

Constantine gave all the prelates a magnificent entertainment, and dismissed them with great presents to their respective sees. St. Alexander, after this triumph of the faith, returned to Alexandria; where, after having recommended St. Athanasius for his successor, he died in 326, on the 26th of February, on which day he is mentioned in the Roman Martyrology.

A true disciple of Christ, by a sincere spirit of humility and distrust in himself, is, as it were, naturally inclined to submission to all authority appointed by God, in which he finds his peace, security, and joy. This happy disposition of his soul is his secure fence against the illusions of self-sufficiency and blind pride, which easily betrays men into the most fatal errors. On the contrary, pride is a spirit of revolt and independence: he who is possessed with this devil is fond of his own conceits, self-confident, and obstinate. However strong the day-light of evidence may be in itself, such a one will endeavour to shut up all the avenues of light, though some beams force themselves into his soul to disturb his repose, and strike deep the sting of remorse: jealousy and a love of opposition foster the disorder, and render it incurable. This is the true portraiture of Arius, and other heresiarchs and firebrands of the universe. Can we sufficiently detest jealousy and pride, the fatal source of such great evils! Do we not discover, by fatal symptoms, that we ourselves harbour this monster in our breasts? Should the eye be jealous that the ear hears, and disturb the functions of this or the other senses, instead of regarding them as its own and enjoying their mutual advantage and comfort, what confusion would ensue!

ST. PORPHYRIUS, BISHOP OF GAZA,

CONFESSOR.

From his life, written with great accuracy by his faithful disciple Mark. See Fleury, t. 5. Tillemont, t. 10. Chatelain, p. 777. In the king's library at Paris is a Greek MS. life of St. Porphyrius, (abridged from that of Mark,) which has never been translated.

A.D. 420.

PORPHYRIUS, a native of Thessalonica in Macedonia, was of a noble and wealthy family. The desire of renouncing the world made him leave his friends and country at twenty-five years of age, in 378, to pass into Egypt, where he consecrated himself to God in a famous monastery in the desert of Sceté. After five

years spent there in the penitential exercises of a monastic life, he went into Palestine to visit the holy places of Jerusalem. After this he took up his abode in a cave near the Jordan, where he passed other five years in great austerity, till he fell sick, when a complication of disorders obliged him to leave that place and return to Jerusalem. There he never failed daily to visit devoutly all the holy places, leaning on a staff, for he was too weak to stand upright. It happened about the same time that Mark, an Asiatic, and the author of his life, came to Jerusalem with the same intent, where he made some stay. He was much edified at the devotion with which Porphyrius continually visited the place of our Lord's resurrection, and the other oratories. And seeing him one day labour with great pain in getting up the stairs in the chapel built by Constantine, he ran to him to offer him his assistance, which Porphyrius refused, saying: "It is not just that I who am come hither to beg pardon for my sins, should be eased by any one: rather let me undergo some labour and inconvenience, that God, beholding it, may have compassion on me." He in this condition never omitted his usual visits of piety to the holy places, and daily partook of the mystical table, that is, of the holy sacrament. And as to his distemper, so much did he contemn it, that he seemed to be sick in another's body and not in his own. His confidence in God always supported him. The only thing which afflicted him was, that his fortune had not been sold before this for the use of the poor. This he commissioned Mark to do for him, who accordingly set out for Thessalonica, and in three months' time returned to Jerusalem with money and effects to the value of four thousand five hundred pieces of gold. When the blessed man saw him, he embraced him, with tears of joy for his safe and speedy return. But Porphyrius was now so well recovered, that Mark scarcely knew him to be the same person: for his body had no signs of its former decay, and his face looked full, fresh, and coloured with a healthy red. He, perceiving his friend's amazement at his healthy looks, said to him with a smile: "Be not surprised. Mark, to see me in perfect health and strength, but admire the unspeakable goodness of Christ, who can easily cure what is despaired of by men." Mark asked him by what means he had recovered. He replied: "Forty days ago, being in extreme pain, I made a shift to reach Mount Calvary, where, fainting away, I fell into a kind of trance or ecstasy, during which I

seemed to see our Saviour on the cross, and the good thief in the same condition near him. I said to Christ, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom*: whereupon he ordered the thief to come to my assistance, who, raising me off the ground on which I lay, bade me go to Christ. I ran to him, and he, coming off his cross, said to me: *Take this wood* (meaning his cross) *into thy custody*. In obedience to him, methought I laid it on my shoulders, and carried it some way. I awaked soon after, and have been free from pain ever since, and without the least appearance of my having ever ailed anything." Mark was so edified with the holy man's discourse and good example, that he became more penetrated with esteem and affection for him than ever, which made him desirous of living always with him in order to his own improvement; for he seemed to have attained to a perfect mastery over all his passions: he was endued at the same time with a divine prudence, an eminent spirit of prayer, and the gift of tears. Being also well versed in the holy scriptures and spiritual knowledge, and no stranger to profane learning, he confounded all the infidels and heretics who attempted to dispute with him. As to the money and effects which Mark had brought him, he distributed all among the necessitous in Palestine and Egypt, so that, in a very short time, he had reduced himself to the necessity of labouring for his daily food. He therefore learned to make shoes and dress leather, while Mark, being well skilled in writing, got a handsome livelihood by copying books, and had some to spare. He therefore desired the saint to partake of his earnings. But Porphyrius replied, in the words of St. Paul: *He that doth not work let him not eat*. He led this laborious and penitential life till he was forty years of age, when the bishop of Jerusalem ordained him priest, though much against his will, and committed to him the keeping of the holy cross: this was in 393.

The saint changed nothing in his austere penitential life, feeding only upon roots and the coarsest bread, and not eating till after sunset, except on Sundays and holidays, when he eat at noon, and added a little oil and cheese; and on account of a great weakness of stomach, he mingled a very small quantity of wine in the water he drank. This was his method of living till his death. Being elected bishop of Gaza, in 396, John, the metropolitan and archbishop of Cæsarea, wrote to the patriarch of Jerusalem to desire him to send over Porphyrius, that he

might consult him on certain difficult passages of scripture. He was sent accordingly, but charged to be back in seven days. Porphyrius, receiving this order, seemed at first disturbed, but said: "God's will be done." That evening he called Mark, and said to him: "Brother Mark, let us go and venerate the holy places and the sacred cross, for it will be long before we shall do it again." Mark asked him why he said so. He answered: "Our Saviour had appeared to him the night before, and said: "Give up the treasure of the cross which you have in custody, for I will marry you to a wife, poor indeed and despicable, but of great piety and virtue. Take care to adorn her well; for, however contemptible she may appear, she is my sister." "This," said he, "Christ signified to me last night: and I fear, in consequence, my being charged with the sins of others, whilst I labour to expiate my own; but the will of God must be obeyed." When they had venerated the holy places and the sacred cross, and Porphyrius had prayed long before it, and with many tears, he shut up the cross in its golden case, and delivered the keys to the bishop; and having obtained his blessing, he and his disciple Mark set out the next day, with three others, among whom was one Barochas, a person whom the saint had found lying in the street almost dead, and had taken care of, cured, and instructed; who ever after served him with Mark. They arrived the next day, which was Saturday, at Cæsarea. The archbishop obliged them to sup with him. After spiritual discourses they took a little sleep, and then rose to assist at the night service. Next morning the archbishop bid the Gazæans lay hold on St. Porphyrius, and, while they held him, ordained him bishop. The holy man wept bitterly, and was inconsolable for being promoted to a dignity he judged himself so unfit for. The Gazæans, however, performed their part in endeavouring to comfort him; and, having assisted at the Sunday office, and stayed one day more at Cæsarea, they set out for Gaza, lay at Diospolis, and, late on Wednesday night, arrived at Gaza, much harassed and fatigued. For the heathens living in the villages near Gaza, having notice of their coming, had so damaged the roads in several places, and clogged them with thorns and logs of wood, that they were scarcely passable. They also contrived to raise such a smoke and stench, that the holy men were in danger of being blinded or suffocated.

There happened that year a very great drought, which the pagans

ascribe to the coming of the new Christian bishop, saying that their god Marnas had foretold Porphyrius would bring public calamities and disasters on their city. In Gaza stood a famous temple of that idol which the emperor Theodosius the Elder had commanded to be shut up, but not demolished, on account of its beautiful structure. The governor afterwards had permitted the heathens to open it again. As no rain fell the two first months after St. Porphyrius's arrival, the idolaters, in great affliction, assembled in this temple to offer sacrifices, and make supplications to this god Marnas, whom they called the Lord of rains. These they repeated for seven days, going also to a place of prayer out of the town but seeing all their endeavours ineffectual, they lost all hopes of a supply of what they so much wanted. A dearth ensuing, the Christians, to the number of two hundred and eighty, women and children included, after a day's fast, and watching the following night in prayer, by the order of their holy bishop, went out in procession to St. Timothy's church, in which lay the relics of the holy martyr St. Meuris, and of the confessor St. Thees, singing hymns of divine praise. But at their return to the city they found the gates shut against them, which the heathens refused to open. In this situation the Christians and St. Porphyrius above the rest, addressed almighty God with redoubled fervour for the blessing so much wanted; when in a short time, the clouds gathering, as at the prayers of Elias, there fell such a quantity of rain that the heathens opened their gates, and joining them, cried out: "Christ alone is God: He alone has overcome." They accompanied the Christians to the church to thank God for the benefit received, which was attended with the conversion of one hundred and seventy-six persons, whom the saint instructed, baptized, and confirmed, as he did one hundred and five more before the end of that year. The miraculous preservation of the life of a pagan woman in labour, who had been despaired of, occasioned the conversion of that family and others, to the number of sixty-four.

The heathens perceiving their number decrease, grew very troublesome to the Christians, whom they excluded from commerce and all public offices, and injured them all manner of ways. St. Porphyrius, to screen himself and his flock from their outrages and vexations had recourse to the emperor's protection. On this errand he sent Mark, his disciple, to Constantinople, and went afterwards himself in company with John, his metropolitan

archbishop of Cæsarea. Here they applied themselves to St. John Chrysostom, who joyfully received them, and recommended them to the eunuch Amantius, who had great credit with the empress, and was a zealous servant of God. Amantius having introduced them to the empress, she received them with great distinction, assured them of her protection, and begged their prayers for her safe delivery, a favour she received a few days after. She desired them in another visit to sign her and her newborn son, Theodosius the Younger, with the sign of the cross, which they did. The young prince was baptized with great solemnity, and on that occasion the empress obtained from the emperor all that the bishops had requested, and in particular that the temples of Gaza should be demolished; an imperial edict being drawn up for this purpose and delivered to Cynegius, a virtuous patrician, and one full of zeal, to see it executed. They stayed at Constantinople during the feast of Easter, and at their departure the emperor and empress bestowed on them great presents. When they landed in Palestine, near Gaza, the Christians came out to meet them with a cross carried before them, singing hymns. In the place called Tetramphodos, or Four-ways-end, stood a marble statue of Venus, on a marble altar, which was in great reputation for giving oracles to young women about the choice of husbands, but had often grossly deceived them, engaging them in most unhappy marriages; so that many heathens detested its lying impostures. As the two bishops, with the procession of the Christians, and the cross borne before them, passed through that square, this idol fell down of itself, and was broken to pieces, whereupon thirty-two men and seven women were converted.

Ten days after arrived Cynegius, having with him a consular man, and a duke, or general, with a strong guard of soldiers, besides the civil magistrates of the country. He assembled the citizens and read to them the emperor's edict, commanding their idols and temples to be destroyed, which was accordingly executed, and no less than eight public temples in the city were burnt; namely, those of the Sun, Venus, Apollo, Proserpine, Hecate, the Hierion, or of the priests, Tycheon, or of Fortune, and of Marnion of Marnos, their Jupiter. The Marnion, in which men had been often sacrificed, burned for many days. After this, the private houses and courts were all searched; the idols were every where burned or thrown into the common

sewers, and all books of magic and superstition were cast into the flames. Many idolaters desired baptism; but the saint took a long time to make trial of them, and to prepare them for that sacrament by daily instructions. On the spot where the temple of Marnas had stood, was built the church of Eudoxia in the figure of a cross. She sent for this purpose, precious pillars and rich marble from Constantinople. Of the marble taken out of the Marnion, St. Porphyrius made steps and a road to the church, that it might be trampled upon by men, dogs, swine, and other beasts; whence many heathens would never walk thereon. Before he would suffer the church to be begun he proclaimed a fast, and the next morning being attended by his clergy and all the Christians in the city, they went in a body to the place from the church Irene, singing the Venite exultemus Domino, and other psalms, and answering to every verse Alleluia, Barochas carrying a cross before them. They all set to work, carrying stones and other materials, and digging the foundations according to the plan marked out and directed by Rufinus, a celebrated architect, singing psalms and saying prayers during their work. It was begun in 403, when thirty high pillars arrived from Constantinople, two of which, called Carostiæ, shone like emeralds when placed in the church. It was five years building, and when finished in 408, the holy bishop performed the consecration of it on Easter-day with the greatest pomp and solemnity. His alms to the poor on that occasion seemed boundless, though they were always exceedingly great. The good bishop spent the remainder of his life in the zealous discharge of all pastoral duties; and though he lived to see the city clear for the most part of the remains of paganism, superstition, and idolatry, he had always enough to suffer from such as continued obstinate in their errors. Falling sick, he made his pious will, in which he recommended all his dear flock to God. He died in 420, being about sixty years of age, on the 26th of February, on which day both the Greeks and Latins make mention of him. The pious author of his life concludes it, saying: "He is now in the paradise of delight, interceding for us with all the saints, by whose prayers may God have mercy on us."