

Domitian, a beloved disciple, that he would follow him out of this world, on the seventh day, which happened accordingly. Euthymius died on Saturday the 20th day of January, being ninety-five years old, of which he had spent sixty-eight in the deserts. Cyril relates his having appeared several times after his death, and the many miracles that were wrought by his intercession; to several of which he declares himself an eye-witness. St. Sabas kept his festival immediately after his death; which is observed both by the Latins and Greeks. The latter always style him the Great. It appears from his life that he was ordained priest before he embraced an eremitical state, and that he founded two monasteries, besides a Laura, which was also converted into a monastery after his death.

ST. FECHIN, ABBOT.

AN ancient hymn on this saint is published by Bollandus. He is honoured with singular devotion at Foure, anciently called Fobhar, a village in Westmeath, where he governed a monastery with great sanctity; and happily departed to our Lord in the year 664, being carried off in the great pestilence which swept off four kings in Ireland; and which scarcely a third part of the inhabitants survived. See his life in Bollandus; Also Giraldus Cambr. Topog. Hibern. dist. 2. c. 52. and Colgan. Giraldus mentions St. Fechin's mill at Foure, which out of respect it is forbidden for any woman ever to enter. Several churches and some villages in Ireland take their name from this saint.

JANUARY XXI.

ST. AGNES, V. M.

The following relation is taken from Prudentius, de Coron. hym. 14. St. Ambrose, l. 1. de Virgin. & Offic. l. 1. c. 41. and other fathers. Her acts are as ancient as the seventh century; but not sufficiently authentic: nor are those given us in Chaldaic by Stephen Assemani of a better stamp. They contradict St. Ambrose and Prudentius in supposing that she finished her martyrdom by fire. See Tillemont, T. 5.

A.D. 304, or 306.

ST. JEROM says, (1) that the tongues and pens of all nations are employed in the praises of this saint, who overcame both

(1) Ep. 8.

the cruelty of the tyrant and the tenderness of her age, and crowned the glory of chastity with that of martyrdom. St. Austin observes,⁽¹⁾ that her name signifies chaste in Greek, and a lamb in Latin. She has been always looked upon in the church as a special patroness of purity, with the immaculate Mother of God and St. Thecla. Rome was the theatre of the triumph of St. Agnes; and Prudentius says, that her tomb was shown within sight of that city. She suffered not long after the beginning of the persecution of Dioclesian, whose bloody edicts appeared in March in the year of our Lord 303. We learn from St. Ambrose and St. Austin, that she was only thirteen years of age at the time of her glorious death. Her riches and beauty excited the young noblemen of the first families in Rome, to vie with one another in their addresses, who should gain her in marriage.⁽²⁾ Agnes answered them all, that she had consecrated her virginity to a heavenly spouse, who could not be beheld by mortal eyes. Her suitors finding her resolution impregnable to all their arts and importunities, accused her to the governor as a Christian; not doubting but threats and torments would overcome her tender mind, on which allurements could make no impression. The judge at first employed the mildest expressions and most inviting promises; to which Agnes paid no regard, repeating always, that she could have no other spouse than Jesus Christ. He then made use of threats; but found her soul endowed with a masculine courage, and even desirous of racks and death. At last, terrible fires were made, and iron hooks, racks, and other instruments of torture displayed before her, with threats of immediate execution. The young virgin surveyed them all with an undaunted eye; and with a cheerful countenance beheld the fierce and cruel executioners surrounding her, and ready to despatch her at the word of command. She was so far from betraying the least symptom of fear, that she even expressed her joy at the sight, and offered herself to the rack. She was then dragged before the idols, and commanded to offer incense: "but could by no means be compelled to move her hand, except to make the sign of the cross," says St. Ambrose.

The governor seeing his measures ineffectual, said he would send her to a house of prostitution, where what she prized so

(1) Serm. 274.

(2) S. Ambrose, l. 1. Virgin.

highly should be exposed to the insults of the debauchees.(1) Agnes answered that Jesus Christ was too jealous of the purity of his spouses, to suffer it to be violated in such a manner; for he was their defender and protector. "You may," said she, "stain your sword with my blood, but will never be able to profane my body, consecrated to Christ." The governor was so incensed at this, that he ordered her to be immediately led to the public brothel, with liberty to all persons to abuse her person at pleasure. Many young profligates ran thither, full of the wicked desire of gratifying their lust; but were seized with such awe at the sight of the saint, that they durst not approach her; one only excepted, who, attempting to be rude to her, was that very instant, by a flash, as it were, of lightening from heaven, struck blind, and fell trembling to the ground. His companions terrified, took him up and carried him to Agnes, who was at a distance, singing hymns of praise to Christ, her protector. The virgin by prayer restored him to his sight and health.*

The chief prosecutor of the saint, who at first sought to gratify his lust and avarice, now laboured to satiate his revenge, by incensing the judge against her; his passionate fondness being changed into anger and rage. The governor wanted not others to spur him on; for he was highly exasperated to see himself baffled, and set at defiance by one of her tender age and sex. Therefore, resolved upon her death, he condemned her to be beheaded. Agnes, transported with joy on hearing this sentence, and still more at the sight of the executioner, "went to the place of execution more cheerfully," says St. Ambrose, "than others go to their wedding." The executioner had secret instructions to use all means to induce her to a compliance: but Agnes always answered, she could never offer so great an injury to her heavenly spouse; and having made a short prayer, bowed down her neck to adore God, and receive

(1) Prudent. and S. Ambros.

* St. Basil witnesses (l. de vera Virgin.) that when virgins were exposed by the persecutors to the attempts of lewd men, Christ wonderfully interposed in defence of their chastity. Tertullian reproached the heathens with this impiety, in these words: Apolog. "By condemning the Christian maid rather to the lewd youth than to the lion, you have acknowledged that a stain of purity is more dreaded by us than any torments or death. Yet your crafty cruelty avails you not: it rather serves to gain men over to our holy religion."

the stroke of death. The spectators wept to see so beautiful and tender a virgin loaded with fetters, and to behold her fearless under the very sword of the executioner, who with a trembling hand cut off her head at one stroke. Her body was buried at a small distance from Rome, near the Nomentan road. A church was built on the spot in the time of Constantine the Great, and was repaired by Pope Honorius in the seventh century. It is now in the hands of Canons-Regular, standing without the walls of Rome; and is honoured with her relics in a very rich silver shrine, the gift of Pope Paul V. in whose time they were found in this church, together with those of St. Emerentiana.* The other beautiful rich church of St. Agnes within the city, built by Pope Innocent X. (the right of patronage being vested in the family of Pamphili) stands on the place where her chastity was exposed. The feast of St. Agnes is mentioned in all Martyrologies, both of the East and West, though on different days. It was formerly a holyday for the woman in England, as appears from the council of Worcester, held in the year 1240. St. Ambrose. St. Austin, and other fathers have wrote her penegyric. St. Martin of Tours was singularly devout to her. Thomas à Kempis honoured her as his special patroness, as his works declare in many places. He relates many miracles wrought, and graces received through her intercession.

Marriage is a holy state, instituted by God, and in the order of providence and nature the general or most ordinary state of those who live in the world. Those, therefore, who upon motives of virtue, and in a Christian and holy manner engage in this state, do well. Those, nevertheless, who for the sake of practising more perfect virtue, by a divine call, prefer a state of perpetual virginity, embrace that which is more perfect and more excellent. Dr. Wells, a learned Protestant, confesses that Christ(1) declares voluntary chastity, for the kingdom of heaven's sake, to be an excellency, and an excellent state of

(1) Matt. xix. 11.

* This church gives title to a cardinal, and every year on her feast the abbot of St. Peter's ad Vincula blesses in it, at high mass, two lambs, which are thence carried to the pope, by whom they are again blessed. After which they are sent to the nuns of St. Laurence's in Panisperna, or sometimes to the Capucinesses, who make of their wool palliums, which his holiness blesses, and sends to archbishops as an emblem of meekness and spotless purity.

life.(1) This is also the manifest inspired doctrine of St. Paul,(2) and in the revelations of St. John,(3) spotless virgins are called, in a particular manner, the companions of the Lamb, and are said to enjoy the singular privilege of following him wherever he goes. The tradition of the church has always been unanimous in this point; and among the Romans, Greeks, Syrians, and Barbarians, many holy virgins joyfully preferred torments and death to the violation of their integrity, which they bound themselves by vow to preserve without defilement, in mind or body. The fathers, from the very disciples of the apostles, are all profuse in extolling the excellency of holy virginity, as a special fruit of the incarnation of Christ, his divine institution, and a virtue which has particular charms in the eyes of God, who delights in chaste minds, and chooses to dwell singularly in them. They often repeat, that purity raises men, even in this mortal life, to the dignity of angels; purifies the soul, fits it for a more perfect love of God, and a closer application to heavenly things, and disengages the mind and heart from worldly thoughts and affections. It produces in the soul the nearest resemblance to God. Chastity is threefold, that of virgins, that of widows, and that of married persons; in each state it will receive its crown, as St. Ambrose observes,(4) but in the first is most perfect, so that St. Austin calls its fruit a hundred fold, and that of marriage sixty fold; but the more excellent this virtue is, and the higher its glory and reward, the more heroic and the more difficult is its victory; nor is it perfect unless it be embellished with all other virtues in an heroic degree, especially divine charity and the most profound humility.

SAINT FRUCTUOSUS, BISHOP OF TARRAGON,

AND HIS COMPANIONS, MARTYRS.

From his most valuable acts in Ruinart, quoted by St. Austin, Serm. 273. and transcribed by Prudentius, hymn 6.

A.D. 259.

ST. FRUCTUOSUS was the zealous and truly apostolical bishop of Tarragon, then the capital city of Spain. The persecution of Valerian and Gallien raging in the year 259, he was apprehended by an order of Emilian the governor, who sent the soldiers,

(1) Wells, Paraph. on S. Matt. p. 185. (2) 1 Cor. vii. 7, 8, 25, 27, 32, 38.
(3) Apoc. x'v. l. 3, 4, 5. (4) S. Ambr. l. de Viduis, T. 5. p. 636.