

Xii. Pollio's Trial

by Martyrs of the Catacombs

The sermon recounts the trial of Pollio, a young Christian boy who resolutely defends his faith despite facing death.

Scripture: Matthew 10:22, Philippians 1:21, Hebrews 11:35, 1 Peter 4:16, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Christian Persecution", "Faith Conviction"

Description

In the sermon by Martyrs of the Catacombs, a young boy named Pollio bravely faces persecution and death for his Christian faith, unwavering in his commitment despite offers of wealth, power, and life if he renounces his beliefs. Pollio's steadfastness in the face of imminent death showcases the strength and conviction that true faith can provide, even in the most dire circumstances.

Transcript

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained praise."

It was a large room in a building not far from the imperial palace. The pavement was of polished marble, and columns of porphyry supported a paneled dome. An altar with a statue of a heathen deity was at one end of the apartment. Magistrates in their robes occupied raised seats on the opposite end. In front of them were some soldiers guarding a prisoner.

The prisoner was the boy Pollio. His face was pale, but his bearing was erect and firm. The remarkable intelligence which had always characterized him did not fail him now. His quick eye took in everything. He knew the inevitable doom that impended over him. Yet there was no trace of fear or indecision about him.

He knew that the only tie that bound him to earth had been severed. Early that morning the news of his mother's death had reached him. It had been carried to him by a man who thought that the knowledge of this would fortify his resolution. That man was Marcellus. The kindness of Lucullus had gained him an interview. His judgment had been correct. While his mother lived, the thought of her would have weakened his resolution; now that she was dead, he was eager to depart also. In his simple faith he believed that death would unite him at once to the dear mother whom he loved so fondly.

With these feelings he awaited the examination.

"Who are you?"

"Marcus Servilius Pollio."

"What is your age?"

"Thirteen years."

At the mention of his name a murmur of compassion went round the assemblage, for that name was well known in Rome.

"You are charged with the crime of being a Christian. What have you to say?"

"I am guilty of no crime," said the boy. "I am a Christian, and I am glad to be able to confess it before men."

"It is the same with them all," said one of the judges. "They all have the same formula."

"Do you know the nature of your crime?"

"I am guilty of no crime," said Pollio. "My religion teaches me to fear God and honor the emperor. I have obeyed every just law, and am not a traitor."

"To be a Christian is to be a traitor."

"I am a Christian, but I am not a traitor."

"The law of the state forbids you to be a Christian under pain of death. If you are a Christian you must die."

"I am a Christian," repeated Pollio firmly.

"Then you must die."

"Be it so."

"Boy, do you know what it is to suffer death?"

"I have seen much of death during the last few months. I have always expected to lay down my life for my religion when my turn should come."

"Boy, you are young. We pity your tender age and inexperience. You have been trained so peculiarly that you are scarcely responsible for your present folly. For all this we are willing to make allowance. This religion which infatuates you is foolishness. You believe that a poor Jew, who was executed a few hundred years ago, is a God. Can anything be more absurd than this! Our religion is the religion of the state. It has enough in itself to satisfy the minds of young and old, ignorant and learned. Leave your foolish superstition and turn to our wiser and older religion."

"I cannot."

"You are the last of a noble family. The state recognizes the worth and the nobility of the Servilii. Your ancestors lived in pomp and wealth and power. You are a poor miserable boy and a prisoner. Be wise, Pollio. Think of the glory of your forefathers and throw aside the miserable obstacle that keeps you away from all their illustrious fame."

"I cannot."

"You have lived a miserable outcast. The poorest beggar in Rome fares better than you. His food is obtained with less labor and less humiliation. His shelter is in the light of day. Above all he is safe. His life is his own. He need not live in hourly fear of justice. But you have had to drag out a wretched existence in want and danger and darkness. What has your boasted religion given you? What has this deified Jew done for you? Nothing, worse than nothing. Turn, then, from this deceiver. Wealth and comfort and friends and the honors of the state and the favor of the emperor will all be yours."

"I cannot."

"Your father was a loyal subject and a brave soldier. He died in battle for his country. He left you an infant, the heir of all his honors, and the last prop of his house. Little did he think of the treacherous influences that surrounded you to lead you astray. Your mother's mind, weakened by sorrow, surrendered to the insidious wiles of false teachers, and she again ignorantly wrought your ruin. Had your noble father lived you would now have been the hope of his ancient line; your mother, too, would have followed the faith of her illustrious ancestors. Do you value your father's memory? Has he no claims on your filial duty? Do you think it no sin to heap dishonor on the proud name that you bear and throw so foul a blot upon the unsullied fame handed down to you from your fathers? Away with this delusion that blinds you. By your father's memory, by the honor of your family, turn from your present course."

"I can do them no dishonor. My religion is pure and holy. I can die, but I cannot be false to my Saviour."

"You see that we are merciful to you. Your name and your inexperience excites our pity. Were you but a common prisoner we would offer you in short words the choice between retraction or death. But we are willing to reason with you, for we do not wish to see a noble family become extinct through the ignorance or obstinacy of a degenerate heir."

"I thank you for your consideration," said Pollio; "but your arguments have no weight with me beside the higher claims of my religion."

"Rash and thoughtless boy! There is another argument which you will find more powerful. The wrath of the emperor is terrible."

"Yet still more terrible is the wrath of the Lamb."

"You speak an unintelligible language. What is the wrath of the Lamb? You do not think on what is before you."

"My companions and friends have already endured all that you can inflict. I trust that I may have like fortitude."

"Can you endure the terrors of the arena?"

"I hope to have more than mortal strength."

"Can you face the savage lions and tigers that will then rush upon you?"

"He in whom I trust will not desert me in my time of need."

"You are confident."

"I confide in Him who loved me and gave himself for me."

"Have you thought of the death by fire? Are you ready to meet the flames at the stake?"

"Alas! If I must bear it I will not shrink. At the worst it will soon be over, and then I shall be forever with the Lord."

"Fanaticism and superstition have taken complete possession of you. You know not what awaits you. It is easy to face threats, it is easy to utter words and make professions of courage. But how will it be with you when the dread reality comes upon you?"

"I will look to Him who never deserts his own in their hour of need."

"He has done nothing for you thus far!"

"He has done all for me. He gave his own life that I might live. Through him I receive a nobler life than this which you take from me."

"This is but a dream of yours. How is it possible that a miserable Jew can do this."

"He was the fullness of the Godhead; God manifest in the flesh. He suffered death of the body that we might receive life for the soul."

"Can nothing open your eyes? Is it not enough that thus far your mad belief has brought you nothing but misery and woe? Must you still hold on to it? When you see that death is inevitable will you not turn away from your errors?"

"He gives me strength to overcome death; I fear it not. I look upon death itself as but a change from this life of sorrow to an immortality of bliss. Whether I die by the wild beasts or by the flames it will be all the same. If I continue faithful he will support me and lead my soul at once to immortal life in heaven. The death which you threaten me with has no terrors; but the life to which you invite me is more terrible to me than a thousand deaths."

"For the last time we give you an opportunity. Rash youth, pause for one moment in your mad career of folly. Forget for an instant the insane counsels of your fanatical teachers. Think of all that has been said to you. Life is before you; life full of joy and pleasure; a life rich in every blessing. Honor, friends, wealth, power, all is yours. A noble name, and the possessions of your family, await you. They are all yours. To gain them you have but to take this goblet and pour the libation on yonder altar. Take it. It is but a simple act. Perform it quickly. Save yourself from a death of agony."

Every eye was fixed upon Pollio as this last offer was held out to him. Amazement had filled the minds of the spectators to find him thus far so unmoved. They could not account for it.

But even this last appeal had no effect. Pale but resolute, Pollio motioned away the proffered goblet.

"I will never be false to my Saviour."

At these words there was a moment's pause. Then the chief magistrate spoke:

"You have uttered your own doom. Away with him," he continued, addressing the soldiery.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/martyrs-of-the-catacombs/xii-pollios-trial/>

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