

St. Vincent the Invincible of Saragossa

Today, many of us think of saints as beings surrounded with mystery and enveloped in the mists of legend. When the name of a saint is mentioned we think of some person, deeply religious, and yet not quite human. These conceptions of sainthood are poor ones to hold for they are quite wrong, and they hinder us from knowing these holy people.

I would tell you now of a saint, and his name is Vincent; Deacon and Martyr of the fourth century. He is one of the few martyrs of that famous century whose deeds are authentic. His name is found in the oldest martyrologies, and the facts concerning his life are established by competent authorities; but like all the Saints of God there is much legend surrounding his life.

Saint Vincent was born at Huesca, Spain during the latter part of the third century. One legend connects Saint Vincent with Saint Laurence by the tie of kindred. This legend states that the mother of Saint Vincent, Enold of Huesca, was the sister of Saint Laurence. However, this may be, both of these saints were born at Huesca, Spain, and both attained martyrdom. We are told that the father of Saint Vincent was the "noble consul" Agrestes.

At the age of twenty years Saint Vincent was already deacon to Bishop Valerious of Saragossa. Due to an impediment of speech the Bishop instructed the teaching office to the young Vincent. He carried out his duties as Deacon faithfully, although his was the lowest order of the ordained ministry. He was always ready to serve the clergy "no matter how humble the part assigned to him."

honor of the proconsul a great multitude of Christians went to the appointed place. When Dacianus had them thus he ordered them massacred and all of their bodies to be thrown on a funeral pyre.

During this persecution in Spain, Saint Vincent did much to help and encourage these children of God but in a short time both Saint Vincent and Bishop Valerius were brought before Dacianus and he ordered that they be chained, thrown into prison, and starved. After many days Dacianus had them brought before the tribunal. He was greatly surprised to find them both in perfect health.

Dacianus addressed Bishop Valerius thus: "Do you not know that those who despise the imperial decrees will lose life? The rulers of the world have commended that you should offer libations, not willing that the dignity of the ancient worship should be profaned with new laws." The Bishop did not reply to this for he had a gross impediment in his speech.

Then Dacianus turned to Saint Vincent saying, "And thou also, Vincent, harken wisely to my words, distinguished as thou art by thy noble birth and by the beauty and grace of thy youth, before thou choose between being loaded with honors and subdued by tortures."

Vincent replied nothing to Dacianus but turning to Valerius he said, "If thou commandest me, my father, I will make answer to the judge."

And Valerius said, "I have long entrusted thee, my dearest son, with the Divine Word; and now to thee I commit the answer for the faith, for which we stand here."

Saint Vincent then spoke his defense, but rather it might be called his accusation, for he spoke out loudly saying, "Know, that it is held among Christians to be a nefarious prudence to blaspheme by denying the worship of the God-head. And, not to detain thee, we Christians pro-

cess to be worshippers, servants, and witnesses of the One True God, who abideth forever. In His name we must ever take spiritual weapons to contend with gladly embracing death for the truth. For thy torments do but bring us home to our own country; through death we are conducted into life. It profits that the flesh should perish by diabolical cruelty, since the inner man fearlessly preserves his faith. For that most poisonous and murderous serpent, who first envied man his paradise and, robbing him of immortality, made him subject to death, is now constraining you to assault the innocence of Christians. He by his malice substituted the worship of idols for the worship of God. It is he and his satellites that we, by calling on God, banish from poor possessed human bodies it is he whom you honour with the vain praises of a profane adoration, with madness preferring the creature to the Creator. For the devil burns with rage against the Christian faith, and when he sees himself despised he groans." (Acta Sincera Martyrum - Ruinart.)

Straight way Dacianus ordered Bishop Valerius banished from the city of Saragossa, but for Vincent he saved the cruellest of tortures; Vincent had despised all the honors of Dacianus and spoken the truth.

St. Vincent was then put to the most cruel of tortures but he submitted to them all with "miraculous strength." He was placed on a grid-iron and his body besprinkled with salt. When this did not bring forth the desired effects his body was dragged over broken pottery; all of these terrible tortures were to no avail.

*Lo, for Christ the deacon Vincent
Warreth in a glorious strife,
And with bold and willing footstep
Mounts the pyre with tortures rife
While his salt-besprinkled body
Crackling flames bereave of life.*

After the ordeal of torture St. Vincent was thrown into prison but Angels came there and ministered unto him. When his jailers looked in and saw the cell filled with heavenly light, and that a sweet perfume came from it, they were amazed. St. Vincent called out to them and asked them to join with him in a hymn of thanksgiving. On hearing the Angels singing the jailers fell on their knees and were converted.

Dacianus seeing that tortures could not destroy the spirit of St. Vincent tried to seduce him by the means of luxury. Dacianus had St. Vincent placed on a bed strewn with flowers and everything that could be done to ease his pain was done. No sooner had St. Vincent been placed on the bed than he died, and Angels carried his soul to glory. (Peristephanior of Prudentius).

The consul then commanded that the body of St. Vincent be sewed up in the hide of an ox and thrown into the sea. This was a lowly mode of burial for it was used only for the body of parricides. St. Vincent's body was prepared and carried out to sea and thrown overboard with a millstone attached to it. When the boatmen returned to the shore the body of St. Vincent lay upon the sands. The waves hollowed out a grave for the body and there it remained for many years until it was discovered by certain Christians from Valencia. These people had St. Vincent's body taken to that city and interred.

Thus died St. Vincent the martyr and deacon. In the very lips of cruelty and seduction he stood invincible. He defied the hosts of Satan and took upon himself the Greater Life. Prudentius (the Christian poet of the fifth century) tells that Saragossa (St. Vincent was martyred January 22, 303 A.D.) could boast of 18 Christian Martyrs; surely

St. Vincent was not the least among these.

When the Christians fled from the Moors they took with them these "sacred relics," but the ship in which they were being carried was driven upon a promontory on the coast of Portugal. The people on the ship stopped there and buried the body of St. Vincent. To this day that point is known as Cape St. Vincent. Here ravens came and kept guard over the sacred remains, and a portion of the cape is called in remembrance of them - *El Monte De Las Cuervas*.

In the year 1147 Alonza the First had remains of St. Vincent removed to Lisbon. During the journey from Cape Vincent to Lisbon two ravens accompanied the ship, one at the stern and one at the prow. These ravens multiplied so fast in Lisbon that rents were assigned to the chapter there for their support.

St. Vincent is surnamed "the Invincible" because of his character and the significance of his name. He is usually represented in art as young, beautiful, in a deacon's dress, bearing a palm of victory, and carrying a smoking censor. His proper attribute is a crow or raven. St. Vincent is the patron saint of Lisbon, Valencia, Saragossa, Milan, Chalons and many other cities in France.

What Prudentius says of St. Laurence we may truly say of St. Vincent, "when his body was lacerated by iron forks, he only smiled on his tormentors; the pangs they inflicted were to him delights; thorns were his roses; the flames a refreshing bath; death itself was but the entrance to life."

In 711 A.D. an army of Moors led by Tarik landed on the coast of Spain and within seven years they had forced their way beyond the Pyrenees Mountains. (The leader Tarik was not in Spain during the seven years for he was recalled from that place earlier in the invasion).

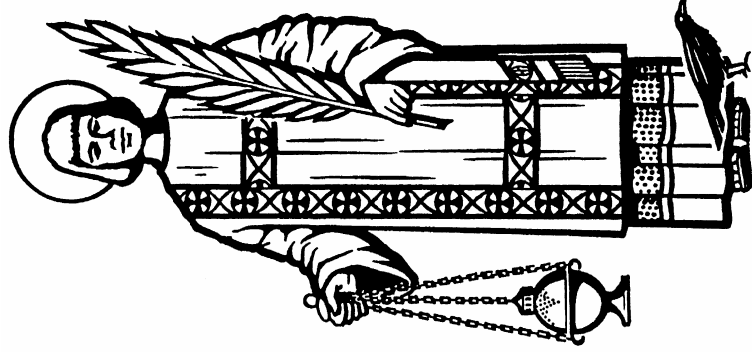
Some authorities state that the relics of St. Vincent were brought to Saragossa in 855 A.D.

and then to Castres (Gascony) in 864 A.D. Father Holweck states that only part of his relics were brought to Lisbon.

At St. Augustine's Orthodox Church in Denver, Colorado, there is a small reliquary that sits on a window sill in the sacristy. Through the glass of the reliquary one can see a very small chip of bone no larger than a grain of rice. Inside is a slip of paper proclaiming the bone to be a relic of St. Vincent. The relic is not certified, but remains in the custody of the Rev. David Lynch, one-time Director General of the Order of St. Vincent.

In art, he is young, mild and handsome; is vested as a Deacon in traditional dalmatic, bearing a palm branch (of victory) and a smoking thurible.

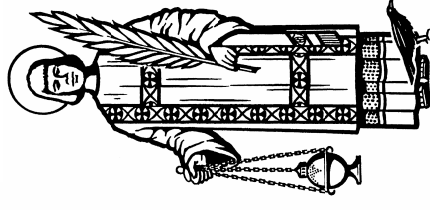
The instrument of his torture is a grid iron on which his salt-besprinkled body was burned, and broken pottery over which his body was dragged. Usually near him is perched a crow or raven, symbolic of the restlessness of the saints in the world.



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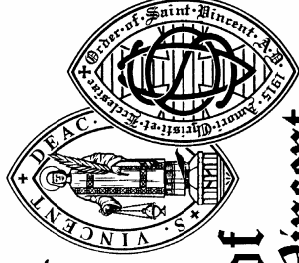
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Patron of the
Order of St. Vincent



The
International

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