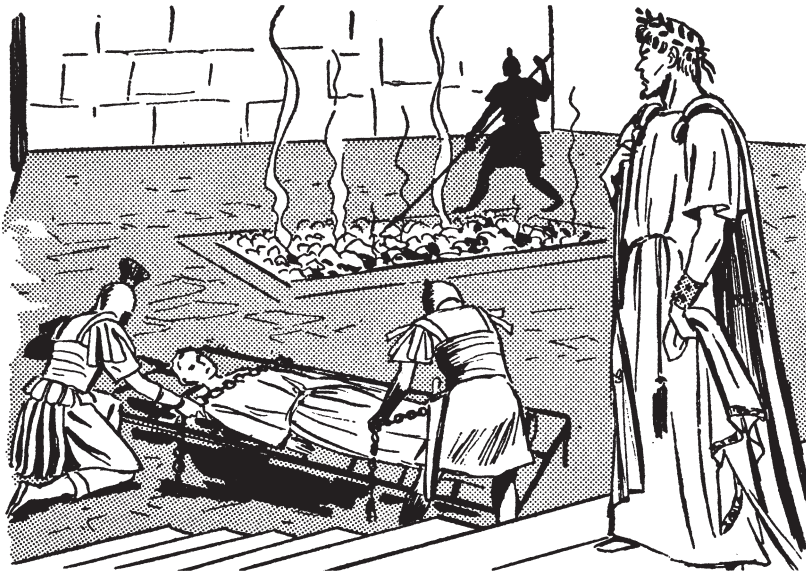


A Story of Saint Lawrence

By
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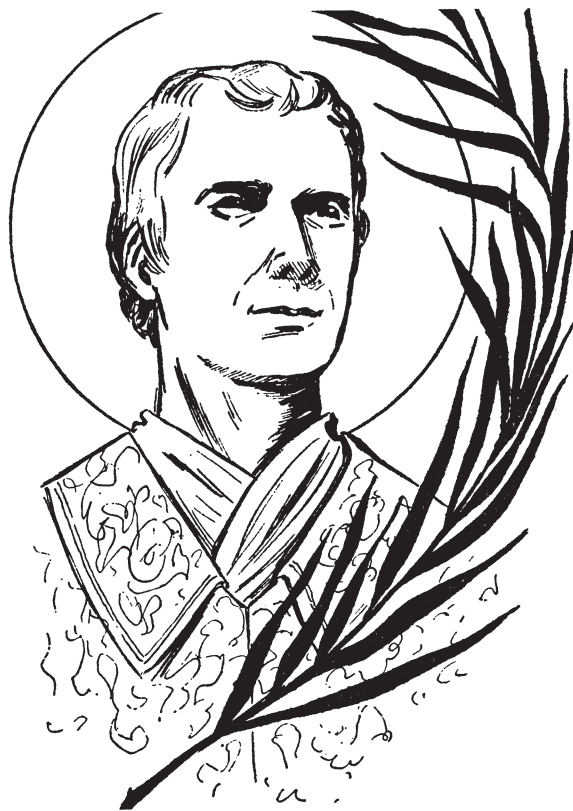
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DEDICATION
to
my mother and father,
Brother Lawrence Miller, C.S.C.
and
Sister Mary Lawrence, O.S.B.
Ferdinand, Indiana



A STORY OF SAINT LAWRENCE

It is really a pity that so little is known about Saint Lawrence. He is one of the most famous martyrs of the early Christian Church, and is among the most honored. We are not told where and when he was born, nor who his parents were. We do know that, though he was very young, he was one of the seven deacons of the Church in Rome. From this we know that Lawrence must have been well educated and, most of all, that he was very holy. Only a person with such

good qualities would have been given a high position of great trust like that.

Christians living in the days of Lawrence could not practice their faith openly. Evil men, prompted by the devil, did their best to destroy the Church. Christians lived as much as possible like everyone else so as not to attract attention. As often as they could, though, they stole away to one of the catacombs. In these underground caverns they gathered for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments, prayers, and mutual encouragement.

In the year 257, things began to get worse. In most respects, April 1 of that year was a typical spring day in Rome. Even in the early morning hours the narrow streets were filled with people, most of them merchants and housewives getting ready for another day's bargaining.

One person, distinct from the rest, was a well-



dressed man named Vincent. He looked worried about something as he hurried down the street. Presently, he turned into the courtyard of a well-to-do home. Running up the wide outside stairway to the second floor, he entered a room where his friend, several years younger than himself, was studying. He said excitedly:

“Lawrence, I came through the marketplace

on my way over here. Have you heard about the decree that Valerian just published?”

“Well, no, I . . .”

“It says that everyone, without exception, has to worship the pagan gods, and you know who he means when he says that!”

“Yes, Christians, of course. It looks like real trouble is starting for us again, Vincent.”

“Yes, things have been fairly peaceful these past three years: the Roman Emperors can’t seem to forget about us,” sighed Vincent.

“But Valerian has been somewhat favorable to us. What could have provoked him? We haven’t done anything to cause it,” said Lawrence.

“Well, you know how much his advisor, Ma-crian, has been influencing him lately. The emperor is superstitious anyway, but old ‘Max’ has been getting him interested in Persian black magic.

I heard just the other day that Max has been trying to convince him that since Christians are enemies of black magic and the pagan gods, they will bring him, and the whole empire, bad luck. He's told Valerian that the gods will turn their anger on him because he permits some of his subjects to despise them. This decree proves that Max did a good job in convincing him."

"Is that all it says?" Lawrence asked.

"No, it also forbids us to gather in the catacombs any more. If we don't obey, we're in danger of exile or even death, and no doubt he means business."

"Yes, I guess so," Lawrence said with a sigh. "We will just have to pray for strength to endure whatever comes. I'm sure any Christian would rather die than insult Almighty God by worshipping some pagan hunk of marble. Old Diana,

Mars, Apollo and the rest of them won't get any incense from us."

They talked for a while longer and then Vincent departed. Being a deacon of the Church, he had duties to perform.

Even though the Christians ignored the decree of the Roman Emperor, nothing at all happened. The rest of April, May, June and July slipped away. On August 2, as the hot sun sank to the horizon, Lawrence made his way to one of the catacombs. When he reached the large underground assembly room, he was delighted to see Pope Stephen himself there, preparing to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice. Things went as usual until shortly after the Consecration. A shock of fear went through Lawrence when he heard Roman soldiers coming down the passageway. They stood in the back of the room, but Pope Stephen went on with the Mass as if nothing