

## ST. MELITO, BISHOP OF SARDES IN LYDIA, C.

IN THE REIGN OF MARCUS AURELIUS.

To that emperor, in 175, he addressed an elegant and modest apology for the faith. From an eminent spirit of prophecy with which he was endued by God, he was surnamed The Prophet, as St. Jerom(1) and Eusebius testify.(2)

## ST. GILBERT, BISHOP OF CAITHNESS IN SCOTLAND.

HAVING administered that see with great sanctity for twenty years, he died on the 1st of April, 1240. See the Aberdeen Breviary.

## APRIL II.

## ST. FRANCIS OF PAULA, CONFESSOR,

FOUNDER OF THE ORDER OF MINIMS.

From the bull of his canonization, and the memoirs relating to it, with the notes of Papebroke, t. 1. Apr. p. 103. also Philip Commynes, b. 6. c. 8. See Le Fevre, Cont. of Fleury, b. 115. n. 111. 120. 144. Helyot, Hist. des Ord. Relig. t. 9. p. 426. Giry, a provincial of his order, in his Lives of Saints, and in a particular dissertation · and De Coste, of the same order, in his judicious and accurate life of this saint, in quarto.

A. D. 1508.

THIS saint was born about the year 1416, at Paula, a small city near the Tyrrhenian sea, in Calabria, the midway from Naples to Reggio. His parents were very poor, but industrious, and happy in their condition, making the will and love of God the sole object of all their desires and endeavours. Their whole conduct was, as it were, one straight line directed to this point. Having lived together several years without issue, they earnestly begged of God, through the intercession of St. Francis of Assisium, a son who might faithfully and assiduously serve him, and become an instrument to glorify his name, to whose service

(1) Catal. c. 24.

(2) Eus. b. 4. Hist. c. 26. b. 5. c. 24.

they solemnly devoted him. A son some time after this was born, whom they considered as the fruit of their prayers, named him after their patron, St. Francis, and made it their chief care to inspire him with pious sentiments, and give him an education suitable to his holy destination. Francis, whilst yet a child, made abstinence, solitude, and prayer his delight. In the thirteenth year of his age, his father, whose name was James Martotille, placed him in the convent of Franciscan friars at St. Mark's, an episcopal town of that province, where he learned to read, and laid the foundation of the austere life which he ever after led. He, from that time, denied himself all use of linen and flesh meat ; and though he had not professed the rule of that Order, he seemed, even in that tender age, to surpass all the religious in a scrupulous observance of every thing prescribed by it. Having spent one year here, he performed, with his parents, a pilgrimage to Assisium, the Portiuncula, and Rome. When he was returned to Paula, with their consent, he retired to a lonesome solitude about half a mile from the town : and, to avoid the distraction of visits, he shortly after chose a more remote retreat in the corner of a rock upon the sea-coast, where he made himself a cave. He was scarcely fifteen years old, when he shut himself up in this hermitage, in 1432. He had no other bed than the rock itself, nor other food than the herbs which he gathered in the neighbouring wood, or what was sometimes brought him by his friends. Before he was quite twenty years old, two other devoutly inclined persons joined him, imitating his holy exercises. The neighbours built them three cells and a chapel, in which they sung the divine praises, and a certain priest from the parish church came, and said mass for them. This is reputed the first foundation of his religious Order, in 1436. Near seventeen years after, their number being much increased, with the approbation of the archbishop of Cosenza, a large church and monastery were built for them in the same place, towards the year 1454. So great was the devotion of the people, that the whole country joined, and all hands were set to this work ; even noblemen would share in carrying burdens. During the erection of this building, our saint performed several miracles. Among others, a person deposed upon oath in the process of the saint's canoni-

zation, that he himself was healed in an instant of a painful lameness in his thigh by the prayer of the servant of God.—When the house was completed, he applied himself to establish regularity and uniformity in his community, not abating in the least of his former severity with regard to himself. His bed was no longer indeed the rock, but it was a board or the bare floor, with a stone or a log of wood for his pillow, till, in his old age, he made use of a mat. He allowed himself no more sleep than was absolutely necessary to refresh weary nature, and to enable him to resume his devout exercises with greater vigour. He took but one repast a day, in the evening, and usually nothing but bread and water. Sometimes he passed two days without taking any food, especially before great festivals.

Penance, charity, and humility he laid down for the groundwork and basis of his rule. He obliged his followers to observe a perpetual Lent, and always to abstain not only from flesh, but also from all white meats, or food made of milk, such as cheese, butter, &c., also from eggs, all which the ancient canons forbid in Lent. In order more effectually to enforce obedience to this injunction, he prescribed a fourth vow, by which every religious of his Order binds himself to observe it. His intention in enjoining this perpetual abstinence was to repair, in some sort, the abuses of Lent among Christians. He always lamented to see that holy fast so much relaxed by the mitigations which the church has been obliged to tolerate, in condescension to the lukewarmness of the generality of her children. He hoped also, by example, to open the eyes of the rest of the faithful, to whom the sight of such a perpetual Lent compared to their remissness in one of only forty days, might be a continual reproach and silent preaching, perhaps more effectual than by words. The saint took charity for the motto and symbol of his Order, to show it was to be its soul, and its most distinguishing characteristic, whereby to signify the intimate union of all its members, not only with one another, but with all the faithful, by their ardent love of God, that divine flame which glowed so warmly in his own breast, and which he eagerly endeavoured to kindle in all others. Humility, however, was his darling virtue. The greater he was before God, and the more

he was distinguished in the sight of heaven, the less he appeared in his own eyes; and the more he was exalted among men, honoured and revered by popes and kings, the more earnestly did he study to live concealed and to debase himself beneath all creatures. It was his fondness for living concealed, unknown, and entirely forgotten by all men, that inspired him with the design in his earliest years of burying himself in a desert: in which part of his life, we know nothing of his sublime contemplations and his heavenly raptures, or of his severe penance, emulating the Eliases and the Baptists, because he sought to live hidden from the eyes of men, according to that maxim of true humility, love to be unknown; nor did he only seek to conceal himself and draw a veil over his other virtues, but also over his humility itself. A humility which sets itself forth with an exterior show of piety, which draws respect, and receives honour, is generally false; only the shadow of that virtue, and in reality a subtle refined pride. At least it is always dangerous, and much to be suspected. But the humility of Francis was both true and secure, because hidden. When God discovered him to the world, the saint conversed with it so as always to retain the same spirit. Not yet twenty years old, he was the legislator and oracle of all who approached him: yet he was no ways elated on this account, he assumed nothing to himself, and professed that he knew nothing save Jesus Christ crucified, and that there is no virtue, no happiness, but in knowing our own littleness, and in being humble of heart with our divine Master. By this humility he was filled with the spirit of God, and by a wonderful prodigy of grace, at nineteen years of age, became the founder of an eminent religious Order. Other Orders have their principal end and distinguishing characters; some being remarkable for their poverty, others for austerity, others for prayer, holy zeal, &c. That of St. Francis of Paula eminently includes all the above-mentioned; but to show his value for humility, which he most earnestly recommended to his followers as the ground of all Christian virtues, he gave them a name that might express it, and begged of the pope, as a singular privilege, that his religious might be called Minims, to signify that they were the least in the house of God. Moreover, as in every community there must

be a supreme, St. Francis would have the superior of each house in his Order called Corrector, to put him in continual remembrance that he is only the servant of all the rest, according to that of Luke xxii. *He who is greater among you, let him be as the least.* But the more this saint humbled himself, the more did God exalt him.

The archbishop of Cosenza approved the rule and Order of this holy man, in 1471. Pope Sixtus IV. confirmed it by a bull, dated the 23rd of May, in 1474, and established Francis superior-general. This Order was then chiefly composed of laymen, with a few clerks, and only one priest, Balthasar de Spino, doctor of laws, afterward confessor to Innocent VIII. About the year 1476, the saint founded another convent at Paterno, on the gulf of Tarentum; and a third at Spezza, in the diocese of Cosenza. In the year 1479, being invited into Sicily, he was received there as an angel from heaven, wrought miracles, and built several monasteries in that island, where he continued a whole year. Being returned into Calabria, in 1480, he built another at Corigliano, in the diocese of Rossano.—Ferdinand, king of Naples, provoked at some wholesome advice the saint had given him and his two sons, Alphonsus, duke of Calabria, and John, cardinal of Arragon, persecuted him: but his third son, Frederic, prince of Tarentum, was his friend.—The king, alleging that he had built monasteries without the royal assent, ordered a messenger to apprehend him at Paterno, and bring him prisoner to Naples. But, the officer approaching to seize his person, was so moved at his humility, and the readiness with which he disposed himself to follow him, that, struck with awe, he returned to Naples, and dissuaded the king from attempting any thing against the servant of God. The holy man was favoured with an eminent spirit of prophecy. He foretold to several persons, in the years 1447, 1448, and 1449, the taking of Constantinople by the Turks, which happened on the 29th of May, in 1453, under the command of Mahomet II., when Constantine Palæologus, the last Christian emperor, was slain, fighting tumultuously in the streets. He also foretold that Otranto, one of the most important places and keys of the kingdom of Naples, would fall into the hands of the same infidels, three months before Achmat Bacha surprised it on the

last day of August, 1480, to the great consternation of Italy and all Europe. But the servant of God promised the Christians, especially the pious John, count of Arena, one of the generals of Ferdinand I., king of Naples, certain success the year following, when they recovered that city, and drove the infidels out of Italy, their victory being facilitated by the death of the Turkish emperor, and a civil war between the two brothers, Bajazet II., and Zizimes. The authentic depositions of many unexceptionable witnesses, given with all the formalities which both the civil and canon law require, prove these and many other illustrious predictions of the holy man, on several public and private occasions,\* with regard to the kings of Naples, Ferdinand I., and Alphonsus II., and Louisa of Savoy, countess, afterward Dutchess of Angouleme, mother of King Francis I. in France, and many others. Lawrence bishop of Grenoble, of the most noble house of Alemands, in Dauphiné, uncle to the most valiant and pious captain De Bayard, † in his letter to Pope Leo X. for the canonization of St. Francis, writes : " Most holy Father, he revealed to me many things which were known only to God and myself." In 1469, Pope Paul II. sent one of his chamberlains, an ecclesiastic of the noble family of Adorno in Genoa, into Calabria, to inform himself of the truth of the wonderful things that were related of the saint. The chamberlain addressed himself to the vigilant archbishop of Cosenza, who assured him, from his own intimacy with the saint, of his sincere virtue and extraordinary sanctity, and sent one of his ecclesiastics, named Charles Pyrrho, a canon of Cosenza, a man of great learning and probity, to attend him to Paula. This Pyrrho had been himself healed ten years before of a violent tooth-ache by the man of God touching his cheek with his hand, (of which the authentic depositions are extant,) and had from that time frequently visited him. The saint was at work, according to his custom, among the masons who were laying the foundation of his church ; but seeing two strangers coming towards him, left his work, and came to meet them. He made them a low obeisance ; and when the chamberlain offered to kiss his hand, according to the Italian custom of

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\* See many of these depositions in De Coste, part 2. and Bollandus.

† Surnamed *Le Chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*.

saluting priests and religious men, he would by no means allow it, and falling on his knees, said he was bound to kiss his hands, which God had consecrated for the thirty years he had said mass. The chamberlain was exceedingly struck at his answer, hearing him, who was an entire stranger to his person, tell him so exactly how long he had been a priest; but concealing himself and his commission, desired to converse with him in his convent. The saint conducted him into a chamber. The chamberlain, who was a very eloquent man, made him a long discourse, in which, to try his virtue, he censured his institute as too austere, spoke much on the illusions and dangers to which extraordinary and miraculous gifts are liable, and exhorted him to walk in ordinary paths, trodden by eminent servants of God. The saint answered his objections with great modesty and humility; but seeing him not yet satisfied, he went to the fire, and taking out some burning coals, held them a considerable time in his hand without receiving any harm, saying: "All creatures obey those who serve God with a perfect heart."—Which golden words are inserted by Leo X. in the bull of his canonization. The chamberlain returned to Cosenza full of veneration for the holy man, and told both the archbishop and his holiness at his return to Rome, that the sanctity of Francis was greater than his reputation in the world. A youth, nephew to the saint, being dead, his mother, the saint's own sister, applied to him for comfort, and filled his apartment with lamentations. After the mass and divine office had been said for the repose of his soul, St. Francis ordered the corpse to be carried from the church into his cell, where he ceased not to pray till, to her great astonishment, he had restored him to life and presented him to her in perfect health. The young man entered his Order, and is the celebrated Nicholas Alesso, who afterward followed his uncle into France, and was famous for sanctity and many great actions.\*

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\* This miracle may be read with a detail of the circumstances in the life of this saint, by F. Giry. Among other testimonies in confirmation of it, Bollandus produces the following extracts.

Ex processu facto in Castellione. SSmo ac Bmo Dno Leoni X. Loysius de Agno, Baro Castellionis, &c. Die 27 Nov. An. 1516. de prodigiis Beati Viri talia quæ subsequuntur, coram nobis a subinsertis testibus recitata et enarrata

Lewis XI. king of France, a prince perhaps the most absolute, the most tenacious of his authority, jealous of his prerogative, and impatient of control, that ever wore that crown, after an apoplectic fit fell into a lingering decay.(1) Never had any man a stronger passion for life, or a greater dread of the very thoughts of death. Such was his frowardness and impatience, that every one trembled to approach him: nor durst any ask him a favour. He gave his physician ten thousand crowns a month, as long as he should prolong his life, and stood in the greatest awe of him. He shut himself up in his palace or castle of Plessis-les-Tours, near the city of Tours. Jesters, buffoons, and dancers were employed to divert his melancholy and peevishness, but in vain. He ordered prayers, processions, and pilgrimages for his health, and even against the north-wind, which he found injurious to him, and he caused holy relics from the remotest places to be brought to Plessis, into his chamber. His distemper still increasing, he sent an ambassador to our holy hermit in Calabria, begging he would come to see him, and restore his health, making the greatest promises to serve both him and his Order. Hearing that the man of God would not be prevailed on by his promises to comply with his request, he entreated Ferdinand, king of Naples, to send him. Francis answered positively, that he could not tempt God, nor undertake

(1) Commynes, b. 6. c. 7, 8. 12. Mezeray, &c.

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D. Petrus de Paula, Consentinus, Terræ Castellioni Prætor, retulit quod Nicolaus nepos beati viri fuit ab ipso in Paula resuscitatus; et hoc miraculum est vulgatum in Calabria, et potissimum in Casalibus civitatis Consentinæ.

Ex processu facto in terra Xiliani. Supplicatur sanctitati vestræ pro parte syndicorum et magistrorum juratorum universitatis, et hujusmodi pertinentiarum turræ Xiliani Diæc. Marthuranæ.—

After several other miracles, related with the certificates of the witnesses upon oath, is added, n. 88.

Donna Andiana deponit per dictum sui patris, qualiter pater ejus vidit nepotem Fr. Francisci deportatum ad eum mortuum de duobus diebus, et vidit ipsum resuscitatum in conventu Paterni.

This nephew, Nicholas d'Alesso, was son of Andrew d'Alesso. The author of the life of St. Francis of Paula, who was a religious man of the saint's own convent, and lived many years with him at Paula, speaks of this miracle as happening before the year 1460. Six other persons are related to have been raised from death by this saint: the authentic proofs of which, and many other miracles, may be seen in the Bollandists, and in De Coste's life of this saint.



a voyage of a thousand miles to work a miracle, which was asked upon low and merely human motives. Lewis did not yet desist, but desired the pope to interpose in favour of his request. Sixtus IV. by two briefs, commanded Francis immediately to repair to the king. Hereupon the obedient saint, without delay, set out and passed through Naples, where he was exceedingly honoured by King Ferdinand. He took also Rome in his way, where he was treated with the highest distinction by the pope and cardinals. Embarking at Ostia, he landed in France, and cured many sick of the plague, in Provence, as he passed. Lewis, in great joy, gave a purse of ten thousand crowns to him who brought the first news of the saint's arrival in his dominions, and sent the dauphin, with the principal lords of his court, to meet him at Amboise, and to conduct him to his palace. The saint arrived at Plessis, on the 24th of April, in 1482. The king went out to meet him, attended with all his court, and falling on his knees, conjured him to obtain of God the prolongation of his life. St. Francis told him, no wise man ought to entertain such a desire. To which he added this useful lesson, that the lives of kings had their appointed limits no less than those of his meanest subjects, that God's decree was unchangeable, and that there remained nothing to be done but for his majesty to resign himself to the divine will, and prepare for a happy death. The king gave orders that he should be lodged in an apartment in his palace, near the chapel, and assigned him an interpreter. St. Francis often spoke to his majesty both in private and before his courtiers, and always with such wisdom, though a man without learning, that Philip Commynes, who frequently heard him, says, that all present were persuaded the Holy Ghost spoke by his mouth. By his prayers and exhortations he effected a perfect change in the king's heart, who, having recommended to him his three children, and the repose of his soul, died in his arms, perfectly resigned, on the 30th of August, in 1483.

King Charles VIII. honoured the saint even more than his father Lewis had done; would do nothing in the affairs of his conscience, or even in those of the state, without his advice; visited him every day as long as he stayed at Plessis, standing before him as a disciple, and engaged him to stand godfather to

his son the dauphin, to whom he gave the name of our saint. He built for him a beautiful convent in the park of Plessis, in a place called Montils: and another at Amboise, and upon the very spot where he met him when he was dauphin: and going to Rome in 1495, where he made a triumphant entry, and was saluted Emperor of Constantinople by Pope Alexander VI., he built there, on Mount Pincio, a stately monastery for this Order, under the name of the Blessed Trinity, in which none but Frenchmen can be admitted. In his reign the saint founded the convent of Nigeon, near Paris, on which occasion two doctors, who had violently opposed the institute before the bishop of Paris, were so moved by the sight of the saint at Plessis, that they entered his Order in 1506. Pope Julius II. again approved the rule, in which the saint had made some alterations. King Charles VIII. dying in 1498, Lewis XII. succeeded him. He at first gave the saint leave to return to Italy; but quickly recalled it, and heaped honours and benefactions on all his relations. St. Francis spent the three last months of his life within his cell, to prepare himself for a happy death, denying himself all communication with mankind, that nothing might divert his thoughts from death and eternity. He fell sick of a fever on Palm-Sunday, in 1506. On Maundy-Thursaday he assembled all his religious in the sacristy, and exhorted them to the love of God, charity with one another and with all men, and to a punctual observance of all the duties of their rule. After having made his confession, he communicated barefoot, and with a cord about his neck, which is the custom of his Order. He died on the 2nd of April, in 1508, being ninety-one years old.\* He was canonized by Leo X. in 1519. His body remained uncorrupted in the church of Plessis-les-Tours, till the year 1562, when the Hugonots broke open the shrine and found it entire, fifty-five years after his death. They dragged it about the streets, and burned it in a fire which they had made with the wood of a great crucifix.(1) Some of his bones were recovered

(1) Baillet; Helyot, *Hist. des Ord. Relig.* Le Fevre; the *Contin. of Meury*; Croisset.

\* F. Papebroke wrote, that St. Francis was born only in 1438, and died sixty-nine years old; but retracted this mistake after he had seen the dissertation of F. Giry.

by the Catholics, and are kept in several churches of his Order at Plessis, Nigeon, Paris, Aix, Naples, Paula, and Madrid. In Tours the same Calvinists burned the body of St. Martin, Alcuin, and many others. But Lewis of Bourbon, Duke of Montpensier, governor of Anjou, Touraine, and Maine, a virtuous and valiant prince, soon gave chase to those sacrilegious plunderers, and restored the churches and religious places to their former possessors.\* St. Francis wrote two rules for his friars, with a Correctorium, or method of enjoining penances, and a third rule for nuns; all approved by Pope Julius II. in 1506.

Vanity and the love of the world make men fond of producing themselves in public, and by having never cultivated an acquaintance with themselves, they shun the very means, look upon retirement as intolerable, and pass their life in wandering always from home, and in a studied series of dissipation, in which they secretly seek the gratification of their vanity, sloth, and other passions, but meet only with emptiness, trouble, and vexation. Man can find happiness only in God and in his own heart. This he flies who cannot bear to converse with God and his own heart. On the contrary, he who is endued with the spirit of prayer, finds the greatest relish in the interior exercises of compunction and contemplation, and in conversing with heaven. Solitude is his chief delight, and his centre: here he lives sequestered from creatures, and as if there were only God and himself in the world, except that he ceases not to recommend all men to God. In paying the debts of charity, and other exterior duties to his neighbours, his heart is fixed on God, and he has purely his divine will in view; so that, even in his public actions, he deposits his intention and sentiments in the bosom of his God and Redeemer, and has no regard to creatures but as he considers God and his holy will in them. *You are dead, says the apostle,(1) and your life is hidden with God in Jesus Christ.*

(1) Colos. iii. 8.

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\* See the verbal process and informations relating to the sacrileges committed in pillaging this church and convent in Plessis, taken in the presidial court of Tours, in 1562 and 1565, in De Coste, p. 482. His