, "but a punishment. However, if you refuse to obey my command, I will give you a taste of your mystery!" "If I were afraid of the pain of the cross," Andrew answered, "I would not be preaching the glory of the cross. But first let me teach you its mystery. Maybe you will believe in it, worship it, and be saved."

He then began to explain the mystery of redemption to the proconsul, proving, by five arguments, how necessary and appropriate this mystery is. Since the first man had brought death into the world by means of wood, a tree, it was appropriate that the Son of man should banish death by dying on a cross of wood. Since the sinner had been formed out of clean earth, it was fitting that the reconciler should be born of an immaculate virgin. Since Adam had stretched out his greedy hands toward the forbidden fruit, it was fitting that the second Adam should open his guiltless hands on the cross. Since Adam had tasted the sweetness of the apple, Jesus had to taste the bitterness of gall. And since he was giving his own immortality to man, it was by a fitting exchange that he took human mortality, because if God had not become man, man could not have become immortal. To all this Aegeus's reply was: "Go teach these inanities to your own people, but now obey me and offer sacrifice to the all-powerful gods!" And Andrew: "To almighty God I offer daily a Lamb without stain, who remains alive and whole after all the people have eaten him." Aegeus asked how this could be, and Andrew answered: "Become his disciple and I will tell you." Aegeus: "Well, then, I will torture an answer out of you"; and, enraged, he had him imprisoned.

The next morning, taking his place in the judgment seat, he again called upon Andrew to sacrifice to the idols, saying: "If you refuse to obey me, I shall have you hung upon the cross you boast about!" And he threatened him with other torments. The apostle responded: "Make them the worst you can think of! The more bravely I bear suffering in his name, the more acceptable I shall be to my king." Aegeus commanded twenty-one men to seize him, flog him, and bind him hand and foot to a cross, so as to make his agony last longer.

While the saint was being led to the cross, a great crowd gathered, shouting: "An innocent man is condemned to shed his blood without cause!" The apostle, however, begged them not to try to save him from martyrdom. Then, seeing the cross in the distance, he greeted it, saying: "Hail, O cross sanctified by the body of Christ and adorned with his limbs as with precious stones! Before the Lord was lifted up on you, you were greatly feared on earth, but now you draw down love from heaven and are accepted as a blessing. I come to you assured and rejoicing, so that you may joyfully accept me, the disciple of him who hung upon you, for I have always loved you and yearned to embrace you. O good cross, honored and beautified by the limbs of the Lord, long desired, constantly loved, ceaselessly sought, and now prepared for my wishful heart! Take me away from the world of men and return me to my Master, that he, having redeemed me by means of you, may receive me from you." Having said these words, he

shed his garments and gave them to the executioners, who fixed him to the cross as they had been commanded. For two days Andrew hung there alive and preached to twenty thousand people. On the third day the crowd began to threaten the proconsul Aegeus with death, saying that a saintly, gentle man should not be made to suffer so; and Aegeus came to have the saint released. Seeing him, Andrew exclaimed: "Why have you come here, Aegeus? If to seek forgiveness, you will be forgiven; but if to take me down from the cross, know that I will not come down alive, for already I see my king awaiting me." When the soldiers tried to free him, they could not even touch him: their arms fell powerless at their sides. Meanwhile Andrew, knowing that the people wanted to rescue him, uttered this prayer from the cross, as Augustine quotes it in his book *On Penance*: "Lord, do not let me come down alive! It is time for you to entrust my body to the earth. You entrusted it to me, and I have borne it so long and watched over it and worked so hard, and now I wish to be discharged of this obedience and relieved of this most burdensome garment. I think of how I have labored to carry its weight, to control its unruliness, to support its weakness, to compel its slow responses. You know, O Lord, how often it has struggled to draw me away from the purity of contemplation and awaken me from the repose of that most sweet stillness, how many and how grave pains it has inflicted on me. O most kind Father, I have resisted the assaults of this body for so long, and with your help I have mastered it. Just and loving Rewarder, I beg of you not to leave it any longer in my care! I give back what you entrusted to me. Commend it to the earth so that I will not have to take care of it, and it will not curb and hamper me, thirsting as I am to come freely to you, the inexhaustible source of life and joy." Thus Augustine.

As Andrew finished his prayer, a dazzling light shone out of heaven and enveloped him for the space of a half hour, hiding him from sight; and as the light faded, he breathed his last. Maximilla, Aegeus's wife, took away the body of the holy apostle and gave it honorable burial. But Aegeus, before ever he got back to his house, was seized by a demon and died in the street, with the crowd looking on.

We are told also that a flourlike manna and sweet-smelling oil used to issue from Saint Andrew's tomb, and that by this sign the people of the region could predict the next year's crops. If the flow was meager, the crops would be poor; if abundant, the yield would be plentiful. This may have been true in the past, but now it is said that the saint's body was transferred to Constantinople.

A certain truly devout bishop venerated Saint Andrew above all other saints and began whatever he was about to do with the invocation, "To the honor of God and Saint Andrew." This aroused the devil's envy, and he turned all his cunning to the task of deceiving the bishop. So he took the form of a marvelously beautiful woman, who came to the bishop's palace and said that she wanted to confess to him. The bishop sent word that she should apply to his own confessor, to whom he gave the necessary faculties, but she refused on the

2. SAINT ANDREW, APOSTLE

ground that the bishop himself was the only one to whom she could reveal the secrets of her conscience. In the end he allowed her to be brought before him, and she said: "I pray you, my lord, have pity on me, young as I am as you can see, tenderly nurtured and of royal blood. I have come here, alone and in the garb of a pilgrim. My father, a mighty king, wanted to give me in marriage to a great prince, but I told him that I held the marriage bed in horror because I had vowed perpetual virginity to Christ, and could never consent to carnal commerce. With the choice of either yielding to his will or suffering dire punishment, I got away secretly, preferring to live in exile rather than break faith with my spouse. The fame of your sanctity had come to my ears, and I have sought refuge under the wings of your protection, hoping to find a place with you where I might enjoy the secret silence of holy contemplation, avoid the pitfalls of life, and escape from the disorders of the noisy world."

The bishop, admiring her noble origin and her physical beauty as well as her fervor and eloquence, answered her kindly: "Be reassured, my child, and have no fear. He for whose love you have given up everything, yourself, your kin, and all your possessions, will heap graces upon you in this life and the fullness of glory in the next. I, as his servant, offer you all that is mine. Please choose wherever you wish to dwell; and today I invite you to dine with me." "O my father," she replied, "do not ask this of me. It might stir up some suspicion that would damage your good name." "Not at all!" said the bishop. "There will be others present, we shall not be alone. There cannot be the slightest suspicion that there is anything amiss."

So the bishop, the woman, and the rest of the company went to the table, the woman seated facing the prelate and the others to either side. The bishop could not take his eyes from her face nor contain his admiration for her beauty; and, the eye being fixed, the inner man was wounded. The ancient enemy, aware of this, drove his dart deep into the bishop's heart, at the same time making the alluring face more and more beautiful. The bishop was on the verge of consenting to the thought of proposing a wicked act to the woman at the first opportunity, when suddenly a pilgrim came pounding on the door and loudly demanded admittance. As no one opened to the stranger and the noise from outside increased, the bishop asked the woman whether she would mind if the pilgrim was allowed to come in. She replied: "We shall propose a very difficult question to him. If he can give a satisfactory answer, let him in. If not, let him be driven away as an ignorant person, unworthy to be in the presence of a bishop!"

The plan appealed to all present, and they looked around to see who might be wise enough to propound the question. Then the bishop said to the woman: "No one of us, my lady, is so well able to do this as you are. You surpass us all in wisdom and eloquence, so you shall propose the question." So the woman said: "Ask him to name the most wonderful thing that God has made in a small form." The question was relayed to the stranger, who answered the messenger:

"It is the variety and excellence of the human face: for among so many human beings, from the beginning of the world to its end, no two could be discovered whose faces resembled each other in every respect, or ever will be; yet in each face, small as it may be, God places the seat of all the senses of the body." This solution pleased the company, and they said: "This is a true and excellent answer." Then the woman said: "Let us propose a second and harder problem, so that we may better gauge his knowledge: ask him at what point earth is higher than the heavens." The stranger replied: "It is in the empyrean heaven, for there the body of Christ resides; and the body of Christ is higher than any heaven, yet it was formed of our flesh, and our flesh was made of earth. Therefore at that point earth is higher than the heavens." Hearing this, the company applauded the stranger's wisdom, but the woman spoke again: "We shall give him one more question, this one far more difficult, more obscure, harder to solve than any other could be. This will let us plumb the depth of his knowledge. If he has the answer, he is indeed worthy to sit at the bishop's table. Ask him therefore how far it is from earth to heaven." The pilgrim's reply to the messenger was: "Go back to the one who sent you to me and put that question carefully to him. He knows the answer better than I do and can answer it better, because he traversed the distance when he fell from heaven into the abyss. I never fell from heaven and so never measured the distance. He is not a woman but the devil, who took on a woman's likeness." The messenger, frightened by what he had heard, hurried to report it to those inside. They sat stunned and bewildered by the message, but the ancient enemy vanished from their midst.

The bishop, coming to himself, bitterly reproached himself and with tears prayed for pardon for his fault. He sent the porter to bring the pilgrim into the house, but the stranger was nowhere to be found. Then he called the people together, explained to them everything that had happened, and asked them to fast and pray that God might deign to reveal the identity of the stranger who had saved him from so great a danger. That very night it was revealed to the bishop that it was Saint Andrew himself who, to save him, had come dressed as a pilgrim. Thereafter the bishop was more than ever devout in his veneration of the holy apostle.

The prefect of a certain city had taken possession of a field that belonged to a church dedicated to Saint Andrew. At the prayer of the bishop, the prefect was immediately stricken with fever as a punishment for his sin. He thereupon asked the bishop to pray for him, promising to return the field to the church if he recovered his health; but once he had been made well he took back the field. Then the bishop again resorted to prayer and extinguished all the lights in the church, saying: "There will be no more light until the Lord is avenged upon his enemy and the church recovers its loss." The prefect promptly fell ill again, this time with a higher fever, so once more he begged the bishop to pray for him, saying that he would give back the stolen field and another of equal size. The bishop's answer was: "I have already prayed, and God has answered my prayer."

3. SAINT NICHOLAS

The sick man then had himself carried to the bishop, whom he forced to go into the church to pray for him again; but hardly had the bishop entered the church when the prefect died, and the field was restored to the church.

4. Saint Lucy, Virgin

Lucy comes from *lux*, which means light. Light is beautiful to look upon; for, as Ambrose says, it is the nature of light that all grace is in its appearance. Light also radiates without being soiled; no matter how unclean may be the places where its beams penetrate, it is still clean. It goes in straight lines, without curvature, and traverses the greatest distances without losing its speed. Thus we are shown that the blessed virgin Lucy possessed the beauty of virginity without trace of corruption; that she radiated charity without any impure love; her progress toward God was straight and without deviation, and went far in God's works without neglect or delay. Or the name is interpreted "way of light."

Lucy, the daughter of a noble family of Syracuse, saw how the fame of Saint Agatha was spreading throughout Sicily. She went to the tomb of this saint with her mother Euthicia, who for four years had suffered from an incurable flow of blood. The two women arrived at the church during the mass, at the moment when the passage of the Gospel was being read that tells of the Lord's cure of a woman similarly afflicted. Then Lucy said to her mother: "If you believe what you have just heard, you should also believe that Agatha is always in the presence of him for whose name she suffered martyrdom; and if in this faith you touch the saint's tomb, you will instantly recover your health."

So, when all the people had left the church, the mother and her daughter stayed to pray at the tomb. Lucy then fell asleep, and had a vision of Agatha standing surrounded by angels and adorned with precious stones, and Agatha said to her: "My sister Lucy, virgin consecrated to God, why do you ask me for something that you yourself can do for your mother? Indeed, your faith has already cured her." Lucy, awakening, said to her mother: "Mother, you are

4. SAINT LUCY, VIRGIN

healed! But in the name of her to whose prayers you owe your cure, I beg of you to release me from my espousals, and to give to the poor whatever you have been saving for my dowry." "Why not wait until you have closed my eyes," the mother answered, "and then do whatever you wish with our wealth?" But Lucy replied: "What you give away at death you cannot take with you. Give while you live and you will be rewarded."

When they returned home, they began day after day to give away their possessions to satisfy the needs of the poor. Lucy's betrothed, hearing about this, asked the girl's nurse what was going on. She put him off by answering that Lucy had found a better property which she wished to buy in his name, and for that reason was selling some of her possessions. Being a stupid fellow he saw a future gain for himself and began to help out in the selling. But when everything had been sold and the proceeds given to the poor, he turned Lucy over to the consul Paschasius, accusing her of being a Christian and acting contrary to the laws of the emperors.

Paschasius summoned her and commanded her to offer sacrifice to the idols. Lucy's answer was: "The sacrifice that is pleasing to God is to visit the poor and help them in their need. And since I have nothing left to offer, I offer myself to the Lord." Paschasius retorted: "Tell that story to fools like yourself, but I abide by the decrees of my masters, so don't tell it to me." Lucy: "You obey your masters' laws, and I shall obey the laws of my God. You fear your masters and I fear God. You are careful not to offend them, I take pains not to offend God. You want to please them, I wish to please Christ. Do then what you think will be of benefit to you, and I shall do what I think is good for me." Paschasius: "You have squandered your patrimony with seducers, and so you talk like a whore"; but Lucy replied, "As for my patrimony, I have put it in a safe place, and never have had anything to do with any seducers of the body or of the mind." Paschasius: "Who are these seducers of the body and the mind?" Lucy: "You and those like you are seducers of the mind, because you induce souls to turn away from their Creator. As for the seducers of the body, they are those who would have us put the pleasures of the flesh ahead of eternal joys."

This moved Paschasius to say: "The sting of the whip will silence your lip!" Lucy: "The words of God cannot be stilled!" Paschasius: "So you are God?" Lucy: "I am the handmaid of God, who said to his disciples, 'You shall be brought before governors and before kings for my sake, but when they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to say, for it is not you that speak but the Holy Spirit that speaks in you.'" Paschasius: "So the Holy Spirit is in you?" Lucy: "Those who live chaste lives are the temples of the Holy Spirit." "Then I shall have you taken to a brothel," said Paschasius, "your body will be defiled and you will lose the Holy Spirit." "The body is not defiled," Lucy responded, "unless the mind consents. If you have me ravished against my will, my chastity will be doubled and the crown will be mine. You will never be able to force my will. As for my body, here it is, ready for every torture. What are you waiting for? Son of the devil, begin! Carry out your cruel designs!"

5. SAINT THOMAS, APOSTLE

Then Paschasius summoned procurers and said to them: "Invite a crowd to take their pleasure with this woman, and let them abuse her until she is dead." But when they tried to carry her off, the Holy Spirit fixed her in place so firmly that they could not move her. Paschasius called in a thousand men and had her hands and feet bound, but still they could not lift her. He sent for a thousand yoke of oxen: the Lord's holy virgin could not be moved. Magicians were brought in to try to move her by their incantations: they did no better. "What is this witchery," Paschasius exclaimed, "that makes a thousand men unable to budge a lone maiden!" "There is no witchery here," said Lucy, "but the power of Christ; and even if you add ten thousand more, you will find me still unmovable." Paschasius had heard somewhere that urine would chase away magic, so he had the maiden drenched with urine: no effect. Next the consul, at the end of his wits, had a roaring fire built around her and boiling oil poured over her. And Lucy said: "I have prayed for this prolongation of my martyrdom in order to free believers from the fear of suffering, and to give unbelievers time to insult me!"

At this point the consul's friends, seeing how distressed he was, plunged a dagger into the martyr's throat; but, far from losing the power of speech, she said: "I make known to you that peace has been restored to the Church! This very day Maximian has died, and Diocletian has been driven from the throne. And just as God has given my sister Agatha to the city of Catania as protectress, so I am given to the city of Syracuse as mediatrix."

While the virgin was still speaking, envoys from Rome arrived to seize Paschasius and take him in chains to Rome, because Caesar had heard that he had pillaged the whole province. Arriving in Rome he was tried by the Senate and punished by decapitation. As for the virgin Lucy, she did not stir from the spot where she had suffered, nor did she breathe her last before priests had brought her the Body of the Lord and all those present had responded Amen to the Lord. There also she was buried and a church was raised in her honor. Her martyrdom took place about the year of the Lord 310.



8. Saint Stephen

The name Stephen—Stephanus in Latin—comes from the Greek word for crown—*stephanos*: in Hebrew the name means norm or rule. Stephen was the crown of the martyrs in the sense that he was the first martyr under the New Testament, as Abel was under the Old. He was a norm, i.e., an example or rule, showing others how to suffer for Christ, as well as how to act and live according to the truth, or how to pray for one's enemies. Or Stephen (Stephanus) comes from *strenue fans*, speaking strenuously or with zeal, as the saint showed in his manner of speaking and his brilliant preaching of the word of God. Or Stephen may be understood as *strenue stans* or *fans anus*, laudably standing and instructing and ruling over old women, here meaning widows, because the apostles put him in charge of the widows, who were literally old women. So Stephen is a crown because he is first in martyrdom, a norm by his example in suffering and his way of life, a zealous speaker in his praiseworthy teaching of the widows.

Stephen was one of the seven deacons whom the apostles ordained for ministry. As the number of the disciples increased, the Christians of Gentile origin began to murmur against those converted from Judaism, because the widows among the former were being neglected in the daily ministry. The cause of these complaints may have been either that the widows were not allowed to do any service, or that they were given too much work to do in the daily round. Whatever the trouble was, the apostles had assigned some services to the widows, so that they could devote themselves entirely to preaching. Now, confronted with these complaints, they called all the disciples together and said to them: "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables . . . (The *Gloss* adds: 'Because the food of the mind is better than feasts for the body.') . . . Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty . . . (The *Gloss*: ' . . . to serve or to supervise the servers.') . . . But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching of the word." This plan pleased the assemblage and they elected seven men, of whom Stephen stood out foremost and as leader, and brought them to the apostles, who imposed hands on them.

Now Stephen, full of grace and fortitude, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then the Jews, being jealous of him and wanting to discredit him and find him guilty, joined issue with him in three ways—by argument, by suborning false witnesses, and by putting him to the torture. But he won the arguments, convicted the false witnesses, and triumphed over his torturers, and in each encounter aid was given him from heaven. In the first, the Holy Spirit

aided him with divine wisdom. In the second it was his face, like the face of an angel, that terrified the false witnesses. In the third Christ himself appeared, ready to give aid and to strengthen the martyr. In each of the three conflicts, therefore, three aspects are to be noted—the battle joined, the aid given, and the triumph achieved. A brief review of the incidents will show all this clearly.

Thus, when Stephen's miracles and preaching aroused the envy of the Jews, they launched the first battle, trying to defeat him by argument. Some of them who rose belonged to the synagogue of the Libertines, so called either after the region they came from or because they were sons of people called *Liberti*, i.e., freedmen, men manumitted from slavery and given their freedom. So they were of servile stock and at first resisted the faith. There were also Cyrenians from the city of Cyrene, Alexandrians, and men from Cilicia and Asia. All of them disputed with Stephen. There we have the first battle. Then comes the triumph: they could not stand up against his wisdom. Lastly, there is the aid—the Spirit, who spoke in him.

Stephen's opponents saw that they could not overcome him by that approach and craftily turned to the second one, namely, the testimony of false witnesses. Into the council they brought two false witnesses who accused the saint of four blasphemies, namely, against God, against Moses, against the Law, and against the Tabernacle or Temple. There is the battle. All of those sitting in the council gazed upon Stephen and saw that his face was like the face of an angel. There is the aid. Then came the victory, when the false witnesses were refuted point by point. The high priest asked Stephen if their testimony was true, and the blessed one proved that he was innocent of the four charges brought against him, taking them in order. Blasphemy against God? The God, he said, who spoke to the fathers and the prophets was the God of glory, and he praised God's glory according to the three ways the term could be explained. God is the God of glory in the sense that he bestows glory: "Whosoever shall glorify me, him will I glorify."¹ He is the God of glory in the sense that he contains glory in himself: "With me are riches and glory."² He is the God to whom all creation owes glory: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever."³ So God glorifies, is glorified, and is worthy of glorification.

Stephen then took up the second accusation, blasphemy against Moses, by commending Moses on many grounds, but principally on three—the fervor of his zeal when he struck and killed an Egyptian; his working of miracles, which he performed in Egypt and in the desert; and his familiar friendship with God, since he spoke familiarly with God more than once. As for the charge of blasphemy against the Law, he commended the Law on three grounds: by reason of the Giver, God himself, of the administrator, mighty Moses, and of the purpose, because the Law gives life. Coming to the accusation of blasphemy against the Temple, he refuted it by commending the Temple on four grounds: that it was

¹ 3 Kings 2:30.

² Prov. 8:18.

³ 1 Tim. 1:17.

ordered by God, that the way it was to be built was shown in a vision, that it was completed by Moses, and that it contained the Ark of the Covenant. The Temple, he added, succeeded the Tabernacle. By his reasoning, therefore, blessed Stephen proved himself clean of the crimes of which he was accused.

The Jews realized that the second attack was as futile as the first, so they resorted to the third, the inflicting of torture and pain, thus embarking on the third battle. Blessed Stephen saw what they were about and, wishing to observe the Lord's command regarding fraternal correction, tried to correct them and recall them from such malice by three means: first, by shaming them; second, by arousing their fear; third, by demonstrating his love for them. To shame them he reproached them for their hardness of heart and for putting saints to death. "You, stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you have always resisted the Holy Spirit. Like father, like son! Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They even killed those who foretold the coming of the just One." Thus, as the *Gloss* says, he posited three degrees of wickedness—resisting the Holy Spirit, persecuting the prophets, some of whom, with increasing malice, they put to death. Shame on them! The forehead of a strumpet was theirs; they knew not how to blush and so be deterred from pursuing their evil designs. But, far from feeling shame, his hearers were cut to the heart and gnashed their teeth at him.

Next, therefore, he tried to correct them by fear, saying that he saw Jesus standing at God's right hand as though ready to help him and condemn his adversaries. Indeed Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit and looking up steadfastly to heaven, saw the glory of God and said: "Behold, I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing on the right hand of God!" But for all his efforts to correct them through shame and fear, they not only did not desist but were worse than before, and, crying out with a loud voice, they stopped their ears (so as not to hear blasphemy, the *Gloss* explains) and with one accord ran violently upon him, cast him outside the city, and stoned him. In doing this they judged that they were acting according to the Law, which made it mandatory to stone a blasphemer outside the camp. And the two false witnesses, who by law were to cast the first stone, took off their garments (lest these be made unclean by contact with the blasphemer, or in order to be more at ease while throwing the stones) and laid them at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul and who later was called Paul. He, by standing guard over their garments and giving them more freedom to stone the victim, shared the guilt of all of them in the stoning.

Stephen had failed to win them over through shame or fear: now he had recourse to his third weapon, love. Could he have shown greater love than by praying for himself and for them? He prayed for himself, that his passion might not be prolonged and their guilt thereby augmented, and for them, that they be not held guilty of this sin. We read that as they were stoning him, he called upon God and said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And, falling to his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, saying: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge, because

they know not what they do!" See here his wondrous love! He stood while praying for himself, but praying for those who stoned him he knelt, as though he desired that the prayer he offered for them be heard even more than the prayer he poured out for himself. He knelt for them rather than for himself, because, as the *Gloss* says at this place, their greater iniquity demanded a greater supplication to remedy it. In this the martyr also imitated Christ, who in his passion prayed for himself, saying: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit"; and for his executioners, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And when Stephen had made his prayer, he fell asleep in the Lord. The *Gloss* notes: "How beautifully it is said that he fell asleep, and not that he died, because he offered a sacrifice of love and fell asleep in the hope of resurrection."

Stephen's martyrdom took place on the third day of August in the year of our Lord's ascension. Saint Gamaliel, and Nicodemus who stood up for the Christians in all the councils of the Jews, buried him in a plot of land that belonged to Gamaliel, and made great mourning over him.

A violent persecution now broke out against the Christians who were in Jerusalem: since Stephen, one of their leaders, had been killed, the rest were hotly pursued, to the point that all the Christians (except the apostles, who were braver than the others) scattered throughout the territory of the Jews. This accorded with the Lord's command to them: "If they persecute you in one town, flee to another."

The eminent doctor Augustine relates that the blessed Stephen shone because of the countless miracles attributed to him. He raised six dead persons to life, cured many who were suffering from various illnesses, and performed other miracles worth remembering. Augustine says, for instance, that flowers which had been laid on the saint's altar cured sick persons to whom they were later applied. Cloths laid on the altar likewise cured many. In the twenty-second book of *The City of God* he reports that a blind woman recovered her sight when flowers taken from the altar were applied to her eyes. In the same book he tells the story of one of the city's leading men, named Martial, who was an unbeliever and absolutely refused to be converted. This man fell gravely ill, and his son-in-law, a devout Christian, went to the church of Saint Stephen, took some flowers from the altar, and placed them secretly on the bed near his father-in-law's head. The sick man slept on them and, when he awoke at the break of dawn, called out that someone should go and bring the bishop to him. The bishop was not at home, but another priest came to Martial's bedside. Martial declared that he now believed, and asked to be baptized. Thereafter, as long as he lived, he repeated the words: "Christ, receive my spirit," not knowing that these were Saint Stephen's last words.

Augustine also tells of a lady named Petronia, who had suffered for a long time from a very serious illness and had tried many remedies without the slightest success. At one point she consulted a certain Jew, who gave her a ring with a stone in it and advised her to tie it with a string against her bare flesh, because

8. SAINT STEPHEN

the stone had power to cure her. She followed his advice, but it did her no good. Then she went to the church of the first martyr and prayed earnestly to Saint Stephen for help. Immediately the ring fell to the ground, although the string was unbroken and the ring and the stone undamaged; and at that instant the woman's health was completely restored.

Still another miracle from the same source. . . . At Caesarea of Cappadocia lived a noble lady who was bereft of her husband but was surrounded by a fine flock of children, including seven boys and three girls. One day they offended their mother and she laid a curse upon them. Divine punishment followed the mother's curse, and the children were stricken with a dreadful ailment. Their limbs were afflicted by a horrible trembling, and they were ashamed to be seen by the people around them; so they wandered far and wide, and wherever they went, they were stared at. Two of them, a brother and a sister named Paul and Palladia, reached Hippo and told their story to Saint Augustine, who was bishop of that city. It was then two weeks before Easter, and the brother and sister went every day to the church of Saint Stephen, beseeching the saint to obtain their health. On Easter day, when the church was filled with the faithful, Paul suddenly went through the gates of the sanctuary and prostrated himself in faith and reverence before the altar, praying; and while the assemblage waited for him to come out, suddenly he stood up cured, and the trembling of his body never returned. The lad was brought to Augustine, who showed him to the people and promised to write an account of this miracle and read it to them the next day. While he was still speaking and the sister, Palladia, was standing there shaking in every limb, she suddenly broke from the crowd, went through the gates to Saint Stephen's altar, seemed to fall asleep, and rose entirely cured. She in turn was shown to the assembly, and a great chorus of thanksgiving went up to God and Saint Stephen for the health of the two young people. We should add that Orosius, coming back to Augustine after a visit to Saint Jerome, had brought relics of Saint Stephen, and it was through these relics that the miracles just described, and many others, were effected.

It is worth noting that Saint Stephen's martyrdom occurred not on the day after the Lord's birth, but, as we have already said, on the morning of the third day of August, the day the finding of his body is celebrated. The reason for this exchange will be explained when we treat of the Finding. For the present suffice it to say that the Church had two motives in placing the three feasts which follow the Nativity as they now stand. The first was that Christ, the spouse and head, might have his companions close by him. When Christ, spouse of his spouse the Church, was born into this world, he took to himself three companions. Of these the Song of Solomon says: "My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." "White" refers to John the Evangelist, the beloved confessor; "ruddy" to Stephen the first martyr; "chosen out of thousands" to the virginal multitude of the Holy Innocents. The Church's second motive was to group together, in the order of their dignity, all the different classes of martyrs,

9. SAINT JOHN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

associating them closely with the birth of Christ, which was the cause of their martyrdom. For there are three kinds of martyrdom: the first is willed and endured, the second willed but not endured, the third endured without being willed. Saint Stephen is an example of the first, Saint John of the second, the Holy Innocents of the third.

11. *Saint Thomas of Canterbury*

Thomas means depth, or twofold, or cut down. He was profound in his humility, as is shown by his hair shirt and his washing the feet of the poor; twofold in his office, teaching the people by word and example; and cut down in his martyrdom.

Thomas of Canterbury, while he was at the court of the king of England, saw things happening that were contrary to religion. He therefore left the court and took service with the archbishop of Canterbury, who made him his archdeacon. At the archbishop's request, however, he accepted the office of chancellor to the king, so that he might use the prudence with which he was endowed to put a

stop to the wrongs being done to the Church by evil men. The king conceived so strong an affection for him that when the archbishop died, he nominated Thomas to the see of Canterbury. Thomas, although he strenuously resisted the offer, finally obeyed and bent his shoulders to the burden. The new dignity immediately made him a different and perfect man. He began to mortify his flesh by fasting and wearing a hair shirt and haircloth drawers that came down to the knees. He was careful to hide his holiness: mindful of the proprieties, he made his outer dress and his furnishings conformable to what those around him wore. Every day he went on his knees and washed the feet of thirteen poor men, saw to their food, and gave each one four silver pennies.

But the king made every effort to bend Thomas to his will at the expense of the Church. He wanted the archbishop to confirm certain customs that were contrary to the Church's liberties, as his predecessors had done. Thomas absolutely refused, thus drawing upon himself the wrath of the king and the barons. There came a time, however, when with the rest of the bishops he was harassed by the king, even with threats of death; and, misled by the advice of the chief men of the state, he gave oral consent to the royal demands. But when he saw the danger to souls that would ensue from his action, he imposed ever more severe penances upon himself and suspended himself from the ministry of the altar until the pope should judge him worthy to be reinstated. Then the king demanded that he confirm in writing the verbal approval he had given. He refused manfully and, holding high his cross of office, walked out, while the impious shouted after him: "Lay hold of the thief! Hang the traitor!"

Now two of the foremost barons, who were loyal to Thomas, came to him shedding tears and told him under oath that many of the barons were conspiring to murder him. Therefore the man of God, fearing for the Church more than for himself, took flight, and was welcomed in Sens by Pope Alexander. The pontiff recommended him to the monastery at Pontigny, and he settled down in France. In the interim the king had sent to Rome, asking that legates come and put an end to their differences; but the request was repulsed, and this exacerbated his anger against the archbishop. Therefore he laid hands on everything that belonged to Thomas and his kinsmen and condemned the whole family to exile, without consideration of age, sex, rank, or condition. Meanwhile Thomas was praying daily for England and the king. Then it was revealed to him that he was to return to his church, and subsequently to leave this world with the palm of martyrdom and be with Christ in heaven. So, after seven years of exile, he was allowed to go back to England and was received with full honors.

Some days before the saint's martyrdom a young man, who had died and miraculously returned to life, said that he had been led to the highest circle of the saints and amidst the apostles had seen one empty throne. He had asked whose throne that was, and an angel had answered that it was reserved for a great priest from England.

There was a priest who celebrated the mass every day in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He was accused of this and summoned before the archbishop, who suspended him from his office as being simpleminded and unlearned. At the time Saint Thomas had to mend his hair shirt, which he hid under his bed until he could find time to take care of it. Then Blessed Mary appeared to the priest and said: "Go to the archbishop and tell him that she for love of whom you said those masses has mended his hair shirt, which is under his bed, and has left there the red silk she used in the sewing. Tell him also that she sent you to him, and that he is to lift the suspension he imposed on you." Hearing this, Thomas was astounded to find his shirt mended, lifted the priest's suspension, and ordered him to keep the whole matter secret.

The archbishop continued to maintain the rights of the Church as in the past, and the king was unable to move him by pleas or by force. Therefore the king's armed soldiers went to the church and loudly asked where the archbishop was. Thomas went to meet them and said: "Here I am! what do you want?" They answered: "We have come to kill you! You cannot live any longer!" He said to them: "I am ready to die for God, to defend justice, and to protect the freedom of the Church. If therefore you are looking for me, I adjure you, in the name of almighty God and under pain of anathema, to do no harm to any of those around me. As for me, I commend myself and the cause of the Church to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Denis, and all the saints." Having said these words, he bowed his venerable head to the swords of the wicked, and they split his skull and spilled his brains over the pavement of the church. Thus the martyr was consecrated to the Lord, in the year of the Lord 1174.

It is said that at the moment when the clergy were about to intone the *Requiem aeternam*, the mass of the dead, choirs of angels came and interrupted the singers, and began to chant the mass of the martyrs, *Laetabitur justus in Domino*, with the clergy joining in. This change was certainly the work of the right hand of the Most High—a chant of sorrow turning into a canticle of praise, and what had begun as prayers for the dead becoming hymns of praise for him who died as a martyr. Indeed he is shown to have been endowed with extraordinary sanctity and to be a glorious martyr of the Lord, since angels visited such honor upon him and ushered him into the choir of the martyrs. Saint Thomas suffered for the Church, in a church, a holy place, at a sacred moment, among his priests and religious, in order to bring out both the holiness of the one who suffered and the cruelty of his persecutors.

God deigned to work many other miracles through his saint. By Thomas's merits the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the dead were brought back to life. Indeed the water in which cloths stained by his blood were washed brought healing to many.

An English lady, who was eager to attract men's attention and therefore to be more beautiful, wanted her eyes to change color, so she made a vow and walked

barefoot to the tomb of Saint Thomas. There she knelt in prayer but, when she stood up, found that she was blind. Repentant, she began to pray to the saint that her eyes, even if their color was unchanged, be restored as they had been before—a favor that was granted her, but not before she had been at great pains to obtain it.

A trickster carried a pitcher of ordinary water instead of Saint Thomas's water to his master at table. The master said: "If you have never stolen anything from me, may Saint Thomas allow you to bring water in; but if you have been guilty of theft, may it evaporate at once!" The servant agreed, knowing that he had just filled the pitcher with water. Wonder of wonders! They tipped the pitcher and found it empty, and the servant was caught in a lie and, worse still, was exposed as a thief.

A bird that had learned to speak was being chased by a hawk, and cried out a phrase it had been taught: "Saint Thomas, help me!" The hawk fell dead and the bird escaped.

A man for whom Saint Thomas had had great affection fell gravely ill. He went to the saint's tomb, prayed for health, and was made whole. But when he got home cured of his illness, he began to think that perhaps the cure was not in the best interest of his soul. So back he went to the tomb and prayed that if health was not propitious for his spiritual good, he would rather be ill; and promptly he was ill again.

As for the saint's killers, the wrath of God dealt with them severely. Some of them gnawed their fingers to bits, others became slaving idiots; some were stricken with paralysis, still others went mad and perished miserably.

23. Saint Sebastian

Sebastian comes from *sequens*, following, *beatitudo*, beatitude, *astim*, city, and *ana*, above; therefore one who pursues the beatitude of the city on high, the city of supernal glory—in other words, one who acquires and possesses that city. Augustine says that this possession costs five payments: poverty pays for the kingdom, pain for joy, toil for rest, dishonor for glory, and death for life. Or Sebastian is derived from *bastum*, saddle; for Christ is the horseman, the Church the horse, Sebastian the saddle on which Christ rode to do battle in the Church and obtain the victory of many martyrs. Or the name means surrounded, or going about; for the saint was surrounded by arrows as a porcupine is with quills, and he went about among the martyrs and strengthened them all.

Sebastian was a most Christian man. A native of Narbonne and a citizen of Milan, he was so well thought of by the emperors Diocletian and Maximian that they made him commander of the First Cohort and attached him to their personal retinue. Sebastian sought military rank for the sole purpose of being able to visit Christians under torture, to encourage them when he saw that their spirit was weakening.

Two twin brothers of the high nobility, named Marcellian and Marcus, were about to be beheaded for the faith of Christ, and their parents came to try to get

them to change their minds. Their mother came first, her hair disheveled, garments torn, and breasts bare, and she cried: "O my dearest sons, misery unheard-of and grief unbearable surround me! Woe is me, I am losing my sons who go willingly to death! Yet if the enemy were taking them away, I would follow their captors through the thick of battle! If they were condemned to prison, I would break in if it cost me my life! What new way of dying is this, that the headsman is exhorted to strike, life's only wish is to be ended, death is invited to take over? New is this mourning, new this misery, when the youth of one's offspring is lost of their own accord, and in their pitiful old age the parents are forced to live on!"

Now the father arrived, supported by his slaves, his head sprinkled with dust, and he cried out to heaven: "I come to bid farewell to my sons on their way to death! Unhappy me, that the funeral rites I had prepared for myself I will carry out for my children! O my sons, staff of my old age and twin fruit of my loins, why do you love death so much? Come hither, young men, and mourn my sons with me! Come, old men, and weep with me for my sons! Gather here, you fathers, and see to it that you do not suffer woes like mine! Let my eyes fail with weeping, that I may not see my sons fall beneath the sword!"

Then came the wives of the two, setting their children in front of them and saying with loud cries: "To whom are you leaving us? Who will guide the lives of these infants? Who will divide your great possessions? Alas, what iron hearts are yours, that you disdain your parents, spurn your friends, cast away your wives, abandon your children, and of your own will hand yourselves over to the executioners!"

All this began to soften the hearts of the two men. Then Saint Sebastian, who was present, broke into the midst of the gathering and said: "O you strong soldiers of Christ, do not let these tearful blandishments cause you to forsake the everlasting crown!" And to the parents he said: "Do not fear, they will not be separated from you but will go to heaven and prepare starry dwellings for you. Since the world began, life has betrayed those who placed their hopes in it, has deceived their expectations, has fooled those who took its goods for granted, and so it has left nothing certain and proves itself false to all. Life induces the thief to steal, the angry to rage, the liar to deceive. It commands crimes, orders wickedness, counsels injustice. But this persecution, which we suffer here on earth, flames up today and tomorrow blows away, today burns hot and cools tomorrow: it comes on in an hour and in another is gone. But the pain of eternity is ever renewed to stab more deeply, is increased to burn more fiercely, is fanned to prolong the punishment. Therefore let us stir up our desire, our love for martyrdom! The devil thinks he conquers by making martyrs, but while he catches he is caught, while he binds he is bound, while he wins he loses, while he tortures he is tortured, while he strangles he is killed, while he mocks he is laughed at!" As Saint Sebastian was saying all this, suddenly a radiance shone from heaven and shed light upon him for almost an hour, wrapping him in its

splendor like a shining cloak, and seven radiant angels surrounded him. A youth also appeared at his side and gave him the kiss of peace, saying: "You will always be with me!"

Now Zoe, the wife of Nicostratus in whose house the two holy young men were kept under guard, fell at the saint's feet and begged forgiveness, nodding and gesturing because she had lost the power of speech. Sebastian said: "If I am Christ's servant, and if all that this woman has heard from my mouth and has believed is true, may he who opened the mouth of Zechariah his prophet let her speak!" Immediately the woman's speech returned and she said: "Blessed be the words of your mouth, and blessed be all who believe what you have said! For I have seen an angel holding a book before you in which everything you said was written."

Hearing this, her husband also knelt at Saint Sebastian's feet and prayed for forgiveness. Then he loosed the martyrs' bonds and told them to go free. They answered that they would not give up the victory they were about to win. The Lord had endowed the saint's words with such grace and power that not only did he confirm Marcellian and Marcus in their acceptance of martyrdom but also converted their father, whose name was Tranquillinus, their mother, and many others of their household to the faith, and the priest Polycarp baptized all of them.

Tranquillinus suffered from a painful disease, but as soon as he was baptized, his illness was cured. The prefect of the city of Rome was afflicted with the same disease and asked Tranquillinus to bring to him the person who had cured him. So Sebastian and the priest Polycarp went to the prefect, who asked them to restore his health, and Sebastian told him that he would first have to renounce the worship of false gods and empower him to demolish his idols: then only would he regain his health. The prefect said that his slaves, not Sebastian, should destroy the idols, but Sebastian answered: "They are afraid to strike their gods, and if they did it and the devil harmed them, the infidels would say that this was because they had laid hands on their gods." So Polycarp and Sebastian girded themselves and reduced more than two hundred idols to fragments.

Then they said to Chromatius, the prefect: "We have shattered the idols and you are not cured. This must be because you have not yet renounced your false beliefs, or else you are holding back some idols." The prefect admitted that he had a room in which the whole order of the stars was represented. His father, he said, had spent two hundred pounds of gold on the work, and by it he could foretell future events. Sebastian insisted: "As long as you keep that room intact, you yourself will not be made whole." The prefect then gave his consent, but his son Tiburtius, a forthright young man, spoke up: "I will not suffer so great a work to be dismantled; but rather than seem to stand in the way of my father's recovery, I will have two ovens fired, and if my father is not cured once the room is destroyed, these two will be roasted alive!" Sebastian replied: "Do as you say!" While the room in question was being taken apart, an angel appeared

to the prefect and told him that the Lord Jesus had cured him of his malady. The prefect realized that he was indeed cured, and ran after the angel to kiss his feet, but the angel would not allow this because the man had not yet received baptism. So he and his son Tiburtius and fourteen hundred persons among his family and retainers were baptized.

Meanwhile Zoe was seized by the pagans, subjected to long torture, and died a martyr. Learning of this, Tranquillinus burst out: "The women are winning the crown ahead of us! Why do we go on living?" And he was stoned to death a few days later. Saint Tiburtius was ordered to burn incense to the gods or to walk barefoot over burning coals. He made the sign of the cross and walked unshod over the coals, saying: "I feel as if I am treading on rose leaves in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Fabian, the prefect, retorted: "Everyone knows that Christ has taught you the arts of magic!" Tiburtius: "Be still, unhappy man! You are not worthy to pronounce that sweet holy name!" The prefect, indignant, had him beheaded. Marcellian and Marcus were tied to a stake and chanted the words of the Psalm: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" The prefect shouted at them: "Wretches, put aside your madness and save yourselves!" "Never have we feasted so well!" they responded. "Please leave us just as we are for as long as we are clothed in our bodies!" The prefect ordered soldiers to run them through with lances, and thus they consummated their martyrdom.

After all this, the prefect denounced Sebastian to the emperor Diocletian, who summoned the saint and said to him: "I have always had you among the first in my palace, and all this time you have been acting secretly against my welfare and offending the gods." Sebastian: "I have always worshiped God who is in heaven, and prayed to Christ for your salvation and the good estate of the Roman Empire." But Diocletian gave the command to tie him to a post in the center of the camp, and ordered the soldiers to shoot him full of arrows. They shot so many arrows into his body that he looked like a porcupine, and left him for dead. Miraculously set free, he stood on the steps of the imperial palace a few days later and, as the emperors came out, firmly reproached them for their cruel treatment of Christians. "Isn't this the Sebastian whom we ordered shot to death?" the emperors exclaimed. Sebastian answered: "The Lord deigned to revive me so that I could meet you and rebuke you for the evils you inflict on the servants of Christ!" The emperors then ordered him to be beaten with cudgels until he died, and had his body thrown into the sewer to prevent the Christians from honoring him as a martyr. The following night Saint Sebastian appeared to Saint Lucina, revealed to her where his body was, and asked that it be buried near the remains of the apostles, which was done. Sebastian suffered under the emperors Diocletian and Maximian, whose reign began about the year of the Lord 287.

In the first book of his *Dialogues* Pope Gregory reports that a woman in Tuscany, recently married, was invited by friends to attend the dedication of a

church to Saint Sebastian; but the night before she was to go there, she was aroused by carnal desire and could not refrain from lying with her husband. Morning came, and, fearing to be shamed in the sight of men more than before God, she went to the church. No sooner had she set foot into the place where the saint's relics were kept than the devil seized her and began to torment her as all looked on. A priest of the church snatched the altar cloth from the altar and threw it around her, whereupon the devil laid hold of the priest. The woman's friends took her to sorcerers who might, by their incantations, drive the devil from her, but as the magic formulas were pronounced, by the judgment of God a legion of demons, 6,666 in number, infested the woman and tormented her more and more severely. Then a certain man eminent for his holiness, whose name was Fortunatus, prayed for her and she was saved.

In the *Annals of the Lombards* we read that during the reign of King Gumbert all Italy was stricken by a plague so virulent that there was hardly anyone left to bury the dead, and this plague raged most of all in Rome and Pavia. At this time there appeared to some a good angel followed by a bad angel carrying a spear. When the good angel gave the command, the bad one struck and killed, and when he struck a house, all the people in it were carried out dead. Then it was divinely revealed that the plague would never cease until an altar was raised in Pavia in honor of Saint Sebastian. An altar was built in the church of Saint Peter in Chains, and at once the pestilence ceased. Relics of Saint Sebastian were brought to Pavia.

Ambrose, in his Preface for Saint Sebastian, says: "Lord, the shedding of the blood of the blessed martyr Sebastian for the confession of your name shows your wonderful works: you confer strength in weakness and success to our efforts, and at his prayer give help to the infirm."



39. Saint Agatha, Virgin

Agatha comes from *agios*, which means holy, and *theos*, God—hence saint of God. According to Chrysostom, there are three requirements for sainthood, and Agatha was perfect in all three—namely, cleanness of heart, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and abundance of good works. Or the name comes from *a*, which means without, *geos*, earth, and *theos*, God—therefore a goddess, as it were, without earth, i.e., without love of earthly things. Or it comes from *aga*, speaking, and *thau*, completion, and Agatha spoke completely and perfectly, as is clear from her answers. Or again from *agath*, servitude, and *thaas*, higher, because one of her answers was: “To be a slave of Christ is proof of the highest nobility.” Or from *aga*, solemn, and *thau*, consummation, because she was solemnly consummated, i.e., buried, which refers to the angels who buried her.

The virgin Agatha was highborn and a great beauty, living in the city of Catania, where she worshiped God at all times and in all holiness. Quintianus, the consular official in Sicily, who was baseborn, libidinous, greedy, and a worshiper of idols, was determined to get her in his grasp. Being of low degree he would gain respect by lording it over a noble, her beauty would satisfy his libido, he would steal her riches to feed his avarice, and, being a pagan, he would force her to sacrifice to the gods.

So he had her brought before him and quickly perceived the firmness of her resolution. He therefore turned her over to a procuress whose name was Aphrodisia and her nine daughters who were as lascivious as their mother. He gave them thirty days to overcome her resistance. They tried to change her mind, at times by promising her pleasure, at others by threatening her with pain. They hoped to win her over from her good resolve, but blessed Agatha said to them: “My determination is built on rock and founded in Christ! Your promises are raindrops, your threats are rivers, and however hard they beat upon the foundation of my house, it cannot fall.” Having said this, she prayed and wept day after day, thirsting to attain the palm of martyrdom. Aphrodisia saw that her will could not be shaken, and told Quintianus: “It would be easier to split rocks or reduce iron to the softness of lead than to move or recall that girl’s mind from its Christian intention.”

Then Quintianus summoned her again. “What is your social standing?” he asked. She answered: “I am freeborn and of illustrious lineage, as my ancestry attests.” Quintianus: “If you are so highborn, why does the way you live make you seem to be of servile status?” Her answer: “I am the slave of Christ, there-

fore I show myself as a person in service." Quintianus: "If you are of noble birth, why do you call yourself a slave?" Agatha: "Because to be a slave of Christ is proof of the highest nobility." "Make your choice!" Quintianus said. "Either sacrifice to the gods or submit to torture!" Agatha retorted: "May your wife be like your goddess Venus, and may you be like your god Jupiter!" Quintianus ordered her to be slapped in the face, and said: "Don't let your loose tongue insult your judge!" Agatha answered: "I marvel that a sensible man like you can fall into such stupidity as to call gods those whose lives neither you nor your wife would want to imitate! Indeed you consider it an insult if you are said to follow their example. If your gods are good, I've made a good wish for you: if you repudiate any association with them, then you agree with me!" "What's the use of all this idle talk?" Quintianus exclaimed; "sacrifice to the gods or prepare to suffer!" Agatha: "If you promise me the wild beasts, the sound of Christ's name will gentle them! If you try fire, angels will serve me with a healing dew from heaven! If you resort to wounds and torments, I have the Holy Spirit, through whom I make naught of all that!" Then, because what she said was making him look foolish in the public eye, Quintianus had her put in jail; and to jail she went happy and triumphant, as if invited to a banquet, and commended her trial to the Lord.

The next day Quintianus said to her: "Forswear Christ and adore the gods!" When she refused, he ordered her stretched on the rack and tortured, and Agatha said: "These pains are my delight! It's as if I were hearing some good news, or seeing someone I had long wished to see, or had found a great treasure. The wheat cannot be stored in the barn unless it has been thoroughly threshed and separated from the chaff: so my soul cannot enter paradise unless you make the headsmen give my body harsh treatment." This made Quintianus so angry that he ordered the executioners to twist her breast for a long time and then cut it off. Said Agatha: "Impious, cruel, brutal tyrant, are you not ashamed to cut off from a woman that which your mother suckled you with? In my soul I have breasts untouched and unharmed, with which I nourish all my senses, having consecrated them to the Lord from infancy."

The tyrant ordered her back to prison, and forbade the jailers to allow any physician to care for her or anyone to bring her food or water. But toward the middle of the night an aged man, preceded by a boy carrying a light, came to her. He brought various medicaments and said to Agatha: "Though this mad consul has inflicted torments on you, the way you have answered him has tormented him even more, and though he has caused your breasts to be injured, his exuberance will turn to bitterness. I was there when all this was done to you, and I saw that your breast could be healed." Agatha: "I have never applied any material remedy to my body, and it would be shameful to lose now what I have preserved for so long." The aged man said to her: "I am a Christian, so you need not be ashamed." Agatha: "How could I be ashamed, since you are so old and a grandfather, and I am so cruelly mangled that no one could possibly desire me?

But I thank you, kind sir and father, for deigning to have such solicitude in my regard." "But why," the old man asked, "why do you not allow me to heal you?" "Because I have my Lord Jesus Christ," Agatha replied, "and he by a single word can cure everything and by his word restores all things. If he so wills, he can cure me instantly." The aged man smiled. "I am his apostle," he said, "and he sent me to you. Know that in his name you are healed." And Peter the apostle vanished. Agatha knelt in thanksgiving, and found that all her hurts were healed and her breast restored to her bosom. The jailers, terrified by the dazzling light, had fled and left the jail open, but some who were left asked her to go away. "Far be it from me," she said, "to run away and lose the crown of patience, and also to expose my guards to trouble!"

After four days passed, Quintianus again told her to worship the gods, or still worse punishments would be hers. Agatha answered: "Your words are silly and useless, they are wicked and pollute the air! You mindless wretch, how can you want me to adore stones and abandon the God of heaven who has healed me?" "Who healed you?" Quintianus asked. Agatha: "Christ the Son of God!" Quintianus: "You dare to pronounce the name of Christ again, when I do not want to hear it?" Agatha: "As long as I live I shall invoke Christ with heart and lips!" Quintianus: "Now we'll see if Christ will cure you!" He ordered Agatha to be rolled naked over potsherds and live coals strewn on the ground. While this was going on, a tremendous earthquake shook the city and caused the palace to collapse, crushing two of Quintianus's counselors. At this the whole populace came running and shouting that such things were being visited on them because of the unjust treatment meted out to Agatha. So Quintianus, caught between the earthquake and the popular uprising, ordered Agatha back to prison. There she prayed, saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, you created me, you have watched over me from infancy, kept my body from defilement, preserved me from love of the world, made me able to withstand torture, and granted me the virtue of patience in the midst of torments. Now receive my spirit and command me to come to your mercy." And, having finished her prayer, she called out in a loud voice and gave up her spirit, about the year of the Lord 253, in the reign of the emperor Dacian.¹

Faithful Christians came, anointed her body with spices, and laid it in a sarcophagus. Then a young man clothed in silken garments and accompanied by over a hundred handsome youths wearing rich white vestments, none of whom had ever been seen in that region, approached the saint's body and placed at the head a marble tablet, after which he and his companions vanished from the sight of all. On the tablet was inscribed: *MENTEM SANCTAM, SPONTANEAM, HONOREM DEO ET PATRIAE LIBERATIONEM*, which may be understood as meaning: "She had a holy and generous soul, gave honor to God, and accomplished the liberation of her country." When this miracle was noised abroad, even pagans and Jews began to venerate the tomb in great numbers.

¹ Graesse notes that "recent editions add 'otherwise called Decius.'"

40. SAINT VAAST

As for Quintianus, he was on his way to look for and make off with Agatha's riches when his two horses began to gnash their teeth and kick out with their hooves, and one of them bit him and the other kicked him into the river, and his body was never found.

One year from the day of Agatha's birth into the new life of heaven, the mountain that looms over Catania erupted and spewed a river of fire and molten rock down toward the city. Then crowds of pagans fled from the mountain to the saint's tomb, snatched up the pall that covered it, and hung it up in the path of the fire; and, on the very day of the virgin's birth, the stream of lava halted and did not advance a foot farther.

About this virgin saint, Ambrose says in his Preface: "O holy and glorious virgin, who faithfully shed her blood as a martyr in praise of the Lord! O illustrious, renowned virgin, upon whom shone a twofold glory: since amidst harsh torments she wrought all sorts of miracles and, strengthened by support from above, merited to be cured by the apostle's visitation! So the airs bore his bride heavenward to Christ, and glorious obsequies shine about her mortal frame as the angel choir acclaims the holiness of her soul and the liberation of her native land."