

V. the Christian's Secret

by Martyrs of the Catacombs

The Christian's secret is the knowledge of God's love and mercy, and the power of faith in the face of adversity.

Scripture: Psalm 103:12, John 1:14, John 3:16, Acts 16:31, Romans 5:8, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 1:5

Topics: "Personal Redemption", "Christian Conversion"

Description

Martyrs of the Catacombs deliver a powerful sermon on the mystery of godliness, revealing God manifest in the flesh through the story of a Roman soldier, Marcellus, who seeks the truth about Christianity. Marcellus, initially a skeptic, is deeply moved by the unwavering faith and courage of the Christians he encounters, leading him on a transformative journey of discovery and redemption. Through the teachings of Honorius, Marcellus learns about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, experiencing profound revelations about God's love, mercy, and the path to salvation. In a moment of prayer and repentance, Marcellus finds peace, forgiveness, and a newfound faith in Christ, embracing the Christian message of redemption and eternal life.

Transcript

"The mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh."

The young soldier stood astonished at the effect which his name produced.

"Why do you all tremble so?" said he. "Is it on my account?"

"Alas!" said Honorius, "though we are banished to this place we have constant communication with the city. We have heard that new efforts were making to persecute us more severely, and that Marcellus, a captain in the Pretorians, had been appointed to search us out. We see you here among us, our chief enemy. Have we not cause to fear? Why should you track us here?"

"You have no cause to fear me," cried Marcellus, "even if I were your worst enemy. Am I not in your power? If you chose to detain me could I escape? If you killed me could I resist? I am helpless among you. My situation here, alone among you, is proof that there is no danger from me."

"True," said Honorius, assuming his calm demeanor, "you are right; you could never return without our assistance."

"Hear me, then and I will explain all to you. I am a Roman soldier. I was born in Spain, and was brought up in virtue and morality. I was taught to fear the gods and do my duty.

"I have been in many lands, and have confined myself chiefly to my profession. Yet I have never neglected religion. In my chamber I have studied all the writings of the philosophers of Greece and Rome. The result is that I have learned from them to despise our gods and goddesses, who are no better, and even worse than myself.

"From Plato and Cicero I learn that there is one Supreme Deity whom it is my duty to obey. But how can I know him, and how shall I obey him? I learn, too, that I am immortal, and shall become a spirit when I die. How shall I be then? Shall I be happy or miserable? How shall I secure happiness in that spiritual life? They describe the glories of that immortal life in eloquent language, but they give no directions for common men like me. To learn more of this is the desire of my soul.

"The priests can tell me nothing. They are wedded to old forms and ceremonies in which they do not believe. The old religion is dead, and men care for it no more.

"In different lands I have heard much of Christians. Shut up in the camp, I have not had much opportunity to see them. Indeed, I never cared to know them until lately. I have heard all the usual reports about their immorality, their secret vice, their treasonable doctrines. I believed all this until lately.

"A few days ago I was in the Coliseum. There, first, I learned something about the Christians. I saw the gladiator Macer, a man to whom fear was utterly unknown, lay down his life calmly rather than do what he believed to be wrong. I saw an old man meet death with a peaceful smile; and above all, I saw a band of young girls give themselves up to the wild beasts with a song of triumph on their lip:

"Unto Him that loved us,

That washed us from our sins."

As Marcellus spoke a wonderful effect was produced. The eyes of his listeners glistened with eagerness and joy. When he mentioned Macer they looked at each other with meaning glances; when he spoke of the old man, Honorius bowed his head; and when he spoke of the children and murmured the words of their song, they turned away their faces and wept.

"For the first time in my life I saw death conquered. I myself can meet death without terror, and so can every soldier when he comes in the battle-field. It, is our profession. But these people rejoiced in death. Here were not soldiers, but children, who carried the same wonderful feeling in their hearts.

"Since then I have thought of nothing else. Who is he that loved you? Who is he that washes you from your sins? Who is he that causes this sublime courage and hope to arise within you? What is it that supports you here? Who is he to whom you were just now praying?

"I have a commission to lead soldiers against you and destroy you. But I wish to learn more of you first. And I swear by the Supreme that my present visit shall bring no harm to you. Tell me, then, the Christian's secret."

"Your words," said Honorius, "are true and sincere. Now I know that you are no spy or enemy, but an inquiring soul sent here by the Spirit to learn that which you have long been seeking. Rejoice, for he that

cometh unto Christ shall be in no wise cast out.

"You see before you men and women who have left friends, and home, and honor, and wealth, to live here in want, and fear, and sorrow, and they count all this as nothing for Christ, yes, they count even their own lives nothing. They give up all for Him who loved them.

"You are right, Marcellus, in thinking that there is some great power which can do all this: It is not fanaticism, nor delusion, nor excitement. It is the knowledge of the truth and love for the great God.

"What you have sought for all your life is our dearest possession. Treasured up in our hearts, it is worth far more to us than all that the world can give. It gives us happiness in life even in this place of gloom, and in death it makes us victorious.

"You wish to know the Supreme Being. Our religion is his revelation, and through this he makes himself known. Infinite in greatness and power, he also is infinite in love and mercy. This religion draws us so closely to him that he is our best friend, our guide, our comfort, our hope, our all, our Creator, our Redeemer, and our final Saviour.

"You wish to know of the immortal life. Our religion tells of this. It shows us that by loving and serving God on earth we shall dwell with him in infinite blessedness in heaven. It shows us how to live so as to please him here, and it makes us know how we shall praise him hereafter. By this we learn that death is no longer a curse, but rather a blessing, since it becomes but the sure passage way unto happiness unspeakable in the presence of Him who loved us."

"O then," cried Marcellus, "if this be so, make known to me this truth. For this I have looked for years; for this I have prayed to that Supreme Being of whom I have heard. You are the possessor of that which I long to know. The end and aim of my life lies here. The whole night is before us. Do not put me off, but at once tell me all. Has God, indeed, made known all this, and have I been ignorant of it?"

Tears of joy glistened in the eyes of the Christians. Honorius murmured a few words of silent thankfulness and prayer. After which he drew forth a manuscript, which he handled with tender care.

"Here," said he, "beloved youth, is the word of life which came from God, which brings such peace and joy to man. In this we can find all that the soul desires. In these divine words we learn that which we can find no where else; and though the mind may brood over it for a lifetime, yet the extent of its glorious truths can never be reached."

Then Honorius opened the book and began to tell of Jesus. He told him of the long succession of prophets which had heralded his coming, of the chosen people of God who had kept alive the knowledge of the truth for so many ages, and of the marvelous works which they had witnessed.

He spoke of his birth, his childhood, his first appearance, his miracles, his teachings. All this he read, with a few comments of his own, from the sacred manuscript.

Then he related the treatment which he received, the scorn, contempt, and persecution which hurried him on to his betrayal.

Finally, he read the story of his death on Calvary.

Upon Marcellus the effect of all this was wonderful. Light seemed to burst upon his mind. The holiness of God, which turned with abhorrence from human sin; his justice, which demanded punishment; his patience, which endured so much; his mercy, which contrived a way to save his creatures from the ruin which they drew on themselves; his amazing love, which brought him down to sacrifice himself for their salvation, all were clear. When Honorius reached the end of the mournful story of Calvary, and came to the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" he was roused by a sob from Marcellus. Looking up through the tears which dimmed his own eyes, he saw the form of the strong man bowed, and his frame quivering with emotion. "No more, no more now," he murmured, "Let me think of Him:

"Him who loved us,

Who washed us from our sins,

In his own blood."

And Marcellus buried his face in his hands.

Honorius raised his eyes to heaven and prayed. The two were alone, for their companions had long since departed. The light from a lamp in a niche behind Honorius but dimly illumined the scene. Thus they remained in silence for a long time.

At last Marcellus raised his head.

"I feel," said he, "that I too had a part in causing the death of the Holy One. Read on, more of that word of life, for my own life hangs upon it."

Then Honorius read the story of the burial, the resurrection, the appearance again to the disciples, and the ascension. Nor did he end with this. He sought to give peace to the soul of his friend. He read to him all the words of Jesus which invite the sinner, and assure to him a gracious reception and complete forgiveness.

"It is the word of God," cried Marcellus, "it is a voice from heaven. My heart responds to everything that I have heard, and I know that it must be eternal truth.

"But how can I be a sharer in these blessings? I am a sinner; I seem now to have my eyes cleared of mist. I know myself at last. Before I thought I was a just and a righteous man. But beside the Holy One of whom I have heard I sink down into the dust, I see that I am a sinner before him."

"He has atoned for all."

"But how can I be benefited?"

"He will pardon everything even to the uttermost."

"How can he pardon me?"

"Lift up your soul to him and pray for pardon. If you ask you shall receive."

"O, then, if I may dare to approach, if it be permitted for me to utter a word to him, teach me the words, tell me the way."

In the dimness of the gloomy vault, in solitude and solemn silence, Honorius knelt down, and Marcellus bowed himself by his side.

The venerable Christian lifted up his soul in prayer. Marcellus felt as though his own soul was being lifted up to the courts of heaven, to the presence of the Saviour, by the power of that, fervent and agonizing prayer. The words seemed to find an echo in his own soul. In his deep abasement he rested his wants upon his companion so that he might present them in a more acceptable manner.

But finally his own desires grew stronger. Hope came to him, timidly, tremblingly, yet still it was hope, and his soul grew stronger at her presence. At, last, when Honorius ended, his feelings burst forth. It was the prayer of the publican: "God be merciful unto me a sinner!"

Hours passed on. But who can fittingly describe the progress of a soul on its way to its God? Enough, that when morning dawned on the earth above, a better day had dawned over the soul of Marcellus in the vaults below. His longings were completely satisfied; the load was all removed; the Christians; secret was his; and with rapture unfelt before, he could now sing the song of the Christian:

"Unto Him that loved us,

To Him that washed us from our sins

In his own blood,

To Him be glory and dominion

For ever and ever."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/martyrs-of-the-catacombs/v-the-christians-secret/>

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