

Arcadius

Arcadius probably lived in Caesarea, the capital city of Mauritania, during the last years of the Emperor Valerian's reign. Every day new sacrileges were committed; the faithful were compelled to assist at superstitious sacrifices, to lead victims crowned with flowers through the streets, to burn incense before idols, and to celebrate the enthusiastic feasts of Bacchus. Arcadius, seeing his city in great confusion, left his estate, and withdrew to a solitary place in the neighboring country, serving Jesus Christ in watching, prayer, and other exercises of penitential life.

His flight could not be long a secret; for his not appearing at the public sacrifices made the governor send soldiers to his house, who surrounded it, forced open the doors, and finding one of his relations in it, who said all he could to justify his kinsman's absence, they seized him, and the governor ordered him to be kept in close custody till Arcadius should be taken. The martyr, informed of his friend's danger, and burning with a desire to suffer for Christ, went into the city and presenting himself to the judge, said: "If on my account you detain my innocent relation in chains, release him; I Arcadius, am come in person to give an account of myself, and to declare to you, that he knew not where I was."

"I am willing," answered the judge, "to pardon not only him, but you also, on condition that you will sacrifice to the gods."

Arcadius replied, "How can you propose such a thing? Do you not know the Christians, or do you believe that the fear of death will ever make me swerve from my duty? Jesus Christ is in my life, the death is my gain. Invent what torments you please; but know that nothing shall make me a traitor to my God."

The governor, in a rage, paused to devise some unheard-of torment for him. Iron hooks seemed too easy; neither plummets of lead, cudgels could satisfy his fury; the very rack he thought by much too gentle. At last, imagining he had found a manner of death suitable to his purpose, he said to the ministers of cruelty, "Take him, and let him see and desire death, without being able to obtain it. Cut off his limbs joint by joint and execute him slowly, that the wretch may know what it is to abandon the gods of his ancestors for the unknown deity."

The executioners dragged Arcadius to the place, where many other victims of Christ had already suffered: a place dear and sweet to all who sigh after eternal life. Here the martyr lifts up his eyes to heaven, and implores strength from above; then stretches out his neck, expecting to have his head cut off; but the executioner bid him hold out his hand, and joint after joint chopped off his fingers, arms and shoulders. Laying the saint afterward on his back, he in the same barbarous manner cut off his toes, feet legs and thighs, one after another, with invincible patience and courage, repeating these words, "Lord teach me thy wisdom." For the tyrants had forgotten to cut out his tongue. Arcadius, surveying his scattered limbs all around him said, "Happy members, now dear to me, as you at last truly belong to God, being all made sacrifice to him." Then, turning to the people, he said, "You who have been present at this bloody tragedy, learn that all torments seem as nothing to one, who has an everlasting crown before his eyes. Your gods are not gods; renounce your worship. He alone, for whom I suffer and die, is the true God. He comforts and upholds me in the condition you see me. To die for Him is to live; to suffer for Him is to enjoy the greatest delights."

Arcadius then expires and the pagans were astonished at such a miracle of patience.
Alban Butler, The Lives of the Saints, Dublin, 1833, volume I, pp 48-49