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SAINT PETER

JUNE 29

Peter had three names. He was called Simon Bariona. Simon is translated as he who obeys, or he who mourns; Bariona, however, means son of the dove, for in Syrian bar means son, and in Hebrew iona means dove. He was obedient, for when Christ called him he answered the first call; he mourned, for when he denied Christ he went out and wept bitterly; He was the son of the dove, because he was diligent in serving God in simplicity. Again, he was called Cephas which means head, or rock, or one whose mouth resounds. He was a head in that he was the chief of the disciples, a rock in the constancy of his suffering, and one whose mouth resounds in his untiring preaching. Thirdly, he was called Peter, which means the knowing one, or one who takes off his shoes, or one who loosens. He knew the divinity of Christ when he said: "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." He took off from the feet of his desires the works of death and all earthly things, when he said: 'Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee.' He loosens the fetters of our sins with the keys which he received from the Lord. Peter has also three surnames. He was called Simon Johanna, which means beauty of the Lord; Simon Johannis, which means he to whom it is given; and thirdly, Simon Bariona, the son of the dove. In this we should note that he had the adornment of good conduct, the gifts of virtue, and an overflowing of tears: for the dove does not sing but it mourns. The name of Peter was first given him by Jesus when He said: "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter." Thereafter He gave him the promised name, as we read in Saint Mark: "And to Simon he gave the name of Peter." For the third time He confirmed the name upon him when He said: "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church."

His martyrdom has been written by Marcellus, Pope Linus, Hegesippus, and Pope Leo.

Saint Peter excelled all the other apostles in his faith. He it was who sought to learn the name of the one who would betray Jesus; and, as Saint Augustine says, he surely would have torn the traitor to pieces with his teeth had he but known who he was. That is why Jesus would not name him; for if He had made his name known, as Chrysostom says, Peter would straightway have arisen and slain him. He it was, likewise, who walked toward Jesus over the waters; who was chosen to be with Jesus at the Transfiguration, and at the raising of the daughter of Jairus; who found the coin of the tribute in the fish's mouth; who received from our Lord the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and was appointed to feed the lambs of Christ; who, on the day of Pentecost, converted three thousand men by his preaching; who laid the sentence of death upon Ananias and Saphira; who healed Eneas, the man sick of the palsy; who baptized Cornelius, and raised Tabitha from the dead; who with the shadow of his body gave health to the sick; who was imprisoned by Herod and freed by an angel. What he ate and what he wore upon his body, he himself tells us in the book of Clement: 'I eat naught but bread and olives,' he says, 'and less often a few vegetables. For vesture I have but the tunic and mantle which thou seest upon me. And having all this, I desire nothing more.' It is also said that he carried ever in his bosom a towel wherewith to dry his tears, for whenever he heard again in memory the sweet voice of his Master, he could not help but weep with tender emotion. He wept also at the memory of his denial: so much indeed did he weep therefore that, as Clement tells us, his face seemed to be inflamed with tears. Clement

also says that when he heard the crowing of the cock in the night, he arose and prayed, and anew the tears began to course down his cheeks. And we also know from Clement that the day when Peter's wife was led to martyrdom, he called her by her name, and joyfully exclaimed: "Dear wife, remember the Lord!"

One day Saint Peter sent two of his disciples forth to preach, and one of them died in the way, and the other returned to his master to make known to him what had happened. This latter, according to some, was Saint Martial; according to others, Saint Maternus; and others hold that he was Saint Front. The disciple who had died was the priest George. Then Peter gave his staff to the surviving disciple, and told him to go and lay it upon his companion's corpse. And no sooner had he done this than the dead man, who had already lain for forty days, came back to life.

In those days there dwelt in Jerusalem a sorcerer named Simon, who proclaimed himself the source of all truth, promised to make immortal all those who would believe in him, and said that nothing was impossible to him. And one time, as the book of Clement tells us, he said: "I shall be adored publicly as a god, I shall receive divine honors, and all that I will to do I shall do. One day my mother Rachel sent me into the fields to reap, and I commanded a scythe to reap of itself; and reap it did, and its work was ten times that of the other workers." And Jerome relates that he said: "I am the Word of God, I am the Holy Spirit, I am God whole and entire." He caused brazen serpents to creep upon the earth, and stone statues to laugh, and dogs to sing. Now this man desired to engage in discussion with Peter, and to prove to him that he was God. On the day agreed, Peter faced him, and said to those who stood by: "Peace be with you, my brethren, who are lovers of the truth!" Then Simon said: "We have no need of thy peace; for if we keep peace among us twain, we shall not strive to discover the truth. Thus thieves are at peace with each other. Call not therefore for peace, but for strife; and no peace shall there be, until one of us has defeated the other." "Why fearest thou to speak of peace?" said Peter. "War is born only of sin, and where there is no sin, there is peace. By discussion we learn the truth, and by good works we accomplish justice." And Simon answered: "Thy words avail naught. But I shall show thee the power of my godhead, so that thou shalt soon kneel down before me and adore me: for I am the highest power. I can fly through the air, create new trees, change stones into bread, walk through fire without suffering harm. All that I will to do, I can do." But one by one Peter refuted his words, and exposed the deceits of his works. And Simon, perceiving that he could not withstand Peter, threw all his books of magic into the sea, lest he be denounced as a magician, and went off to Rome, hoping that there he might be adored as a god. And as soon as Peter knew this, he followed Simon to Rome.

He came to Rome in the fourth year of the reign of Claudius, and remained there for twenty-five years. He consecrated two bishops, Linus and Cletus, one for the outlying country, the other for the city itself. Tireless in preaching, he converted a goodly number of pagans to the faith, and cured many who were ailing. And as he never ceased to praise the virtue of chastity, the four concubines of the prefect Agrippa, who had been converted by him, refused to return to their master, so that he, in his wrath, sought an opportunity to perish the apostle. But Our Lord appeared to Peter and said to him: "Simon the sorcerer and Nero have evil designs upon thee. But fear naught, for I am with thee: and for thy comfort I shall give thee the companionship of my servant Paul, who tomorrow will arrive in Rome." Thereupon, as Linus has related, Peter understood that he was nearing the end of his rule over the Church. He therefore summoned an assembly of the faithful, took Clement by the hand, ordained him bishop, and seated him upon his own throne.

And on the morrow, as Our Lord had foretold, Paul came to Rome, and labored with Peter in the preaching of the word.

Meanwhile Simon the magician had become so dear to Nero that, as was known to all, he held in his hands the fate of the whole city. One day, being in Nero's presence, he altered his countenance in such a way that at one moment he seemed an old man, and at the next a youth; and Nero, seeing this, believed that he was in Booth the Son of God. Another day the sorcerer said to the emperor: "In order to be convinced that I am the Son of God, have me beheaded, and the third day I shall rise again!" Nero ordered the executioner to cut off his head: but Simon, by his magic art, caused the executioner to behead a ram, thinking the while that he was beheading Simon himself. Then the magician hid the ram's remains, left the bloodstains upon the pavement, and went into hiding for three days. The third day he made his appearance before Nero, and said to him: "Let the marks of my blood be washed from the pavement, for behold I am risen from the dead, as I promised thee." And Nero doubted of his divinity no longer. Thus writes Leo. Still another day, while Simon was with Nero in a room, a devil who had assumed his shape harangued the populace in the Forum. In the end he won such respect from the Romans that they raised a statue to him, with the inscription: "To the holy god Simon."

Now Leo tells us that Peter and Paul then made their way into Nero's presence, and unmasked all the sorcerer's arts. And Peter declared that as there were in Christ two substances, the divine and the human, so there were in Simon two substances, the human and the diabolical. Simon then exclaimed, as Leo and Marcellus tell us: "I shall brook this opponent no longer! Now shall I order my angels to avenge me upon him!" "I fear not thine angels," said Peter; "rather do they fear me!" "Hast thou no fear of Simon," asked Nero, "even when his works show forth his godhead?" "If godhead be in him," answered Peter, "let him tell what I am thinking and doing at this moment! And first I shall whisper my thought to thee, lest he make bold to lie!" Nero said to him: "Come near, and tell me what thou art thinking!" And Peter whispered to him: "Have a barley-loaf brought to me in secret." He received the barley-loaf, and blessed it as he put it in his sleeve; and then he said: "Let Simon now tell what I have said, thought, and done!" But Simon, rather than avow that he was defeated, said: "Let Peter first tell what I myself am thinking!" And Peter answered: "I shall show that I know his thoughts, by setting his scheme at naught!" Then, smitten with rage, Simon cried: "Let huge dogs come and devour him!" And at once huge dogs appeared, and launched themselves upon the apostle: but he threw to them the loaf which he had blessed, and chased them away. And he said to Nero: "Thus have I showed, not by words but by deeds, that I knew what Simon was devising against me." And Simon said: "Give ear to me, Peter and Paul! Here I can do nothing against you, and I spare you for this day; but we shall meet again, and then I shall judge you." Thus writes Leo. But Hegesippus and Linus relate that this same Simon, carried away with pride, dared to boast that he could raise the dead. And as a certain young man had just died, Peter and Simon were called, and upon Simon's demand it was determined that the one who could not revive the youth should be put to death. Then Simon, by his incantations, caused the dead man's head to move; and already the crowd clamored that Peter should be stoned. But he, quelling their tumult with difficulty cried out: "If the youth be really alive, let him get up, and walk, and speak; otherwise ye shall know that it is a demon that moves the dead man's head to and fro. But first let Simon be sent away from the bed, that the devil's tricks may be laid bare!" Simon was therefore placed at some distance from the bed, and at once the dead men ceased to move. But then Peter, likewise standing at a distance, and having prayed, said: "Young man, in the name of Jesus Christ

the Crucified, arise and walk!" And at once the dead man came to life, arose, and walked. Whereupon the crowd wished to stone Simon. But Peter said: "He is punished enough, being forced to acknowledge the vanity of his witchcraft! And our Master teaches us to return good for evil!" Simon said: "Peter and Paul, know ye that in spite of your desire, I will not consent to obtain for you the crown of martyrdom!" And Peter answered: "Would that we might have our wish: but to thee may naught but ill befall, for all thy words are lies!"

Then Simon betook himself to the house of Marcellus, his disciple. He tied an enormous dog at the entrance, and then said to Marcellus: "Now I shall see whether Peter, who is wont to visit thee, will be able to enter at thy door!" And when Peter came to Marcellus' house, with a sign of the cross, he freed the dog, who thereafter began to cuddle to everyone save Simon, whom he threw to the ground and started to maul. Indeed he would have strangled him, had not Peter come quickly and forbade him to do the sorcerer any ill. Thus the dog left Simon's body untouched, but tore his clothing to rags. And at this the populace, and especially the children, began to pursue the magician, and chased him from the city as they would a wolf. And thenceforth Simon, completely put to shame, durst not appear in public for a whole year, and his disciple Marcellus, convinced by these miracles; became Peter's disciple.

But later on Simon returned to Rome, and regained Nero's favor. One day he called the people together, and declared that because he was much offended by the Galileans, he was about to abandon city, which hitherto he had shielded by his presence, and that moreover he would ascend into Heaven, since the earth was no longer worthy to hold him. On the appointed day, therefore, he climbed to the top of a high tower, or, according to Linus, to the summit of the Capitoline hill; and thence he rose in flight, with a laurel crown upon his head. And Nero said to the two apostles: 'Simon says Booth! You are both impostors!' And Peter said to Paul: 'Lift up thy head and look!' Paul lifted his head, saw Simon flying about, and said to Peter: 'Peter, linger not to finish thy work, for already the Lord calls us!' Then Peter cried out: 'Angels of Satan, who hold this man up in the air, in the name of my Master Jesus Christ, I command you to hold him up no longer!' And straightway Simon was dashed to earth, his skull was split, and he died. This is related by Leo.

When all this was made known to Nero, he was sore afflicted at the loss of a man of this kind, and told the apostles that he would punish them therefore. He committed them to a high official named Paulinus, who cast them into prison, under the guard of two soldiers, Processus and Martinianus. But they were converted by Peter, and opened the prison, setting the two apostles free; for which act they were beheaded at Nero's command, after the death of Peter and Paul. But Peter, yielding at last to the entreaties of the brethren, decided to quit Rome. But when he came to one of the city gates, at the place where the church of Saint Mary ad Passus stands today, as Leo and Linus tell us, he came face to face with Christ Himself; and he said to Him: "Lord, whither goest Thou?" And Our Lord responded: "I go to Rome, to be crucified anew!" "To be crucified anew?" asked Peter. "Yes!" said Our Lord. And Peter said: "Then, Lord, I too return to Rome, to be crucified with Thee!" Whereupon Our Lord ascended to Heaven, leaving Peter all in tears. Then, being aware that the hour of his martyrdom was at hand, he vent back to Rome, where he was seized by Nero's ministers, and brought to the prefect Agrippa: and Linus relates that his face shone with joy. The prefect said to him: "Art thou then the man who is pleased to dwell among the common folk, and who persuadest the women of the faubourgs to leave their husbands' beds?" Peter answered: "Naught pleases me but the Cross of Christ!" Then, being an alien, he was condemned to die on the cross, whereas Paul, being a Roman citizen, was condemned to be beheaded.

In his letter to Timothy on the death of Saint Paul, Dionysius relates that the crowd of pagans and Jews did not weary of heaping blows on the two apostles and spitting in their faces. And when the moment of their separation came, Paul said to Peter: "Peace be with thee, cornerstone of the Church, shepherd of the lambs of Christ!" And Peter said to Paul: "Go in peace, preacher of truth and good, mediator of salvation to the just!" Thereafter Dionysius followed his master Paul, for the two apostles were put to death in different places. And when Peter came in sight of the cross, he said: "My Master came down from Heaven to earth, and so was lifted up on the Cross. But I, whom He has deigned to call from earth to Heaven, wish to be crucified with my head toward the earth and my feet pointing to Heaven. Crucify me head downwards, for I am not worthy to die as my Master died." And so it was done: the cross was turned, so that he was fixed to it head downwards. At this the crowd was enraged, and wished to kill Nero and the prefect, and deliver the apostle; but he besought them not to hinder his martyrdom. Then God opened the eyes of those who wept, and they saw angels standing with crowns of roses and lilies, and Peter standing in their midst, and receiving from Christ a book whose words he read aloud. For, as Hegesippus tells us, he began to speak from the cross: "Lord, I have desired to follow Thee, but I did not wish to be crucified upright. Thou alone art erect, upright, and high. We are children of Adam, whose head was bowed to the ground: his fall denotes the manner in which men are born, for we are born in such wise that we are let fall prone upon the ground. And our being is so changed that the world thinks that left is right, and right is left. Lord, Thou art my all and other than Thee have I naught. I thank Thee with all my soul, with which I live, understand, and call to Thee." In this speech we note two other reasons why Peter did not wish to be crucified in an upright position. And the apostle, being aware that the people saw his glory, commended them once more to God, and breathed his last. Then two brothers, Marcellus and Apuleius, his disciples took him down from the cross, anointed him with sweet spices, and buried him.

Isidore says in his book, *Life and Death of the Saints*: "After Peter had founded the Church of Antioch, he went to Rome under the Emperor Claudius, to oppose Simon the sorcerer, and there preached the Gospel for twenty-five years, and was bishop of that the city. In the thirty-sixth year after the Passion of Our Lord, he was crucified by Nero with his head to the ground, as he himself had desired."

But on the same day Peter and Paul appeared to Dionysius, and he himself writes in the letter we have quoted above: "But hear of the wonder, see the sign, dear brother Timothy, that occurred on the day of their martyrdom. In the hour when they parted from one another, I was still with them; but after their death, I saw them entering through the city gate hand in hand, dressed in shining garments, crowned with crowns of light and glory."

But Nero did not go unpunished for this crime, and the others of which he was guilty, but died of his own hand. Some of these we shall now relate.

First, we read in an apocryphal history that when Seneca, who was Nero's teacher, held himself in readiness to receive the guerdon of his labors, Nero told him that for his reward he might have the right to choose the tree from which he would be hanged. And when Seneca asked how he had deserved to be condemned to death, Nero brandished a sword above his head, in such wise that Seneca closed his eyes and bowed his head in terror. And Nero said to him: "Master, why bowest thou thy head before this glaive?" Seneca responded: "Being a man, I fear death, and have no

wish to die. "Ha, But I fear thee also!" cried Nero, "and have feared thee since I was a child. I shall not rest easy whilst thou art alive!" Then Seneca said: "If I must die, let me at least choose the manner of my dying! "Choose if thou wilt," said Nero, "save only that thou must die forthwith!" Whereupon Seneca opened his veins in his bath, and bled to death: and thus was the omen of his name fulfilled, for *se necans* means one who kills himself. And Seneca had two brothers, Julian Gallio, the orator, who likewise took his own life, and Mela, the father of the poet Lucan, who also opened his veins at Nero's command.

Some time later Nero, captivated by the story of the burning of Troy, set fire to Rome, and the city burned for seven days and seven nights, while he, overlooking the fire from the summit of a tower, grandiosely recited verses from the Iliad. He fished with golden line, and boasted of singing better than any tragedian or lute player. But in the end the Romans, no longer able to bear with his madness, threw themselves upon him and drove him out of the city. Then, seeing that he was lost, he sharpened the end of a stick with his teeth and drove it into his heart. Or else, as others say, he was devoured by wolves.

In the time of Pope Saint Cornelius, certain pious Greeks stole the bodies of the apostles, and sought to carry them off into their country. But the power of God compelled the demons who dwelt in the idols to cry out: "Help, help, Romans, for your gods are being snatched away!" Thereupon the whole city set out in pursuit of the thieves, for the faithful perceived that this referred to the apostles, while the pagans thought that it meant their idols; so that the Greeks, terrified, cast the bodies of the apostles into a well near the catacombs, whence the faithful succeeded in drawing them out at a later time. Then there was doubt about which bones belonged to Saint Peter and which to Saint Paul, so all prayed and fasted, and a voice from Heaven responded: 'The larger bones are those of the preacher, and the smaller those of the fisher.' And the bones of the two saints drew apart of themselves, and those of each were carried to the church which was dedicated to him. Nevertheless some authors maintain that Pope Sylvester weighed the great and little bones, and divided them exactly in half, giving to each church half of the two bodies.

Saint Gregory relates in his Dialogue that nearby the church wherein repose the bones of Saint Peter there dwelt a holy man named Agontius. Now a young girl who was paralyzed was wont to pass the day in this church: she crawled about on her hands, for her loins and feet were crippled. And after she had long besought Saint Peter to restore her to health, the saint appeared to her and said:

"Go to Agontius, who dwells hard by, and he will cure thee." At once the maiden began to drag herself through the church buildings, hoping to discover the whereabouts of Agontius. But then he came to meet her, and she said to him: "Our shepherd and foster father Saint Peter sends me to thee, that thou mayest make me well of my infirmity." And Agontius replied: 'If in truth it be he who has sent thee, arise and walk!' Then he gave her his hand to aid her to rise, and at once she was cured, her paralysis disappearing completely.

Gregory also relates in the same book that there was once a young Roman named Galla, the daughter of the consul and patrician Symmachus, who became a widow after a year of marriage. But whereas her age and fortune impelled her to marry again, she preferred to be united to God in spiritual espousals. And as her body was consumed with inward fire, the physicians said that if she continued to abstain from the embraces of men, this inward heat would cause a beard to grow on her face, contrary to nature. And in time this actually happened. But she had no fear of this outward

disfigurement, knowing that it would not stay the love of her heavenly Spouse, if only she kept herself pure within. Leaving behind her the life of the world, she entered a convent which was attached to the church of Saint Peter, and there she long served God by prayer and almsworks. And finally she was found to be suffering with a cancer in the breast. At her bedside two torches always stood lighted, because she loved the light, and could suffer neither spiritual nor bodily darkness. And one day she saw the apostle Peter standing before her between the two torches. Then, filled with love and joy, she exclaimed: "What, my master! Are my sins forgiven?" And he, smiling, answered: "Yes! Come!" And she said: "I ask only that Sister Benedicta come with me!" He replied: "No, the other sister shall come with thee." Galla, recounted the matter to the abbess; and three days later, she and the said sister died together.

Saint Gregory further tells us that a very holy priest, being at the point of death, cried out: "Welcome, my masters, welcome, my masters, who condescend to come to a wretched slave like me! I come! I come! Be thanked! Be thanked!" And when those who stood by asked him to whom he spoke in this manner, he replied: "Do you not see the holy apostles Peter and Paul, standing there beside me?" And when he began anew to thank the apostles, his soul was freed of the bonds of the flesh.

Certain authors have raised a doubt that Peter and Paul were martyred the same day, and have maintained that they died a year apart. But Saint Jerome and all the saints who deal with this question agree in saying that the martyrdom of the saints occurred the same day and in the same year. Moreover, this is clear from the letter of Dionysius. The truth is simply that they were not executed at the same spot: and when Pope Leo says that both suffered in the same place, he means merely that both suffered at Rome. About this the following verses were written:

Ense coronatur Paulus, truce Petrus, eodem
Sub duce, lace, loco, dux Nero, Roma locus

and another wrote:

Ense sacrat Paulum par lux, dux, orbs truce Petrum.

But although they died the same day and at the same hour, Saint Gregory ordained that their feasts be celebrated separately, and that the commemoration of Saint Paul take place on the morrow of the feast of Saint Peter. The latter saint indeed deserves to be honored first, since he was both higher in dignity and earlier converted. Moreover, his title of sovereign pontiff gives him a definite right to this primacy.