

DECEMBER II.

SAINT BIBIANA, V. M.

Abridged from her Acts, which are disfigured by interpolations. See Anast. in Simplicio, et Baron. Annot. in Martyr. Rom. Bosius et Aringhi, Roma Subterr. l. 3, c. 37.

A. D. 363.

WE are informed by Ammianus Marcellinus, a pagan historian of that age, and an officer in the court of Julian the Apostate, that this emperor made Apronianus governor of Rome in the year 363, who, while he was on the way to that city, had the misfortune to lose an eye. This accident he superstitiously imputed to the power of magic, through the malice of some who excelled in that art; and, in this foolish persuasion, to gratify his spleen and superstition, he resolved to punish and exterminate the magicians; in which accusation, Christians were involved above all others, on account of many wonderful miracles which were wrought in the primitive ages. Under this magistrate, St. Bibiana received the crown of martyrdom. This holy virgin was a native of Rome, and daughter to Flavian, a Roman knight, and his wife Dafrosa, who were both zealous Christians. Flavian was apprehended, deprived of a considerable post which he had held in the city, burned in the face with a hot iron, and banished to Acquapendente, then called Aquæ Taurinæ, where he died of his wounds a few days after. Dafrosa, by an order of Apronianus, who had thus treated her husband for his constancy in his faith, was, on the same account, confined to her house for some time; and, at length, carried out of the gates of the city, and beheaded. Bibiana and her sister Demetria, after the death of their holy parents, were stripped of all they had in the world, and suffered much from poverty for five months, but spent that time in their own house in fasting and prayer. Apronianus had flattered himself that hunger and want would bring them to a compliance; but seeing himself mistaken, summoned them to appear before him. Demetria, having made a generous confession of her faith, fell down and expired at the foot of the tribunal, in the presence of the judge. Apronianus

gave orders that Bibiana should be put into the hands of a wicked woman named Rufina, who was extremely artful, and undertook to bring her to another way of thinking. That agent of hell employed all the allurements she could invent: which were afterwards succeeded by blows; but Bibiana, making prayer her shield, remained invincible. Apronianus, enraged at the courage and perseverance of a tender virgin, at length passed sentence of death upon her, and ordered her to be tied to a pillar, and whipped with scourges loaded with leaden plummets till she expired. The saint underwent this punishment cheerfully, and died in the hands of the executioners. Her body was left in the open air, that it might be a prey to beasts; but, having lain exposed two days, was buried in the night, near the palace of Licinius, by a holy priest called John. Peace being soon after restored to the church, a chapel was erected over her tomb; and a hundred years after, in 465, Pope Simplicius built there a fair church, as Anastasius mentions in his life. This church was called Olympina, from a pious lady of that name, who defrayed the expenses. It was repaired by Honorius III. but being fallen to decay was afterwards united to St. Mary Major, till it was sumptuously rebuilt by Urban VIII. in 1628, who placed in it the relics of SS. Bibiana, Demetria, and Dafrosa, which were discovered in that place which has been sometimes called St. Bibian's cemetery.

The only affair which a Christian has in this world, and in which consists all his happiness and joy, is to seek God, to attain to the perfect possession of his grace and love, and in all things most perfectly to do his will. By this disposition of heart he is raised above all created things, and united to the eternal and unchangeable object of his felicity. He receives the good things of this world with gratitude to the Giver, but always with indifference; leaves them with joy, if God requires that sacrifice at his hands; and, in his abundance, fears not so much the flight of what he possesses as the infection of his own heart, or lest his affections be entangled by them. Such attachments are secretly and imperceptibly contracted, yet are ties by which the soul is held captive, and enslaved to the world. Only assiduous prayer and meditation on heavenly things, habitual self-denial, humble distrust and watchfulness, and abundant alms-

deeds proportioned to a person's circumstances, can preserve a soul from this dangerous snare amidst worldly affluence. To these means is that powerful grace annexed. This disengagement of the heart, how sincere soever, usually acquires a great increase and perfection by the actual sacrifice of earthly goods, made with heroic sentiments of faith and divine love, when God calls for it. Such an offering is richly compensated by the most abundant spiritual graces and comforts at present, and an immense weight of eternal glory in the next life.

DECEMBER III.

SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER, C.

APOSTLE OF THE INDIES.

His life was written in Latin by F. Turselin, in six books, first printed at Rome in 1594. The same author translated into Latin, and published in 1596 the saint's letters in four books. The life of this saint was also composed by F. Orlandino in the history of the Society: in Italian by F. Bartoli; also by F. Maffei: in Portuguese by Luzena, and in Spanish by F. Garcia. See likewise F. Nieremberg's illustrious men: the modern histories of India, especially that of Jarrio: Solia's history of Japan, Lewis de Gusman's Spanish history of the Missions to the East-Indies, China, and Japan; and Ferdinand Mendez Pinto's Travels in Portuguese. From those and other sources is the life of St. Francis Xavier elegantly compiled in French by the judicious and eloquent F. Bouhours, published in English by Dryden in 1688. See also Maffei, *Histor. Indicar.* l. 15, F. Ribadeneira, F. Charlevoix, *Hist. de Japan*. Lafiteau, *Découvertes et Conquestes des Indes Orientales par les Portugais*.

A. D. 1552.

A CHARGE to go and preach to all nations was given by Christ to his apostles. This commission the pastors of the church have faithfully executed down to this present time; and in every age have men been raised by God, and filled with his Holy Spirit for the discharge of this important function, who, being sent by the authority of Christ and in his name by those who have succeeded the apostles in the government of his church, have brought new nations to the fold of Christ for the advancement of the divine honour, and filling up the number of the saints. This conversion of nations, according to the divine commission is the prerogative of the Catholic Church, in which it has never had any rival. Among those who in the sixteenth