

29// HERE FOLLOWETH OF ST. PAULINE THE WIDOW

St. Pauline was a much noble widow of Rome, of whom St. Jerome wrote the life, and saith first thus: If all my members were turned into tongues, and all my arteries should resound in human voice, yet I might not worthily write the virtues of St. Pauline. I take witness of God and of his holy angels, and also of the angel that was keeper of this woman that I shall say nothing for praising but that same that I shall say shall be less than appertaineth to her virtues. She was born among the nobles of the senators of Rome, and of the lineage of the noble Gregois, rich of good and puissant of seignory at Rome. She was the most humble of all other, for like as the sun surmounteth the clearness of the stars, so surmounted she the beauty of others by her great humility.

THE VOYAGE TO JERUSALEM

When her husband was passed out of this world, she abode lady of all the goods and riches. It happed that, at the mandment of the Emperour, many bishops came to Rome, among whom were there the holy man Paulinus, the patriarch of Antioch, and Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, of [by] whom she was esprised [enkindled] in good virtues, so that she gave largely of her goods for God's sake. Her parents, ne her friends, ne her own children could not turn her, ne make her to change her purpose, but that she would become the pilgrim of Jesu Christ, for the amorous desire that she had to Jesu Christ surmounted the love that she had to her children. Only among all her children she had put her affection in Eustochium her daughter, whom she led with her in this pilgrimage.

She took the sea and sailed so far that she came into the holy land of Jerusalem. O how great devotion she had to visit the sepulchre of Jesu Christ and the other holy places, and how all weeping she kissed them, there can no man rehearse. All the city of Jerusalem could speak of it, and yet best of all knew the Lord for whose love she had forsaken all things.

She had been at Rome so puissant and so noble, that every man coveted to do to her honour for her great renomee [fame], but she that was founded upon humility sought the humble places and religious, and came at the last to Bethlehem.

HER VISION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

And when she had devoutly visited the place in which the Virgin Mary infanted and childed Jesu Christ, she fell in a vision, and as she sware to me, she saw in that vision the child wrapped in poor clouts [clothes] lying in the crib or in the rack [manger], and how the three kings worshipped him, how the star came upon the house, and how the shepherds came to see him, and how Herod made persecution upon the innocents, and how Joseph bare the child into Egypt. And this vision she said, all in weeping and in laughing, and said: I salute thee Bethlehem wherein he is born, that descended from heaven, of thee prophesied (Micah the fifth chapter),

that of thee should be born the God that should govern the people of Israel, and the lineage of David should endure in thee unto the time that the glorious virgin should enfant Jesu Christ; and I wretched, as unworthy to repute me to kiss the crib in which our Lord wept as a child, and the virgin childed, here I shall take my rest and my dwelling, for my Saviour chose this place in Bethlehem.

HER LIFE IN BETHLEHEM

She made there her habitation with many virgins that served God, and how well that she was lady of all, nevertheless she was the most humble and meek in speaking, in habit, and in going, in such wise that she seemed servant of all the other. She never ate after the death of her husband with no man, how good that he was; she visited as it is said tofore, all the holy places and the monks of Egypt, among whom were many of the ancient fathers and many holy men, and her seemed that she saw Jesu Christ among them.

HER GOVERNANCE OF THE CONVENT AT BETHLEHEM

And after, she founded in Bethlehem an abbey in which she assembled virgins as well of noble estate as of middle and low lineage, and departed them in three congregations, so that they were departed in work, in meat, and drink, but in saying their psalter and adoring were they together at the hours as it appertaineth. And she induced and informed all the other in prayer and in work, by example giving, she was never idle. And all they were of one habit, and they had ne sheets ne linen cloth but to dry their hands, and they might have no licence to speak to men, and they that came late to the hours [prayers], she blamed debonairly [mildly] or shortly, after that they were, and suffered not that any of them should have anything save the living and clothing, for to put away avarice from them.

She appeased [pacified] them sweetly that strove, and also she brake and mortified among the young maidens their fleshly desires by continual fastings, for she had liefer [rather] have them good, suffering sorrow and sickness, than their heart should be hurt by fleshly will. And she chastised them that were nice [elegant] and quaint [dainty], saying that such nicety was filth of the soul. And said also that word[s] sounding to any ordure or filth should never issue out of the mouth of a virgin, for by the words outward is showed the countenance of the heart within. And she that so spake and was rebuked therefor, if she amended it not at the first warning, ne at the second, ne at the third, she should be dissevered [separated] from the others in eating and in drinking, by which she should be ashamed, and thus should be amended by debonair correction, and if she would not, she should be punished by right great moderation.

HER VIRTUES

She was marvellous debonair and pitiful to them that were sick, and comforted them and served them right busily, and to them largely to eat such as they asked, but to herself she was hard in her sickness and scarce, for she refused to eat flesh, how well she gave it to other, and also to drink wine. She was oft by them that were sick, and laid the pillows aright and in point, and frotted [rubbed] their feet and chauffed [heated] water to wash them. And her seemed that the less she did to the sick in service, so much less service did she to God, and deserved less merit, and

therefore she was to them pitiful, and nothing to herself. In her right great sicknesses she would have no soft bed, but lay upon the straw or upon the ground, and took but little rest.

For the most part she was in prayers both by day and by night, and she wept so much that it seemed of her eyes a fountain. So many tears ran from them, and when we said to her oft-times that she should keep her eyes from weeping so much, she said: The visage ought to be like to be foul because it hath so much been made fair and gay against the commandment of God, and the body ought to be chastised that hath had so much solace in this world, and the laughings ought to be recompensed by weepings, and the soft bed and the sheets ought to be changed into the sharpness of hair. I that was accustomed to please man and the world, I desire now to please Jesu Christ. And what shall I say of chastity in which she was ensample unto all ladies of time past when she was yet secular?

For she conversed in such wise that they that were envious durst not avise on her any evil fame.

She was debonair and courteous unto all, for she comforted the poor and warned [advised] the rich to do well, but in largess she passed so that no poor man complained of her. And this did she not by the great abundance that she had of goods, but by her wise governance, and when I said to her that she should have measure [moderation] in doing alms, after that the apostle saith that the alms that is done to another be not grievous to him that doth it.¹ But she said that for the love of our Lord she did all, and that she desired to die, begging in such wise that she should not leave one penny to her daughter after her, and that she might be wrapped in a strange sheet when she should die.

And at the last she said: If I should demand ought [if I should ask anything], I should find enough that would give to me, and these beggars, if I gave to them nought and they so departed and died for poverty, of whom should God demand this? Oft said she so: They be happy that be merciful, and alms quencheth sins as the water quencheth the fire, but for to do alms it cometh not always to perfection, for many do alms that abide in their carnalities; they seem to be good without forth but within they be mortal.

Pauline was not such an one. She affebled her body right sore in fasting and in labouring, that unnethe she set her eyes to her meat, without eating fish, ne milk, eggs, or white meat, in which many ween to do great abstinence without eating flesh. For our Lord gave to her an adversary, the stimulation fleshly, by which she held her in humility without savouring anything of pride for the foison [plentiful supply] of her virtues, and also that she thought not to be higher than other women. She had always in her mind the holy Scriptures against the deceptions of the fiend, and especially this that Moses saith: “God assayeth [tries] you if he love you,”² and this that saith Isaiah the prophet: “Ye that have been at the solace and joys of the

¹ 2 Corinthians 8:13-14, “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality.”

² Deuteronomy 13:3, “Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

world and now be withdrawn from them and left them, look after none other thing but to suffer tribulation upon tribulation and know ye by tribulation is had patience, and by patience is had poverty.” It is said, Job, *primo capitulo* [first chapter], when it was showed to him the loss of his patrimony, he answered: “I issued naked from the belly of my mother, and I shall re-enter naked again into the earth, like as God may be pleased so be it done, his name be praised and blessed.”³ He learned us that we should not love the world, for the world shall finish in her covetise.

When one told her that her children were right sick, she said: Who loveth his son or his daughter more than God is not worthy to be with God.

A man that seemed to be her friend sent her word on a time that she had great need to keep well her brain, for because of the ardour that she had in virtues, she seemed to be out of her wit, and she answered: In this world we be reputed as fools for the love of Jesu Christ. And our Lord said to his apostles, “The world hateth you, for ye be not of the world, if ye were of the world (that is to say of the conversation of the world), the world should love you.” Fair Lord God, we mortify ourselves always, and we be reputed as sheep that be brought to death, because that without plaining we mortify our bodies.

In such patience was she unto the death, and suffered humbly the envy of them that were evil. She had in her mind the holy Scriptures, and she held her more to the spiritual understanding than to the histories of the Scripture. She could [understood] perfectly Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French, and read coursably the Scriptures in these four languages.

HER DEATH

Who may recount without weeping the death of this woman? She fell in a malady mortal and saw well that she should die, for all her body became cold, and she felt that her spirit held her in her breast. Then said she without plaining, and without having any charge save to God: Fair sweet Lord, I have coveted the beauty of thy house for to be in thy habitation that is so fair, my soul hath desired to be in thy realm.

And when I demanded her wherefore she spake no more, and she would not answer me, and I asked if she suffered great pain, she said to me in Greek tongue that she was well and in good peace. And anon she left speaking to me, and closed her eyes in saying to God: Lord, like as the hart desireth to come to the fountain, so desireth my soul to come to thee; alas! when shall I come to thee fair Lord God?

And in saying these words, she made a cross upon her mouth. There were bishops, priests, clerks, canons, and monks without number, and at the last, when she heard her spouse, Jesu Christ, which called her saying, “Arise and come to me my sweet love and fair espouse, for the winter is passed,” she answered gladly, “The flowers be showed in our country, and I believe that I shall see the goods in the realm of heaven of my Lord Jesu Christ.”

And thus she rendered her soul and passed out of this world. And anon all the congregation of virgins made no cry in weeping as do the people of the world, but read devoutly

³ Job 1:21.

their psalter not only unto the time that she was buried, but all the day and all the night. And with great pain could not Eustochium, her venerable daughter, the virgin, be withdrawn from her, but she kissed her and embraced her piteously in weeping the death of her mother. And Jesus witnesseth that St. Pauline left not one penny to her daughter, she had so given alms of all her great riches. Many give largely for God's sake, but they give not so much but some abideth.

When she was passed as said is, her lips ne her face were not pale, but was as reverent to look on as she had been yet alive. She was buried in a sepulchre in Bethlehem with right great honour by the bishops, priests, clerks, monks, virgins, and all the poor people of the country, which plained that they had lost their good mother that had nourished them. She lived in Rome holily thirty-three years, and in Bethlehem twenty years, and all her age was fifty three years seven months and twenty days, from the time of Honorius, emperor of Rome. Then let us pray to this holy woman that she pray for us.

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

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

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