

St. Nicander and Marcian



These saints, as appears from the circumstances of their acts, suffered under Dioclesian, and probably in Mœsia, a province of Illyricum, under the same governor who condemned St. Julius; though some moderns place their martyrdom at Venafro, at present in the kingdom of Naples. They had served some time in the Roman troops, but when the edicts were everywhere published against the Christians, foregoing all expectations from the world, they forsook the army. This was made a crime in them, and they were impeached before Maximus the governor of the province. The judge informed them of the imperial order that all were commanded to sacrifice to the gods. Nicander replied, that order could not regard Christians, who looked upon it as unlawful to abandon the immortal God, to adore wood and stones. Daria the wife of Nicander was present, and encouraged her husband. Maximus interrupting her said: "Wicked woman, why would you have your husband die?" "I wish not for his death," said she, "but that he live in God, so as never to die." Maximus reproached her that she desired his death, because she wanted another husband. "If you suspect that," said she, "put me to death first." The judge said his orders did not extend to women; for this happened upon the first edict which regarded only the army. However, he commanded her to be taken into custody; but she was released soon after, and returned to see the issue of the trial. Maximus, turning again to Nicander, said: "Take a little time, and deliberate with yourself whether you choose to die or to live." Nicander answered: "I have already deliberated upon the matter, and have taken the resolution to save myself." The judge took it that he meant he would save his life by sacrificing to the idols, and giving thanks to his gods, began to congratulate and

rejoice with Suetonius one of his assessors, for their imaginary victory. But Nicander soon undeceived him, by crying out: "God be thanked," and by praying aloud that God would deliver him from the dangers and temptations of the world. "How now," said the governor, "you but just now desired to live, and at present you ask to die." Nicander replied: "I desire that life which is immortal, not the fleeting life of this world. To you I willingly yield up my body; do with it what you please, I am a Christian." "And what are your sentiments, Marcian?" said the judge, addressing himself to the other. He declared that they were the same with those of his fellow-prisoner. Maximus then gave orders that they should be both confined in the dungeon, where they lay twenty days. After which they were again brought before the governor, who asked them if they would at length obey the edicts of the emperors. Marcian answered: "All you can say will never make us abandon our religion or deny God. We behold him present by faith, and know whither he calls us. Do not, we beseech you, detain or retard us; but send us quickly to him, that we may behold him who was crucified, whom you stick not to blaspheme, but whom we honour and worship." The governor granted their request, and excusing himself by the necessity he lay under of complying with his orders, condemned them both to lose their heads. The martyrs expressed their gratitude, and said: "May peace be with you, O most clement judge." They walked to the place of execution joyful, and praising God as they went. Nicander was followed by his wife Daria, with his child, whom Papinian, brother to the martyr, St. Pasicates, carried in his arms. Marcian's wife, differing much from the former, and his other relations, followed him, weeping and howling in excess of grief. She in particular did all that in her lay to overcome his resolution, and for that purpose often showed him his little child, the fruit of their marriage; and continually pulled and held him back, till he having rebuked her, desired Zoticus, a zealous Christian to keep her behind. At the place of execution he called for her, and embracing his son and looking up to heaven, said: "Lord, all-powerful God, take this child into thy special protection." Then with a check to his wife for her base cowardice, he bade her go away in peace, because she could not have the courage to see him die. The wife of Nicander continued by his side, exhorting him to constancy and joy. "Be of good heart, my lord," said she, "ten years have I lived at home from you, never ceasing to pray that I might see you again. Now am I favoured with that comfort, and I behold you going to glory, and myself made the wife of a martyr. Give to God that testimony you owe to his holy truth, that you may also deliver me from eternal death;" meaning, that by his sufferings and prayers he might obtain mercy for her. The executioner having bound their eyes with their handkerchiefs, struck off their heads on the 17th of June.

Faith and grace made these martyrs triumph over all considerations of flesh and blood. They did not abandon their orphan babes, to whom they left the example of their heroic virtue, and whom they committed to the special protection of their heavenly Father. We never lose what we leave to obey the voice of God. When we have taken all prudent precautions, and all the care in our power, we ought to commend all things with confidence to the divine mercy. This ought to banish all anxiety out of our breasts. God's blessing and protection are all we can hope or desire; we are assured he will never fail on his side; and what can we do more than to conjure him never to suffer us by our malice to put any obstacle to his mercy? On it is all our reliance for the salvation of our own souls. How much more ought we to trust to his goodness in all other concerns?