

**Odilo of Saint-Médard – Extract from the *Translatio sancti Sebastiani***

(ca. 930)

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For the entire work, see *PL* 132, col. 575–628]

Translated by

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44. I, Emperor Louis caesar augustus (broken off of a once vigorous branch), ruling with the grace of God, administering to the Roman world, had with disgrace relaxed too immoderately the reins of law over the people. Some men released by my indulgence rushed forward into the cruelty of infidelity by impugning my piety. That evil grew until it was red hot, so that they also compelled my own dear sons  
5 themselves to rage against me and made them plot the murder of their own father. And so by chance it occurred at a place, which since then is called the Lying Field because of the occurrence [there] of broken faith, peace, and oaths. Here almost my entire army deserted me, as I recall. The horrid crime entangled my sons in this treason and made them the leaders of the crime, charging me, an innocent man, with many foul deeds [leading to] death. Harmed and deluded in many ways by those [whom I] never harmed, I was  
10 not unaware of my own foul actions, and bore the events with equanimity, imagining that I was suffering these things deservingly in accordance with the resoundingly fair judgment of God. I was led from there surrounded by a hostile troop to the city of Soissons to the monastery of my lords, the saints Medard and Sebastian. And because they [the sons] knew that I cherish that place, they deliberated there that, after my despair, I should perhaps set down my arms willingly.

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To this end, when they had me confined in public custody, so that they should complete in deed that which they had plotted with their cunning, they dispatched certain men, who announced to me that my wife either had been made a nun in a monastery of virgins or, and this they had heard as more likely, she had died. Moreover, they affirmed that my little son, innocent Charles, a little boy of good character,  
20 whom they knew was dearest to me above all else, had been tonsured and admitted to the company of

monks. When I heard that, I, who had been robbed of the kingdom and deprived of my wife and child, could not contain myself. For days on end I wailed and had no one to console me. I gradually felt myself, because of the enormity of my sadness, being consumed by the fires of the most overwhelming languor. And because I could have no one to console me except God (since in fact admittance and discussion with everyone was denied [me]), a path lay open [to me] only to the church and rarely to the monks, [one] that was under the sharpest watch of the guards. It occupied my mind to go there.

Since I had come to [such a state], having been compelled by the signs in everything, I reported the bout of illness I was suffering to the wise doctors [that is, monks]. I beseeched them to obtain as much relief as possible from favorable lords, and I appealed persistently to their venerable religiosity to celebrate masses and pray very attentively for the remains of my wife, whom I believed was dead. They, kindly moved by my affliction and wretchedness, promised me, as if they could see the future, an imminent remedy from the Almighty through the merits and intervention of the saints, whom they diligently served; that is, if I turned my mind to the sacraments of faith. Thus, well comforted by them, I was led by them after prayer into the familiar recesses of the prison and at last was restored [to health].

In the dark of the following night, I was wishing with a persistent thought to see a shining star and, having entered the oratory of the Holy Trinity next to the prison, I spent the rest of the night there alone after the matins service was over. Then I directed my eyes outside through the window and I saw one of the guards beyond [my] power, nevertheless undeservingly dangerous to me; he was lying close at hand in the gutter and desiring to serve in that [prone] position so that I not slip away through a small hole in the wall. Perceiving him senseless from sleep and wine, among the deep sighs of my heart an absurd omen came to me envisioning something better. For in fact I saw [the guard] lying spread out [in the gutter] and that his sword, by [his] frequent pounding of the pillow on which it had been placed, [had fallen and] was stuck near the foundations of the church. Climbing rapidly a ladder that was set in the corner for the purpose of lighting the beacon in the tower, I untied a rope hanging idly above from the ceiling. Spying nearby the poles upon which the standards carried at Lent are fastened, I tied the rope to one of them with a noose and cast it through the window. By this trick I lifted the sword I had seen and threw it into the deep and squalid latrines. I called out [the guard's] name and said to him: "O ever vigilant guard, most trustworthy hope of your people, are you awake?" To this he said, "I am awake, very awake." Again I said, "And what are you doing?" "What is that to you?" he shot back. I replied, "If by chance a sudden necessity should confront you, perhaps your sword will be far from your hand." He put his arms to his head and felt for [the sword] here and there. I said, "If you had [always] guarded me in this way, you would by no means have held me here today." He replied, "[Despite] whatever was done with my sword, I have guarded over you [well] enough, as I was commanded, and I shall take care to guard [you still]." And I [said back]: "Go then and, in reward for your fidelity and vigilance in this place, recover from [its] fitting 'armory' the sword which you foully lost."

On that same day one of the brothers, who were inquiring into the strength of the whole truth  
60 of my situation, communicated [with me] in writing through Hardinus, who was accustomed to chant the  
masses before me in daily service. While I was offering oblations to him to glorify God as usual, chiefly for  
the absolution of my wife, whom I believed to be [now] free of human concerns, that one [brother]  
touching my hand cautiously, said, "It is otherwise in the altar." After the Host had been consummated,  
when everyone went outside, I remained alone and, taking a little roll sticking out from a small chest, I  
65 learned that my wife was alive and that nothing sinister had happened to my son. [I also learned] that  
many were now penitent because they had broken their faith in such a way and abandoned me, and that  
they were eagerly working with firm purpose toward the restoration of the kingdom. That came to  
happen with God favoring and making things better, thanks to the intervention of His saints.

70 But although I, [now] more august, the summit of the kingdom having been regained, came to  
enjoy the glory of [my] original dignity, nevertheless I was not unmindful of my vows and prayers, with  
which I had implored that most excellent martyr Sebastian, and I believed without hesitation that I would  
receive [his answer]. With rebellion arising again, when the calm of the kingdom was indiscriminately  
assaulted and the tranquility of the peace was overturned, I went to that holy place [the monastery of St-  
75 Medard] in order to pray to the saint about these matters. And because I had very often experienced his  
powerful assistance in private and public matters of this kind, I prayed earnestly concerning these things  
for the usual [assistance] with which it was deemed worthy to be imparted.

On the following night I received by the clearest signs in a nocturnal vision that which I had asked  
80 for previously. I think that was delivered to me from heaven by [the saint]. And since the calamity of the  
disasters falling [on me] would for no reason allow me to stay there longer, as I desired, I went out from  
there; I was determined to devote myself to the crisis and to the struggle for the sake of the people  
committed [to me] by God, and [I was determined], if possible, to act forcefully. Hence, when I left, a man  
by the name of Teutherus, the prior of this dear college, accompanied [me] and became the companion of  
85 my journey. And while he was riding with me, we were soon taken far from that holy place. Turning my  
head and, alas, with sadness, I took a final look at that place and was overcome with sadness deep in my  
heart, and I could no longer hold back the overflowing tears of my profound sadness. Sad and mourning I  
poured forth bitter tears, [being] shut up in a deadly pall and completely uncertain what I ought to do. I  
had devoted a prayer to the saint, whose appointed day of work I was to see. From him I had perceived  
90 the end of [my] life, whose ends I knew it was not permitted for me to cross. At last I was not in the dark  
about the Christian empire granted to me by God to rule, whose imminent destruction, which I had  
foreknown since I considered the whole world to be weakened, I had hitherto feared. I feared that I  
would be found the one responsible for this, and for this reason be damned to eternal punishment by that

95 one who is the author and lord of all and who will return as the judge of each of us according to the works we did.

That one [Teutherus], seeing me so sad, had a long talk [with me], for he was a most faithful man in all things. And since he could not bear the now overflowing shower of my tears, for he too was very moved by this, he fell to crying. He said, “How, o best caesar, can these [tears] help you and your seriously distraught men? All will be consoled by you. If your happiness were evident to the sorrowful, it would do away with all sadness. Do not, o most glorious lord and emperor (to whom there should always be surpassing joy), do not show openly with the clouding over of your most serene visage the wound of your deadly sadness to your servants. The hearts and limbs of your soldiers will be weakened by this [and] the troops of the enemy will grow hard. At least that alone ought to be kept secret from your men, [namely,] that which could disturb the happiest and always most tranquil condition of your breast. Perhaps it will be given to [you]—if they will have suffered for you faithfully—to be able to find the relief of consolation; and if it cannot be achieved otherwise, you will still bear it more lightly, since many will have begun to share this thing.”

110 Then, taking up the words of my consoler, which I knew were uttered with loyal persuasion, I immediately cloaked in speech what lay hidden in my heart and replied to him with a pretext. I said that I much loved that holy place, which I knew from the revelation of the holy martyr I would not see any longer. The fluctuation of the besieged empire had hindered the fulfillment of the vow I had given above; and unless it be ascribed by the enemy to fear, or that its ruin, which was to be feared above all, be demanded by the Almighty, I had decided to lay down [my] arms, the purple [that is, the imperial title and regalia], and my crown as freely as possible in that same place. Thence, since I desired to be given even more helpful counsel by him, I received such. He said, “Your vow was a good one, most glorious caesar, but just as Saint Gregory teaches, nothing is more valuable to God than a good will. Indeed, what is great is that [those] riches, which you possess in this world and in all things, be renounced, for in this way you can be an imitator of Christ. To be sure, the salvation of many is achieved in this way, it promises multiple rewards to individuals. He counselled that to you, this to all. That is great, but this the greatest. If His will cannot be done in this, it will be rewarded in that. Finally what is more wonderful in God that He deemed it worthy to die for His servants. That one commended that there also be an increase of charity, if anyone had not hesitated to set down his soul for his brother; He did what He taught, He set down His soul for us. The Lord suffered death, so that His servant might receive dignity, succumbing not to necessity, He ineffably came to the rescue of His creatures. Let us follow that example He showed in Himself and promised the palm of victory to those doing [His] work and He set down [for them] a permanent reward. Because therefore He committed His flock to your governance, if it is necessary for you to fight to the death on His behalf, it will be a praiseworthy honor.”

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Instructed very clearly in these things by that aforementioned man and moved strongly to act, commending myself again and again and most attentively to the holiness of that one and [his] brothers, I, even if not as sad as before, [yet] not joyful, nevertheless was strong enough to depart from there, since I knew that those whom I had loved specially would transmit me on high. Farewell.

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45. Therefore when these things had been related to those brothers senior by way of age and religion, they resolved as one that the holy martyr should be praised, in as much as his oracles for their salvation, if it could happen in any way, might be turned to another. Which, when it [the praise] was done assiduously, nevertheless by no means were they deemed worthy to be heard concerning this, since indeed this never corresponded with God's immutable predestination. For on the same journey, leading [his] army against his legitimate son of the same name [that is, Louis the German], he gave up his corporeal life on a certain island in the Rhine [river], and, because of his merits, acquired everlasting [life] with the saint, as we believe, whom he had honored with an incomparable love. His celebrated remains [which rest] in the basilica of Saint Arnulf in Metz, from whose line he had descended, are worthily commended in the richness as much of precious works as royal lands. And since, as we knew through his making it manifest, he refused to fulfill [his] vow, he did not deserve to have the so-often wished for place of burial in the foundation of the martyr.

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