

85// HERE FOLLOW THE LIVES OF SAINTS GERVASE AND PROTHASE

St. Gervase and St. Prothase were brethren of one burden of father and mother. Their father was St. Vital, and their mother the blessed Valery, which gave all their goods unto the poor for the love of God, and dwelled with St. Nazarine which made a right fair oratory in the city of Hebredune.

THE ATTACK ON CELSUS AND NAZARINE

And a child named Celsus bare to him the stones, and if Nazarine had then the child Celsus or Anot, I wot never, for the history of Nazarine reheareth that Celsus was offered to him long after. And when they were offered and led to Nero the emperor, this child Celsus followed them much sore weeping, and one of the knights buffeted and smote him, and Nazarine then blamed him. Then the knights in their great anger beat and defouled Nazarine under their feet, and after, they put this Celsus with the other in prison, and after that they threw him into the sea, and led Gervase and Prothase to Milan. And Nazarine was delivered by miracle, and came to Milan.

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. GERVASE AND ST. PROTHASIVS

In that time there came thither the earl Astasius which went in battle against them of Marcomannos which came against him. Then the keepers of the idols came to him and said that their gods would give none answer but if Gervase and Prothase should first offer to them and do sacrifice. Then anon were they brought and led forth for to sacrifice; and then Gervase said that all the idols were deaf and dumb, and that he should require help of Almighty God. Then the earl was wroth [angry] and commanded him to be beaten with scourges of lead so long till he gave up his spirit, and so suffered death.

Gervase is said of gerar, which is as much to say as a vessel, or holy, or of gena, that is to say strange, and of syor, that is little, for he was holy by merit of his life; a vessel for to receive virtues in himself; strange by despising of the world, and he was little by despising of himself. Prothase is said of prothos, which is as much to say as first, and of syos, that is, divine. Or Prothase may be said of procul, that is, far, and of stasis, that is, set, that is to say he was first by dignity, he was divine by dilection, and far set from worldly affection. And St. Ambrose found their passion written in a book found in the sepulchre at their head.

Then he commanded Prothase to be brought to him, to whom he said: Thou cursed wretch, now think to save thy life and die not an evil death with thy brother.

To whom Prothase said: Who is a wretch? I that dread thee not, or thou that darest me?

To whom Astacius said: How should I dread thee, wretch?

To whom Prothase said: In that thou darest me, that thou shouldst be hurt by me if I make not sacrifice to thy gods; if thou darest not to be hurt of me thou wouldst never compel me to the sacrifice of idols.

Then the provost commanded him to be hanged on a gibbet. Then said Prothase to him: I am not angry with thee, for I see thine eyes of thine heart blinded, and I have great pity of thee because thou seest not what thou doest, but do that thou hast begun, that this day the benignity of our Saviour may bring me to my brother.

Then the earl commanded him that his head should be smitten off, and thus he suffered martyrdom for our Lord. Philip, a servant of Jesu Christ, with his son, took the bodies and buried them secretly in his house in a tomb of stone, and laid a book at their heads containing their nativity, their life, and their end. And they suffered death under Nero about the year of our Lord fifty-six.

THE DISCOVERY OF THEIR BODIES BY ST. AMBROSE

These bodies were hid there many years, but in the time of St. Ambrose they were found in this manner.

St. Ambrose was in prayer in the church of St. Felix and St. Nabor in such wise that he neither slept ne woke wholly. There appeared to him two young men clad in white vestments with one coat and mantel, and hosed, and they appeared praying with him with their hands holden up. Then St. Ambrose prayed that if it were illusion that it would appear no more, and if it were truth that it should be showed him. Then when the cock crew, the younglings appeared to him, adoring with him in semblable [similar] manner, and at the third time they appeared the third night when he had fasted and slept not.

And with them appeared St. Peter the apostle, after that he had seen him in painture. Then the younglings said nothing, but the apostle spake: These be they that desire none earthly thing, but have followed mine admonishments, and these be they of whom thou shalt find the bodies in such a place, and there thou shalt find an arch of stones covered with twelve feet of earth, and thou shalt find at their heads a little book, wherein is contained their birth and their end.

Then St. Ambrose called all his neighbours and began first to dig the earth, and found like as the apostle had said to him, and they had lain in that place well a three hundred years, and they were as fresh as they had been laid there that same hour; and a right sweet savour issued out of their tomb; and incontinent [immediately] a blind man touched the bier, and anon he had his sight again, and many other sick people were healed by the merits of them, and in their solemnity peace was reformed between the Lombards and the emperor of Rome.

And then St. Gregory, the pope, established for the introit of the mass of them: *Loquitur dominus pacem* ["The Lord speaks peace"], and this office appertained in part to the saints, and in part to the great adventures that were in that time.

COMMENTS ON SAINTS GERVASE AND PROTATHIUS BY THE FATHERS

And St. Austin rehearseth in the book of *The City of God* that he was present, and the emperor and much great company, when that a blind man received his sight at Milan at the bodies of Gervase and Prothase, but it is not known whether it was the same blind man or no.

Also he telleth in the same book that there was a young man in a town named Victoriana rode his horse into a river that lay thereby, and as soon as he was therein the devil strangled him and threw him in the water all dead, and whiles they sang evensong in a church of St. Gervase and Prothase, which was thereby, he was so smitten with the voices of them that sang that he started up alive, and in a great haste he entered into the church in a great dread, and held fast by the altar like as he had been bounden thereto. Then the devil menaced him, and said if he would not come thence he would break all his members, and a little while after, by the merits of the holy martyrs he was plainly healed.

And St. Ambrose saith in his preface: These be they that by the heavenly banner took the arms of the apostles and vanquished and have the victory, and be assoiled from the snares of the world, they destroyed the fellowship of the fiend and followed freely without any empesment [hindrance] our Lord Jesu Christ, like unto a debonair [humble, mild] fraternity that so learned the holy words that no filth was meddled among them. O how glorious a strife was this that causeth them both to be crowned in heaven like as they issued out of one belly.

The [iconography of these saints](#) 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, rstracke@aug.edu