

## **153// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. DENIS [AND ST. RUSTICUS AND ST. ELEUTHERIUS]**

**S**t. Denis Areopagite was converted to the faith of Jesu Christ of St. Paul the apostle. And he was called Areopagite of the street that he dwelled in. And in that street called Areopage was the temple of Mars, for they of Athens named every street of the gods that they worshipped in the same, and that street that they worshipped in the god Mars, they called Areopage, for *Areo* is to say Mars, and *pagus* is a street, and where they worshipped Pan, they named Panopage, and so of all other streets.

Areopage was the most excellent street, because that the noble men haunted it, and therein were the scholars of the arts liberal, and Denis dwelled in that street, which was a right great philosopher. And forasmuch as the plant of wisdom of the deity was in him he was called *Theosophus*, that is to say, knowing God. And one Apollophanes was his fellow in philosophy. There were also Epicureans, which said that all felicity of man was in only delight of the body. And Stoics, which held opinion that it was in the only virtue of courage.

### **THE DARKNESS OF GOOD FRIDAY**

**A**nd then on the day of the passion of our Lord when darkness was upon the universal world, the philosophers that were at Athens could not find in causes natural the cause of that darkness. And it was no natural eclipse, for the moon was then from the sun, and was fifteen days old, and so was in a perfect distance from the sun, and nevertheless an eclipse taketh not away the light in the universal parts of the world, and it may not endure three hours long. And it appeareth that this eclipse took away all the light, by that which St. Luke saith that, our Lord suffered in all his members; and because that the eclipse was in Heliopolis, in Egypt, and Rome and in Greece.

And Orosius saith that it was in Greece, and in the end of Asia the less, and saith that when our Lord was nailed to the cross there was a right great trembling and earthquake through the world. The rocks were cut asunder, and the mountains cloven [sliced], right great floods fell in many parts, more than they were wont to do, and that day, from the sixth hour unto the ninth hour, the sun lost his sight throughout all the lands of the universal world. And in that night there was no star seen in all Egypt.

And this remembereth Denis to Apollophanes, saying in his epistle: The world was dark commonly of obscurity of darkness, and after the only diameter returned purged, and when he had found that the sun might not suffer such heaviness, and that we may not have knowledge in our courage, ne understand yet the mystery of this thing by our conning and wisdom. And, O Apollophanes, mirror of doctrine, what shall I say of these secrets and hid things? I attribute and put them to thee as to a mouth divine, and not as to understanding ne speech human.

To whom he said: O good Denis, these be the mutations of divine things, and in the end it is signified all along, the day and the year of the annunciation that Paul our Doctor said to our deaf ears, and by the signs that all men cried, which I remembered, I have found the very truth and am delivered from the leash of falseness.

These be the words of Denis that he wrote in his epistle to Polycarp, and to Apollophanes, saying: We were, we twain, at Heliopolis, and we saw the moon of heaven go disordinately, and the time was not convenable. And yet again from the ninth hour unto evensong time, at the diameter of the sun established above all natural ordinance, that eclipse we saw begin in the east and coming unto the term of the sun. After that returning again, and not purged of that default, but was made contrary after the diameter. Then Denis and Apollophanes went to Heliopolis in Egypt by desire to learn astronomy. And after, Denis returned again.

That the said eclipse took away the light from the universal parts of the world, it appeareth that Eusebius witnesseth in his

chronicles, which saith that he hath read in the dictes of the Ethnicians that there was in Bithynia, which is a province of Asia the less, a great earth shaking, and also the greatest darkness that might be, and also saith that in Nicene, which is a city of Bithynia, that the earth trembling threw down houses. And it is read in *Scholastica Historia* that the philosophers were brought to this, that they said that: The God of nature suffered death, or else the ordinance of nature in this world was dissolved, or that the elements lived, or the God of nature suffered, and the elements had pity on him.

### THE ALTAR OF THE UNKNOWN GOD

And it is said in another place, that Denis saith: This night signified that the new very light of the world should come. And they of Athens made unto this God an altar, and set this title thereupon: This is the altar of the God unknown. And on every altar of their gods the title was set

*Denis is as much to say as hastily fleeing, or Denis is said of dia, which is as much to say as two, and nysus, which is to say lift up, for he was lifted up after two things, that is, after the body and after the soul. Or Denis may be said of Diana, that is Venus, the goddess of beauty, and of sios, that is to say God, as who saith, he is fair to God; or as some say he is said of Dionisia, that is, after Isidore, a precious stone black, which is good against drunkenness. He was hasty in fleeing the world by perfect renunciation. He was lift up by contemplation of things within forth, he was fair to God by beauty of virtues. He profited to sinners against drunkenness of vices, and he had many names tofore his conversion, for he was called Areopagita, for the street that he dwelled in.*

*He was called Theosophus, that is to say wise to God. Also of the wise men of Greece, he is said unto this day Pterigiontuvrani, that is to say, the wing of heaven, for he flew marvellously with the wing of spiritual understanding into heaven. Also he was said Macarius, that is, blessed. Also he was said of his country Ionicus. Ionica, as saith Papias, is one of the languages of Greeks. Or Ionices be said a manner of round pillars. Or Ionicum is said a foot of versifying which hath two syllables short and twain long. By which he is showed that he was wise and knowing God by inquisition of things privy and hid, wing of heaven by love of things celestial, and blessed by possession of everlasting goods. By other things it is showed that he was a marvellous rhetorician by eloquence, a sustainer and a bearer up of the church by doctrine, short to himself by humility, and long to others by charity. St. Austin saith in the eighth book of the City of God that Ionique is a kind of philosophers, Italian, which be towards Italy, and Ionian which be of the parts of Greece, and because that Denis was a sovereign philosopher he was named Ionicus. And Methodius of Constantinople indited his life and his passion in Greekish tongue, and Anastasius in Latin, which was a writer of the Bible of the church of Rome, as Hincmar, bishop of Rheims, saith.*

above in showing to whom that altar was dedicated, and when the Athenians would make their sacrifice unto this unknown God, the philosophers said: This God hath no need of none of our gods, but let us kneel down tofore him and pray unto him devoutly, for he requireth not the oblations of beasts but the devotions of our courages [hearts].

And after, when the blessed St. Paul came to Athens, the Epicurean philosophers and Stoics disputed with him. Some of them said: What will this sower of words say? And others said that he seemed a shower of new gods that be devils. And then they brought him into the street of the philosophers, for to examine their new doctrine, and they said to him, "Bringest thou any new tidings? We would know what thou hast brought to us." For the Athenians entended to none other thing but to hear some new things.

And then when St. Paul had beholden all their altars he saw among them the altar of God unknown, and Paul said: Whom honour ye that ye know not, him show I to you to be very God that made heaven and earth.

And after, he said to Denis, whom he saw best learned in divine things: Denis, what is he, that unknown God?

And Denis said: He is verily a God which among gods is not showed, but to us he is unknown, and to come into the world and to reign without end.

And Paul said: Is he a man only, or spirit?

And Denis said: He is God and man but he is unknown, because his conversation is in heaven.

Then said St. Paul: This is he that I preach, which descended from heaven, and took our nature human, and suffered death and arose again the third day.

#### St. Denis' Conversion, Preaching, and Missionary Work

And as St. Denis disputed yet with St. Paul, there passed by adventure [by chance] by that way a blind man tofore them, and anon Denis said to Paul: If thou say to this blind man in the name of thy God: "See," and then he seeth, I shall anon believe in him, but thou shalt use no words of enchantment, for thou mayst haply know some words that have such might and virtue.

And St. Paul said: "I shall write tofore the form of the words, which be these: 'In the name of Jesu Christ, born of the virgin, crucified and dead, which arose again and ascended into heaven, and from thence shall come for to judge the world: See.'" And because that all suspicion be taken away, Paul said to Denis that he himself should pronounce the words.

And when Denis had said those words in the same manner to the blind man, anon the blind man recovered his sight. And then Denis was baptized and Damaris his wife and all his meiny [household], and was a true Christian man and was instructed and taught by St. Paul three

years, and was ordained bishop of Athens, and there was in predication [preaching], and converted that city, and great part of the region, to Christian faith.

And it is said that St. Paul showed to him that he saw when he was ravished into the third heaven, like as St. Denis saith and showeth in divers places, whereof he speaketh so clearly of the hierarchies of angels, and of the orders and of the dispositions and offices of them, so that it is not supposed that he learned of any other, but only of him that was ravished into the third heaven, and had seen all things.

He flourished by the spirit of prophecy like as it appeareth in an epistle that he sent to John the Evangelist, in the isle of Patmos, to which he was sent in exile, whereas he prophesied that he should come again, saying thus: Enjoy thou verily beloved, very wonderful and to be desired, right well beloved, thou shalt be let out from the keeping that thou hast in Patmos, and shalt return unto the land of Asia, and thou shalt make there the following of thy good God, and the good works of him, and shalt deliver them to them that shall come after thee.

And, as it is seen and showed in the book of the names divine, he was at the dying of the blessed Virgin Mary. And when he heard that Peter and Paul were imprisoned at Rome under Nero, he ordained a bishop under him, and came for to visit them. And when they were martyred and passed to God, and Clement was set in the see of Rome, after a certain time he was sent of the said Clement into France, and he had in his company Rusticus and Eleutherius, and then he came with them to Paris and converted there much people to the faith, and did do make many churches, and set in them clerks of divers orders.

And then he shone by so great heavenly grace that, when the bishops of the idols moved by strife the people against him, and the people came for to destroy him, anon as they had seen him they left all their cruelty, and kneeled down at his feet, where they had so great dread that they fled away from him for fear.

### **ST. DENIS'S MARTYRDOM UNDER DOMITIAN**

**B**ut the devil which had envy, and saw every day his power minished and destroyed, and that the church increased and had victory of him, moved Domitian the emperor in so great cruelty that he made a commandment that whosomever might find any Christian man, that he should constrain them to do sacrifice or torment them by divers torments. And then he sent the provost Fescennius of Rome to Paris against the Christian men. And found there the blessed Denis preaching, and made him cruelly to be beaten, bespit and despised, and fast to be bounden with Rusticus and Eleutherius, and to be brought tofore him: And when he saw that the saints were constant and firm in the acknowledging of our Lord, he was much heavy and sorrowful.

Then came thither a noble matron, which said that her husband was foully deceived of these enchanterers, and then anon the husband was sent for, and he abiding in the confession of our Lord, was anon put to death. And the saints were beaten cruelly of twelve knights, and were straightly bounden with chains of iron, and put in prison. The day following, Denis was laid upon a gridiron, and stretched all naked upon the coals of fire, and there he sang to our Lord saying: Lord thy word is vehemently fiery, and thy servant is embraced in the love thereof.

And after that he was put among cruel beasts, which were excited by great hunger and famine by long fasting, and as soon as they came running upon him he made the sign of the cross against them, and anon they were made most meek and tame. And after that he was cast into a furnace of fire, and the fire anon quenched, and he had neither pain ne harm. And after that he was put on the cross, and thereon he was long tormented, and after, he was taken down and put into a dark prison with his fellows and many other Christian men. And as he sang there the mass and communed the people, our Lord appeared to him with great light, and delivered to him bread, saying: Take this, my dear friend, for thy reward is most great with me.

After this they were presented to the judge and were put again to new torments, and then he did do smite off the heads of the three fellows, that is to say, Denis, Rusticus, and Eleutherius, in confessing the name of the holy Trinity. And this was done by the temple of Mercury, and they were beheaded with three axes. And anon the body of St. Denis raised himself up, and bare his head between his arms, as the angel led him two leagues from the place, which is said the hill of the martyrs, unto the place where he now resteth, by his election, and by the purveyance of God.

And there was heard so great and sweet a melody of angels that many of them that heard it believed in our Lord. And Laertia, wife of the foresaid provost Lubrius, said that she was Christian, and anon she was beheaded of the wicked felons, and was baptized in her blood, and so died. And Virbius his son, which was a knight at Rome under three emperors, came afterward to Paris and was baptized, and put himself in the number of the religious.

And the wicked paynims doubted [feared] that the good Christian men would bury the body of Rusticus and Eleutherius, and commanded that they should be cast into the river Seine. And a noble woman bade them to dine that bare them, and whilst they dined, this lady took away the bodies and buried them secretly in a field of hers, and after, when the persecution was ceased, she took them thence, and laid them honourably with the body of St. Denis. And they suffered death about the year of our Lord four score and sixteen, under Domitian. The years of the age of St. Denis four score and ten.

### **MIRACLES OF ST. DENIS**

**O**n a time when Regulus the holy bishop sang mass at Arles, and rehearsed the names of the apostles in the canon, he added and joined thereto the blessed martyrs Denis, Rusticus, and Eleutherius, which so said, many supposed that they yet lived, and marvelled why he so rehearsed their names in the canon. And they so wondering, there appeared upon the cross of the altar three doves sitting, which had the names of the saints marked and written on their breasts with blood, which diligently beholding, they understood well that the saints were departed out of this world.

And Hincmar, bishop of Rheims, saith in an epistle which he sent to Charles that, this Denis that was sent into France was Denis Areopagite as afore is said, and the same saith Johannes Scotus in an epistle to Charles, lest by the reason of the counting of the time should be said against, as some would object.

About the year of our Lord eight hundred and thirty-two, in the time of Louis, king of France, the messengers of Michael, emperor of Constantinople, among other things, brought to Louis, son of Charles le Grand, the books of St. Denis of the hierarchy of the angels, translated out of Greek into Latin, and were received with great joy, and that same night were nineteen sick men healed in his church.

About the year of our Lord six hundred and forty-three, like as it is contained in a chronicle, Dagobert, king of France, which reigned long tofore Pepin, began to have from his childhood great reverence to St. Denis, for when he doubted in that time the ire of his father Clothair, he fled anon to the church of St. Denis. And when this holy king was dead, it was showed in a vision unto a holy man that, the soul of him was ravished to judgment, and that many saints accused him that he had despoiled their churches. And as the wicked angels would have had him to the pains, the blessed Denis came thither, and by him he was delivered at his coming, and escaped from the pains, and peradventure the soul returned to the body and did penance. King Clovis discovered the body of St. Denis not duly, and brake the bone of his arm and ravished it away covetously, and anon he became out of his mind.

Then let us worship Almighty God in his saints, that we, by their merits, may amend ourselves in this wretched life, that we may after this life come into his sempiternal bliss in heaven. Amen.

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The [iconography of Saint Denis](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

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

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