

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO MARY AT NEAPOLIS, NEAR ZAR

IGNATIUS

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THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO MARY AT NEAPOLIS, NEAR ZARBUS.

Ignatius, who is also called Theaphorus, to her who has obtained mercy through the grace of the most high God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Lord, who died for us, to Mary, my daughter, most faithful, worthy of God, and bearing Christ [in her heart], wishes abundance of happiness in God.

CHAP. I. ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HER EXCELLENCE AND WISDOM.

SIGHT indeed is better than writing, inasmuch as, being one(1) of the company of the senses, it not only, by communicating proofs of friendship, honours him who receives them, but also, by those which it in turn receives, enriches the desire for better things. But the second harbour of refuge, as the phrase runs, is the practice of writing, which we have received, as a convenient haven, by thy faith, from so great a distance, seeing that by means of a letter we have learned the excellence that is in thee. For the souls of the good, O thou wisest(2) of women resemble fountains of the purest water; for they allure by their beauty passers-by to drink of them, even though these should not be thirsty. And thy intelligence invites us, as by a word of command, to participate in those divine draughts which gush forth so abundantly in thy soul.

CHAP. II. HIS OWN CONDITION.

But I, O thou blessed woman, not being now so much my own master as in the power of others, am driven along by the varying wills of many adversaries,(3) being in one sense in exile, in another in prison, and in a third in bonds. But I pay no regard to these things. Yea, by the injuries inflicted on me through them, I acquire all the more the character of a disciple, that I may attain to Jesus Christ. May I enjoy the torments which are prepared for me, seeing that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us."(4)

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CHAP. III. HE HAD COMPLIED WITH HER REQUEST.

I have gladly acted as requested in thy letter,(5) having no doubt respecting those persons whom thou didst prove to be men of worth. For I am sure that thou barest testimony to them in the exercise of a godly judgment,(6) and not through the influence of carnal favour. And thy numerous quotations of Scripture passages exceedingly delighted me, which, when I had read, I had no longer a single doubtful thought respecting the matter. For I did not hold that those things were simply to be glanced over by my eyes, of which I had received from thee such an incontrovertible demonstration. May I be in place of thy soul, because thou lovest Jesus, the Son of the living God. Wherefore also He Himself says to thee, "I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me shall find peace."(7)

CHAP. IV. COMMENDATION AND EXHORTATION.

Now it occurs to me to mention, that the report is true which I heard of thee whilst thou wast at Rome with the blessed father(8) Linus, whom the deservedly-blessed Clement, a hearer of Peter and Paul, has now succeeded. And by this time thou hast added a hundred-fold to thy reputation; and may thou, O woman! still further increase it. I greatly desired to come unto you, that I might have rest with you; but "the way of man is not in himself."(9) For the military guard [under which I am kept] hinders my purpose, and does not permit me to go further. Nor indeed, in the state I am now in, can I either do or suffer anything. Wherefore deeming the practice of writing the second resource of friends for their mutual encouragement, I salute thy sacred soul, beseeching of thee to add still further to thy vigour. For our present labour is but little, while the reward which is expected is great.

CHAP. V. SALUTATIONS AND GOOD WISHES.

Avoid those that deny the passion of Christ, and His birth according to the flesh: and there are many at present who suffer under this disease. But it would be absurd to admonish thee on other points, seeing that thou art perfect in every good work and word, and able also to exhort others in Christ. Salute all that are like-minded with thyself, and who hold fast to their salvation in Christ. The presbyters and deacons, and above all the holy Hero, salute thee. Cassian my host salutes thee, as well as my sister, his wife, and their very dear children. May the Lord sanctify thee for evermore in the enjoyment both of bodily and spiritual health, and may I see thee in Christ obtaining the crown!

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO ST. JOHN THE APOSTLE

Ignatius, and the brethren who are with him, John the holy presbyter.

WE are deeply grieved at thy delay in strengthening us by thy addresses and consolations. thy absence being prolonged, it will disappoint many of us. Hasten then to come, for we believe that it is expedient. There are also many of our women here, who are desirous to see Mary [the mother] of Jesus, and wish day by day to run off from us to you, that they may meet with her, and touch those breasts of hers which nourished the Lord Jesus, and may inquire of her respecting some rather secret matters. But Salome also, [the daughter of Anna,] whom thou lovest, who stayed with her five months at Jerusalem, and some other well-known persons, relate that she is full of all graces and all virtues, after the manner of a virgin, fruitful in virtue and grace. And, as they report, she is cheerful in persecutions and afflictions, free from murmuring in the midst of penury and want, grateful to those that injure her, and rejoices when exposed to troubles: she sympathizes with the wretched and the afflicted as sharing in their afflictions, and is not slow to come to their assistance. Moreover, she shines forth gloriously as contending in the fight of faith against the pernicious conflicts of vicious(1) principles or conduct. She is the lady of our new religion and repentance,(2) and the handmaid among the faithful of all works of piety. She is indeed devoted to the humble, and she humbles herself more devotedly than the devoted, and is wonderfully magnified by all, while at the same time she suffers detraction from the Scribes and Pharisees. Besides these points, many

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relate to us numerous other things regarding her. We do not, however, go so far as to believe all in every particular; nor do we mention such to thee. But, as we are informed by those who are worthy of credit, there is in Mary the mother of Jesus an angelic purity of nature allied with the nature of humanity.(3) And such reports as these have greatly excited our emotions, and urge us eagerly to desire a sight of this (if it be lawful so to speak) heavenly prodigy and most sacred marvel. But do thou in haste comply with this our desire; and fare thou well. Amen.

A SECOND EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO ST. JOHN.

His friend(1) Ignatius to John the holy presbyter.

IF thou wilt give me leave, I desire to go up to Jerusalem, and see the faithful(2) saints who are there, especially Mary the mother, whom they report to be an object of admiration and of affection to all. For who would not rejoice to behold and to address her who bore the true God from hers own womb, provided he is a friend of our faith and religion? And in like manner [I desire to see] the venerable James, who is surnamed Just, whom they relate to be very like Christ Jesus in appearance,(4) in life, and in method of conduct, as if he were a twin-brother of the same womb. They say that, if I see him, I see also Jesus Himself, as to all the features and aspect of His body. Moreover, [I desire to see] the other saints, both male and female. Alas! why do I delay? Why am I kept back? Kind(5) teacher, bid me hasten [to fulfil my wish], and fare thou well. Amen.

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE VIRGIN MARY

Her friend(1) Ignatius to the Christ-bearing Mary.

THOU oughtest to have comforted and consoled me who am a neophyte, and a disciple of thy [beloved] John. For I have heard things wonderful to tell respecting thy [son] Jesus, and I am astonished by such a report. But I desire with my whole heart to obtain information concerning the things which I have heard from thee, who wast always intimate and allied with Him, and who wast acquainted with [all] His secrets. I have also written to thee at another time, and have asked thee concerning the same things. Fare thou well; and let the neophytes who are with me be comforted of thee, and by thee, and in thee. Amen.

REPLY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN TO THIS LETTER.

The lowly handmaid of Christ Jesus to Ignatius, her beloved fellow-disciple.

THE things which thou hast heard and learned from John concerning Jesus are true. Believe them, cling to them, and hold fast the profession of that Christianity which thou hast embraced, and conform thy habits and life to thy profession. Now I will come in company with John to visit thee, and those that are with thee. Stand fast in the faith,(2) and show thyself a man; nor let the fierceness of persecution move thee, but let thy spirit be strong and rejoice in God thy Saviour.(3) Amen.