

A POEM ON THE PASSION OF THE LORD

FORMERLY ASCRIBED TO *LACTANTIUS*

Whoever you are who approach, and are entering the precincts²⁰⁶⁵ of the middle of the temple, stop a little and look upon me, who, though innocent, suffered for your crime; lay me up in your mind, keep me in your breast. I am He who, pitying the bitter misfortunes of men, came hither as a messenger²⁰⁶⁶ of offered peace, and as a full atonement²⁰⁶⁷ for the fault of men.²⁰⁶⁸ Here the brightest light from above is restored to the earth; here is the merciful image of safety; here I am a rest to you, the right way, the true redemption, the banner²⁰⁶⁹ of God, and a memorable sign of fate. It was on account of you and your life that I entered the Virgin's womb, was made man, and suffered a dreadful death; nor did I find rest anywhere in the regions of the earth, but everywhere threats, everywhere labours. First of all a wretched dwelling²⁰⁷⁰ in the land of Judæa was a shelter for me at my birth, and for my mother with me: here first, amidst the outstretched sluggish cattle, dry grass gave me a bed in a narrow stall. I passed my earliest years in the Pharian²⁰⁷¹ regions, being an exile in the reign of Herod; and after my return to Judæa I spent the rest of my years, always engaged²⁰⁷² in fastings, and the extremity of poverty itself, and the lowest circumstances; always by healthful admonitions applying the minds of men to the pursuit of genial uprightness, uniting with wholesome teaching many evident miracles: on which account impious Jerusalem, harassed by the raging cares of envy and cruel hatred, and blinded by madness, dared to seek for me, though innocent, by deadly punishment, a cruel death on the dreadful cross. And if you yourself wish to discriminate these things more fully,²⁰⁷³ and if it delights you to go through all my groans, and to experience griefs with me, put together²⁰⁷⁴ the designs and plots, and the impious price of my innocent blood, and the pretended kisses of a disciple,²⁰⁷⁵ and the insults and strivings of the cruel multitude; and, moreover, the blows,

2065 Limina, "the threshold."

2066 Interpres.

2067 Venia, "remission."

2068 Communis culpæ.

2069 Vexillum.

2070 Magalia.

2071 i.e., Egypt.

2072 Secutus.

2073 Latius, "more widely," "in greater detail."

2074 Collige.

2075 Clientis. The "cliens" is one who puts himself under the protection of a "patronus." Here it is used of a follower.

and tongues prepared²⁰⁷⁶ for accusations. Picture to your mind both the witnesses, and the accursed²⁰⁷⁷ judgment of the blinded Pilate, and the immense cross pressing my shoulders and wearied back, and my painful steps to a dreadful death. Now survey me from head to foot, deserted as I am, and lifted up afar from my beloved mother. Behold and see my locks clotted with blood, and my blood-stained neck under my very hair, and my head drained²⁰⁷⁸ with cruel thorns, and pouring down like rain²⁰⁷⁹ from all sides a stream²⁰⁸⁰ of blood over my divine face. Survey my compressed and sightless eyes, and my afflicted cheeks; see my parched tongue poisoned with gall, and my countenance pale with death. Behold my hands pierced with nails, and my arms drawn out, and the great wound in my side; see the blood streaming from it, and my perforated²⁰⁸¹ feet, and blood-stained limbs. Bend your knee, and with lamentation adore the venerable wood of the cross, and with lowly countenance stooping²⁰⁸² to the earth, which is wet with innocent blood, sprinkle it with rising tears, and at times²⁰⁸³ bear me and my admonitions in your devoted heart. Follow the footsteps of my life, and while you look upon my torments and cruel death, remembering my innumerable pangs of body and soul, learn to endure hardships,²⁰⁸⁴ and to watch over your own safety. These memorials,²⁰⁸⁵ if at any time you find pleasure in thinking over them, if in your mind there is any confidence to bear *anything* like my *sufferings*),²⁰⁸⁶ if the piety due, and gratitude worthy of my labours shall arise, will be incitements²⁰⁸⁷ to true virtue, and they will be shields against the snares of an enemy, aroused²⁰⁸⁸ by which you will be safe, and as a conqueror bear off the palm in every contest. If these memorials shall turn away your senses, which are devoted to a perishable²⁰⁸⁹ world, from the fleeting shadow of earthly beauty, the result will be, that you will not venture,²⁰⁹⁰ enticed by empty hope, to trust the



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- 2076 Promptas.
2077 Infanda, “unspeakable,” “wicked.”
2078 Haustum.
2079 Pluens.
2080 Vivum cruorem.
2081 Fossos.
2082 Terram petens.
2083 Nonnunquam; others read, “nunquam non,” always.
2084 Adversa.
2085 Monumenta.
2086 Meorum.
2087 Stimuli.
2088 Acer.
2089 Labilis orbis amicos sensus.
2090 Auseris, an unusual form.

frail²⁰⁹¹ enjoyments of fickle fortune, and to place your hope in the fleeting years of life. But, truly, if you thus regard this perishable world,²⁰⁹² and through your love of a better country deprive yourself²⁰⁹³ of earthly riches and the enjoyment of present things,²⁰⁹⁴ the prayers of the pious will bring you up²⁰⁹⁵ in sacred habits, and in the hope of a happy life, amidst severe punishments, will cherish you with heavenly dew, and feed you with the sweetness of the promised good. Until the great favour of God shall recall your happy²⁰⁹⁶ soul to the heavenly regions,²⁰⁹⁷ your body being left after the fates of death. Then freed from all labour, then joyfully beholding the angelic choirs, and the blessed companies of saints in perpetual bliss, it shall reign with me in the happy abode of perpetual peace.

2091 Occiduis rebus.

2092 Ista caduca sæcula.

2093 Exutum.

2094 Rerum usus.

2095 Extollent. The reading is uncertain; some editions have “expolient.”

2096 Purpuream, “bright, or shining.”

2097 Sublimes ad auras.