

## 117// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. LAURENCE

**L**aurence, martyr and subdeacon, was of the lineage of Spain, and St. Sixtus brought him thence. And as Master John Beleth saith: When the blessed Sixtus went into Spain, he found there two young men, Laurence, and Vincent his cousin, right ordinate by honesty of manners, and noble in all their works, and brought them with him to Rome. Of whom that one, that was Laurence, abode with him, and Vincent his cousin returned into Spain, and there finished his life by glorious martyrdom.

But in this reason Master Beleth repugneth [is inconsistent with] the time of martyrdom of that one and of that other. For it is said that Laurence suffered death under Decius, and Vincent under Diocletian, and between Decius and Diocletian were about forty years. And there were seven emperors between them, so that the blessed Vincent might not be young, and the blessed Sixtus ordained Laurence his archdeacon.

### DECIOUS USURPS THE IMPERIAL THRONE

**A**nd in his time Philip the emperor, and Philip his son, received the faith of Jesu Christ. And when they were christened, they entended greatly to enhance the church. And this emperor was the first that received the faith of Jesu Christ, whom, as it is said, Origen converted to the faith. How be it that it is read in another place otherwise, and that St. Pontius had done it. And he reigned the year one thousand from the building of Rome, so that the year one thousand should rather be given to Christ than to the idols.

And that year was hallowed of the Romans with right great apparel of games and great esbatements [amusements]. And there was a knight with Philip the emperor named Decius, which was noble, and much renowned in arms and in battles. And when in that time France rebelled against this emperor, he sent thither Decius for to take away the contentious and subdue them to Rome. And Decius, so sent thither, made all things well, and subdued them all to Rome, and had victory. And when the emperor heard his coming, and would honour him more highly, and went against [i.e. went to meet] him unto Verona.

But for as much as evil people feel them more honoured, so much more they are swollen in pride, then Decius, elate in pride,

*Laurence is said as holding a crown made of laurel. For sometimes they that vanquished in battle were crowned with laurier boughs and branches, showing victory, and it is always of convenable verdure, of odour agreeable, and virtuous of strength; and the blessed Laurence is said of laurier, for he had victory in his passion, whereof Decius, confused, said: I ween now that we be vanquished. He had verdure in cleanness of heart and purity, for he said: My voice hath no darkness. He had odour of perpetual memory, whereof it is said: He departed all and gave to poor people, and therefore remaineth his droiture perdurably, which he fulfilled with holy works, and hallowed it by his glorious martyrdom. He had strength by his virtuous preaching, by which he converted Lucillus the Roman provost. This is that tree of such virtue that the leaf brake the stone, healed the deaf, and doubted no thunder. And thus Laurence brake the hard heart, gave spiritual reward, and defended the sentence from the thunder of evil people.*

began to covet the empire, and on a time when Decius knew that the emperor slept in his pavilion, he entered in secretly and cut the throat of his lord sleeping. And then he drew to him by gifts and prayers, and also by promises, all them of the host that the emperor had brought, and went anon to the city of Rome. And when Philip the younger heard this thing, he was sore afraid and doubted strongly. And as Sicardus saith in his chronicle, he delivered all his father's treasure and his, to St. Sixtus and to St. Laurence, to the end that if it happed to him to be slain of Decius that they should give this treasure to poor people and to the churches. And wonder not that the treasures that Laurence gave be not named the treasures of the emperor, but of the church, or peradventure they were said treasures of the church. For Philip had left them to be dispended to the church, and after, Philip fled and hid him for fear of Decius. And then the Senate went against Decius and confirmed him in the empire.

### **THE PERSECUTION OF DECIUS**

**A**nd because he was not seen to have slain his lord by treason, but only for he had renied the idols, therefore he began right cruelly to persecute the church and Christian men, and commanded that they should be destroyed without mercy. And many thousand martyrs were slain, among whom Philip was crowned with martyrdom. And after that Decius made a search of the treasures of his lord. Then was Sixtus brought to him as he that adored Jesu Christ, and had the treasures of the empire. And then commanded Decius that he should be put in prison so long that, by torments he should reny God, and tell where the treasures were.

And the blessed Laurence followed him, and cried after him: Whither goest thou, father without a minister? What thing is in me that hath displeased thy fatherhood, or what thing hast thou seen in me? Hast thou seen me forsake my lineage, or go out of kind? Prove me whether thou hast chosen a convenable minister to whom thou hast committed the dispensation of the body and blood of our Lord.

To whom St. Sixtus said: I shall not leave thee, my son, but greater strifes and battles be due to thee for the faith of Jesu Christ. We, as old men, have taken more lighter battle, and to thee as to a young man shall remain a more glorious battle of which thou shalt triumph and have victory of the tyrant, and shalt follow me within three days.

Then he delivered to him all the treasures, commanding him that he should give them to churches and poor people. And the blessed man sought the poor people night and day, and gave to each of them that as was needful, and came to the house of an old woman, which had hid in her house many Christian men and women, and long she had had the headache, and St. Laurence laid his hand upon her head, and anon she was healed of the ache and pain.

And he washed the feet of the poor people and gave to each of them alms. The same night he went to the house of a Christian man and found therein a blind man, and gave to him his sight by the sign of the cross. And when the blessed Sixtus would not consent to Decius, ne offer to the idols, he commanded that he should be led forth and beheaded.

And the blessed Laurence ran after him and said: Forsake me not, holy father, for I have dispended the treasures that thou deliveredst to me.

## THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. LAWRENCE

And when the knights heard speak of the treasures, they took Laurence and brought him to the provost, and the provost delivered him to Decius. And Decius Cæsar said to him: Where be the treasures of the church, which we know well that thou hast hid?

And he answered not. Wherefore he delivered him to Valerianus the provost to the end that he should show the treasures and do sacrifice to the idols, or to put him to death by divers torments. And Valerianus delivered him to a provost named Hippolitus for to be in prison. And he enclosed him in prison with many others.

And there was in prison a paynim named Lucillus, which had lost the sight of his eyes with overmuch weeping. And St. Laurence promised to him to re-establish his sight if he would believe in Jesu Christ and receive baptism, and he required anon to be baptized. Then St. Laurence took water and said to him, "All things in confession be washed." And when he had diligently informed him in the articles of the faith, and he confessed that he believed all, he shed water on his head, and baptized him in the name of Jesu Christ. And anon, he that had been blind received his sight again. And therefore came to him many blind men, and went again enlumined from him, and having their sight.

And then again Hippolitus said to him: Show to me the treasures; to whom Laurence said: Hippolitus, if thou wilt believe in our Lord Jesu Christ, I shall show to thee the treasures, and promise to thee the life perdurable.

And Hippolitus said: If thou dost this that thou sayest, I shall do that thou requirest.

And in that same hour Hippolitus believed and received the holy baptism, he and all his meiny. And when he was baptized he said: I have seen the souls of the innocents joyous and glad.

And after this, Valerianus sent to Hippolitus that he should bring him Laurence. And Laurence said to him: Let us go together, for the glory is made ready to me and to thee.

And then they came to judgment. And he was inquired again of the treasures, and Laurence demanded dilation of three days, and Valerianus granted him on pledge of Hippolitus. And St. Laurence in these three days gathered together poor people, blind and lame, and presented them tofore Decius, in the palace of Salustine, and said: These here be the treasures perdurable, which shall not be minished, but increase, which he departed to each of them. The hands of these men have borne the treasures into heaven.

Then Valerianus in the presence of Decius said: What variest thou in many things? Sacrifice anon, and put from thee thine art magic.

And Laurence said to him: Whether ought he to be adored that maketh, or he that is made?

And then Decius was angry, and commanded that he should be beaten with scorpions, and that all manner of torments should be brought tofore him. And then commanded he him that he should do sacrifice for to eschew these torments, and St. Laurence answered: Thou cursed man, I have always coveted these meats.

To whom Decius said: If these be meats for thee, show to me them that be like to thee, that they may eat with thee.

To whom Laurence said: They have given their names in to heaven, and thou art not worthy to see them. And then, by the commandment of Decius, he was beaten all naked with rods and staves, and pieces of iron burning were laid to his sides. And Laurence said: Lord Jesu Christ, God! Son of God, have mercy upon me, thy servant, which am accused, and I have not renied thee, and they have demanded me, and I have confessed thee to be my Lord.

And then Decius said to him: I know well that thou despisest the torments by thine art magic, but me thou mayst not despise. I swear by my gods and goddesses but that thou wilt do sacrifice to them, thou shalt be punished by divers torments.

Then he commanded that he should be long beaten with plummetts [whips with lead balls on the ends], and then he prayed, saying: Lord Jesu Christ, receive my spirit.

And then came a voice from heaven, Decius hearing, which said: Yet many torments be due to thee.

And then Decius said, replenished with felony: Ye men of Rome, have ye heard the devils comforting this cursed man, which adored not the gods, ne doubted not the torments, ne dreaded not the prince's wrath?

And then commanded he again that he should be beaten with scorpions. And then Laurence smiling rendered thankings to God, and prayed for them that were there. And in that same hour a knight named Romaine believed in God, and said to St. Laurence: I see tofore thee a right fair youngling standing, and with a linen cloth cleansing thy wounds. I adjure thee by the living Lord God that thou leave not, but haste thee to baptize me.

And then said Decius to Valerianus: I ween that we shall now be overcome by art magic. And then he commanded that he should be unbounden and enclosed in the prison of Hippolitus. And then Romaine brought an urcelle [small pitcher] or a cruse [small vessel] with water, and fell down at the feet of St. Laurence, and received baptism of him. And when Decius knew it, he commanded that Romaine should be beaten with rods, and he was so much beaten that he might not hold him upon his legs, but in no manner might no man make him say but that he was a good Christian and freely baptized.

And then Decius did do smite off his head. And that night was Laurence led to Decius, and when Hippolitus, which was there, saw that, he began to weep, and would have said that he was christened. And Laurence said to him: Hide Jesu Christ within thee, and when I shall cry, hear and come thither.

And then all manner of torments that could be devised or thought were brought tofore Decius. And then said Decius to Laurence: Or [Either] thou shalt make sacrifice to the gods, or this night shall all these torments be dispended on thee.

And then Laurence said to him: My night hath no darkness, but all things shine in my sight.

And then said Decius: Bring hither a bed of iron, that Laurence *contumax* [contumacious] may lie thereon.

And the ministers despoiled him, and laid him stretched out upon a gridiron of iron, and laid burning coals under, and held him with forks of iron. Then said Laurence to Valerianus: Learn, thou cursed wretch, that thy coals give to me refreshing of coldness, and make ready to thee torment perdurable, and our Lord knoweth that I, being accused, have not forsaken him, and when I was demanded I confessed him Christ, and I being roasted give thankings unto God.

And after this he said with a glad cheer unto Decius, Thou cursed wretch, thou hast roasted that one side, turn that other, and eat.

And then he, rendering thankings to our Lord, said: I thank thee, Lord Jesu Christ, for I have deserved to enter into thy gates.

And so gave up his spirit. And then Decius, being all confused, walked into the palace of Tiberius with Valerianus, and left the body lying upon the fire, which Hippolitus in the morning took away, with Justin the priest, and buried it with precious ointments in the field Veranus. And the Christian men that buried him fasted three days and three nights and hallowed the vigils, weeping there and wailing.

### **PROBLEMS WITH DATING LAWRENCE'S STORY**

**B**ut many doubt if he suffered under this Decius, for it is read in the chronicle that Sixtus was long after Decius. Eutropius nevertheless affirmeth and saith that, Decius moving persecution against Christian men, among other he slew the blessed Laurence, deacon and martyr. And it is said in a chronicle authentic enough, that it was not under this Decius, the emperor that succeeded to Philip, but under another Decius younger, which was Cæsar and not emperor, that he suffered martyrdom. For between Decius the emperor and this Decius the younger, under whom it is said that Laurence was martyred, there were many emperors and popes. Also, it is said that Gallus, and Volusianus his son, succeeded Decius. And after them, Valerianus, with Gallianus his son, held the empire, and they made Decius the younger, Cæsar, and not emperor. For, anciently, when any was made Cæsar, neverthmore he was Augustus ne emperor, as it is read in the chronicles, that Diocletian made Maximian Cæsar, and after from Cæsar he was made Augustus and emperor. In the time of these emperors, Valerianus and Gallianus, Sixtus held the see of Rome, and this Decius was called Cæsar, and not emperor but Decius Cæsar only. And he martyred the blessed Fabian, and Cornelius succeeded after Fabian which was martyred under Valerianus and Gallianus, which reigned fifteen years. And Lucian succeeded Cornelius, and Stephen the pope succeeded Lucian, and Denys succeeded

Stephen, and Sixtus succeeded Denys. And this is contained in that chronicle, and if this be true, that which Master John Beleth putteth may be true. And it is read in another chronicle that the said Gallianus had two names, and was called Gallianus and Decius, and under him Sixtus and Laurence suffered martyrdom, about the year of our Lord two hundred and sixty. Godfrey, in his book that is called Pantheonides, affirmeth that Gallianus was called by another name, Decius.

## MIRACLES OF ST. LAWRENCE

### The Garrulous Nun

St. Gregory saith in his dialogues that there was a nun Sabina which held her continent of her flesh, but she eschewed not the janglery of her tongue, and she was buried in the church of St. Laurence the holy martyr, and was laid tofore the altar of the martyr, and was taken of the devils and departed and sawn asunder, and that one part was burnt, and that other part remained whole, so that on the morning the burning appeared visibly.

### The Wooden Church-Beam

Gregory of Tours saith that when a certain priest repaired the church of St. Laurence, and one of the beams was over short, and required St. Laurence that he which had nourished poor men would help his poverty, and the beam grew so suddenly that there remained a great part, and the priest cut that part into small pieces, and cured and healed therewith many maladies.

And this witnesseth St. Fortunatus: It happed at Prioras, a castle in Italy, that a man was sore vexed with toothache, and he attouched this wood, and anon the ache was gone.

### The Workmen's Loaf

St. Gregory telleth in his book of dialogues that a priest named Sanctulus repaired a church of St. Laurence, which had been burnt of Lombards, and hired many workmen; and one time he had nothing to set tofore them, and then he made his prayers, and after looked in his panier [basket], and there he found a much white loaf of bread, but him seemed that it sufficed not for one dinner for three persons. St. Laurence, which would not fail his workmen, did do multiply it, that his workmen were sustained thereby ten days.

### The Broken Chalice

In the church of St. Laurence at Milan was a chalice of crystal, marvellously clear, and as the deacon bare it on a day suddenly to the altar, it fell out of his hands to the ground, and was all tobroken. And then the deacon, weeping, gathered together the pieces and laid them on the altar, and prayed the holy martyr St. Laurence that the chalice broken might be made whole again, and then anon it was founden all whole.

## The Corrupt Judge

It is read in *The Book of the Miracles of Our Blessed Lady St. Mary* that a judge named Stephen was at Rome and took gladly gifts, and perverted the judgments. And this judge took away by force three houses that were longing to the church of St. Laurence, and a garden of St. Agnes, and possessed them wrongfully. It happened that the judge died and was brought to judgment tofore God. And when St. Laurence saw him, he went to him in great despite, and strained him three times by the arm right hard, and tormented him by great pain. And St. Agnes and other virgins deigned not to look on him, but turned their visages away from him, and then the judge giving sentence against him, said: Because he hath withdrawn other men's things, and hath taken gifts and sold truth. that he should be put in the place of Judas the traitor.

And St. Projecte, whom the said Stephen had much loved in his life, came to the blessed Laurence and to St. Agnes, and cried them mercy for him. Then the Blessed Virgin Mary, and they, prayed to God for him, and then it was granted to them that the soul of him should go again to the body, and there should do his penance thirty days; and our Blessed Lady commanded him that as long as he lived he should say the psalm: *Beati immaculati* [Psalm 118(119)]. And when the soul came to the body again, his arm was like as it had been burnt, like as he had suffered that hurt in his body, and that token and sign was in him as long as he lived. Then rendered he that which he had taken and did his penance. And at the thirtieth day he passed out of this world to our Lord.

## St. Laurence's Intercession for St. Henry

It is read in the life of Henry the emperor, that he and Cunegonde his wife were virgins together. By the atisement [instigation] of the devil he had his wife suspected of a knight, and he made his wife go barefoot upon burning ashes fifteen paces, and when she ascended upon them she said this: As I am not corrupted ne defouled of Harry ne of all other, so Jesu Christ help me.

Then Henry the emperor was ashamed, and gave her a buffet on the cheek, and a voice said: The Virgin Mary hath delivered thee, virgin.

And she went without any hurt upon the burning ashes.

And when the emperor was dead, there went a great multitude of devils tofore the cell of an hermit, and he opened the window and demanded at the last what they were, and one answered: A legion of devils we be that go to the death of the emperor, if peradventure we may find anything in him.

He adjured him that he should come again to him, which returning said: We have profited nothing, for when this false suspicion of his wife and all the good things and evil things were laid in a balance, this burnt and bruled Laurence brought forth a pot of gold of much great weight. And when we supposed to have surmounted, he cast that pot in the balance on that other side, so that it weighed more and was heavier. And then I was angry and brake an ear of the pot, and he called that pot a chalice, which the emperor had given to the church of Eichstadt, which he had in special devotion, and had do made it in the honour of St. Laurence. And for the greatness of it, it

had two ears. And it was founden then that the emperor died that time, and one ear was broken off the chalice.

### The Finding of St. Lawrence's Body

Gregory rehearseth in his *Register* that his predecessor coveted to make better some things about the body of St. Laurence, but he wist not where it lay. Nevertheless, the body of St. Laurence was discovered and unheled [revealed] by ignorance, but all they that were there present, as well monks as others, were dead in fifteen days after.

### THE EXCELLENCE OF THE PASSION OF ST. LAWRENCE

It is to wit that the passion of St. Laurence was most excellent in four things, like as it is founden by the sayings of St. Maximin bishop, and of St. Austin. First, in the sourness of his passion or bitterness; secondly, in profit or effect; thirdly, in constancy or strength; and fourthly, in the marvellous battle and manner of his victory.

### The Bitterness of His Pain

First, it was right excellent in the bitterness of the pain; this saith St. Maximin; and after some books of St. Ambrose:

Brethren, St. Laurence was not slain by short and simple passion, for who that is smitten by a sword he dieth but once, and who that is cast in a fire is delivered at once, but this holy man was tormented by long and multiplied pains, so that the death should not fail him at torment ne fail him at the end. We read that the blessed children went through the flames, and have gone upon the coals burning bare foot, whereof St. Laurence is not to be preferred of lesser glory, for as they went in their pains through the flames, this, in his torment, lay upon the fire. They defouled and trod upon the fire with their feet, and this was restrained for to lay his sides therein.

They prayed in their pains holding up their hands to our Lord God, but he was stretched in his pain, and prayed our Lord with all his body.

And it is to wit that the blessed Laurence is he that, after St. Stephen, ought to hold the primacy. Not only for that he suffered greater pain than other martyrs, as is well found and read that many have suffered as much pain, but it is said for six causes.

First, for the place of the passion, for it was at Rome, which is head of the world, and siege of the apostles.

Secondly, for the office of the predication, for he accomplished diligently the office of preaching.

Thirdly, for the laudable distribution of the treasures, that he gave all to poor men wisely. And these three reasons putteth master William of Auxerre.

Fourthly, for the antiquity and proved martyrdom. For if it be said that some other have had greater pain, always it is not so authentic, and also some time in doubt, but the passion of St. Laurence is much solemn and approved in the church. And therefore many saints approve his passion in their sermons and affirm it.

Fifthly, for the degree of dignity. For he was archdeacon of the siege of Rome, and as it is said, there was never sith [afterwards] archdeacon in Rome.

Sixthly, for the cruelty of torments, for he suffered them right grievous, as he that was roasted upon a gridiron of iron. Whereof St. Austin saith: Sith [Since] that the members were broken by many diverse beatings, he was commanded to be tormented upon a griddle of iron, and was laid thereupon, which by continual heat that was thereunder, the griddle had the force to burn, so that he was tormented by the turning of his members more forcibly for the pain was the more long.

### The Profit or Effect of His Martyrdom

Secondly, he was right excellent in effect or profit, for after this that Austin and Maximin say, this bitterness of pain made him high by glorification, and honourable by opinion, and laudable by devotion, and noble by contention.

First, it made him high by glorification, whereof St. Austin saith: “Persecutor, thou wert wood [mad] against the martyr and more than wood, for when thou assembledst pain thou increasedst his glory, thine engine found not glory of the aid when the instruments of the torments transported him in the honour of victory.” And after Maximin, and in some books of Ambrose, it is said: “How be it that the members were bounden in the heat of the sparles, the force of the faith was not corrupt. The body suffered impairing, but he gat the gain of health.” And St. Austin saith truly: “His body is blessed, for torment never changeth him out of the faith of God, but his religion crowned him in holy rest.”

Secondly, he was honourable by opinion, and renomee after Maximin and Ambrose, that say: “We may liken the blessed Laurence to mustard seed which is broken by many manners, when by the grace of his mystery he replenished the world of good odour, for tofore that he was constitute in his body, he was humble, unknown, and serviceable; and after that he was all tobroken and burnt, he shed in all the churches of the world the odour of his nobleness.” Also [two quotations from St. Augustine:] “this is a holy thing and pleasant, that the solemnity of St. Laurence be nobly honoured, whose shining flames, he as vanquisher, holy church halloweth this day in all the world,” “in so much that his glorious passion enlumineth all the world by the glory of his martyrdom.”

Thirdly, he was louable [praiseworthy] by devotion. Wherefore was he so louable, and so with devotion to be reputed, St. Austin showeth it by three reasons, and saith thus: “We ought to receive the blessed man with devotion; first, for he gave his precious blood for the love of our

Lord, and after, for because he had unto our Lord great affinity, showing that the faith of Christian men ought to deserve to be of the company of martyrs; thirdly, because he was so holy of conversation that in the time of peace he deserved the crown of martyrdom.”

Fourthly, he made himself noble by following, whereof St. Austin saith that the cause of all his passion was because he exhorted others to be like to him. In three things he showed him to us following: First, in strong suffering of adversities, whereof St. Austin saith: The most profitable form for to inform the people to God is the fair speech of martyrs. It is light to pray, and it is profitable to admonish and warn, the things and the examples be better than the words. And it is more to teach by work than by voice. And in this right excellent manner of teaching the persecutors might feel of Laurence how he shone by great dignity. And how the marvellous strength of his courage gave not only place of belief, but also comforted and strengthened others by ensample of his suffering. Secondly, by greatness of the faith and fervour of love. Whereof Maximin saith, and Ambrose also, when he vanquished by faith the flames of the persecutors, he showed to us by the fire of faith that he overcame the embracements of the fire of hell, and by the love of Christ not to fear the day of doom. Thirdly, in burning love. Maximin and Ambrose say that, St. Laurence enlumined the world plainly of the same light that he was embraced with, and chauffed the hearts of all Christian people by the flames that he suffered. By these three things saith St. Maximin, after the books of St. Ambrose, that we be called to the faith by the example of St. Laurence, and embraced to martyrdom, and chauffed to devotion.

### His Constancy and Strength

Thirdly, he was right excellent in constancy and in strength. And hereof saith St. Austin: The blessed Laurence dwelled in Jesu Christ unto the temptation, unto the demand of the tyrant, and unto the death, in whom the occision was long, and because that he had well eaten and well drunken, he was fat of this meat, and drunken of the chalice, so that he felt not the torments ne eschewed them, but succeeded to the realm of heaven.

He was so constant that he set not by the torments; but after that St. Maximin saith: He was made more perfect in dread, more ardent in love, and more joyous in burning. For the first it is said thus: He was stretched upon the flames of the great brands of fire, and turned oft from that one side to that other. And how much more he suffered of pains, so much more he dreaded God.

And of the second he saith thus: When the grain of the mustard is ground it chauffeth, and when Laurence suffered torments he was inflamed again, and tormented of a new manner of marvellous torments, and the greater torments that the wood persecutors did, the more devout was Laurence to our Saviour.

And as to the third, he saith thus: He was chauffed in the law of Jesu Christ, that by great highness of courage he despised the torments of his own body, that in having victory of his wood tormentor, he was joyous for to despise it by the fire.

## The Marvelous Manner of His Victory

Fourthly, he was right excellent in the marvellous battle, and in the manner of his victory, and as it appeareth openly by the words of St. Maximin and of St. Austin, the blessed Laurence had five burnings without forth, which he all overcame manly and extinted them. The first was the fire of hell, the second material flame, the third carnal concupiscence, the fourth of burning covetise, and the fifth of a mad woodness.

The quenching of the first fire, that is of hell, Maximin saith: It might give no place of burning to the worldly fire; for to burn his body which quenched the fire perdurable of hell, he went through the fire earthly and material of this world, but he escaped and eschewed then the horrible flame of the fire perdurable of hell.

The quenching of the second fire, he saith also, he travailed by bodily burning but the divine ardour quenched the material burning. And yet saith he: How be it the evil people put under the fagots and wood for to increase and make great flame, St. Laurence esprised by the heat of the faith felt not the flames. And St. Austin saith: The charity of Jesu Christ may not be surmounted with flames, for the fire that burnt without forth was more feeble than that which he embraced within forth.

And of the quenching of the third fire of carnal concupiscence, saith St. Maximin: St. Laurence passed through the fire which he abhorred being not burnt, but he enlumined shone; he burned lest he should burn, and because he should not burn he was burnt.

Of the quenching of the fourth fire, that is of avarice; of them that covet the treasures of which they be deceived, said St. Austin thus: A man covetous is armed by double ardour of money, and is enemy of truth; his avarice is for to steal gold, and by his felony he loseth our Lord. He hath nothing, he profiteth nothing, human cruelty is withdrawn by his winds and corporal matter, and Laurence goeth to heaven, and he faileth in his flames.

Of the quenching of the fifth fire, that is of the furious woodness [madness], how, that is to say, furious woodness of the persecutors was deceived and brought to nought, saith Maximin thus: When the woodness of the ministers of the flames was surmounted, he restrained the burning of the worldly woodness, and till that time the devil's entent profited till that the true man ascended and mounted into heaven gloriously unto his Lord God. And he made to cool the cruelty of the persecutors, confused all with their fires, and showeth that the woodness of the persecutors was fire, when he said: The woodness of the paynims made ready a griddle of iron upon the fire strongly burning, and that was done to the end that he should avenge the fires and great heats of indignation.

And it was no wonder though he surmounted these three great fires without forth [external]. For as it is had of the words of the said Maximin: He had within forth three refroidours or colds, and bare in his heart three fires by which he assuaged by coldness all the fire without forth, and surmounted with the embracing of more fire. And the first coldness was the desire of celestial glory, the second was the remembrance of the law of God, and the third

was the cleanness of his conscience. By this treble coldness he quenched all the fire without forth.

And he was cold of the first refroidour, which is desire of heavenly glory. As St. Ambrose saith: The blessed Laurence might not feel the torments of fire in his entrails, which within him possessed the refroidour of paradise. Though the burnt flesh lay tofore the tyrant, and the body burnt, nevertheless the body suffered no pain in earth whose soul and courage was in heaven.

Of the second coldness or refroidure that is the remembrance of the law of God, he saith thus: When he remembered tofore the commandments of Jesu Christ, all was cold that he suffered.

Of the third, which is purity and cleanness of conscience, he saith thus: The right strong martyr truly is burnt in his entrails, but he, seeking the kingdom of heaven, enjoyeth as a vanquisher by the refroidure of the cleanness of his conscience.

And as St. Maximin saith: He had three fires within forth [internal], by the which he surmounted by embracing all the fires without forth. The first was the greatness of the faith; the second the ardent dilection; the third the very knowledge of God, which embraced him as fire.

Of the first fire saith St. Ambrose: As much as the burning of the faith chauffed him, so much cooled him the flame of the torment. We read in the gospel that the fire of the faith is the fire of the Saviour. The evangelist said: I came into the earth to put fire therein, and with this fire was St. Laurence embraced, and felt not the burning of the flames.

And of the second fire he saith thus: The martyr Laurence burned withoutforth of the embracements of the tyrants, but the greater flame of the love of God burneth him withinforth.

Of the third fire he saith thus: The right cruel flame of the persecutor might not surmount the martyr, for he was overmuch more ardently chauffed in his thought by the rays of truth, that he felt not the flame withoutforth, which he vanquished and overcame.

Laurence, among the other martyrs, hath three privileges as towards office. The first, he hath only a vigil among all the other martyrs. But at this day the vigils of saints be changed into fastings by many, and as Master John Beleth rehearseth: It was sometime the custom that men went with their wives and children at the solemnity of feasts, and woke there all the night with tapers and light; but because many adventures were made in these vigils, it was established that the vigils should be turned into fastings, and nevertheless the ancient name is retained, and is yet retained, and is called vigil. The second privilege is in the octaves or utas; for he only with St. Stephen have their octaves among all other martyrs, like as St. Martin hath among the confessors. The third is in the reprising of the anthems, for he only and St. Paul have that only. But Paul hath that for the excellence of his preaching, and Laurence for the excellence of his passion.

The [iconography of St. Lawrence](#) 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](mailto: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](mailto:halsall@fordham.edu)

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and explanatory insertions by Richard Stracke, [rstracke@aug.edu](mailto:rstracke@aug.edu)