

refused to accept a single farthing of it notwithstanding his extreme poverty, and the difficulties which he had to struggle with, in laying the foundation of that new church. He had inherited the spirit of the apostles in an heroic degree. Our saint died about the year 1002, and was buried in his cathedral at Wexiow, where his tomb became famous for miracles. He was canonized about the year 1158, by Pope Adrian IV.,⁽¹⁾ an Englishman, who had himself laboured zealously, and with great success, in the conversion of Norway, and other northern countries, about a hundred and forty years after St. Sigefride, who was honoured by the Swedes as their apostle, till the change of religion among them.*

FEBRUARY XVI.

ST. ONESIMUS,

DISCIPLE OF SAINT PAUL.

HE was a Phrygian by birth, slave to Philemon, a person of note of the city of Colossæ, converted to the faith by St. Paul. Having robbed his master, and being obliged to fly, he providentially met with St. Paul, then a prisoner for the faith at Rome, who there converted and baptized him, and sent him with his canonical letter of recommendation to Philemon, by whom he was pardoned, set at liberty, and sent back to his spiritual father, whom he afterwards faithfully served. That apostle made him, with Tychicus, the bearer of his epistle to the Colossians,⁽²⁾ and afterwards, as St. Jerom⁽³⁾ and other fathers witness, a preacher of the gospel, and a bishop. The Greeks say, he was crowned with martyrdom under Domitian, in the year 95, and keep his festival on the 15th. Bede, Ado, Usuard, the Roman and other Latin martyrologists mention him on the 16th of February.⁽⁴⁾

Baronius and some others confound him with St. Onesimus, the third bishop of Ephesus, after St. Timothy, who was suc-

(1) Vastove, Vineæ Aquilonis. (2) Colos. iv. (3) Ep. 62. c. 2.

(4) Tillem. t. 1. p. 294. and note 10 on St. Paul.

* In the life of St. Sigefride, published by Benzelius, it is mentioned, that St. Sigefride, upon his first arrival in Sweden, preached chiefly by interpreters.

ceeded first by John, then by Caius. This Onesimus showed great respect and charity to St. Ignatius, when on his journey to Rome, in 107, and is highly commended by him.(1)

When a sinner, by the light and power of an extraordinary grace, is snatched like a firebrand out of the fire, and rescued from the gates of hell, we cannot wonder if he be swallowed up by the deepest and most lively sense of his own guilt, and of the divine mercy; if such a one love much, because much has been forgiven him; if he endeavour to repair his past crimes by heroic acts of penance and all virtues, and if he make haste to redeem his lost time by a zeal and vigilance hard to be imitated by others. Hence we read of the *first love of the church of Ephesus*(2) as more perfect. The ardour of the compunction and love of a true penitent, is compared to the unparalleled *love of Judah in the day of her espousal*.(3) This ardour is not to be understood as a passing sally of the purest passions, as a short-lived fit of fervour, or desire of perfection, as a transient taste or sudden transport of the soul: it must be sincere and constant. With what excess of goodness does not God communicate himself to souls which thus open themselves to him! With what caresses does he not often visit them! With what a profusion of graces does he not enrich and strengthen them! It often happens that, in the beginning, God, either to allure the frailty of a new convert, or to fortify his resolution against hazardous trials, favours him with more than usual communications of the sweetness of his love, and ravishes him by some glances, as it were, of the beatific vision. His tenderness was not less, when, for their spiritual advancement, their exercise in heroic virtues, and the increase of their victories and glory, he conducted them through severe trials. On the other side, with what fidelity and ardour did these holy penitents improve themselves daily in divine love and all virtues! Alas! our coldness and insensibility, since our pretended conversion from the world and sin, is a far greater subject of amazement than the extraordinary fervour of the saints in the divine service.

(1) Ep. ad Ephes.

(2) Apoc. 11. 4.

(3) Jerem. 11. 2.