

tyrs. There stands in Rome an ancient church, which is dedicated to God in her memory. In the acts of St. Chrysogonus we are told, that she was of an illustrious descent at Rome, had St. Chrysogonus for her tutor and director in the faith, and when that holy martyr was apprehended at Aquileia in the persecution of Dioclesian, went thither to comfort him in his chains. It is further related, that after suffering exquisite tortures, she was sentenced by the prefect of Illyricum to be burnt alive in 304. Her body was removed to Rome, and laid in the church which still bears her name. In this church the popes anciently said their second mass on Christmas-night, or rather that of the morning, whence a commemoration of her is made in the second mass. The relics of St. Anastasia were translated to Constantinople in the time of the Emperor Leo, and deposited first in the church of Anastasia or the Resurrection, afterwards in the patriarchal church of St. Sophia: but were lost when that city was taken by the Turks. The Greek Menologies and the Muscovite Calendars commemorate our saint on the 22nd of December, the Roman Missal on the 25th. See on her also Nicephorus, Suidas, and Joſ. Assemani ad 22 Dec. p. 489

Another St. ANASTASIA, called the Elder, was crowned with martyrdom in the persecution of Valerian; others think of Nero. See the Acts of St. Chrysogonus, though of small authority; her Acts in Metaphrastes are of no better stamp.

SAINT EUGENIA, V. M.

SHE suffered at Rome under Valerian about the year 257, and is mentioned by St. Avitus, though we have no authentic acts of her sufferings, those recited by Metaphrastes and Surius deserving no notice. She is also mentioned in the lives of SS. Protus and Hyacinthus, MM. on the 11th of September, p. 116.

DECEMBER XXVI.

SAINT STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR.

See Acts vi. vii. and Tillemont, t. 2, p. 1, Cave. &c.

THAT St. Stephen was a Jew is unquestionable, himself owning that relation in his apology to the people. But whether he

(1) S. Avitus de Virgin. l. 6, p. 1312.

was of Hebrew extraction, and descended of the stock of Abraham, or whether he was of foreign parents incorporated and brought into that nation by the gate of proselytism is uncertain. The name Stephen, which signifies a crown, is evidently Greek; but the priest Lucian, in the history of the discovery of his relics, and Basil of Seleucia(1) inform us, that the name Cheliel, which in modern Hebrew signifies a crown, was engraved on his tomb at Caphragamala* It is generally allowed that he was one of the seventy-two disciples of our Lord; for immediately after the descent of the Holy Ghost we find him perfectly instructed in the law of the gospel, endowed with extraordinary measures, both of the interior and exterior gifts of that divine spirit which was but lately shed upon the Church, and incomparably furnished with miraculous powers. The Church of Christ then increased daily, and was illustrious for the spirit and practice of all virtues, but especially for charity. The faithful lived and loved one another as brethren, and were of one heart and one soul. Love and charity were the common soul that animated the whole body of believers.

The rich sold their estates to relieve the necessities of the poor, and deposited the money in one common treasury, the care whereof was committed to the apostles, to see the distribution made as every body's necessity required. Heaven alone is free from all occasions of offence, and the number of converts being very great, the Greeks (that is, the Christians of foreign countries, who were born and brought up in countries which spoke chiefly Greek, or at least were Gentiles by descent, though proselytes to the Jewish religion before they came over to the faith of Christ) murmured against the Hebrews, complaining that their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. The apostles, to provide a speedy remedy, assembled the faithful, and observed to them, that they could not relinquish the duties of preaching, and other spiritual functions of the ministry to attend to the care of tables; and recommended to them the choice of seven men of an unblemished character,

(1) Basil Seleuc. Or. de S. Stephano.

* This name is not properly Hebrew, but Syriac, in which language *Chelil* signifies a crown, and *Chelilael* the Crown of God. See Jos. Assemani, p. 509.

full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, who might superintend that affair, that so themselves might be freed from distractions and incumbrances, the more freely to devote themselves without interruption to prayer and preaching the gospel. This proposal was perfectly agreeable to the whole assembly, who immediately pitched on Stephen, *a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost*; and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch. All these names are Greek; whence some think they were chosen among the Greeks, in order to appease the murmurs that had been raised. But it frequently happened that Hebrews changed their names into Greek words of a like import, when they conversed with Greeks and Romans, to whom several names in the oriental languages sounded harsh, and were difficult to pronounce. Stephen is named the first of the deacons, as Peter is of the apostles, says St. Austin: (1) Hence he is styled by Lucian, (2) *archideacon*. These seven were presented to the apostles, who praying, imposed hands upon them; by which rite they received the Holy Ghost, to qualify them to become ministers of God's holy mysteries.* Their ordination was made by virtue of a commission, either general or particular, given by Christ to his apostles for the establishment of inferior ministers or Levites for the service of the altar. Whence St. Paul requires

(1) S. Aug. Serm. 316, ol. 94, de div.

(2) Lucian. De Inventione et Translat. S. Stephani c. 8, 9, &c.

* Some have imagined that the institution of deacons was at first only intended for the dispensation of temporals, though that of the sacred mysteries was soon after committed to them. But the general opinion of the church, fathers, and commentators, is, that the very institution regarded the ministry of the altar in the first place, and is clear from the prayer and imposition of hands used in their institution. The holy eucharist was then received after supper, 1 Cor. xi. 18. Acts xx. 7. See Baron. (ad ah. 34.) Pearson, (Annal. Pauli, pp. 53, 54.) Bingham, (Origines Eccles. b. 2, c. 23, p. 262, t. 1.) In the primitive ages we find that the deacons not only had care of the utensils and sacred vessels of the altar, and of the treasury, and the oblations of the faithful, but also read the gospel in some churches, (St. Jerom, ep. 57, ad Sabin. and Constit. Apost. l. 2, c. 57. S. Cypr. ep. 34, al. 39,) and often administered the holy eucharist to the people, especially the cup, (S. Cypr. de Lapsis, p. 132. S. Justin, M. sp. 1, ol. 2, p. 97,) though never in the presence of a priest, unless by his order. (Conc. Carthag. 4, can. 88.) They were allowed solemnly to baptize, by the bishop's leave and authority, never without it, (Tert. de Bapt. c. 17. S. Jerom, Dial. contra Lucifer. c. 4,) &c.

almost the same conditions in deacons as in bishops and priests,(1) and speaks of their sacred ministry. St. Ignatius, the disciple of the apostles, orders the faithful "to reverence deacons as the command of God,"(2) and calls them, "ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ." And again, "Ministers not of meat and drink, but of the Church of God"(3)

St. Stephen had the primacy and precedence among the deacons newly elected by the apostles, as St. Chrysostom observes, and being filled with the Holy Ghost, preached and pleaded the cause of Christianity with undaunted courage, confirming his doctrine by many public and unquestionable miracles. The number of believers were multiplied in Jerusalem, and a great multitude even of the priests obeyed the faith. The distinguished zeal and success of our holy deacon stirred up the malice and envy of the enemies of the gospel, who bent their whole force, and all their malice against him. The conspiracy was formed by the Libertines, (or such as had been carried captives to Rome by Pompey, and had since obtained their freedom,) those of Cyrene, in Lybia, of Alexandria, Cilicia, and Lesser Asia, who had each a distinct synagogue at Jerusalem. At first they undertook to dispute with St. Stephen; but finding themselves unequal to the task, and unable to resist the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke, they suborned false witnesses to charge him with blasphemy against Moses and against God. The indictment was laid against him in the Sanhedrim, and the saint was hauled thither. After the charge was read, Caiphas, the high priest, ordered him to make his defence. The main point urged against him was, that he affirmed that the temple would be destroyed, that the Mosaic sacrifices were but shadows and types, and were no longer acceptable to God, Jesus of Nazareth having put an end to them. It pleased God to diffuse a heavenly beauty and a shining brightness on the saint's face, whilst he stood before the council, so that to all that were present it seemed as if it had been the countenance of an angel. According to the license given him by the high priest to speak for himself, he made his apology, but in such a manner as boldly to preach

(1) 1 Tim. iii. 8.

(2) St. Ign. ep. ad Smyrn. x. 7, p. 37.

(3) Ep. ad Trallian. n. 2, p. 62.

Jesus Christ in the Sanhedrim itself. He showed that Abraham, the father and founder of their nation, was justified, and received the greatest favours of God without the temple: that Moses was commanded to erect a tabernacle, but foretold a new law and the Messiah: that Solomon built the temple, but it was not to be imagined that God was confined in houses made by hands, and that the temple and the Mosaic law were temporary ministrations, and were to give place when God introduced more excellent institutions. The martyr added, that this he had done by sending the Messiah himself; but that they were like their ancestors, a stiff-necked generation, circumcised in body, but not in heart, and always resisting the Holy Ghost; and that as their fathers had persecuted and slain many of the prophets who foretold the Christ, so they had betrayed and murdered Him in person, and though they had received the law by the ministry of angels, they had not observed it.

This stinging reproach touched them to the quick, and kindled them into a rage, gnashing with their teeth at the holy martyr, and expressing all the symptoms of unbridled passion. The saint, not heeding what was done below, had his eyes and heart fixed on higher objects, and being full of the Holy Ghost, and looking up steadfastly to the heavens, saw them opened, and beheld his divine Saviour standing at the right hand of his Father, appearing by that posture ready to protect, receive, and crown his servant. With this vision the saint was inexpressibly ravished, his soul was inspired with new courage, and a longing to arrive at that bliss, a glimpse of which was shown him. His heart overflowed with joy, and in an ecstasy, not being able to forbear expressing his happiness in the very midst of his enemies, he said: *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.* Thus divine consolations are then nearest to us, when human succours are furthest from us: but on such occasions we must cleave to God with confidence, and a perfect disengagement of heart from earthly things. If we still hold to them by the least twig, we have not perfectly attained to the dispositions of the saints. The Jews became more hardened and enraged by hearing the saint's declaration of this vision, and calling him a blasphemer, resolved upon his death without any further pro-

cess. In the fury of their blind zeal they staid not for a judicial sentence, not for the warrant of the Roman governor, without which no one could at that time be legally put to death amongst them. But stopping their ears against his supposed blasphemies, they with great clamour rushed upon him, furiously hauled him out of the city, and with a tempest of stones satiated their rage against him. The witnesses who, according to the Levitical law, were to begin the execution in all capital cases,(1) threw their clothes at the feet of Saul, who thus partook of their crime.(2) In the mean time the holy martyr prayed, saying: *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*. And falling on his knees, he cried with a loud voice, and the greatest earnestness: *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*. When he had said this he fell asleep in the Lord. This word is used by the Holy Ghost elegantly to express the sweetness of the death of the just, which is to them a rest after the toils of this painful life, a secure harbour after the dangers of this mortal pilgrimage, and the gate to eternal life. St. Austin and other fathers doubt not but the eminent conversion of St. Paul was the fruit of the dying groans and prayer of this martyr, and is a proof of his great interest in heaven.(3) The edification and manifold advantages which the church received from the martyrdom of this great and holy man compensated the loss which it sustained in him. Certain devout men took order to inter him in a decent manner, and made great mourning over him, though such a death was his own most glorious triumph, and unparalleled gain. The priest Lucian, who recounts the manner of the miraculous discovery of his relics in the fifth century, informs us, that they were deposited about twenty miles from Jerusalem, by the direction of Gamaliel, and at his expense.(4) St. Stephen seems to have suffered towards the end of the same year in which Christ was crucified.*

In the whole life of our divine Redeemer we have the most

(1) Deut. xvii. 7.

(2) Acts xxii 20, and vii. 57.

(3) S. Aug. Serm. 382.

(4) See on the 3rd of August.

* It is expressly affirmed in the chronological collections published by Scaliger with Eusebius's chronicle, that St. Stephen's martyrdom happened that year on the 26th of December: and that this was Eusebius's opinion, see Valesius, Annot. in Eus. Hist. l. 2, c. 1.

perfect pattern of meekness. During his ministry he meekly bore with the weakness, ignorance, and prejudices of some; with the perverseness, envy, and malice of others; with the ingratitude of friends, and the pride and insolence of enemies. How affecting is the most patient silence which he held in the courts of unjust judges, and through the whole course of his passion! How did he confirm this example which he had given us by spending his last breath in fervent prayer for his murderers! With what ardour and assiduity did he press upon us the practice of this virtue of meekness, and inculcate its indispensable obligation and unspeakable advantage! St. Stephen inherited more perfectly this spirit in proportion as he was more abundantly replenished with the Holy Ghost. No one who is passionate, unforgiving, and revengeful, can be a follower of the meek and humble Jesus. In vain do such assume to themselves the honour of bearing his name. In charity, meekness, and humility, consists the very spirit of Christianity; and scarcely any thing dishonours religion more than the prevalence of the opposite spirit in those who make a profession of piety.

ST. DIONYSIUS, POPE, C.

Dionysius was a priest of the church of Rome, under the pontificates of Stephen and Sixtus II. The latter having received the crown of martyrdom under Valerian, on the 6th of August, 258, through the violence of the persecution, the holy see continued vacant almost a year, till our saint was chosen pope on the 2d of July, 259. St. Dionysius of Alexandria styles him an admirable man, and a person eminently learned. St. Basil wonderfully extols his charity, which he extended to the most remote provinces of the empire. When the Goths had plundered Casarea, the capital of Cappadocia, and carried away most of its inhabitants into captivity, the good pope wrote to that city a letter of comfort, and sent messengers with large sums of money to ransom the captives. (1) Our saint condemned Sabellius, &c., in a council at Rome, and afterwards confuted the blasphemies of Paul of Samosata. (2) St. Athanasius and

(1) S. Bas. ep. 290.

(2) See S. Athan. l. de Synodis, et l. de sententiâ Dionys. &c.