

X. the Arrest

by Martyrs of the Catacombs

The sermon explores the themes of faith, perseverance, and community in the face of persecution, highlighted by the arrest of Pollio and the martyrdom of Chrysippus.

Topics: "Persecution", "Eternal Rewards"

Description

In the sermon 'The trial of your faith worketh patience,' the preacher Martyrs of the Catacombs, through the characters of Honorius, Marcellus, and Lady Caecilia, reflects on the challenges faced by early Christians living in hiding in the Catacombs, discussing the dangers, fears, and sorrows they endure while remaining faithful to their beliefs. Despite the increasing sufferings and persecution, they find hope and strength in the promises of overcoming and receiving eternal rewards as mentioned in the Book of Revelation, encouraging each other to rise above earthly troubles and look forward to the joy set before them.

Transcript

"The trial of your faith worketh patience."

Honorius was seated in the chapel with one or two others, among whom was the lady Caecilia. The feeble rays of a single lamp but faintly illuminated the scene. They were silent and sad. A deeper melancholy than usual rested upon them. Around them was the sound of footsteps and of voices and a confused murmur of life.

Suddenly a quick step was heard, and Marcellus entered. The occupants of the chapel sprang up with cries of joy.

"Where is Pollio?" cried Caecilia eagerly.

"I have not seen him," said Marcellus.

"Not seen him! said Caecilia, and she fell back upon her seat.

"Why? Is he beyond his time?"

"He ought to have returned six hours ago, and I am sick with anxiety."

"O there is no danger," said Marcellus soothingly. "He can take care of himself." He tried to pass it off with a careless tone, but his looks belied his words.

"No danger!" said Caecilia. "Alas! we know too well what new dangers there are. Never has it been so dangerous as now."

"What has delayed you, Marcellus? We had begun to give you up."

"I was stopped near the Via Alba," said Marcellus. "I dropped my load and ran to the river. The crowd followed, but I jumped into the river and swam across. There I took a circuitous route among the streets on the opposite side, after which I came across again and reached this place in safety."

"You had a narrow escape. A price is on your head."

"Have you heard it?"

"Yes, and much more. We have heard of the redoubled efforts which they are making to crush us. All through the day tidings of sorrow have been reaching us. We must rely more than ever on Him who alone can save us."

"We can baffle them still," said Marcellus hopefully.

"They watch our principal entrances," said Honorius.

"Then we can make new ones. The openings are numberless."

"They have offered rewards for all the prominent brethren."

"What then? We will guard those brethren more carefully than ever."

"Our means of living are gradually lessening."

"But there are as many bold and faithful hearts as ever. Who is afraid to risk his life now? There will never cease to be a supply of food so long as we live in the Catacombs. If we escape pursuit we bring help to our brethren; if we die we receive the crown of martyrdom."

"You are right, Marcellus. Your faith puts my fear to shame. How can those who live in the Catacombs be afraid of death? It is but a momentary gloom and it will pass. But this day we have heard much to distress our hearts and fill our spirits with dismay."

"Alas," continued Honorius in a mournful voice, "how are the people scattered and the Churches left desolate! But a few months ago and there were fifty Christian churches within this city where the light of truth shone, and the sound of prayer and praise ascended to the Most High. Now they are overthrown, the people dispersed, and driven out of the sight of men."

He paused, overcome by emotion, and then in a low and plaintive voice he repeated the mournful words of the eightieth psalm:

"How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears;

And givest them tears to drink in great measure.

Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbors;

And our enemies laugh among themselves.

Turn us again, O God of hosts,

And cause thy face to shine,

And we shall be saved.

Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt;

Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

Thou preparedst room before it,

And didst cause it to take deep root,

And it filled the land.

The hills were covered with the shadow of it,

And the boughs thereof were like goodly cedars.

She sent out her boughs to the sea,

And her branches unto the river.

Why hast thou broken down her hedges,

So that all who pass by the way do pluck her?

The boar out of the wood doth waste it,

And the wild beast of the field doth devour it.

Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts,

Look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine.

And the vineyard which thy right hand planted,

And the branch which thou madest strong for thyself.

It is burned with fire, it is cut down;

They perish at the rebuke of thy countenance."

"You are sad, Honorius," said Marcellus. "Our sufferings, it is true, increase upon us; but we can be more than conquerors through Him who loved us. What says he--"

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'

"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.'

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.'

"He that overcometh and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and I will give him the morning star.'

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.'

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name.'

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

As Marcellus spoke these words his form grew erect, his eye brightened, and his face flushed with enthusiasm. His emotions were transmitted to his companions, and as one by one these glorious promises fell upon their ears they forgot for a while their sorrows in the thought of their approaching blessedness. The New Jerusalem, the golden streets, the palms of glory, the song of the Lamb, the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne; all these were present to their minds.

"Marcellus," said Honorius, "you have driven away my gloom by your words; let us, rise superior to earthly troubles. Come, brethren, lay aside your cares. The youngest born into the kingdom puts our faith to shame. Let us look to the joy set before us. 'For we know that if this earthly tabernacle be destroyed we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'"

"Death comes nearer," he continued, "our enemies encircle us, and the circle grows narrower. Let us die like Christians--"

"Why these gloomy forebodings?" said Marcellus. "Is death nearer to us than it was before? Are we not safe in the Catacombs?"

"Have you not heard, then?"

"What?"

"Of the death of Chrysippus!"

"Chrysippus! dead! No--how? when?"

"The soldiers of the emperor were led down into the Catacombs by some one who knew the way. They advanced upon the room where service was going on. This was in the Catacombs beyond the Tiber. The brethren gave a hasty alarm and fled. But the venerable Chrysippus, either through extreme old age or else through desire for martyrdom, refused to fly. He threw himself upon his knees and raised his voice in prayer. Two faithful attendants remained with him. The soldiers rushed in, and even while Chrysippus was upon his knees they dashed out his brains. He fell dead at the first blow, and his two attendants were slain

by his side."

"They have gone to join the noble army of martyrs. They have been faithful unto death, and will receive the crown of life," said Marcellus.

But now they were interrupted by a tumult without. Instantly every one started upright. "The soldiers!" exclaimed all.

But, no; it was not the soldiers. It was a Christian; a messenger from the world above. Pale and trembling, he flung himself upon the floor, and wringing his hands, cried out as he panted for breath,

"Alas! alas!"

Upon the lady Caecilia the sight of this man produced a terrible effect. She staggered back against the wall trembling from head to foot, her hands clenched each other, her eyes stared wildly, her lips moved as though she wished to speak, but no sound escaped.

"Speak--speak! Tell us all," cried Honorius.

"Pollio!" gasped the messenger.

"What of him?" said Marcellus sternly.

"He is arrested--he is in prison!"

At that intelligence a shriek burst forth which sounded fearfully amid the surrounding horrors. It came from the Lady Caecilia. The next moment she fell heavily, to the floor.

The bystanders hurried to attend her. They carried her away to her own quarters. There they applied the customary restoratives and she revived. But the blow had struck heavily, and though sense and feeling returned, yet she seemed like one in a dream.

Meanwhile the messenger had recovered strength and told all that he knew.

"Pollio was with you, was he?" asked Marcellus.

"No, he was alone."

"On what errand?"

"Finding out the news. I was on one side of the street a little behind. He was coming home. We walked on until we came to a crowd of men. To my surprise, Pollio was stopped and questioned. I did not hear what passed, but I saw their threatening gestures, and at length saw them seize him. I could do nothing. I kept at a safe distance and watched. In about half an hour a troop of Pretorians came along. Pollio was handed over to them, and they carried him away."

"Pretorians?" said Marcellus. "Do you know the captain?"

"Yes; it was Lucullus."

"It is well," said Marcellus, and he fell into a deep fit of musing.

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