

think of nothing but of loving, and suffering in what manner it shall please God to make us tread in the footsteps of his divine Son, being solicitous only to walk in the continual exercise of pure love. The ninety-fourth sermon of St. Leo, which is on this mystery, shows this festival to have been observed at Rome in the middle of the fifth century. Pope Calixtus III. made it more universal and solemn by a bull, dated in 1457.

ST. XYSTUS, OR SIXTUS II., POPE AND MARTYR.

HE was a Grecian by birth, deacon of the Roman Church under St. Stephen, and upon his demise, in 257 was chosen pope, being the twenty-fifth from St. Peter. St. Dionysius of Alexandria consulted him by three letters on certain difficulties, and recommended to him to bear a little while with the Africans and some among the Asiatics with regard to their error concerning the validity of baptism given by heretics. Accordingly this pope used towards them indulgence, contenting himself with strongly recommending the truth to them; and his successors pursued the same conduct till that error was condemned in the plenary council often mentioned by St. Austin.* St. Sixtus is styled by St. Cyprian a peaceable and excellent prelate. Though some have ascribed eight years to his pontificate, it is certain from all the circumstances of his history, that he only sat one year.(1)

Gallus, the successor of Decius in the empire, and a persecutor of the Christians, being despised for his cowardice, was slain with his son and colleague Volusius in 253, after having reigned eighteen months. Æmilius then assumed the title of emperor; but was killed after he had reigned four months without having been acknowledged by the senate; and Valerianus, a person of a noble family, and great reputation, who had been censor and chief of the senate, was acknowledged em-

(1) See Berti, Diss. l. in Sæc. 3, p. 172.

* By this plenary council, Launoy, Sirmond, and Albaspinæus understand the council of Arles, assembled out of all the West in 314; but Bellarmin, Natalis Alexander, &c. explain it more probably of the council of Nice, because St. Austin calls it a plenary council of the whole world.

peror by the consent of the whole world. He was at first more favourable to the Christians than any of the emperors before him had been, not excepting the Philips; and his palace was full of religious persons. By this means the church enjoyed peace during three years and a half: which tranquillity afforded an opportunity of holding many councils; but in 257 Valerian raised the eighth, or, according to Sulpicius Severus, the ninth general persecution, which continued three years and a half, till he was taken prisoner by the Persians. The change wrought in this emperor is ascribed by Eusebius to a motive of superstition, and to the artifices and persuasion of one Macrianus, who was extremely addicted to the Persian sect of the Magians, and to the black art. This man, whom St. Dionysius of Alexandria calls the archmagian of Egypt, had worked himself into the highest favour with the superstitious emperor, was raised by him to the first dignities of the state, and persuaded him that the Christians by being avowed enemies to art magic, and to the gods, obstruct the effects of the sacrifices, and the prosperity of his empire. Valerian had reason to tremble for his own safety upon the pinnacle of his honours; for some compute that only six, out of thirty emperors, who had reigned from Augustus to his time, had escaped the violent hands of murderers; but, by declaring himself an enemy to the servants of God, he dug a pit for his own ruin. He published his first edict against them in April, 257, which was followed by the martyrdom of Pope Stephen and many others.

The persecution grew much more fierce in the following year, when Valerian marching into the East against the Persians, sent a new rescript to the senate to be passed into a law, the tenour and effect of which St. Cyprian notified to his fellow bishops in Africa as follows: (1)—“Valerian has sent an order to the senate, importing that bishops, priests, and deacons should forthwith suffer,” (even although they should be willing to conform), “but that senators, persons of quality, and Roman knights, should forfeit their honours, should have their estates forfeited, and if they still refused to sacrifice, should lose their heads: that matrons should have their goods seized, and be banished: that any of Cæsar’s officers or domestics who

(1) S. Cyprian, ep. ad Successum episc. 80; Fello. 82, Pamelio.

had already confessed the Christian faith, or should now confess it, should forfeit their estates to the exchequer, and should be sent in chains to work in Cæsar's farms.* To this order the emperor subjoined a copy of the letters which he hath despatched to the presidents of the several provinces concerning us: which letter I expect, and hope will soon be brought hither. You are to understand that Xystus (bishop of Rome) suffered in a cemetery upon the 6th day of August, and with him Quartus. The officers of Rome are very intent upon this persecution; and the persons who are brought before them are sure to suffer and to forfeit their estates to the exchequer. Pray notify these particulars to my colleagues, that so our brethren may every where be prepared for their great conflict; that we may all think rather of immortality than death, and derive more joy than fear or terror from this confession, in which we know that the soldiers of Christ are not so properly killed as crowned."

St. Xystus suffered in a cemetery; for the Christians, in the times of persecution, resorted to those subterraneous caverns to celebrate the divine mysteries. Here they met, though Valerian had forbidden them to hold assemblies, and here they were hunted out. Quartus must have been a priest or deacon; otherwise he would not have suffered upon the spot, but been first pressed by the rack to sacrifice. Some think this name Quartus a slip of the copiers, and read this passage as follows: "with four deacons;† for, say these authors, about that time four deacons suffered at Rome, Prætaxatus, Felicissimus, and Agapitus, with their bishop, as the Liberian and other ancient Calendars testify; and Laurence, who suffered soon after him. This last was his archdeacon, and seeing him led to execution, expostulated with him, lamenting to be left behind.(1) "St. Sixtus replied that he should follow him within three days, by a more glorious triumph; himself being spared on account

(1) S. Ambros. Offic. l. 1, c. 41.

* It is well known in the Cæsarean law what sort of servitude that was which the Adscriptitii Glebæ were under, they being slaves employed in the meanest drudgery of tillage.

† A mistake of the contraction *quartus* for *quatuor* in an old MS. was very easy. This is the conjecture of Baluze. "Xystum in cœmeterio animadversum sciatis, 8vo. Id. Aug. et cum eo diaconos quatuor." S. Cypr. loc. cit. ed. Baluz.

of his old age." Those are mistaken who say that St. Sixtus was crucified; for the Liberian Calendar assures us, that he was beheaded in the cemetery of Calixtus, and the expression which St. Cyprian uses signifies the same. St. Cyprian suffered in the September following; and all the provinces of the empire were watered with the blood of innumerable martyrs;* for

* This fierce persecution was continued during the last three years and a half of Valerian's reign. Most flourishing was the condition of his empire till he drew his sword against those whose prayers were the protection of the state. They still prayed for those who most unjustly persecuted them; but God revenged their cause, even in this world. No sooner did this war break out against them, but the provinces became on every side a prey to barbarians. Valerian marched first against the Goths and Scythians, who poured in upon the empire from the north; but the terrible devastations committed by the Persians in Cilicia, Cappadocia, and other provinces of the east, called him on that side. Finding his affairs there in a bad condition, he was for purchasing a peace for money of Sapor I. the son of Artaxerxes, who having revolted with the Persians and slain Artabanus, the last king of Parthia, had erected upon the ruins of that empire the second Persian monarchy in 226. Sapor refused to treat with any other person but the emperor himself, who imprudently ventured his person with but few attendants. The barbarian caused him to be surrounded, and seized him prisoner, and as long as Valerian lived, made use of him for a footstool or horseblock, making him stoop, and setting his foot upon his neck whenever he mounted on horseback. He led him everywhere about in triumph, loaded with chains, and clad in purple and all the imperial ornaments. Valerian was taken in the seventh year of his reign, the seventy-sixth of his age, of Christ 259, and he lived thus seven years in captivity. Agathias says, that at length Sapor caused him to be flayed alive, and rubbed over with salt; but this seems only to have been done after his death, when the Persian had his skin pickled, died red, and hung up in a temple to be afterwards shown to the Roman ambassadors whenever they should come into Persia. The pagan Romans seemed little concerned at his misfortune, or their own disgrace, and his unnatural son Gallien used no great efforts for his liberty, though, after his death, he caused him to be enrolled among the gods; and the heathen Romans had always regarded him as one of their best emperors.

The Christians looked upon this catastrophe as an effect of divine vengeance upon this unjust persecutor of the saints. Lactantius writes of it as follows: "Not long after Decius Valerian was inflamed with the like rage, and in a very little time he shed a great deal of the blood of the saints. But God afflicted him with a new sort of judgment. He was taken prisoner by the Persians, and not only lost the empire, but as he had robbed many others of their liberty, so he lost his own at last, and fell under a most infamous slavery; for, as often as king Sapor had occasion either to mount on horseback, or to go into his chariot, he made the Roman emperor stoop down, that he might make his back a step to get up. And whereas the Romans had made some representations of the Persians being defeated by them, Sapor used to rally Valerian, and to tell him, that the posture in which he lay, was a more real proof to show on whose side the victory went, than all the pictures that the Romans

though Valerian's first edicts regarded chiefly the clergy, they were soon extended to the whole body of Christians; old and young, men, women, and children; and great numbers of every condition, rich and poor, soldiers, husbandmen, slaves, and even children, were put to cruel deaths, as Eusebius,(1) St. Cyprian,(2) and the ancient Martyrologies testify.

(1) L. 7, c. 11.

(2) Ep. 77, Pam. alias 70.

could make. Valerian, being thus led about in triumph, lived for some time, so that the barbarians had in him occasion given for a great while to treat the very name of a Roman with all possible indignity and scorn. And this was the heightening of his misery, that though he had a son, upon whom the empire had devolved by his misfortune, yet no care was taken by the son either to rescue the father, or to revenge his ill usage. After he had ended his infamous life, his skin was flayed off his body, and both it and his guts being tintured with a red colouring, they were hung up in one of the temples of the Persian gods, to be a perpetual remembrance of so remarkable a triumph, by which they might always put such Roman ambassadors as should be sent among them in mind of it, and from so unusual a sight, warn them not to presume too much upon their own strength, but to remember Valerian's fall."

Gallien, his son and successor, terrified by so dreadful an example of the divine vengeance, as Orosius says, restored peace to the church.—He led a life of debauchery and supine indolence, whilst thirty tyrants in different parts of the world assumed the purple, and were at war with one another. Macrianus, the magician, by whose advice Valerian had persecuted the church, was one of this number, but was slain the first of them with his two sons. Olenatus, a Saracen, king of Palmyra in Syria, repressed the insolence of the Persians; for which service Gallien declared him his colleague in the empire, allotting to him all the East, and giving to his wife Zenobia the title of Augusta. After the death of her husband she became queen of the East, and is celebrated for her extraordinary wisdom, learning, and valour. The empire was at the same time visited with a dreadful pestilence which depopulated its provinces; and the barbarians on all sides poured in upon it like a torrent, which, having broken down its banks, impetuously spreads itself over the whole country. Nor could those nations be any more confined to their snows and mountains; but, in the end, they overthrew that empire which had formerly thought them not worth a conquest. The saints shared in these public calamities; but, by their charity, resignation, and patience, found in them solid comfort and joy, and by them attained to their crown. God converted all things to the good of his elect. Gallien was murdered in 268, after an ingominious reign of nine years from the captivity of his father. His successor Claudius II. surnamed Gothicus, a prince of moderation and wisdom, continued to suspend the edicts of former persecutors during the two years that he reigned; but, after his death, Aurelian raised the ninth general persecution. Nevertheless, that some received the crown of martyrdom in the reign of Claudius Gothicus, is evident from the holy martyr St. Severa, whose body was found in the cemetery of SS. Thraso and Saturninus, on the Salarian way, one mile from Rome, in 1730. See the dissertation of F. Lupi on that martyr's tomb and epitaph, printed at Panormo in 1734; also the remarks of and learned canons Boldetti and Marazzoni.