

Peter the Venerable, Sermon III, Concerning St. Marcellus, Pope and Martyr

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Natalem, fratres, gloriosi martyris et summi pontificis Dei Marcelli hodie cum honore et gaudio celebrandum suscepistis. Et merito cum honore et gaudio, ut eum ad summum honorem et sempiternum gaudium hoc suo natali pervenisse significetis. Et unde hoc probamus? Unde, inquam, probamus? Unde ostendimus diem mortis natalem ejus esse, et eum hoc natali ad summum honorem et sempiternum gaudium pervenisse? Natalis, charissimi, sive generationis in Scripturis divinis ille dies dicitur, quo sicut de utero, sic de morte ad vitam pervenitur: unde Dominus in Evangelio spiritualiter docens omnem hominem ad vitam debere renasci, Nicodemo ait: Nisi quis natus fuerit denuo, non potest videre regnum Dei (Joan. III). Rursum illam, quae in consummatione saeculi futura est, etiam corporum resurrectionem generationem vocans ait discipulis: In regeneratione cum sederit Filius hominis in sede majestatis suae, sedebitis et vos super sedes duodecim (Matth. XIX). Sicut igitur per aquam et spiritum de peccati morte ad vitam justitiae homines renovati renasci dicuntur, et sicut de sepulchris ad vitam immortalem resurgentia corpora regenerari perhibentur, sic sancti Dei de corpore mortis hujus gratia Dei liberati, et ad vitam quae post mortem eis datur translata, merito nati referuntur. Hinc et dies ille quo de miseria ad beatitudinem, quo de tenebris ad lucem, quo de morte ad vitam transferuntur, non ut dies funeris cum moestitia, sed ut dies natalis cum laetitia celebratur. Ista enim sanctorum nativitas longe verior, quam illa carnis est, in qua non de matrum uteris ad vitam miseram et cito finiendam exeunt, sed de mundi angustis tenebris ad liberam lucem et aeternam vitam conscendunt, de qua Dominus: Ego sum, inquit, resurrectio et vita; qui credit in me, etiamsi mortuus fuerit, vivet (Joan. II). Tali ergo modo felix beati Marcelli de terris ad coelos transitus ejus dies natalitius vocatur, qualiter vero hoc suo natali ad summum honorem et sempiternum gaudium pervenerit a Domino audiamus: Si quis, ait, mihi ministraverit, honorificabit eum Pater meus qui in coelis est (Joan. XII).

You, brothers, have undertaken the [commemoration of the] birthday, that is to be celebrated today, with honor and joy, of the glorious martyrs and supreme pontiff of God, Marcellus.¹ And rightly "with honor and joy," so that you may show him to have achieved supreme honor and eternal glory on his birthday.² And how do we prove this? How, I ask, do we prove this? How do we show that the day of his death is the day of his birth, and that he achieved supreme honor and this eternal glory on this birthday? My most dear ones, that birthday is called, in divine scriptures, the day of generation, from which life is arrived at from death as much as from the womb. Thus the Lord, teaching in the gospel, that all men ought to be spiritually reborn to life, says to Nicodemus: "unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3). Once again, also calling that resurrection of bodies (which is to come in the consummation of the age) a "generation," he says to his disciples: "in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the seat of his majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats" (Matthew 19:28). Therefore, just as men are said to be reborn through water and spirit from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and just as the rising bodies are held to be regenerated from the sepulchres to immortal life, so the saints of God, liberated by the grace of God from the body of this death and translated into the life that it is given to them after death are rightly referred to as being born. Hence, that day, on which they are transferred from misery to beatitude, from darkness to light, from death to life, is celebrated not with sadness, as the day of a funeral, but with joy, as a birthday. This nativity of saints is more true than [the nativity] of the flesh, during which they do not exit from the womb of their mothers to a life that is wretched and quickly comes to an end, but ascend from the straits of darkness to the freedom of light and eternal life, concerning which the Lord says: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live" (John 11:25). Therefore in such a fashion the happy passage of the blessed Marcellus from earth to heaven is referred to as his real birthday.³ Let us hear from the Lord how he arrived at the highest honor and eternal joy on this his nativity: "If any man," he says, "shall have ministered to me, him will my Father, who is in heaven, honour" (John 12:26)

¹ Pope Marcellus I (308-309). His feast day is January 16.

² That is, the anniversary of his execution, which is treated as his "birthday" into heaven.

³ It seems that "natalitius" is being used in a comparative form, indicating a more significant, or real, birthday.

Videndum est quomodo Christo beatus Marcellus ministraverit, et qualiter bene ministrans, a Patre honorificari meruerit. Ministravit ille Christo in omni cleri ministerio, ministravit in pontificatus officio, ministravit in multiplici martyrio, neque enim in pace ei licuit ministrare, sed imposita est necessitas etiam militare. Nec tantum rei familiari providere ut sapiens et fidelis dispensator jussus est, sed ut probatus miles et peritus bellorum dux coelestis militiae in magnis praeliorum periculis factus est. Probat hoc atrocior solito suo tempore emergens persecutorum immanitas. Probat largiter ubique profluens martyrum sanguis. Probat orbis totis adversus Christum viribus dimicans.

Multa quidem ante adversus Ecclesiam Dei Satanas molitus fuerat, multas a Neronianis temporibus incipiens tempestates excitaverat; sed nihil se proficere cognoscens, hujus beati viri diebus totam vim furoris effudit, et de tumente utero omnem veneniferae pestis plenitudinem evomens, regna universa contra eam movit, et Romanos principes qui fere omnibus dominabantur, ad eam si fieri posset eradicandam acrius instigavit. Nam ut multiplicia mortium genera seponantur, ut innumera occisorum illis persequentibus Christianorum agmina supprimantur, soli triginta dies, decem et septem millia in Christi confessione suo sanguine purpuratos coelestium camporum floribus addiderunt.

Tunc et beatus Marcellinus summus apostolicae sedis episcopus, et praecipuus ovium Christi pastor, eisdem ovibus sibi creditis per martyrii coronam adjunctus est. Hujus tempore beatus Marcellus, cujus passione hodiernus dies illustris est, presbyterii honore insignitus, et post ipsum atque cum ipso principalem Ecclesiae Dei sollicitudinem gerens nihil remissum esse patiebatur; sed quanto majus videbat instare periculum, tanto ad omnia toleranda majorem parabat et animum.

It should be observed how blessed Marcellus “ministered” to Christ, and how he, ministering well, deserved to be honored by the Father. He ministered to Christ in every aspect of a cleric’s ministry, he ministered in the office of the pontificate, and he ministered by manifold martyrdom, for it was not permitted for him to minister in peace; instead the need to struggle was also imposed [on him]. For he was not only sent as a knowing and faithful steward to provide for domestic matters, but he was made a proven soldier and a skilled commander of wars amidst the great dangers of the battles of the heavenly militia. The emerging brutality of the persecutors proves this to be more terrible than usual in his time. The blood of the martyrs flowing plentifully all over proves this. [This sword] being brandished against Christ all over the world proves this.

Indeed Satan had previously set in motion many things against the church of God; beginning in the time of Nero, he had stirred up many storms; but realizing that he was accomplishing nothing for himself, he poured the entire force of his fury in the days of that blessed man [Marcellus], and, vomiting up from his swollen belly the complete plenitude of his venomous pestilence, he moved all of the kingdoms against [the church], and bitterly roused the Roman princes, who exercised sovereignty over almost everything, for the eradication (if it could possibly be accomplished) of [the church]. So that the many different kinds of deaths may be set aside, and the innumerable flocks of Christians, with their slayers persecuting them, be checked, [let me just say that] in only thirty days, 17,000, made purple with their own blood in their confession of Christ, were added to the flowers of the celestial fields.

At that time blessed Marcellus, the supreme bishop of the apostolic see and the extraordinary pastor of Christ’s sheep, was himself, through the crown of martyrdom, joined to same sheep entrusted to him. In his time blessed Marcellus, by whose passion today [January 16] is made illustrious, was distinguished with the honor of the priesthood, and after it (and still with it), bearing the principal care for the church of God, allowed [himself] to be remiss in nothing; but to the extent that he saw a greater danger to be threatening, he prepared his soul even more with regard to the things that were to be endured.

Ducitur interea pontifex Marcellinus ad victimam, sequitur et presbyter Marcellus ad coronam, optat pati cum magistro discipulus, sed differtur ad pugnandum diutius. Non permittitur eum comitari ad requiem, quia ad majorem reservatur laborem. Pergit cum eo quasi pariter moriturus, sed Deo providente non moritur episcopo successurus. Praeparat Ecclesiae suae Christus idoneum rectorem. Providet navi suae multa vi fluctuum laboranti doctissimum gubernatorem. Conservat in acriori certamine fortissimum praeliatorem. Abscondit in pharetra sagittam, qua postmodum durum transverberet hostem.

Adjurat ergo antequam pateretur beatus papa presbyterum, ne in aliquo consentiat impiis praeceptis imperatorum. Forte martyr sanctus, spiritu admonente, didicerat eum pro se Christi Ecclesiae praeponendum, quem tam sollicitè in ipsa jam pene sui sanguinis effusione putavit admonendum. Praedixit in hoc verbo gravi verbere flagellandum Domini gregem, cujus tam intente ne deficiat hortatur pastorem. Sic et Christus, summus Pastor, passione imminente, de grege quem quasi relinquebat sollicitus, ait Petro: Simon, ecce Satanas expetivit vos, ut cribraret sicut triticum. Ego autem rogavi pro te, ut non deficiat fides tua; et tu aliquando conversus, confirma fratres tuos (Luc. XXI). Ita beatus Marcellinus locum Petri habens, et eum beato Marcello relinquens, ne deficeret admonuit, et ad mala quae sequebantur aequanimiter tolerando animavit. Nec putet quispiam tantum eum beato viro in multis jam probato timuisse, quantum alios quibus timendum erat, in ipso quasi eorum personam gerebat, talibus sermonibus instruxisse; etsi enim a Christi martyre forti viro non erat formidandum, erant tamen infirmi quibus erat utique metuendum, de quibus paterna cura sollicitus successuro pastori eos commendabat attentius.

Meanwhile, the pontiff Marcellinus is led [away] as a sacrificial victim,⁴ and the priest Marcellus succeeds [him] to the [papal] crown; the disciple wishes to suffer with his master but is kept waiting longer with regard to doing battle. It was not permitted to [Marcellus] to accompany [Marcellinus] to [his] rest, because he was being saved for a greater task. He proceeds with him as if he were also about to be killed, but, with God looking toward the future, he was about to succeed to the episcopacy, not die. Christ prepares a suitable rector for his church. He provides a most learned pilot for his ship, struggling with such great force of the waves. He saves his strongest warrior for a more savage battle. He hides the arrow in the quiver, the arrow by which later he will transfix the cruel enemy.

Therefore the blessed pope [Marcellinus], before he suffers [his passion], entreats the priest, lest he should assent in any way to the impious commands of the emperors. Perhaps the holy martyr [Marcellinus], with his spirit advising [him], had learned that [Marcellus] was to be put forward in his place for the church of Christ, and thought that he should be so carefully admonished right before the effusion of his own blood. He foretold, with these words, that the flock of the Lord was to be whipped with a harsh lash, the flock whose shepherd he exhorts so intently so that he not be found lacking. In this way, Christ, the highest shepherd, with his passion approaching, says to Peter, concerning the flock that he, concerned, was (as it were) leaving behind: Simon "behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren." (Luke 22:31-32). Therefore, blessed Marcellinus, holding the place of Peter, and relinquishing it to the blessed Marcellus, warned him, lest he fail, and encouraged him by tolerating with patience the bad things that were to come. Let not anyone think that [Marcellinus] feared this [would happen], (with this blessed man already having been proved in so many ways); as much as he was instructing with such words the others, for whom this was something to be feared, as if he bore their identity in himself. Although there was nothing to be dreaded by this strong male martyr of Christ, there were, however, weak ones, for which there was by all means something to be feared. With regard to these ones, [Marcellinus], solicitous with paternal care, commended them attentively to the pastor who was about to succeed him [Marcellus].

⁴ In fact, the fate of Pope Marcellinus (296-304), Marcellus' predecessor, is uncertain. He may have avoided execution by cooperating with the imperial authorities. This would account for

his name not appearing in any of the early martyrologies. In any case, by Peter's time, his status as a martyr seems to have been unquestioned.

Consummatur igitur sanctus pontifex glorioso martyrio, et remanet Marcellus in majori quam fuerat ante periculo. Incumbit ei cogitare de grege quem cernit proprio viduatum pastore. Videte, fratres, **quanti** fuerit apud Deum martyr noster, cujus hodie festa solemnizatis. Videte, inquam, qui de eo iudicium coeleste decreverit, et sic videbitis quantus fuerit. De virtute militis consulite sententiam imperatoris. Consurgit vehemens contra Christi militiam persecutionis pressura. Conjurat mundus in arma; fremunt gentes, et populi meditantur inania; astant reges terrae et principes conveniunt in unum adversus Dominum et adversus Christum ejus; exerunt gladios, prosternunt exercitum, interimunt ipsum ducem, reliquos fugantes ubi ubi dispergunt. At miles noster fugatos revocat, revocatos congregat, instaurat aciem, hortatur ad bellum, aggreditur hostes, pugnat acriter, victoriam obtinet, victor exsultat. Sic, sic beatus Marcellus in spirituali agens praelio, virtute animi in Christi militia insignis effulsit. Undique enim gladio saeviente, ubique persecutore instante, Diocletiano et Maximiano ferociter urgentibus, tot sanctorum millibus interemptis, ad hoc ille, ut diximus, singulariter ad tempus servatus est, ut Ecclesiam per multum temporis pastore destitutam atque trepidantem meritis defenderet, consilio muniret, labore sustentaret.

The holy pontiff [Marcellinus] is consummated in glorious martyrdom, and Marcellus remains in greater danger than he had been before. It is incumbent on him to think about the flock that he discerns to be deprived of its own shepherd. Look, brothers, how great our martyr, whose feast you celebrate today, was in God's presence. Consider, I say, who decreed the heavenly judgment about him, and thus you will see how great he was. With regard to the virtue of [this] soldier, consider the sentence of the emperor. This violent one rose up against the soldier of Christ with the pressure of persecution. The world conspires in arms; the nations rage; and the peoples contemplate foolish things; the kings of the earth stand up against and the princes come together as one against the Lord and against his Christ; they thrust forth swords, they lay waste the army, they kill the commander [Marcellinus] himself, they scatter the remaining ones fleeing everywhere. And our soldier calls back those who fled, he gathers the ones who were called back, he restores the battle line, he exhorts to war, he advances to the enemy, he fights bitterly, he obtains victory, and he rejoices as the victor. Just so, blessed Marcellus, engaging in spiritual battle, shown forth as worthy with the virtue of his soul in the militia of Christ. With the sword raging from all sides, with the persecutor pressing hard everywhere, with Diocletian and Maximian savagely threatening, with so many thousands of the saints being killed; it was for this that that one was saved, as we have said, especially for this time, so that he might defend with his merits the church (destitute of its shepherd and trembling for a long period of time), arm it with his counsel, and sustain it with his labor.

Attendite, fratres, et considerate quantus tribulationis ignis Ecclesiam Dei illo tempore exurendo probavit, quando per septem annos et sex menses ac diebus viginti quinque; quod nunquam ante nec post contigisse legitur, nec Romana sedes episcopum, nec universalis Ecclesia apostolicum super caeteros potuerit habere pontificem persecutionis turbine prohibente, clero et populo qui supererat nec conveniendi possibilitas, nec eligendi potuit esse facultas. Toto hoc tempore beatus Marcellus ante pastorem curam pastorale gerens officium, vices summi pontificis indoctos instruendo, trepidos confortando, Christi sacramenta tribuendo, omnia in tanto mortis timore providendo indesinenter agebat. Mortuos pro confessione fidei, quorum pene quotidie acervi fiebant, sollicitè disquirens et colligens sepeliebat. Unde et beati Marcellini papae ac sanctorum martyrum Claudii et Sirini corpora quae per triginta sex dies iussu Diocletiani ad terrorem Christianorum in platea jacuerant, noctu veniens cum presbyteris et diaconibus, rapuit, et sepelivit in crypta clara via Salaria cum Dei laudibus. Assumitur deinde aliquantulum sedato persecutionis fervore in summum pontificem. Gratulatur Ecclesia magnum se nunc tandem habere pastorem, probatum etiam adversum cuncta certamina ac fortissimum propugnatorem. Haec duo in illo specialiter effulsisse ut scilicet et commissis sollicitè provideret, et hostibus fortiter resisteret, susceptum multo magis probavit officium. Nam quod sollicitus et pervigil in Ecclesiae administratione sive ordinatione fuerit, declarant plurima ab eo, prout temporis ratio permittebat, salubriter disposita atque ordinata. Sic quippe de eo inter caetera in gestis scribitur: Hic fecit coemeterium via Salaria, et viginti quinque titulos in urbe Roma. Constituit et dioeceses propter baptismum et poenitentiam multorum, qui convertebantur ex paganis, et propter sepulcra martyrum. Hic ordinavit viginti quinque presbyteros in urbe Roma, et diaconos duos per mensem decembrium. Vere magnus dispositor, vere providus ordinator familiae Christi, qui non cogitabat exertos super cervicem inimicorum gladios, nec periculum imminens attendebat, sed velut tranquilla pace perfruens universa procurando non cessabat, suam que mortem vice omnium impendebat.

Take notice, brothers, and consider how much the fire of tribulation tested the church of God by its burning at that time, when for seven years and six months and 25 days, a thing [happened] that is never read to have happened before or since: neither the Roman see was able to have a bishop nor was the universal church able to have an apostolic pontiff over the other [bishops], with the turmoil of persecution prohibiting it, nor, for the clergy and people who remained, was there any possibility of convening or any means of electing. Over that entire period, blessed Marcellus, carrying out pastoral care before [assuming] the pastoral office, incessantly acted in place of the supreme pontiff by instructing the untrained, by comforting the fearful, by distributing the sacraments of Christ, and by providing everything in the midst of such fear of death. Sollicitously inquiring after and collecting the bodies of those who had died on behalf of the confession of the faith, heaps of which were being made almost every day, he buried them. Whence, coming by night with priests and deacons, he snatched up the bodies of Pope Marcellinus and of the holy martyrs Claudius and Sirinus (which had lay into the street for thirty six days by order of Diocletian and to the terror of the Christians) and buried them in the illustrious crypt on the via Salaria with praises to God. [At a point after] the persecution's fervor is somewhat subdued, he is taken up into the rank of supreme pontiff. Now the church rejoices to finally have such a great shepherd, who is proven in all the struggles and a most powerful warrior. The received office proved that these two [identities] shown much more specifically in him so that he might carefully provide for those entrusted [to him], and powerfully resist the enemy. The many things that were beneficially disposed and ordained by him, as the logic of the season permitted, declared that he would also be attentive and vigilant in the administration or arrangement of the church. Thus by all means it is written in the deeds (among other things about him): he made a cemetery on the Via Salaria and twenty-five monuments in the city of Rome. He also established dioceses for the sake of the baptism and penance of many, who were converted from [being] pagans, and for the sake of the sepulchres of the martyrs. He ordained twenty-five priests in the city of Rome and two deacons over the month of December. He was truly a great organizer, truly a provident manager of the family of Christ, he who was not thinking about the swords of the enemy stretched out over [his] neck, nor did he attend to imminent danger; instead he, as if enjoying a tranquil peace, he did not cease in procuring all things, and awaited his death in exchange for the death of everyone.

Propterea rursus beatus martyr a tyranno comprehenditur, ecclesia in stabulum redigitur, animalia publica in ea congregantur, sub arcta custodia papa stabularius esse cogitur. Desudat per multum tempus in tam laborioso et tam injurioso officio, deservit cum multa patientia animalibus, nudus amictus cilicio. Non ille gladio peremptus, non igne consumptus, non aquis immersus, non praecipitio collisus est, ne compendio finitus laborem requie, dolores gaudiis commutaret. Sed tali est ministerio deputatus, cujus ignominia plusquam ignibus concremaretur, corpus nimia fatigatione attereretur; nec adhuc multo transacto tempore finiretur, horresceret aspectus sordes, odoratus non ferret fetores, carnem durus atque assiduus labor consumeret, fames hinc acriter instans urgeret, illinc nuditas miseras cumularet, et inter multimoda angustiarum genera nequaquam moriens, morte miserius semper deficeret.

For this reason, this blessed martyr was in turn seized by the tyrant, the church was reduced to a stable, public livestock were gathered there under close custody, and the pope was forced to be a stable boy. He exerted [himself] for a long time in such laborious and injurious duty, and served the animals with great patience, naked, clothed [only] by a hairshirt. He was not struck by the sword, he was not consumed by fire, he was not submerged in water, he was not dashed [by being thrown off] a precipice, lest, finished, he exchange labor for rest by a shortcut or [such earthly] sufferings for [heavenly] joys. But assigned to such a ministry, [so that] he might be burned by its shame more than by fire; [so that] his body might be worn down by excessive fatigue; [so that] he would not be finished even after much time had passed; [so that] he would be terrified by sordid appearances; [so that], smelling [awful], he would not bear the stench; [so that] his hard and unrelenting labor would consume [his] flesh; [so that] urgent hunger would afflict him bitterly; [so that] nakedness would add to [his] miseries there; and, [so that,] by no means dying amidst these manifold sorts of miseries, he would always be most miserably lacking [an actual] death.

Ita martyr egregius non tam animalibus quam Christo ministrans, ad illum quem in initio sermonis diximus, ministrantium honorem pervenit, de quo ipse Dominus Christus ait: Ubi sum ego, illic et minister meus erit (Joan. XII). Ad tantum ergo honorem bene ministrando beatus vir proventus est, ut illuc conscenderet ubi Dei Filius est. Quale vero pro tot angustiis gaudium obtinuerit, et ipse Dominus indicat loquens discipulis: Et vos igitur nunc quidem tristitiam habetis: Iterum autem videbo vos, et gaudebit cor vestrum; et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis (Joan. XVI). Habent vere nunc sancti tristitiam, non quia mala mundi inviti sustineant, sed quia illa sensus naturaliter molesta fugientes conturbant. Hanc conturbationem sive tristitiam in se ipse Dominus suscipere dignatus, sic in Evangelio ait: Nunc anima mea turbata est (Joan. XII), et iterum: Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem (Matth. XXVI). Hanc sancti viri ex carnalibus, ut dictum est sensibus contrahentes patiuntur, sicut in psalmo legitur: Euntes ibant et flebant mittentes semina sua (Psal. CXXV). Hanc apostolus Petrus passus est, cui dictum est: Extendes manus tuas, et alius te cinget et ducet quo non vis (Joan. XXI). Volebat sane Petrus pro Christo pati, qui, si nollet, nec pateretur. Pati, inquam, pro Christo volebat, sed voluntati spiritus carnis infirmitas resistebat, de quo Dominus: Spiritus quidem promptus est, caro autem infirma (Matth. XXVI). Hujusmodi tristitiam beatus Marcellus, beati apostoli Petri successor, cum ipso ac caeteris Christi discipulis habuit propter quam gaudio succedente gaudere promeruit.

He was such a distinguished martyr, ministering not so much to the animals as to Christ, that he achieved the honor of those ministering to Him, whom we mentioned in the beginning of the sermon, about whom the Lord Christ himself says: "where I am, there also shall my minister be" (John 12:16). Thus the blessed man was conveyed to such an honor by ministering well so that he would ascend to the place where the Son is. How much joy he would obtain for so many difficulties, the Lord himself indicates, saying to his disciples: "So also you now indeed have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you" (John 16:22). Truly saints have sorrow now, not because they sustain bad things of the world reluctantly, but because fleeing those troublesome things, they naturally disturb the senses. The Lord himself deigned to receive this dismay or sorrow into himself, and says so in the gospel: "Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27); and again: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death" (Matthew 26:38). Holy men suffer this in the flesh, as was said, being saddened in [their] senses, as is read in the Psalm: "Going they went and wept, casting their seeds" (Psalm 125:6) [Also] suffering this [sorrow] was the apostle Peter, to whom it was said: "thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not" (John 21:18). Indeed Peter was willing to suffer for Christ who, had he not been willing, would not have suffered. He was willing to suffer, I say, for Christ, but the infirmity of the flesh resisted the will of the spirit: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak" (Matthew 26:41). The blessed Marcellus, the successor of the blessed apostle Peter, along with him and the other disciples of Christ, had sorrow of this sort on account of which, he deserved to rejoice in the joy that followed.

Videbo, inquit, vos, et gaudebit cor vestrum (Joan. XVI); videbo vos piis clementiae meae oculis, videbo vos, non ultra avertens faciem meam a vobis; videbo vos, ut domesticos recognoscendo; videbo vos, labores praeteritos remunerando, et in sinu meo ut proprios filios confovendo. Gaudebit cor vestrum nihil in se retinens tristitiae; gaudebit cor vestrum, non dimidium, sed totum; gaudebit cor, hoc est totus homo vester interior; gaudebit cor, quod solum gaudere potest; gaudebit cor vestrum omni exutum infelicitate, omni repletum beatitudine: Et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis (ibid.), corde vestro mecum gaudente quod mecum contristatum fuerat, gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis. Nolite timere ne gaudium, quo vestrum cor replebitur, aliquando a vobis tollatur. Nolite timere ne magnum, quod dabo, gaudium possit quandoque de termino esse suspectum. Non hoc sic incipiet, ut aliquando terminetur; non sic inchoabitur, ut vel post multa saecula finiatur. Non recedet cum tempore quod datur ab illo qui est sine tempore. Non potest finire gaudium, quod in se nec initium habet, nec terminum. Ipsum gaudium vestrum ego sum, qui in me id sum semper quod sum. Hoc gaudium postquam adepti fueritis, nemo tollet a vobis, quia me nullus poterit separare a vobis. Ad hoc gaudium post passionum tristitiam hodierna die Marcellus beatus perducitur, et in conspectu regis aeterni miles bellicosus post multas victoriarum palmas praesentatur. Nam moritur in egregia confessione martyr et pontifex Dei, et transit de stabulo ad regnum Dei, imitatus in morte sua nativitatem Filii Dei.

"I will see you," it says, "and your heart shall rejoice" (John 16:22); "I will see you with the pious eyes of my clemency, I will see you, not averting my face from you any longer; I will see you, by recognizing [you] as members of my household; I will see you, by remunerating past labors, and by nurturing [you] in my bosom as [I would] my own children. Your heart will rejoice, retaining in itself nothing of sadness; your heart will rejoice, not half of it but the whole thing; the heart, that is, the entire core of your humanity, will rejoice; the heart will rejoice, because it alone is able to rejoice; your heart will rejoice, stripped of all unhappiness, and filled with all blessedness; "and your joy no man shall take from you" (John 16:22), with your heart rejoicing with me because it had been saddened with me; "your joy no man shall take from you." Fear not that the joy, with which your heart will be filled, may ever be taken away from you. Fear not that the great joy which I will give, be able to be second-guessed at some point with regard to [its] end. It will not begin in such a way, that it may be ended at any time; it will not start in such a way that it may be finished even after many ages. What is given from that one who is without time will not recede with time. The joy cannot be ended, because in itself it has no beginning or end. I am your very joy; it is in me, who am always what I am.⁵ After you will have attained this joy, no one will remove it from you, because no one will be able to separate me from you. To this joy the blessed Marcellus was led on this day, after the sorrow of the passions, and the fierce soldier was, after many palms of victories, presented to the gaze of the eternal King. For he died as a martyr and high priest of God in distinguished confession, and he crossed from the stable to the kingdom of God, having imitated in his death the nativity of the Son of God.

⁵ Based on Exodus 3:14: *Ego sum qui sum*. "I am who am."

Merito, fratres, natalis beati Marcelli nativitati est proximus Christi, proximus est tempore, quia nec remotus est similitudine, locus enim illius nativitatis loco non est dissimilis istius passionis. In tali namque loco Marcellus mortuus est, in quali Christus natus est. Habuit ibi Christus temporale principium, ubi sumpsit Marcellus non finiendae vitae initium. Inde et ibi ei fuit aeternus natalis, ubi fuit Christo exortus temporalis; suscepit praesepe infantem nascentem, accipit stabulum martyrem patientem. Patitur summa majestas vile reclinatorium, tolerat summus pontifex sordidum habitaculum. Involvitur vilibus pannis divina infantia, tegitur asperrimis ciliciis damnata innocentia. Fit natus Christus animalibus quae forsitan aderant spectaculum, fit Marcellus animalibus serviens ludibrium. Nato in praesepe Deo puero angelicus chorus gloriam in excelsis canit, mortuus in stabulo martyr ad angelorum gloriam hodie pervenit. Pervenit ad gloriam conjunctus supernis civibus, sed relinquit et ipse post se tunc quoque ab angelis nuntiatam pacem hominibus. In eo namque quasi defatigatus furor hostium conquievit, et fervor camini, Ecclesia jam purgata, refriguit. Fuit enim in apostolicis pontificibus solus qui in paganorum principum persecutionibus martyrii confessione meruit coronam extremus. Primus in illis martyrii certamen Petrus inivit, ultimus in eis illud fortiter dimicans Marcellus finivit, et hoc fine ad principium quod est sine fine pervenit Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum qui cum Patre et Spiritu sancto vivit et regnat Deus per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen

Rightly, brothers, is the birth of blessed Marcellus near that of Christ, near to it in time, because it is not remote in its similitude;⁶ [nor] indeed is the place [i.e., the stable] of the former's passion dissimilar to the latter's place [i.e., the manger] of nativity. Marcellus was killed in a [similar] place to that in which Christ was born. Christ had his temporal beginning there, where Marcellus took up the beginning of his life that was never to end. There his birth was eternal there, where Christ's birth was temporal; the manger received the infant who was being born, the stable received the suffering martyr. The supreme majesty endures a lowly bed, the supreme pontiff tolerates a filthy habitation. Divine infancy is wrapped up in worthless rags; condemned innocence is covered with rough garments. Christ upon his birth is made a spectacle to animals that were perhaps present; Marcellus, serving animals, is made a laughingstock. An angelic chorus sings "glory in the highest" (Luke 2:14) to the child God born in a manger; on this day the martyr arrived to the glory of the angels from a stable. He came to glory, joined to the citizens on high, but then he, after himself, also left behind to men the peace [that had been] announced by angels. In him the furor of the enemies quieted, as if exhausted, and the heat of the furnace cooled with the church already having been purged. He alone was the last among the apostolic pontiffs who earned the crown by the confession of martyrdom in the midst of the persecutions of the pagan princes. Peter, the first among them, entered the battle of martyrdom, [Marcellus] finished as the last among these, fighting that [battle] bravely, and with this end he came to the beginning that is without end, [and to] our Lord Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit as God for all ages and ages. Amen.

⁶ St. Marcellus feast day is January 16. The Feast of the Nativity is December 25.