

Passio Pelagii

Life and Martyrdom [passio] of St. Pelagius the martyr, who suffered in the city of Cordoba under King Abd ar-Rahman [III (912-961) on the sixth day before the calends of July [June 26 (926)]

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1. Truly it is regarded as an illustrious example of one's work when the text of its narrative has a beginning that is well begun, because it contributes greatly to the praise of the subsequent narrative if the last [parts] are not out of tune with the first parts; so that which was the reason for beginning, may also be [the reason] for the completion of the work to be finished. Although our narrative strives to recount the martyrdom of a most faithful witness, it is nevertheless not unconnected from the beginnings, when punishment was being prepared for the Christian peoples. Whence the Lord is to be entreated so that He may offer us a beginning for what is to be said in praise of Him, one that may not be inconsistent with the completed work, by which He who was the author inwardly in the realm of thought may resound outwardly with the tongue.

2. Consequently in those times, when the most fierce tempest had risen up against the Christians, it happened that the enemy forces of all in Spain were mobilized against Galicia so that, [once it was] utterly destroyed-if this were able to be done-foreign domination might take hold of all the faithful. But divine assistance did not completely desist from restraining the temerity of those coming unrightfully against His [people]. When the aforementioned enemy forces arrived at that place, the army of the Christians rushed out to them and they met each other in battle. But because it was the custom of the king of the faithful (that is, of the Christians) that he have bishops with him on the expedition, when battle was joined, the people of God turned in flight, so that the bishops themselves, along with some of the faithful, were held as captives. Among whom was one named Ermogius, who, bound in iron, remained captive with the rest in jail.

3. Then, because manifold are the heavenly signs for those whom Omnipotent God summons to the heavenly kingdom, this Bishop Ermogius, exhausted by the difficulties associated with his prison and by the burdens of the iron [chains], gave his nephew, named Pelagius, as a hostage in exchange for himself, holding on to the hope that once he had departed

[from Córdoba], he might send captives which which he could ransom his nephew. But the accustomed benefits from heaven abounded, and they so illuminated this Pelagius that he considered the jail to be a test, a [kind of] file [to wear him down with] ordinary food-without which human fragility was incapable of surviving-that because of it he might accept this prison for himself for the sake of washing away [his] sins. For formerly, when he was placed in his own [country], he had been incapable of leading a life without the enticements of temptations. For it is very rare for a man placed in [a position of] honor to please God, when he wishes to claim for himself those things that are his. For this reason the Lord says that the the way that leads to life is narrow, but the way that leads to destruction is wide and broad [Matthew 7:13-14]. Truly it is as easy to fall in the depths from favorable [terrain] as it is fitting for someone to rise to [great] heights through rough and ragged [terrain]; indeed to the extent that as it is similar to death, it associates more favorably with the court of the angels.

4. This most blessed Pelagius, carefully examining all of these things inspired in him from on high in accordance with what his signs said, remained in prison, where he had been confined when he was barely ten years of age. But his companions did not keep quiet nor was rumor silent about how he carried himself in that place. He was chaste, sober, calm, prudent, alert in his prayers, assiduous in his study, not unmindful of the Lord's commandments, a participant in good conversation, free from evil ones, slow to laugh. He had chosen as his teacher Paul, who was vigilant in his teachings, urgent in his prayers, willing to share when it came to difficulties, never coming up short under pressure; as a result of which he [Paul] was skilled in reading and learning came easy to him. The conduct of the former [i.e., Pelagius] was the same; likewise his [ability] to refute, such that, if by chance a garrulous person of a different faith was present, he would by all means be refuted and leave when [Pelagius] fought back. Moreover he so preserved his integrity in mind and body, that you would think him to be meditating on nothing but his future martyrdom, especially when he produced such signs that he would by no means be lacking in celestial joys. Who would not honor with applause such inborn character, the heavenly-born appearance of which was already adorned with such privilege? Truly Christ remained the instructor on the inside for him who was on the outside His image, by which he might glorify the Master himself with regard to appearance. He, his worthy protegee, without a doubt bore [the Master] in his mind, purifying his vessel, preparing a dwelling place in which, after a little while, he would rejoice as a bridegroom and from which, crowned with the sacred blood, this servant, worthy of honor, would be joined to him and his embraces among the court of the saints, so that, abundantly enriched with the double crown of virginity as much as martyrdom, he might more completely win victory over the enemy, having

both abhorred riches and resisted vices, so that, with these things (in which the devil continually takes delight) having been disdained, he might be crowned by the Lord. Therefore rightly does he attain the double reward, who had trampled the foul enemy along with his followers. But holy Pelagius, remaining strong by resisting promises and praiseworthy by not yielding to vices, to the extent that the old enemy, twice plumed, tried in the meantime to entangle him in the evils of his own malice, sometimes openly and sometimes covertly-"for he is a liar, and the father thereof" (John 8:44)-the wretched one, prevented by shrewdness, was, with God's assent, laid low, broken under this one's feet.

5. With these things having been commendably sustained for a period of three and a half years, one day by chance some attendants of a certain recruit of the king appeared for the sake of commerce, and they told their lord that the beauty of this most blessed Pelagius' face was most attractive. Not undeservedly was he considered to be beautiful on the outside because he, more beautiful on the inside, was loved in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so these stupid men, ignorant of the truth, thought to ruin his beauty with the whirlpools of vices, that beauty which Our Lord himself promised would stand at his right side among the choirs of holy virgins; certainly those wretched ones, not understanding that they who are unable to make "one hair white or black" (Matthew 5:36), are unable to oppose the Lord. Meanwhile after this news had been admitted to the ears of the king, it most greatly (but not rightly) pleased him because Pelagius the servant of God appeared handsome even in the confines of the jail. Whence [the king], in the middle of his feasting, sent attendants who were to detain [Pelagius,] that future sacrifice to Christ, so that he could be examined with his own eyes. But because all things remain possible to Omnipotent God, the things commanded were executed with deeds: making haste they dragged off Pelagius, the servant of God in chains-so that, grating in the hall of the king, when they were cut off, the noise of the chains would resound-rejoicing [to be able] to offer to the mortal mind of the blind king [the one] whose soul Christ had already given in marriage to himself with inseparable faith. They offered him, dressed in a royal robe, to his sight, whispering into the ears of the most blessed boy that his beauty was being excorted to a great honor.

6. Immediately the king [said] to him: "Boy, I will raise you to a rank of great honor if you are willing to deny Christ and say that our prophet is true. Do you not see how great and how many are the kingdoms we possess?," and saying [further], "moreover I will add for you large quantities of gold and silver, the best clothes, and precious ornaments. Moreover you will obtain for yourself whichever of these young servants [you want] and he will serve your wishes in accordance with your customs. I will offer [you] courts to live in, horses to use, pleasures to enjoy. Then I will release as many as

you ask from jail and, if you wish, I will confer immense dignities on your parents once they are summoned to this region." But St. Pelagius, despising all of these things and undertanding them as things to be ridiculed, said: "These things which you show me, O king, are nothing, and I will not deny Christ. I was, am, and always will be a Christian. For all of these things have an end and they will pass away in due course. But Christ whom I worship does not know how to have an end because neither did he have a beginning. For He remains God, one with the Father and Holy Spirit, who made us out of nothing and holds all things in his power."

7. Meanwhile when the king wished to touch [him] playfully, St. Pelagius said, "Dog! Do you think me effeminate like your [men]? " And immediately he tore [off] the garment in which he was dressed and positioned himself as a strong athlete in the palaestra, worthily choosing to die for Christ rather than to live shamefully with the devil and be polluted with vices. But the king, thinking him still [able to be] persuaded, ordered his attendants [to serve] as advisors to entice him with temptations, [so that] perhaps, by apostatizing, he might acquiesce to such regal ostentation. But [Pelagius], with the Lord assisting him, stood strong and remained fearless, declaring only that Christ existed, and saying that he would obey his commands forever. Seeing his most fervent spirit persist and understanding himself to be spurned in regard to his desires, the king was roused by anger. He said: "hang him up on iron pincers and partly let him down, raising [him] up high again, until he either denies Christ to be God or breathes out his soul."

8. Blessed Pelagius, enduring this, remained fearless with his brave soul, he who still did not refuse to suffer deeply for Christ. When the king saw his unmoving fortitude, he ordered him to be hacked with a sword limb by limb and thrown in the river. Accepting this task, the attendants and their savage mockeries so raged, with the knife extended toward him, you would have thought them to be arranging as a sacrifice the one whom, without them knowing it, it was necessary to be sacrificed in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he who was already chosen in heaven, still suffered harshly on earth; for one cut off his arm completely, and another severed his legs, and another did not desist from striking his neck. Meanwhile the martyr stood fearless, [while his] blood, streaming like sweat, trickled out in drops, invoking only the Lord Jesus Christ, on whose behalf he did not hesitate to suffer, saying: "Lord, rescue me from the hands of my enemies."

9. Divine power, of course, did not desert him, rendering him a confessor through [his] punishments and a glorious martyr in heaven under the edge of the sword. Those most wicked ones cut off with the sword the hands that he raised up to God, in the midst of which the most holy Pelagius, exhausted, breathed his last. Because there was no one present of those

men who might have had any pity on him, he only invoked God; that most brave athlete called out, but the Lord of the struggle, [already] being present, took the lead, saying: "Come," receive the crown, which I promised you from the beginning." While his spirit migrated to God, his body was thrown onto the riverbed. By no means were faithful people lacking there who sought him and carried him to his tomb with honor. Indeed the cemetery of St. Cyprian has his head, and the grassy field of St. Gines [de la Jara] his body.

10. O, how truly worthy of God was this martyrdom, begun in the seventh hour and consummated on that same day at vespers! Who will be ever able to match it with any words? For the glory of heaven was given to him in exchange for the squalor of prison, and he deserved to enjoy the gifts of heaven in exchange for earthly difficulties, [so that] in exchange for the fatherland that he left behind, he might obtain the paradise that he desired. Indeed he gave up his parents and his siblings, but now he has the angels as his companions [drinking partners!]. The divine word says: "And every one that hath given up father or mother or the others for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall possess life everlasting." (Matthew 19:29) He who suffered the sword [being applied to] his members now achieves the kingdom of heaven.

11. O most blessed witness Pelagius, you who, in the midst of [promises of] delights and threats, confess Christ, you who does not wish to yield to enticements, choosing to die for the truth rather than to live in this world and be without justice. And he whom Christ [already] held among the lot of the chosen, did not wish to yield to the promises of those lost ones. Therefore we beseech you, holy martyr: be a patron of the church and indefatigably nurture with [your] protections [that church] which you see to serve you with the compliance of [its] prayers; to the extent that it may have you as a patron in the presence of God, [a patron] whom, though arising up out of Galicia, Córdoba holds glorious in the blood of martyrdom. Therefore this most blessed Pelagius died as a martyr [passus est] at the approximate age of thirteen and a half years in Cordoba, as was said, in the city, with King Abd a-Rahman ruling, namely on Sunday, at the tenth hour, on the sixth day [before] the calends of July, era 964 (June 26, 926), with our Lord Jesus Christ ruling, who lives and reigns with God the Father and in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God in Trinity, for ever and ever. Amen.