

## ST. LAURENCE, DEACON AND MARTYR.—AUG. 10.

**S**T. LAURENCE, who on this day is commemorated by the whole Church, is one of the most illustrious of the early martyrs. Of his birthplace and early life nothing is certainly known, though the Spaniards have claimed him as their countryman.

In the third century of the Christian era we first hear of him as a youth, whose extraordinary virtue and piety attracted the notice of St. Xystus, then Archdeacon of Rome, who instructed him in theology and the maxims of Christian perfection. St. Xystus, being made Bishop of Rome in 257, ordained Laurence deacon, and though extremely young, appointed him chief of the seven deacons who served in the Church. This was a very important and responsible office, for to him were entrusted the care of the riches and revenues of the Church, and the distribution of them amongst the poor. In 258, a fierce persecution having broken out against the Christians, St. Xystus was led out to receive his crown. St. Laurence followed him weeping, and filled with a holy envy and a burning desire of sharing his martyrdom, cried out, "Whither art thou going, O my father, without your deacon? You were never wont to offer sacrifice without me, your minister! Wherein have I offended you? Try me now, and see whether you have made choice of an unfit minister to dispense the Blood of the Lord." The holy bishop, moved with tenderness and compassion, and filled with the spirit of prophecy, answered him, "I do not leave you, my son; but a greater trial and more glorious victory are reserved for you who are strong and in the vigour of youth. We are spared because of our weakness and old age. You shall follow me in three days." He then charged Laurence to distribute the treasures of the Church amongst the poor, lest this their patrimony should fall into the hands of the persecutors. This Laurence immediately did, full of joy at the prospect of speedily following his beloved bishop.

The prefect of Rome, hearing of the considerable riches thus distributed, imagined the Christians were possessed of hidden treasures, and desired to secure them. Laurence was summoned to his presence, and mildly invited to deliver up these supposed treasures. He replied, "The Church is indeed rich, nor hath the Emperor any treasure equal to what it possesseth. I will shew them to you, but allow me time to set all in order, and make an inventory." Three days were allowed him, during which interval Laurence sought out the poor who had been supported by the Church, and on the third day gathered them all together before the Church,—the lame, the blind, the maimed, the lepers, widows, orphans, and virgins,—a vast company; and then brought the prefect to the place, pointing out to him the treasures of the Church. "The gold you desire," said he, "is a vile metal, and incites men to crime and sin: but these are the children of light, which is the true wealth, and cannot be destroyed. The Church hath no other riches."