

123// THE LIFE OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW THE APOSTLE

St. Bartholomew, the apostle, went into India, which is in the end of the world. And therein he entered into a temple where an idol was which was named Astaroth, and he, as a pilgrim, abode there. In that idol dwelt a fiend that said that he could heal all manner sicknesses, but he lied, for he could not make them whole, but might better them but for a while.

And the temple was full of sick people, and could have no answer of that idol, wherefore they went in to another city whereas another idol was worshipped named Berith, and they demanded him wherefore Astaroth gave to them no answer. And Berith said: Your god is bound with chains of fire that he neither dare draw breath ne speak after that Bartholomew, the apostle of God, entered into the temple.

And they said to him: Who is that Bartholomew?

And the devil said: He is the friend of God Almighty, and he is come into this province for to avoid all the gods of India.

And then they said: Tell us some tokens and signs that we may know him and find him.

Bartholomew is expounded the son of abovehanging the waters, or son of overhanging the sea. He is said of bar, that is as much to say as son, and tholos, which is as much to say as sovereignty, and of moys, that is to say water. And hereof is said Bartholomew, as a son hanging over the waters. That is of God, which enhanceth the minds of doctors on high, for to shed and bespring beneath the waters of doctrine. And it is a name of Syriac and not of Hebrew.

And the first three suspendings that he had, ought to be noted: He was suspended or taken up from the love of the world, and he was suspended, that is to say ententive, in heavenly love, and he was suspended, that is to say wrapped, in the grace and in the aid of God. Not by his merits his life shone, but by the aid of God. Of the second came the deepness of his wisdom, of which deepness of wisdom Denis saith, in his mystical theology: The divine Bartholomew, of whom is much divinity and right little, and that the gospel is broad and great, and also it is short. And after the entent of St. Denis, Bartholomew will show that all things may be affirmed and showed of God under one consideration, and by another consideration may be more properly denied.

And the devil said to them: He hath his hairs black and crisp, his skin white, eyes great, his nostrils even and straipht, his beard long and hoar a little, and of a straight and seemly stature. He is clad in a white coat, and a white mantle, which in every corner hath gems of purple and precious stones therein. And it is sith twenty-six years that his clothes never waxed old ne foul. He prayeth and worshippeth God on his knees a hundred times a day, and a hundred times by night. The angels go with him, which never suffer him to be weary ne to be an hungered, he is always of like semblant, glad and joyous. He seeth all things tofore, he knoweth all things, he speaketh all manner languages, and understandeth them, and he knoweth well what I say to you. And when ye seek him, if he will he may show himself to you, and if him list not, not shall ye find him. And I pray you, when ye find him, that ye pray him that he come not hither, that his angels do not to me as they have done to my fellow.

Then they went and sought him diligently and busily two days, and found him not.

On a day, one that was beset with a devil cried, and said: Apostle of God, Bartholomew, thy prayers burn me.

And the apostle said: Hold thou thy peace and come thence.

And anon he was delivered. And when Polemius, king of that region, heard this thing, which had a daughter lunatic, he sent to the apostle, praying that he would come to him and heal his daughter. And when the apostle was come to him and saw that she was bound with chains, and bit all them that went to her, he commanded to unbind her. And the ministers durst not go to her.

And he said: I hold the devil fast bound that was in her, and therefore be not afeard.

And then anon she was unbound and delivered. And then would have presented to the apostle camels charged with gold and silver and precious stones, but he could not be found in no manner. And on the morrow following, the apostle appeared to the king, alone in his chamber, and said to him: Wherefore soughtest thou me yesterday with gold and silver and precious stones? Those things be necessary to them that covet things worldly, but I desire no things terrien ne carnal.

Then St. Bartholomew began to say many things, and inform the king of our redemption, and among other things how Jesu Christ vanquished the devil by marvellous and convenable puissance, justice, and wisdom. For it was convenable that he that overcame the son made of the earth, that was Adam, while he was yet a virgin, should be overcome of the son of the virgin. He overcame him then mightily, when he threw him puissantly out of his lordship which had thrown out by force our forefather. And thus, as he that overcometh some tyrant, sendeth his fellows tofore for to set up his sign over all, and to cast out tyrants, in like wise Jesu Christ sent his messengers over all for to take away the honour and the worshipping of the devil righteously.

For it is right that he that vanquished man by eating, and held him, that he should be overcome by a man fasting, and hold man no longer. For it is rightful that he which by the art of the devil was despised, that by the art of Jesu Christ he should be vanquished. And like as the falcon taketh the bird, right so took he Jesu Christ in desert because he fasted, and would assay if he had hunger; and if he had hunger, that he might have deceived him by meat, and if he had no hunger, then knew he well without doubt that he was God. But he might not know him, for he had hunger, and consented nothing to him ne to his temptations.

And when [Bartholomew] had preached the sacraments of the faith, he said to the king that, if he would receive baptism, he would show him his god bounden with chains. And the day following, when the bishops sacrificed within the palace of the king, the devils began to cry and say: Cease, ye cursed wretches, to do sacrifice to us, lest ye suffer worse than I that am bounden with chains of fire by the angels of Jesu Christ, whom the Jews crucified and supposed to have brought to death. Which death, that is our queen, he hath imprisoned, and hath bound our prince in chains of fire.

And anon then they set cords on the image for to pull down and overthrow the idol, but they might not. The apostle then commanded the devil that he should issue and go out and break the idol all to pieces, and he issued out and destroyed and brake all the idols of the temple. And anon the apostle made his prayer, saying: O God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob, which hast given to us such power that we enlumine the blind, and cleanse the lepers, I desire and require that this multitude might be healed.

And they all answered, Amen. And forthwith all the sick people were cured and healed. And then the apostle did do hallow and dedicate that temple, and commanded the devil to go in to the desert.

Then the angel of our Lord appeared there, and flew round about the temple, and ensigned and graved with his finger the sign of the cross in four corners of the temple, saying: Our Lord saith this: Like as I have you cured and made you clean of all your sickness, so let this temple be made clean of all filth and ordure. but I shall show him of all filth and ordure. But I shall show him to you that dwelleth therein tofore, to whom the apostle hath commanded to go in to desert. And doubt ye not to see him, but make in your forehead such a sign as I have graven in these stones.

And then he showed to them an Ethiopian more black than thunder, the face sharp, the beard long, his hairs hanging unto his feet, his eyes flaming as hot fire, and cast out sparkles of fire, and casting out of his mouth flames of sulphur, and his hands bound with chains of fire behind his back.

And then the angel said to him: Because that thou hast heard that the apostle hath commanded, and hast broken all the idols of the temple, I shall unbind thee; go in to such a place whereas dwelleth no man, and be thou there unto the day of judgment.

And when he was unbound he went his way with a great braying and howling, and the angel of our Lord mounted up to heaven in the sight of them all. And then was the king baptized, with his wife and his children and all his people, and left his realm and was made disciple of the apostle.

Then all the bishops of the idols assembled them together and went to Astrages the king, and brother to Polemius, and complained of the loss of their gods and of the destruction of their temples, and of the conversion of his brother made by art magic. Astrages was wroth and sent a thousand men armed to take the apostle.

And when he was brought tofore him, the king said to him: Art thou not he that hast perverted my brother?

And the apostle answered to him: I have not perverted him, but I have converted him.

And the king said to him: Like as thou hast made my brother forsake his god and believe in thy God, so shall I make thee forsake thy God, and thou shalt sacrifice to my god.

And the apostle said: I have bound the god that thy brother adored, and showed him bound, and constrained him to break his false image, and if thou mayst do so to my God, thou mayst well draw me to thine idol, and if not, I shall all to-break thy gods, and then believe thou in my God.

And as he said these words, it was told the king that his god Baldach was overthrown and all to-broken, and when the king heard that, he brake and all to-rent his purple in which he was clad, and commanded that the apostle should be beaten with staves, and that he should be flayed quick, and so it was done.

Then the Christians took away the body and buried it honourably. Then the king Astrages and the bishops of the temples were ravished with fiends and died, and the king Polemius was ordained bishop, and accomplished the office of a bishop twenty-two years much louably, and after that rested in peace full of virtues.

THE MANNER OF HIS PASSION

There be divers opinions of the manner of his passion. For the blessed Dorotheus saith that he was crucified, and saith also: Bartholomew preached to men of India, and delivered to them the gospel after Matthew in their proper tongue. He died in Alban, a city of great Armenia, crucified the head downward. St. Theoderus saith that he was flayed, and it is read in many books that he was beheaded only. And this contrariety may be assoiled in this manner, that some say that he was crucified and was taken down ere he died, and for to have greater torment he was flayed and at the last beheaded.

HOW BARTHOLOMEW'S BODY CAME TO ITALY

In the year of our Lord three hundred and thirty-one, Saracens assailed Sicily, and destroyed the isle of Lipari whereas the body of St. Bartholomew lieth, and brake up the sepulchre and threw the bones hither and thither. And it is said that his body came in such wise from India thither into that isle.

When the paynims saw that this body and his sepulchre were greatly honoured for the miracles that befell, they had thereof great despite, and laid them in a tomb of lead, and threw them into the sea, and by the will of God they came into this isle. And when the Saracens had departed and thrown the bones here and there, and were departed thence, the apostle appeared to a monk and said to him: Arise up, and go and gather together my bones that be departed.

And he said to him: By what reason shall I gather together thy bones, and what honour ought we to do to them, when thou sufferest us to be destroyed?

And the apostle said to him: Our Lord hath spared this people here a long while by my merits, but for their sins that they have sinned, which cry vengeance unto heaven, I have not conget pardon ne forgiveness for them.

And then the monk said: How shall I among so many bones find thine?

And the apostle said to him: Thou shalt gather them by night, and them that thou shalt find shining thou shalt take up. And the monk went, and found them all as he had said, and took them up, and brought them with him in to a ship, and sailed with them to Benevento, which is chief city of Apulia, and thus were they transported thither. And it is said now that they be at Rome, howbeit they of Benevento say they have the body.

MIRACLES OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW

The Vessel of Oil

There was a woman that brought a vessel full of oil for to put in the lamp of St. Bartholomew, and how well she inclined the vessel for to pour out the oil, there would none issue out, how well she touched with her finger the oil clear. And then one cried and said: I trow this oil be not agreeable to the apostle that it should be in his lamp, wherefore they put it in another lamp and it issued anon.

The Emperor Frederick

When that the emperor Frederick destroyed Benevento, and he had commanded that all the churches that there should be destroyed, and enforced them to bear away the goods from that city into another place, there was a man which found men all white shining, and him seemed that they spake together of some secret thing, and he marvelled strongly who they were and demanded them, and then one of them answered and said: This is Bartholomew, the apostle, with the other saints which had churches in this city, that speak and ordain together in what manner and by what pain this emperor should be justified, that hath cast them out of their tabernacles. And they have now confirmed among them by firm sentence that he, without tarrying, shall go to the judgment of God for to answer thereupon. And anon the emperor died an evil death.

St. Bartholomew Sets Riddles for the Devil

It is in a book read of the miracles of saints that, a certain master hallowed solemnly the feast of St. Bartholomew, and the devil in the form of a maid appeared to this master that preached. And when he saw her, he bade her to come and dine with him, and when they were set at the table she enforced her much for to draw him to her love.

And then St. Bartholomew came to the gate and prayed that he might come in for the love of St. Bartholomew, and she would not, but sent him bread, and he would none take, but prayed the master by his message that he should say what thing that he supposed was most proper in a man.

And he answered: To laugh.

And the maid said: Nay, it is sin in which a man is conceived, born and liveth in sin.

And St. Bartholomew answered that he had well said, but she had more profoundly answered.

And the pilgrim demanded after at the master, where the place was containng the space of a foot where had God made greatest miracle.

And he said, the sign of the cross, in which God had made many miracles.

And she said: Nay, it is the head of a man, in which the little world is.

And the apostle allowed the sentence of that one and of that other, and then he demanded the third time: How far it was from the sovereign siege or seat in heaven unto the lowest and deepest place of hell.

And the master said that he wist not; and she said: I know it well, for I fell down from that one to that other, and it behoveth that I show it to thee.

And the devil fell down into hell with a great bruit and howling, and then they sent for the pilgrim, and he was vanished and gone and away and they could not find him. And in like wise nigh according to this is read of St. Andrew.

COMMENTS BY THE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose

The blessed Ambrose saith thus in the preface that he made of this apostle in abridging his legend:

Jesu Christ, thou hast vouchsafed to show to thy disciples, preaching, many things of thy divine Trinity in marvellous manner, and thy majesty, among whom thou hast sent the blessed Bartholomew honour by right great prerogative in to a far country. And how be it that he was all far from human conversation, nevertheless he deserved by the increasing of his predications to mark and think in thy sign the beginning of that people.

Ah! by what louings [praise] is the marvellous apostle to be honoured. And when the hearts of the people of his neighbours sufficed not to him to receive his seed, he through-pierced like in fleeing in to the last countries of the lands of India, and entered in to the temple where there was great company of sick people without number, and made the devil so mute that he gat no remembrance to them that adored him, and the maid that was lunatic by torment of the devil he did unbind and delivered her all whole to her father. Oh, how great was this miracle of holiness, when he made the fiend, enemy to the lineage human, to break and destroy his own idol, and to bring it to nought. Oh, how worthy is he to be numbered to the heavenly company to whom the angel appeared, to praise the faith of him by his miracles, and came from the sovereign hall and showed to all the people the devil chained, and right foul, and the sign of the cross impressed in the stone bearing health. And the king and the queen were baptized, with the people of their cities. And at the last the tyrant brother of Polemius, new in faith by the relation of the bishops of the temple, made the blessed apostle, constant in

the faith, to be beaten, flayed, and receive right foul death. And as he denounced the mischief of death, he had and bare with him, in to the glory of heaven, victory of his glorious strife.

Theodore

And the blessed Theodore, abbot and noble doctor, saith of this apostle in this manner among other things:

The blessed apostle Bartholomew preached first in Licaonia, and after in India, and at the last in Alban, a city of great Armenia, and there he was first flayed and afterward his head smitten off, and there he was buried.

And when he was sent of our Lord to preach, as I suppose, he heard how our Lord said to him: Go, my disciple, to preach, void out of this country, and go fight and be capax of [valiant in] perils. I have first accomplished and finished the works of my father, and am first witness, fill thou the vessel that is necessary and follow thy master, love thy lord, give thy blood for his blood, and thy flesh for his flesh, and suffer that which he had suffered, let thine armour be debonairty in thy sweatings, and suffer sweetly among wicked people and be patient among them that perish thee.

And the apostle recoiled not, but as a true servant and obeissant to his master went forth joying, and as a light of God illumining in darkness the work of holy church, like as the blessed St. Austin witnesseth in his book, that, like a tiller of Jesu Christ, he profiteth in spiritual tilling.

St. Peter the apostle taught the nations, but St. Bartholomew did great miracles. Peter was crucified the head downward, and Bartholomew was flayed quick, and had his head smitten off. And they twain increased greatly the church by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

And right as a harp giveth a right sweet sound of many strings, in like wise all the apostles gave sweet melody of the unity divine, and were established by the king of kings. And they departed among them all the world, and the place of Armenia was the place of Bartholomew, that is from Ejulath unto Gabaoth. There thou mayst see him, with the plough of his tongue, ear [plough] the fields unreasonable, sowing in the deepness of the heart the word of the faith, and in planting the vines of our Lord and trees of paradise. And to every each setting medicinally the remedies of the passions, rooting out pernicious thorns, cutting down trees of felony, and setting about hedges of doctrine.

But what reward yielded the tyrants to their curate? They gave to him dishonour for honour, cursing for benediction, pains for gifts, tribulation for rest, and right bitter death for restful life. And sith that he had suffered many torments, he was of them discoriate and flayed quick, and died not, and yet for all that he had them not in despite that slew him, but admonished them by miracles, and taught them by demonstrances, that did him harm. But there was nothing that might refrain their bestial thoughts, ne withdraw them from harm.

What did they afterwards? They enforced them against the holy body, and the malades and sick men refused their mediciner and healer, the city refused him

that enlumined their blindness, governed them that were in peril, and gave life to them that were dead.

And how cast they him out? Certainly, they threw the body into the sea in a chest of lead, and that chest came from the region of Armenia with the chests of four other martyrs, for they did also miracles and were thrown with him into the sea. And the four went before a great space of the sea, and did service to the apostles like as servants in a manner, so far that they came into the parts of Sicily in an isle that is named Lipari, like as it was showed to a bishop of Ostia which then was present. And these right rich treasures came to a right poor woman. And these right precious margarets [pearls] came to one not noble, the bright shining light came to one right heavy.

And then the other four came in to other lands, and left the holy apostle in that isle, and he left the other behind him.

And that one which was named Papian went into a city of Sicily, and he sent another, named Lucian, into the city of Messina. And the other twain were sent into the land of Calabria, St. Gregory into the city of Columna, and Achate into a city named Chale, where yet at this day they shine by their merits.

And then was the body of the apostle received with hymns, louings, and candles honourably, and there was made and builded a fair church in the honour of him.

And the mountain of Vulcan is nigh to that isle, and was to it much grievous because it received fire, the which mountain was withdrawn by the merits of this holy saint from that isle seven miles, without to be seen of any body, and was suspended toward the sea. And yet appeareth it at this day to them that see it, as it were a figure of fire fleeing away.

Now then, therefore, I salute thee, Bartholomew, blessed of blessed saints, which art the shining light of holy church, fisher of fishes reasonable, hurter of the devil which hurted the world by his theft. Enjoy thee, sun of the world, enlumining all earthly things, mouth of God, fiery tongue pronouncing wisdom, fountain springing goodly, full of health, which hallowest the sea by thy goings and ways not removable, which makest the earth red with thy blood, which repairest in heaviness, shining in the middle of the divine company clear in the resplendishour of glory. And enjoy thee in the gladness of joy insatiable. Amen.

And this is that Theodore saith of him.

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

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

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