

Saint Leo of Patara

At Patara, in Lycia, a great festival was once being celebrated in honor of a certain idol, at which a great concourse assembled; some having gone willingly, and many through fear, as an edict had been published to that effect. Saint Leo, who was a good Christian, departed from the city, and went to perform his devotions before the relics of Saint Paregorius, who had died for the faith some short time previously. Upon his return home, Saint Paregorius appeared to him in a vision, standing at the opposite side of a torrent, and inviting him to pass over.

Saint Leo hence conceived a great hope that he would be honored with martyrdom; and going, some days after, to make a second visit to the tomb of Saint Paregorius, he passed by the temple of Fortune, where many lanterns burned before the idol. Impelled by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost, he entered the temple and threw down the lights: but the idolaters, enraged at the insult offered to their idol, raised such a clamor, that the governor heard of the affair, and ordered that the saint should be brought before him.

When Leo made his appearance, the governor rebuked him for the outrage he had committed against the gods, in violation of the commands of the sovereign.

Saint Leo, animated with holy zeal, replied: "Thou speakest to me of the gods, as if there were many: there is but one God, and Jesus Christ is his only begotten Son. Since statues of stone and wood are devoid of sense and feeling, of what use can lanterns be to them? If thou hadst the knowledge of the true God, thou wouldst not worship these false deities. Oh, do abandon this vain superstition, and adore our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!"

The governor said: "Thou dost then exhort me to become a Christian? Better it were for thee to conform to the general practice, lest thy rashness be punished as it deserves."

Saint Leo with increased ardor replied: "I see about me a multitude of those who, blindly persevering in error, despise the true God; but I am a Christian notwithstanding, and follow the instructions of the apostles. If this deserve chastisement, award it; for I am determined to suffer every torture, rather than become the slave of the devil. Others may do as they please, since they are solicitous merely for the present, and are reckless of the future life, which is to be obtained only by sufferings. The Scripture tells us that narrow is the way which leadeth to life."

The governor observed: "Since, then, the way of the Christians is narrow; exchange it for ours, which is wide and commodious."

Saint Leo answered: "I have said that the way is narrow, because it is one of affliction, and of persecutions suffered for justice sake; but it is wide enough for those who walk therein, because their faith, and the hope of an eternal reward, make it so to them. The love of virtue maketh that easy which to thee seemeth difficult. On the contrary, the road of vice is in reality narrow, and leads to an eternal precipice."

This discourse was most unpalatable to the pagans, who accordingly exclaimed that the impious man, who had spoken against their religion, should be silenced.



The governor then asked Saint Leo whether he would sacrifice; and being answered that his compliance was totally impossible, he ordered him to be scourged.

Although this command was most cruelly executed, the saint suffered without a groan; whereupon the governor threatened still greater torments, but the saint answered:

“I know not these gods, and will never sacrifice to them.”

“At least,” said the governor, “say that our gods are great, and I will dismiss thee, for I have compassion upon thy old age.”

Saint Leo replied: “They are great for the destruction of those souls that believe in them.”

The governor, infuriated at this reply, said: “I will order thee to be dragged over stones till thou art torn to pieces.” The saint replied: “I shall welcome any kind of death that procures me the kingdom of heaven, and that blessed life which I shall enjoy in company with the saints, upon my departure from this world.”

The tyrant continued to importune him to sacrifice, or at least to acknowledge that the gods could save him from death.

The saint replied: “Thou art very weak, since thou dost nothing but threaten, without putting thy threats into execution.”

The populace, being enraged at this reply, obliged the judge to condemn the saint to be tied by the feet and dragged through a torrent.

Saint Leo, finding himself about to obtain the accomplishment of his desire to die for Jesus Christ, raised his eyes to heaven, and prayed after the following manner: “I thank Thee, O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for granting me the grace to follow Thy servant Paregorius. I praise Thee, because Thou hast enabled me, by martyrdom, to cancel my past sins. I commend my soul to the care of Thy holy angels, that it may be saved from the perdition prepared for the wicked. I beseech Thee, by that which it is my blessed lot to suffer, to have mercy on those who are the cause thereof; and since Thou desirest not the death of the sinner, grant them the grace to recognize Thee as the Lord of the universe. May all that which I suffer in the name of Jesus Christ thy Son redound to Thy glory forever and ever. Amen.”

As soon as he pronounced the word Amen, he rendered up his soul to God, and went to enjoy the crown to which Saint Paregorius had invited him.

The executioners cast the body into a deep pit, in order to break it to pieces; but it was taken thence and found entire, with only a few slight bruises, and the face appeared comely and smiling.