

The *Golden Legend or Lives Of The Saints*
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110// HERE FOLLOWETH THE FEAST OF ST. PETER AD VINCULA, AT LAMMAS [AUGUST 1]

The feast of St. Peter the apostle that is called *ad Vincula* was established for four causes. That is to wit, in remembrance of the deliverance of St. Peter, and in mind of deliverance of Alexander, for to destroy the customs of the paynims [pagans], and for to get absolution of spiritual bonds.

THE DELIVERANCE OF ST. PETER

And the first cause which is in remembrance of St. Peter. For as it is said in the *History Scholastic* that Herod Agrippa went to Rome, and was right familiar with Gaius, nephew of Tiberius emperor. And on a day as Herod was in a chariot brought with Gaius, he lifted up his hands unto heaven and said: I would gladly see the death of this old fellow Peter, and the Lord of all the world.

And the chariot man heard this word said of Herod, and anon told it to Tiberius. Wherefore Tiberius set Herod in prison. And as he was there he beheld on a day by him a tree, and saw upon the branches of this tree an owl which sat thereon, and another prisoner which was with him, that understood well divinations. said to him: Thou shalt be anon delivered, and shalt be enhanced to be a king, in such wise that thy friends shall have envy at thee, and thou die in that prosperity. And know thou for truth, that when thou shalt see the owl over thee, at the end of five days after thou shalt die for certain.

And anon after Tiberius died, and Gaius was emperor. Which delivered Herod out of prison and enhanced him gloriously, and sent him as king into Judea, and anon as he came he sent his puissance, and set hand to for to put some of the church to affliction, and did do slay James, brother of St. John the Evangelist, with a sword, before the day of Easter. And because it was a thing agreeable, and pleased the Jews, he took Peter on Easter-day, and enclosed him fast in prison, and would after Easter bring him forth and show him to the people and slay him, but the angel came marvellously, and unbound him and loosed his chains, and sent him forth all quit to the service of preaching the Word of God.

And the felony of this king suffered not to abide any dilation of vengeance, for the next day following, he made to come the keepers for to begin to torment them with divers pains for the fleeing of Peter, but he was let [hindered] to do that, that the deliverance grieved them not. For he went hastily to Cæsarea and there was smitten of an angel and died. Thus rehearseth Josephus in the Book of Antiquity. For when he came into Cæsarea, all the men and women of that province came to him, and when the day came that he should go in judgment and take possession of the country, he went and clad him with a vestment of tissue marvellously shining of gold and silver, and when the sun smote and shone on it, it was more shining than the sun. For it was so bright that no man might behold it, and the brightness was like red metal, and gave fear

and dread to them that looked thereon, and therefore the pride of him was so great that, he better seemed a man made by craft than by nature human.

And then the people began to cry and say: We have seen thee till now like a man, but now we confess that thou art above nature human.

And thus as he was flattered with honours, and refused not divine worship, he being there set, he saw above his head an owl sitting, which was messenger of his hasty death. And when he had apperceived the owl, and beheld the people that were there assembled and come at his commandment, he said to them: Certainly, I that am your lord shall die within five days.

For he knew it well, because the diviner had told him that he should die within fire days that he had seen the owl sitting above him. And incontinent [straightaway], after this thing thus accomplished, he was smitten suddenly in such wise that worms ate his bowels, and on the fifth day he died. And this saith Josephus.

And because then in remembrance of the deliverance of St. Peter prince of the apostles from the cruel vengeance of the cruel tyrant, which as soon as he was enhanced to be king went to pursue and destroy the church, therefore the church halloweth the feast of St. Peter *ad vincula*. And the epistle is sung in the mass in which this deliverance is witnessed here to be done.

THE DELIVERANCE OF ALEXANDER

The second cause of the establishing of this feast was because Alexander the pope, which was the sixth after Peter, and Hermes, provost of Rome, which was converted to the faith by the same Alexander, were holden in divers places in the prison of Quirinus the judge. Which judge said to Hermes the provost: I marvel of thee that art so wise a man, that thou wilt leave the great worldly honours that thou hast, and the great riches that thou receivest of thy provostry, and wilt thou leave all these things for dreaming of another life.

To whom Hermes said: Tofore this time I despised and scorned, and weened there had been none other life than this.

Quirinus answered: Make proof to me that there is another life, and anon I shall apply me to thy faith.

To whom Hermes said: Alexander, whom thou holdest in thy prison, shall inform thee better than I.

Then Quirinus cursed Alexander, and said to him: I will that thou shalt make proof of this thing to me, and thou sendest me to Alexander, whom I hold bounden in chains for his evil deeds. Truly I shall double the prison upon thee and Alexander, and I shall set watch upon you. And if I find thee with him or him with thee, I shall verily give faith to thine and his words.

And then he doubled their keepers and showed this to Alexander, and then Alexander prayed to God, and an angel came to him and brought him into the prison to Hermes. And when

Quirinus came to the prison he found them both together, whereof he was much amarvelled. And then Hermes recounted to Quirinus how Alexander had healed his son and raised him from death. And Quirinus then said to Alexander: I have a daughter named Balbina which is sick of the gout, if thou mayst heal her, I promise thee that I shall receive thy faith if thou mayst get for her health.

To whom Alexander said: Go anon, and bring her to me into my prison.

And Quirinus said to him: How may I find thee in thy prison and art here?

And Alexander said: Go thy way anon, for he that brought me hither shall soon bring me thither.

And Quirinus went then and fetched his daughter, and brought her into the prison where Alexander was and found him there, and then kneeled down to his feet. And his daughter began to kiss the chains with which St. Alexander was bounden, hoping thereby to receive her health. And St. Alexander said to her: Daughter, kiss not my chains, but seek the chains of St. Peter and kiss them with devotion, and thou shalt receive thy health.

And anon, Quirinus did do seek the chains of Peter and they were found. And Alexander did the daughter do kiss them, and anon as she had kissed them she received her health and was all whole. Then Quirinus demanded pardon and forgiveness, and delivered Alexander out of prison, and received the holy baptism, he and all his meinly [household] and many others.

Then Alexander established this feast to be hallowed alway the first day of August, and did do make a church in the honour of St. Peter, whereas he set the chains and named it St. Peter *ad vincula*. And to that church come much people at that solemnity, and the people kiss there the bonds and chains of St. Peter.

FOR TO DESTROY THE CUSTOMS OF THE PAYNIMS

The third cause of this establishment, after Bede, is this: Antony and Octavius were so conjoined together by affinity, that they departed between them two the empire of the world. Octavius had in the occident Italy, France, and Spain, and Antony had in the east, Asia, Pontus, and Africa. Antony was wild, jolly, and ribald, and had the sister of Octavius to his wife, and left her, and took Cleopatra, which was Queen of Egypt; and for this cause Octavius had him in great despite, and went with force of arms against Antony in Asia, and overcame him in all things.

Then Antony and Cleopatra fled as vanquished, and slew themselves by great sorrow, and Octavius destroyed entirely the realm of Egypt, and made it to be under the Romans. And from thence he went in all the haste he might into Alexandria, and despoiled it of all riches and brought them to Rome, and increased so the common profit of Rome that there was given for one penny that which tofore was sold for four. And because the battles of the people had wasted and destroyed the city of Rome, he renewed it, saying: I found it covered with tiles, and I shall leave it now covered with marble.

And for these causes he was made emperor, and the first that ever was called Augustus. And of him been all other that come after him called Augustus. Like as after his uncle Julius Cæsar they be called Cæsarians. Also this month of August which tofore was called ~~S~~xtilis, the people entitled it to his name and called it Augustus, in the honour and remembrance of the victory of the emperor that he had the first day of this month. In so much that all the Romans made that day great solemnity unto the time of Theodosius the emperor, which began to reign the year of our Lord four hundred and twenty-six.

Then Eudosia, daughter of the said Theodosius the emperor, and wife of Valens, went by a vow to Jerusalem, and there a Jew gave to her for great love a great gift. And they were the bonds, that is to wit the two chains, with which St. Peter under Herod was bounden with. Whereof she was much joyous.

And when she returned to Rome she saw that the Romans hallowed the first day of August in the honour of an emperor paynim which was dead. Then was she much sorrowful because they did so much honour to a man damned, and thought that they might not lightly be withdrawn from this custom. But if she might so much do, she would not leave it thus, but that it should be made in the honour of St. Peter, and that all the people should name that day the day of St. Peter *ad vincula*.

And hereof she had collation [conference] with St. Pelagius the pope, and brought them with fair words to that, that the remembrance of the prince of paynims was forgotten, and the memory of the prince of the apostles was hallowed. And it pleased right well to all the people. Then she brought forth the chains which she had brought from Jerusalem, and showed them to all the people.

And the pope brought forth the chain with which he had been bound under Nero, and as soon as that chain touched that other, all three by miracle were but one, like as they had been never but one.

Then the pope and the queen established that the foolish religion of the people, making solemnity of a paynim, were changed into better, and was made of St. Peter, prince of the apostles. And the pope and the queen set the chains in the church of St. Peter *ad vincula*. And were given of the queen to the said church right great gifts and right fair privileges, and it was established that day to be hallowed over all. And this is that Bede saith, and Sigbert also saith the same of this thing.

Miracles of St. Peter's Chains

And of what great virtue this chain is, it appeareth well in the year of our Lord four hundred and fortyfour: There was an earl which was nigh to the emperor Otto, that was so cruelly vexed and tormented with the devil tofore all the people that, with his own teeth he bit and tare himself. And by the commandment of the emperor he was led to pope John, for to put the chain about his neck, and there was another put about the neck of this wood [mad] man and demoniac. And it did him none allegement [relief] because it had no virtue. And at last the very chain of St. Peter was

brought and put about the neck of the said man demoniac. But it was of such virtue that the devil might not bear it, but departed and went out crying, tofore them all.

Then Theodoric, bishop of Metz, took that chain, and said he would not depart from it in no manner but if his hand were cut off, and for this cause was great discord between the pope and the bishop and the other clerks. And at the last the emperor appeased the noise and gat of the pope that he had a link of the chain. And he kept it much worthily in great devotion.

Miletus also recounteth in his chronicle, and it is written in the *History Tripartite*, that in that time there was a great horrible dragon which appeared at Epirus. And the bishop Donatus spit in his mouth and killed him forthwith. But that bishop made tofore the sign of the cross with his fingers upon the dragon, for he was so great that there behoved seven couple oxen to draw him thence out of the town in to a place where he was burnt, for because the stench of him should not corrupt the air.

Yet saith the same Miletus, and also it is said in the *History Tripartite*, that the devil appeared in a town named Crete in the semblance of Moses, and this Crete is nigh to a mountain which is nigh to the sea, and assembled a great multitude of Jews of all places and brought them to the top and highest of all the mountain, and promised them to lead them and to go dry foot with them upon the sea in to the land of promise. And there he assembled people without number.

And some believe that the devil had despite of the Jew that had given this chain to the queen by which the feast of Octavius ceased to be made. And when the devil saw that he had there of the Jews without number, about that great mountain, he made many fall down from the top to the ground beneath, and made of them without number to be drowned in the sea; and thus the devil avenged him on them.

And many of them that escaped became Christian. For when they would have gone up on the mountain with the others, they might not go up so sharp rocks, in such wise that they that went up were all tocut with the stones, and the others were drowned in the sea, and were all dead. And when the others would have done the same, and tarried because they wist not what was happed of the others, certain fishers going by them told what was fallen of the others, and thus they that might escape returned, and went not after the others. And all these things be contained in the said History.

FOR TO GET ABSOLUTION OF SPIRITUAL BONDS

The fourth cause of the institution of this feast may be assigned here in this wise. For our Lord delivered St. Peter out of his chains by miracle, and gave him power to bind and to unbind. For we be holden and bounden unto the bond of sin and have need to be assoiled. Therefore we worship the solemnity of the chains aforesaid. For as he deserved to be unbound of the bonds of his chains, so received he power of our Lord Jesu Christ to assoil us.

And this last reason may be lightly apperceived, for thou seest that the epistle accordeth the absolution and loosing of the chains made to the apostle. And the gospel recordeth the power

that was given to him for to assoil. And the orison of the death requireth that absolution be made to us, and this, that sometime he giveth absolution, and assoileth the damned otherwhile, by the power of the keys which he received; it appeareth in a miracle of the blessed Virgin Mary:

On a time there was a monk, a scholar, which was in the city of Cologne in the monastery of St. Peter, which monk was sinful; and when this monk was surprised with sudden death, the devils accused him and cried on him that he had done all manner sins.

That one said: I am Covetise, which so oft thou hast coveted against the commandment of God.

And another said: I am Vain Glory, of which thou hast enjoyed thee, in making a vaunt among men.

And another said: I am thy Leasing [Lying], in which thou oft sinnedst in lying, and other in like wise.

And contrary to them, some good works that he had done excused him, saying: I am Obedience, which thou didst to thine elders and sovereigns.

Another said: I am the Song of Psalms, which thou hast sung to God much ardently.

And St. Peter, to whom he was a monk, went to God for to pray for him. And our Lord answered to him: Hath not the prophet said, by my inspiration, "*Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo?*" Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, or who shall rest in thy holy mountain? He that shall be without spot of sin." How may this man then be saved which is not entered without spot, ne hath done no righteousness?

And yet Peter prayed for him with the blessed Virgin, mother of God. Then our Lord gave upon him this sentence: that the soul should return again to the body and that he should do penance. And then St. Peter, with the key that he held in his hand, feared the devils and made them to flee, and after delivered the soul to a monk of the same monastery, and commanded him that he should bring it to the body.

And he bare it to him and required of him for his reward that he had brought it again, that he should say every day for him the psalm *Miserere mei deus* ["Have mercy on me, O Lord"], and that he should oft sweep his sepulture [tomb] and keep it clean. And thus he revived from the death and came again to the world, and did his penance, and recounted to all the people this that had happed to him.

Then let us pray this glorious apostle St. Peter to be our advocate to our Lord Jesu Christ, that we may by the power of the keys given to him have very absolution of our sins, that after the accomplishment of this short and transitory life we may come to everlasting life in heaven.
Amen.

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

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

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