

THE LIFE AND MIRACLES OF

ST. PHILOMENA

VIRGIN AND MARTYR

WHOSE SACRED BODY WAS LATELY DISCOVERED IN THE  
CATACOMBS AT ROME, AND FROM THENCE TRANSFERRED TO  
MUGNANO, IN THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

“YE DRY BONES, HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD. THUS SAITH  
THE LORD GOD TO THESE BONES: BEHOLD, I WILL SEND  
SPIRIT INTO YOU, AND YOU SHALL LIVE.” — EZECH. 37:4,5

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## Chapter 1

**DISCOVERY OF THE BODY OF ST. PHILOMENA**

*The Psalmist says: "God is wonderful in His saints. The God of Israel is He who will give power and strength to His people."  
Blessed be God.*

During nearly fifteen centuries, these sacred relics had lain buried and concealed from the world, when all at once they appear, crowned with honor and glory. Whence therefore is this prodigy? Who can have wrought it, but He Who dictated these words to His prophet: *In memoria aeterna erit justus*, "The just will be in everlasting remembrance."<sup>1</sup>

The just, therefore, only deserve to be called wise; since they build not the edifice of their virtues upon the quicksands of the world, but upon the imperishable rock, upon "the mountain of God;" *Fundamenta ejus in montibus sanctis*.<sup>2</sup> Oh! that the insensate inhabitants of the earth could comprehend and appreciate this language. But, be it as it may, such is the lesson that God has been pleased to give them: if their folly prevents their profiting by it, it will not, for all that, be the less truly useful for those who already walk in the straight way; and, in seeing what the Lord has done to exalt his humble servant, St. Philomena, they will feel

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<sup>1</sup> Psa. 111

<sup>2</sup> Psa. 111

themselves animated with new ardor, and, full of joy and hope, they will fly, with the swiftness of the eagle, in the narrow way, of which the end is life and eternal glory.

The blessed body of St. Philomena was found, in 1802, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, during one of those annual excavations which are usually made at Rome, in those places which have been rendered sacred by the burial of the martyrs. Those excavations took place this year in the catacombs of St. Priscilla, on the new Salarian way. The first thing discovered was the sepulchral stone, which was remarkable for its singularity. It was of baked earth, and distinguished by several symbols, bearing allusion to virginity and martyrdom. They were cut with a transverse line, formed by an inscription, of which the first and last letters appeared to have been effaced by the instruments of the workmen, when endeavoring to detach it from the tomb: it was conceived in these words:

(FI) LUMENA, PAX TECUM FI (AT).<sup>3</sup>

The learned Father Parthenio, S. J., thinks that the two last letters, FI, ought to be united to the first word of the inscription, according to the usage of the ancients, which he says was common to the Chaldeans, Phoenicians, Arabs, Hebrews; and he adds, there are some traces of it to be found even among the Greeks. But the discussions on this point must be left to the learned, and it will be sufficient for us to observe, with the same learned Father, that, “on sepulchral

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<sup>3</sup> Filumena, peace be with thee, Amen.



stones, placed by the Christians upon the tombs of the martyrs who confessed Jesus Christ in the first persecution, in place of the formula, *In pace*, generally more used, they put *Pax tecum*, which is something more lively and more animated.”

The stone having been removed, the sacred relics of the holy martyr appeared, and close beside, an earthen vase of extremely thin material, one half of it broken, and the sides incrustated with dried blood. The blood, a sure sign of the sort of martyrdom which terminated the days of St. Philomena, had been, according to the practice of the primitive Church, collected by pious Christians. When the Christians could not themselves perform this office of devotion, they had recourse to the pagans, and sometimes even to the executioners of their brethren, in order to have, together with their venerable remains, their sacred blood, offered so generously to Him, who, upon the cross, sanctified, by the effusion of His own blood, the sacrifices, the pains, and the death of His children.

Whilst they were engaged in detaching from the different pieces of the broken vase the blood that adhered to them, and that with the greatest care they gathered in a crystal urn the small particles, the persons present, among whom were some men of talent and cultivated minds, were astonished in seeing sparkle, all on a sudden, the urn upon which their eyes were fixed. They drew nearer; they viewed at leisure the wonderful phenomenon, and with sentiments of the most lively admiration, joined to the most profound respect, blessed God, “Who is glorified in His saints.” The

sacred particles, in falling from the vase into the urn, were transformed into various precious and shining bodies; some presenting the luster and color of the purest gold, some of silver, some appearing like diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones; so that in place of the matter, of which the color, in detaching it from the vase, was brown and dark, they saw only in the crystal the mingled brilliancy of different colors, like those that shine in the rainbow.

The witnesses of this prodigy were not men to doubt of what they had seen with their eyes, and examined with attention; they knew that God, particularly to those whom in heaven He loads with the riches of His glory, is not so sparing of His gifts, as that a like miracle could cost Him much. They considered it, not only in itself, as a shadow of that heavenly brightness promised in the sacred writings to the body and soul of the just—*Fulgebunt justi sicut sol ... et tanquam scintillae*<sup>4</sup>—but also in the happy and salutary effects which it produced in their hearts. They felt their faith revive, and had they desired to compare the present and the past, they might have recalled to mind, to justify their pious belief, many similar facts: that, for example, of St. John Nepomucene, whose body, having been cast into the Muldau, was distinguished in the midst of the waters, during the night, by the brilliant light which clothed it like a garment. What is told of St. Philomena is certainly more wonderful, but yet, how far short of that miracle, of which it is the figure and the pledge, the resurrection of the body,

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<sup>4</sup> Wis. 3:7

when the elect shall be transformed into the glory of Jesus Christ!

In reading the foregoing, one must be struck with admiration at the permanence of this miraculous transformation. At the present time it excites the wonder of all who go to venerate the sacred relics. They see also, in the same urn, the same brilliant bodies, but their brilliancy has not always the same liveliness, and the colors with which they shine have at different moments different shades: at one time it is the appearance of the ruby, at another that of the emerald that predominates; again, their brilliancy is at times as it were tarnished by a light layer of ashes. Once only it was observed to disappear, and the terrified eyes of those who witnessed it saw in the sacred urn but a little ordinary earth. But this new miracle terminated as soon as the unworthy eyes of a person, who shortly afterward died suddenly, had ceased to profane the holiness of the venerable relics. O God, how the display of Thy power is at the same time amiable and terrible!

A difficulty may here present itself to the reader's mind. This prodigy, as we have called it, took place first at the moment of the extraction of the holy body from the catacombs; the eyewitnesses must have spoken of it, and consequently it must have made a noise in Rome; how then has it happened that, from the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, 1802, until almost the middle of 1805, an object so worthy of all respect should, instead of being exposed upon the altars to receive the homage of the faithful, have been kept concealed and confounded with several other bodies of holy martyrs, which it had not pleased

the Lord to honor in so singular a manner? But let us reflect on and admire the wise slowness, and the supernatural, as it were, circumspection of the Court of Rome, when called upon to pronounce on these extraordinary events. Let us meditate particularly on the views of Providence in regard to these sacred remains, and the difficulty will disappear. Yes; God wished, as all that has since happened concurs to prove, that this new sun, like the morning, after having shed the first light, should remain some time longer under the clouds.

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