

169// HERE FOLLOWETH OF ST. CECILIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR

St. Cecilia, the holy virgin, was come of the noble lineage of the Romans, and from the time that she lay in her cradle she was fostered and nourished in the faith of Christ, and always bare in her breast the gospel hid, and never ceased day ne night from holy prayers, but recommended to God always her virginity.

ST. CECILIA'S WEDDING NIGHT

And when this blessed virgin should be espoused to a young man named Valerian, and the day of the wedding was come, she was clad in royal clothes of gold, but under she ware the hair [i.e., hairshirt]. And she hearing the organs making melody, she sang in her heart, only to God, saying: O Lord, I beseech thee that mine heart and body may be undefouled so that I be not confounded. And every second and third day she fasted, commending herself unto our Lord whom she dreaded.

The night came that she should go to bed with her husband as the custom is, and when they were both in their chamber alone, she said to him in this manner: O, my best beloved and sweet husband, I have a counsel to tell thee, if so be that thou wilt keep it secret and swear that ye shall bewray it to no man.

To whom Valerian said that he would gladly promise and swear never to bewray it, and then she said to him: I have an angel that loveth me, which ever keepeth my body whether I sleep or wake, and if he may find that ye touch my body by villainy, or foul and polluted love, certainly he shall anon slay you, and so should ye lose the flower of your youth. And if so be that thou love me in holy love and cleanness, he shall love thee as he loveth me and shall show to thee his grace.

Then Valerian, corrected by the will of God, having dread, said to her: If thou wilt that I believe that thou sayest to me, show to me that angel that thou speakest of, and if I find veritable that he be the angel of God, I shall do that thou sayest, and if so be that thou love another man than me, I shall slay both him and thee with my sword.

Cecilia answered to him: If thou wilt believe and baptize thee, thou shalt well now see him. Go then forth to Via Appia, which is three miles out of this town, and there thou shalt find

Cecilia is as much to say as the lily of heaven, or a way to blind men. Or she is said of celo and lie, or else cecilia, as lacking blindness. Or she is said of celo, that is heaven, and legs, that is people. She was a heavenly lily by cleanness of virginity, a way to blind men by information of example, heaven by devout contemplation, lia by busy operation, lacking blindness by shining of wisdom, and heaven of the people. For the people beheld in her as in following the spiritual heaven, the sun, the moon, and the stars, that is to say, shining of wisdom, magnanimity of faith, and diversity of virtues. Or she is said a lily, for she had the whiteness of cleanness, a good conscience, and odour of good fame. Or she is said heaven, for Isidore saith that the philosophers say that heaven is movable, round, and burning. In like wise was she moving by busy operation, round by perseverance, and burning by fiery charity.

Pope Urban with poor folks, and tell him these words that I have said, and when he hath purged you from sin by baptism, then when ye come again ye shall see the angel.

THE CONVERSION OF CECILIA'S HUSBAND VALERIAN

And forth went Valerian and found this holy man Urban louting [lurking] among the burials; to whom he reported the words that Cecilia had said, and St. Urban for joy gan hold up his hands and let the tears fall out of his eyes, and said: O Almighty God Jesu Christ, sower of chaste counsel and keeper of us all, receive the fruit of the seed that thou hast sown in Cecilia, for, like a busy bee she serveth thee; for the spouse whom she hath taken which was like a wood lion, she hath sent hither like as a meek lamb.

And with that word appeared suddenly an old man clad in white clothes, holding a book written with letters of gold, whom Valerian seeing, for fear fell down to the ground as he had been dead. Whom the old man raised and took up, and read in this wise. One God, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, above all, and in us all, everywhere.

And when this old man had read this, he said: Believest thou this or doubttest thou it? Say yea or nay.

Then Valerian cried saying: There is nothing truer under heaven.

Then vanished this old man away. Then Valerian received baptism of St. Urban and returned home to St. Cecilia, whom he found within her chamber speaking with an angel. And this angel had two crowns of roses and lilies which he held in his hands, of which he gave one to Cecilia, and that other to Valerian, saying: Keep ye these crowns with an undefouled and clean body, for I have brought them to you from Paradise, and they shall never fade, ne wither, ne lose their savour, ne they may not be seen but of them to whom chastity pleaseth. And thou Valerian because thou hast used profitable counsel, demand what thou wilt.

THE CONVERSION OF VALERIAN'S BROTHER TYBURIUS

To whom Valerian said: There is nothing in this world to me liefer than my brother, whom I would fain that he might know this very truth with me.

To whom the angel said: Thy petition pleaseth our Lord, and ye both shall come to him by the palm of martyrdom.

And anon Tyburtius, his brother, came and entered into this chamber, and anon he felt the sweet odour of the roses and lilies, and marvelled from whence it came. Then Valerian said: We have crowns which thine eyes may not see, and like as by my prayers thou hast felt the odour of them, so if thou wilt believe thou shalt see the crowns of roses and lilies that we have.

Then Cecilia and Valerian began to preach to Tyburtius of the joy of heaven and of the foul creance of paynims, the abuse of idols, and of the pains of hell which the damned suffer, and also they preached to him of the incarnation of our Lord, and of his passion, and did so much that

Tyburtius was converted and baptized of St. Urban. And from then forthon he had so much grace of God that every day he saw angels, and all that ever he required of our Lord he obtained.

VALERIAN AND TYBERTIUS ARE MARTYRED

After, Almachius, provost of Rome, which put to death many Christian men, heard say that Tyburtius and Valerian buried Christian men that were martyred, and gave all their goods to poor people. He called them tofore him, and after long disputation he commanded that they should go to the statue or image of Jupiter for to do sacrifice, or else they should be beheaded.

And as they were led, they so preached the faith of our Lord to one called Maximus that they converted him to the Christian faith, and they promised to him that if he had very repentance, and firm creance that he should see the glory of heaven which their souls should receive at the hour of their passions, and that he himself should have the same if he would believe. Then Maximus gat leave of the tormentors for to have them home to his house, and the said Maximus, with all his household and all the tormentors, were turned to the faith.

Then came St. Cecilia thither with priests, and baptized them, and afterwards, when the morning came, St. Cecilia said to them: Now, ye knights of Christ, cast away from you the works of darkness and clothe you with the arms of light.

And then they were led four miles out of the town, and brought tofore the image of Jupiter, but in no wise they would do sacrifice ne incense to the idol, but humbly with great devotion kneeled down and there were beheaded, and St. Cecilia took their bodies and buried them. Then Maximus, that saw this thing, said that he saw in the hour of their passion angels clear shining and their souls ascend into heaven, which the angels bare up, wherefore many were converted to the Christian faith.

And when Almachius heard that Maximus was christened, he did do beat him with plummets of lead so long till he gave up his spirit and died, whose body St. Cecilia buried by Valerian and Tyburtius.

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. CECILIA

And after, Almachius commanded that Cecilia should be brought into his presence for to do sacrifice to Jupiter, and she so preached to them that came for her that she converted them to the faith, which wept sore that so fair a maid and so noble should be put to death. Then she said to them: O ye good young men, it is nothing to lose the youth, but to change it, that is, to give clay, and take therefor gold, to give a foul habitation, and to take a precious, to give a little corner, and to take a right great place. God rewardeth for one simple, a hundredfold. Believe ye this that I have said?

And they said: We believe Christ to be very God which hath such a servant.

Then St. Urban was called, and four hundred and more were baptized.

Then Almachius, calling tofore him St. Cecilia, said to her: Of what condition art thou?

And she said that she was of a noble kindred. To whom Almachius said: I demand thee of what religion art thou?

Then Cecilia said: Then beganst thou thy demand foolishly, that wouldst have two answers in one demand.

To whom Almachius said: From whence cometh thy rude answer?

And she said: Of good conscience and faith not feigned.

To whom Almachius said: Knowest thou not of what power I am?

And she said: Thy power is little to dread, for it is like a bladder full of wind, which with the pricking of a needle is anon gone away and come to nought.

To whom Almachius said: In wrong beganst thou, and in wrong thou perseverest; knowest thou not how our princes have given me power to give life and to slay?

And she said: Now shall I prove thee a liar against the very truth. Thou mayst well take the life from them that live, but to them that be dead, thou mayst give no life, therefore thou art a minister not of life, but of death.

To whom Almachius said: Now lay apart thy madness and do sacrifice to the gods.

To whom Cecilia said: I wot never where thou hast lost thy sight, for them that thou sayest be gods we see them stones, put thine hand, and by touching thou shalt learn that which thou mayst not see with thine eyes.

Then Almachius was wroth, and commanded her to be led into her house, and there to be burnt in a burning bain [bath], which her seemed a place cold and well tempered. Then Almachius, hearing that, commanded that she should be beheaded in the same bath. Then the tormentor smote at her three strokes, and could not smite off her head, and the fourth stroke he might not by the law smite, and so left her there lying half alive and half dead, and she lived three days after in that manner, and gave all that she had to poor people, and continually preached the faith all that while; and all them that she converted she sent to Urban for to be baptized, and said: I have asked respite three days, that I might commend to you these souls, and that ye should hallow of mine house a church.

And then at the end of three days she slept in our Lord, and St. Urban with his deacons buried her body among the bishops, and hallowed her house into a church, in which unto this day is said the service unto our Lord. She suffered her passion about the year of our Lord two hundred and twenty three, in the time of Alexander the emperor, and it is read in another place that she suffered in the time of Marcus Aurelius, which reigned about the year of our Lord one

hundred and seventy. Then let us devoutly pray unto our Lord that by the merits of this holy virgin and martyr, St. Cecilia, we may come to his everlasting bliss in heaven. Amen.

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

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

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