

137// HERE FOLLOWETH THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The exaltation of the Holy Cross is said, because that on this day the Holy Cross and faith were greatly enhanced. And it is to be understood that, tofore the passion of our Lord Jesu Christ, the tree of the cross was a tree of filth, for the crosses were made of vile trees and of trees without fruit, for all that was planted on the mount of Calvary bare no fruit. It was a foul place, for it was the place of the torment of thieves, it was dark, for it was in a dark place and without any beauty. It was the tree of death, for men were put there to death, It was also the tree of stench, for it was planted among the carrions. And after the passion the cross was much enhanced, for the vilety was transported into preciousness.

Of the which the blessed S. Andrew saith: O precious Holy Cross, God saw thee. His barrenness was turned into fruit, as it is said in the Canticles: I shall ascend up into palm tree, et cetera. His ignobility or unworthiness was turned into sublimity and height.

The cross, that was torment of thieves, is now borne in front of the emperors, his darkness is turned into light and clearness; whereof Chrysostom saith: The cross and the wounds shall be more shining than the rays of the sun at the judgment. His death is converted into perdurability of life, whereof it is said in the preface that, from whence that the death grew, from thence the life resoured, and the stench is turned into sweetness, Canticorum I.

EMPEROR ERACLIUS' DEFEAT OF KING COSDROE OF PERSIA

This exaltation of the Holy Cross is solemnised and hallowed solemnly of the church, for the faith is in it much enhanced. For the year of our Lord six hundred and fifteen, our Lord suffered his people much to be tormented by the cruelty of the paynims. And Cosdroe, king of the Persians, subdued to his empire all the realms of the world; and he came into Jerusalem and was afeard and adrad of the sepulchre of our Lord, and returned, but he bare with him the part of the Holy Cross that S. Helena had left there. And then he would be worshipped of all the people as a god, and did do make a tower of gold and of silver, wherein precious stones shone, and made therein the images of the sun and of the moon and of the stars, and made that by subtle conduits water to be hid, and to come down in manner of rain. And in the last stage he made horses to draw chariots round about, like as they had moved the tower, and made it to seem as it had thundered. And thus this cursed man abode in this temple, and delivered his realm to his son, and did do set the cross of our Lord by him, and commanded that he should be called god, of all the people. And as it is read in libro de mitrali officio: The said Cosdroe, resident in his throne as a father, set the tree of the cross on his right side instead of the sun, and a cock on the left side instead of the Holy Ghost, and commanded that he should be called father.

And then Eraclius the emperor assembled a great host and came for to fight with the son of Cosdroe by the river of Danube; and then it pleased to either prince that each of them should

fight one against that other upon the bridge, and he that should vanquish and overcome his adversary should be prince of the empire without hurting either of both hosts, and so it was ordained and sworn, and that whosoever should help his prince should have forthwith his legs and arms cut off and to be plunged and cast into the river. And then Eraclius commended him all to God and to the Holy Cross with all the devotion that he might, and then they fought long. And at the last our Lord gave the victory to Eraclius and subdued to him his empire. The host that was contrary, and all the people of Cosdroe, obeyed them to the christian faith, and received the holy baptism.

And Cosdroe knew not the end of the battle, for he was adored and worshipped of all the people as a god, so that no man durst say nay to him. And then Eraclius came to him, and found him sitting in his siege [throne] of gold, and said to him: For as much as after the manner thou hast honoured the tree of the cross, if thou wilt receive baptism and the faith of Jesu Christ, I shall get it to thee, and yet shalt thou hold thy crown and realm with little hostages, and I shall let thee have thy life. And if thou wilt not, I shall slay thee with my sword, and shall smite off thy head.

And when he would not accord thereto, he did anon do smite off his head, and commanded that he should be buried because he had been a king. And he found with him one, his son, of the age of ten years, whom he did do baptize, and lifted him from the font, and left to him the realm of his father; and then did do break that tower, and gave the silver to them of his host, and gave the gold and precious stones for to repair the churches that the tyrant had destroyed, and took the Holy Cross and brought it again to Jerusalem.

And as he descended from the Mount of Olives and would have entered by the gate by which our Saviour went to his passion, on horseback, adorned as a king, suddenly the stones of the gates descended and joined them together in the gate like a wall, and all the people was abashed. And then the angel of our Lord appeared upon the gate, holding the sign of the cross in his hand, and said: When the king of heaven went to his passion by this gate, he was not arrayed like a king, ne on horseback, but came humbly upon an ass, in showing the example of humility, which he left to them that honour him.

And when this was said, he departed and vanished away. Then the emperor took off his hosen and shoes himself, in weeping, and despoiled him of all his clothes in to his shirt, and took the cross of our Lord and bare it much humbly unto the gate. And anon the hardness of the stones felt the celestial commandment and removed anon, and opened and gave entry unto them that entered.

Then the sweet odour that was felt that day when the Holy Cross was taken from the tower of Cosdroe and was brought again to Jerusalem from so far country and so great space of land, returned in to Jerusalem in that moment and replenished it with all sweetness. Then the right devout king began to say the praisings of the cross in this wise: O crux splendidior, et cetera. O cross more shining than all the stars, honoured of the world, right holy and much amiable to all men, which only wert worthy to bear the ransom of the world, sweet tree, sweet nails, sweet iron, sweet spear, bearing the sweet burdens, save thou this present company that is this day assembled in thy laud and praisings.

And thus was the precious tree of the cross re-established in his place, and the ancient miracles renewed. For a dead man was raised to life, and four men taken with the palsy were cured and healed, ten lepers were made clean, and fifteen blind received their sight again. Devils were put out of men, and much people and many were delivered of divers sickness and maladies. Then the emperor did do repair the churches, and gave to them great gifts, and after returned home to his empire.

An Alternative Narrative of the Above

And it is said in the Chronicles that this was done otherwise. For they say that when Cosdroe had taken many realms, he took Jerusalem and Zacharias the patriarch, and bare away the tree of the cross. And as Eraclius would make peace with him, the king Cosdroe sware a great oath that he would never make peace with christian men and Romans if they renied not him that was crucified, and adored the sun. And then Eraclius, which was armed with faith, brought his host against him, and destroyed and wasted the Persians with many battles that he made to them, and made Cosdroe to flee unto the city of Ctesiphont. And at the last Cosdroe had the flux in his belly, and would therefore crown his son king, which was named Medasan, and when Syrois, his oldest son, heard hereof he made alliance with Eraclius, and pursued his father with his noble people, and set him in bonds, and sustained him with bread of tribulation and with water of anguish, and at last he made to shoot arrows at him because he would not believe in God, and so died. And after this thing he sent to Eraclius, the patriarch, the tree of the cross, and all the prisoners. And Eraclius bare into Jerusalem the precious tree of the cross, and thus it is read in many chronicles; also Siby saith thus of the tree of the cross: That the blessed tree of the cross was three times with the paynims, as it is said in the History Tripartite: O thrice blessed tree on which God was stretched. This peradventure is said for the life of nature, of grace, and of glory, which came of the cross.

MIRACLES OF THE CROSS

The Jew who Smote the Image of Jesus

At Constantinople a Jew entered into the church of S. Sophia and considered that he was there alone, and saw an image of Jesu Christ, and took his sword and smote the image in the throat, and anon the blood gushed out and sprang in the face and on the head of the Jew. And he then was afeard, and took the image and cast it into a pit, and anon fled away. And it happed that a Christian man met him and saw him all bloody, and said to him: From whence comest thou? Thou hast slain some man. And he said: I have not. The Christian man said: Verily, thou hast committed some homicide, for thou art all besprongen with the blood. And the Jew said: Verily, the God of Christian men is great, and the faith of him is firm and approved in all things; I have smitten no man, but I have smitten the image of Jesu Christ, and anon issued blood of his throat; and then the Jew brought the Christian man to the pit and there they drew out that holy image. And yet is seen on this day the wound in the throat of the image; and the Jew anon became a good Christian man and was baptized.

The Tortured Crucifix that Bled

In Syria, in the city of Beirout, there was a Christian man which had hired an house for a year and he had set the image of the crucifix by his bed, to which he made daily his prayers, and said his devotions, and at the year's end he removed and took an other house, and forgat and left the image behind him. And it happed that a Jew hired that same house, and on a day he bade another Jew, one of his neighbours, to dinner, and as they were at meat, it happed to him that was bidden, in looking on the wall, to espy this image which was fixed to the wall, and began to grin at it for despite, and against him that bade him, and also threatened and menaced him because he durst keep in his house the image of Jesus of Nazareth; and that other Jew sware as much as he might that he had never seen it, ne knew not that it was there, and then the Jew feigned as he had been appeased, and after, went straight to the prince of the Jews and accused that Jew of that which he had seen in his house. Then the Jews assembled and came to the house of him and saw the image of Jesu Christ, and they took that Jew and beat him and did to him many injuries, and cast him out half dead of their synagogue; and anon they defiled the image with their feet, and renewed in it all the torments of the passion of our Lord, and when they pierced his side with the spear, blood and water issued abundantly, insomuch that they filled a vessel which they set thereunder. And then the Jews were abashed and bare this blood into their synagogue, and all the sick men and malades that were guerished and made whole. And then the Jews told and recounted things by order to the bishop of the country, and all they with one will received baptism in the faith of Jesu Christ.

And the bishop put this blood in ampuls of crystal and of glass for to be kept, and then he called the Christian man that had left it in the house, and enquired of him who had so fair an image. And he said that Nicodemus had made it, and when he died he left it to Gamaliel, and Gamaliel to Zaccheus, and Zaccheus to James, and James to Simon, and had been thus in Jerusalem unto the destruction of the city. And from thence it was borne into the realm of Agrippa, of Christian men, and from thence it was brought again into my country, and it was left to me by my parents by rightful heritage. And this was done in the year of our Lord seven hundred and fifty. And then all the Jews hallowed their synagogues into churches, and thereof cometh the custom that churches be hallowed, for tofore that time the altars were but hallowed only. And for this miracle the church hath ordained that the fifth kalends of December, or as it is read in another place the fifth ides of November, should be the memory of the passion of our Lord, wherefore at Rome the church is hallowed in the honour of our Saviour, whereas is kept an ampul with the same blood. And there a solemn feast is kept and done, and there is proved the right great virtue of the cross, unto the paynims, and to the misbehaved men in all things.

The Jew's Vision of Satan's Court

And S. Gregory recordeth in the third book of his dialogues that when Andrew, bishop of the city of Fundana, suffered a holy nun to dwell with him, the fiend the enemy began to imprint in his heart the beauty of her in such wise that he thought in his bed wicked and cursed things. And on a day a Jew came to Rome, and when he saw that the day failed and he might find lo lodging, he went that night and abode in the temple of Apollo. And because he doubted of the sacrilege of the place, howbeit that he had no faith in the cross, yet he marked and garnished him with the sign of the cross. Then at midnight when he awoke, he saw a company of evil spirits, which went

tofore one like as he had some authority of puissance above the others by subjection, and then he saw him sit in the midst among the others, and began to enquire the causes and deeds of every each of these evil spirits which obeyed him, and he would know what evil every each had done.

But Gregory passeth the manner of this vision because of shortness, but we find semblably in the lives of Fathers that as a man entered in a temple of the idols, he saw the devil sitting and all his meiny about him. And one of these wicked spirits came and adored him, and he demanded of him: From whence comest thou? And he said: I have been in such a province, and have moved great wars, and made many tribulations, and have shed much blood, and am come to tell it to thee. And Satan said to him: In what time hast thou done this? And he said: In thirty days. And Satan said: Why hast thou been so long thereabout? and said to them that stood by him: Go ye and beat him all to-lass him.

Then came the second and worshipped him, and said: Sire, I have been in the sea, and have moved great winds and torments, and drowned many ships and slain many men. And Satan said: How long hast thou been about this? And he said: Twenty-two days. And Satan said: How! hast thou done no more in this time? And he commanded that he should be beaten.

And the third came and said: I have been in a city, and have moved strifes and debates in a wedding, and have shed much blood, and have slain the husband, and am come to tell thee. And Satan asked: In what time hast thou done this? And he said: In ten days. And he said: Hast thou done no more in that time? And commanded them that were about him to beat him also.

Then came the fourth and said: I have been in the wilderness forty years, and have laboured about a monk, and unnethe at the last I have thriven, and made him fall in the sin of the flesh. And when Satan heard that, he arose from his seat and kissed him, and took his crown off his head and set it on his head, and made him to sit with him, and said: Thou hast done a great thing, and hast laboured more than all the others.

And this may be the manner of the vision that S. Gregory leaveth. When each had said, one started up in the middle of them all, and said he had moved Andrew against the nun, and had moved the fourth part of his flesh against her in temptation, and thereto that yesterday he drew so much his mind on her that, in the hour of evensong he gave to her in japing a buff, and said plainly, that she might hear it, that he would sin with her. Then the master commanded him that he should perform that he had begun, and for to make him to sin he should have a singular victory and reward among all the others.

And then commanded he that they should go look who that was that lay in the temple; and they went and looked, and anon they were ware that he was marked with the sign of the cross. And they being afeard, cried and said: Verily, this is an empty vessel, alas ! alas! he is marked. And with this voice all the company of the wicked spirits vanished away. And then the Jew, all amoved, came to the bishop and told to him all by order what was happened. And when the bishop heard this he wept strongly, and made to void all the women out of his house. And then he baptized the Jew.

The Nun and the Lettuce

S. Gregory rehearseth in his dialogues that a nun entered into a garden and saw a lettuce, and coveted that, and forgat to make the sign of the cross, and bit it gluttonously, and anon fell down and was ravished of a devil. And there came to her S. Equicius, and the devil began to cry and to say: What have I done? I sat upon a lettuce and she came and bit me. And anon the devil issued out by the commandment of the holy man of God.

The Cross Replaces the Arms of Serapis

It is read in the History Scholastic that the paynims had painted on a wall the arms of Serapis, and Theodosius did do put them out, and made to be painted in the same place the sign of the cross. And when the paynims and priests of the idols saw that, anon they did them to be baptized, saying that it was given them to understand of their elders that, those arms should endure till that such a sign were made there in which were life. And they have a letter of which they use that they call holy, and had a form that they said it exposed, and signified life perdurable.

The [iconography of the Holy Cross](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

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

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. bob_blackmon@mindspring.com.

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

E-text © Paul Halsall, September 2000
halsall@fordham.edu

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and explanatory insertions by Richard Stracke