

## Excerpts from Butler's *Lives of The Saints*

### **SS. ADDAI AND MARI, BISHOPS (C. A. D. 1801)**

THERE is evidence of a Christian colony at Edessa in the second century, but it was probably not till the coming of the Sassanid dynasty that the faith began to spread from there over Mesopotamia, Adiabene and Persia. Local ecclesiastical tradition, however, attributes their evangelization to the apostle St Thomas, and more particularly to St Addai, St Aggai and St Mari. The story of how they came to Edessa, combined from the narratives of Eusebius and of a Syriac document called *The Doctrine of Addai* (written c. 400), is as follows.

At the time when our Lord was still incarnate upon earth there reigned in Osroene a king called Abgar the Black, who lived at Edessa. He suffered from some incurable disease and, having heard of the miracles of healing of our Lord, he sent to Him a letter by the hand of his secretary, Hannan. In it he addresses Christ as 'the good Physician' and asks Him to come to Edessa and heal him. Hannan found our Lord in the house of Gamaliel, and He replied to Abgar that, 'I am about to return to my Father, all for which was sent into the world being finished. But when I shall have ascended to Him I will send one of my disciples, who shall heal you of your sickness and bring you and yours to eternal life.' According to Eusebius our Lord wrote out this message Himself and it was accordingly greatly revered throughout Christendom during the middle ages. The Syriac document states that Hannan also brought back to Abgar a portrait of our Lord which he had painted (later, 'not-made-by-human-hands'), and which as the Holy Man-dylon is famous in Christian iconography.

After the Ascension, the apostle Thomas accordingly sent one of the seventy-two disciples, Addai (Thaddeus), to the court of King Abgar. He lodged at the house of a Jew, Tobias, and when he was brought before the king he healed him of his disease, and spoke to him of the faith of Christ. Addai converted Abgar and multitudes of his people, among others the royal jeweller, Aggai, whom he made bishop and his successor, and Palut, whom he ordained priest on his death-bed. In due course St Aggai was martyred and Palut had to go to Antioch to be consecrated by Serapion, who in his turn had been made bishop by Pope St Zephyrinus at Rome. Quite apart from any other consideration, this last statement throws the whole of the legend into confusion, for it is known that there was a Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, who was at least contemporary with St Zephyrinus, and was, moreover, contemporary with another Abgar, who was a Christian king of Edessa between about 179 and 213, and probably the first; so Serapion could not have consecrated a convert of one of the Seventy-two.

The most, then, that can be said of St Addai is that he was perhaps a missionary in Edessa, before the end of the second century. St Mari is an even less satisfactory person, for there are serious doubts of his existence at all. According to his late 'acts' he was a disciple of St Addai, who sent him to Nisibis; he preached there and took up the work of Jonas the prophet Ninive, then he went down the Tigris, until he began 'to smell the smell of the apostle Thomas', and died near Seleucia-Ctesiphon, after consecrating as its bishop Papa bar Aggai, another certainly historical personage, the first *katholikos* of the East Syrian churches but at the beginning of the fourth century. Wherever he went St Mari made numerous converts, destroyed temples, built churches and founded monasteries, on a scale familiar in spurious legends but rarely, if ever, found in sober history. Nevertheless, SS. Addai and Mari, nebulous as they now are, have from early ages been venerated as the evangelists of the lands around the Tigris and Euphrates, and still are by their successors, the Catholic Chaldeans and the Nestorians of Iraq and Kurdistan.

### **ST HORMISDAS, POPE (A. D. 523)**

ORMISDAS, a Campanian by birth, was a widower and a deacon of the Roman church, whose son St Siverius was also to become pope. He earned the high regard of St Ennodius, Bishop of Pavia, who prophesied that this deacon would one day be pope. Two days after the death of St Symmachus in 514 the prediction was fulfilled. Practically the whole of the pontificate of St Hormisdas was devoted to dealing with the delicate and complex situation brought about in the East by the Acacian schism, caused by the attempt of Acacius of Constantinople to

placate the monophysites; and to this pope belongs the honour of having brought it to an end by means of the confession of faith that bears his name, the Formula of Hormisdas.

Nothing is recorded of the less public life of St Hormisdas, but it is clear that he was able and sagacious, and a man of peace: he severely rebuked some African monks for their quarrelsomeness. His last days were made happy by the cessation of the Vandal persecution in Africa.

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## APPRECIATION

Greetings to everyone in Christ;

It is great honor to write to express my heartfelt gratitude to you, on behalf of my home diocesan Bishop, Most Rev. Dominic Yeboah Nyarko. As of now our diocese in Ghana is blessed with 80 young men in formation, training to be priests for the Mother Church. Your support is appreciated now and always. Again, may God's blessings remain with you all for the check of \$402. For now, my personal thanks, regards and Blessings, ever,

In Christ,

Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Baffoe  
(Diocesan Mission Liaison)