

This Happened on Friday

(This article is based on the story from one of the several legends about the first icon of Christ.)

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Veronica rose early. She had slept badly because the night before she learned that the soldiers, sent by Pilate at the insistence of the high priests, had arrested the Master and conducted Him before Caiphas to be tried. The omens augured ill. She worried about the fate of this Righteous Man who was so kind to all the unfortunate, who defended the poor, and was known as a protector of women. Moreover, she had to clean the house and wash the linen for the Sabbath. Having cleaned the house, Veronica stepped out to take down the dry linen, when she heard the noise of a crowd approaching along the street.

Full of curiosity Veronica ran out as she was, the clean towel she had just taken down, hanging over her arm.

In the street she saw a terrible scene:

Beneath the hot rays of the sun an enraged mob, emitting wild cries, was moving along and ahead, bowed down under the weight of a huge cross, urged on with the blows of scourges, was the Master. Her heart was heavy with grief. Forgetting all fear, Veronica rushed to the Master's side. Seeing His face running with sweat and blood from the crown of thorns, she handed Him the towel she had just taken off the line.

With a grateful look, the Master took the towel, wiped his face and then returned it to Veronica. The soldier who accompanied the Master, on seeing this, pushed Veronica aside. Fearful, she pressed the towel to her heart, ran into the house and shut the door. She could not understand what it was the Master had done that they should want to put Him to death.

Yesterday, Nicodim visited them and said that on seeing Peter the soldiers had wanted to seize him too, because he was always close to the Master. But Peter denied this, saying that he did not know this man; and this he did thrice. Soon His mother came and also said that the Master was taken to the Golgotha, to be executed with other robbers.

In the meantime, darkness came and Veronica and her mother were about to sup. Suddenly the mother noticed that in the corner, where the linen was folded, there was a strange light! She walked over and took the towel from which the light was emanating. She unfolded it and cried out with fear and surprise – on the towel was a clear and exact impression of the Master's face with a crown of thrones!

Veronica came running over and when she saw this she guessed at once what towel this was; it bore the imprint of the Master's face and therefore it gave off light. She told her mother everything, and the latter hastened to hide the towel, fearing the wrath of the Jews.

At this time, faraway Rome was shocked by the sudden news that the Emperor was stricken! Every day, every hour, the news about the ailing sovereign grew more gloomy – it was even said that Tiberius had been poisoned by his enemies. But this news proved false because the physicians and Magi decided unanimously that the Emperor had the “Oriental Leprosy!”

This announcement frightened all the servants and attendants who soon deserted him under various pretexts, with the exception of several men who loved him and were devoted to him.

Once, being alone with the Emperor, his old manservant, Albanus, said: “I have heard that a young Jew has appeared in Palestine who not only treats the most serious illnesses, but even resurrects the dead! Perhaps we should send for Him?” said the old servant, cautiously... The Emperor’s eyes lit up with hope!

“No, do not send anyone. Go to Judea yourself, Albanus, and find Him, and bring Him here,” said the Emperor, inspired with hope. “Take the best one of my ships and bring me this Man. Do it as quickly as possible!” – said Tiberius, hurrying his faithful servant.

“Everything will be done as you wish,” replied Albanus, taking leave of his master. This was quickly found out and hardly had two days passed since the day of Albanus’ departure for distant Palestine, then the most improbable rumors spread throughout Rome; it was even said that the Emperor had died but that his death was being carefully concealed.

But Tiberius was alive, however his illness had so changed him that he dared not show himself to the Romans.

Albanus hurried the seamen and the long journey finally came to an end; the ship docked at the Palestinian shores, while the good steeds quickly carried Tiberius’ messenger to Jerusalem. Notified of his arrival, the Emperor’s Viceregent in Palestine, Pontius Pilate, disturbed by the surprise visit, met Albanus with honors but in bafflement.

Albanus told the Viceregent of the Emperor’s wish to see this miraculous physician and healer at once. Pilate turned pale, not knowing what to reply... Several days before the arrival of Albanus, the Viceregent faint-heartedly agreed to the execution of Jesus, at the demand of the Jews and the high priests.

He had already been crucified, and the news of his resurrection had spread throughout Judea. Albanus alone, being a stranger had not known or heard about it. Pilate then got the idea that he could delay the admission of his guilt. “You know, Albanus, this physician travels all over the country; to find him, not a little time is needed...”

“How much time?”

“Twenty – thirty days,” said Pilate, boldly.

“Oh, how very long it is,” cried Albanus. “Well, there is nothing I can do but wait. Send messengers to seek him.” And he left Pilate’s house.

Sadly, Albanus wandered over Jerusalem, consumed with anxiety over the health of his Emperor.

Once, in an olive grove beyond the boundaries of the city, he met a beautiful Jewish maiden. She was gathering olives. Stricken by her beauty, he approached her and asked her who she was and what was her occupation. Veronica told him everything and seeing that he spoke Hebrew badly, asked him who he was. Albanus told her who he was and why he came. He asked her if she knew anything about the miraculous physician and where He might be found?

“You will wait for Him in vain, He is already there,” and she raised her eyes and arms, pointing to Heaven.

“If you want me to, I shall tell you all about Him. I am one of His disciples and my name is Veronica.”

With astonishment and grief, Albanus listened attentively to everything Veronica told him, and he burst into bitter tears on hearing of the cruel death by crucifixion and the resurrection of the God-Man.

“What shall I tell the Emperor? What comfort will I bring him? He will soon die of this horrible leprosy!” cried the faithful servant in despair.

“I see your sorrow and I shall help you alleviate it,” said Veronica. “Come with me.”

Albanus followed her into her modest domicile. Veronica took out the carefully guarded relic: the Face of Christ imprinted on the towel with which He wiped His face on that Holy Friday.

“Here is the face of Him Whom you are seeking, on Whom your master put his hopes.”

“Sell me this image, Veronica, I shall pay you anything you want,” exclaimed the servant, happily.

“Never will I part with the dear features of my Teacher and God!” quickly answered Veronica.

“Since you refuse to sell this towel,” said Albanus after thinking for a while, “go to Rome with me and show this image to my master – the Emperor Tiberius... Who knows, perhaps this towel will bring him recovery, and respect and wealth to you.” “I want nothing, I believe that this holy image will help to heal your master, therefore, I consent to go with you to Rome,” answered Veronica, who hid the sacred towel carefully in her bosom, set out for distant Rome. In the meantime, the Emperor’s illness grew progressively worse, and his physicians lost hope for his recovery. Now only the Emperor, who still had a glimmer of hope, awaited Albanus’ return impatiently.

And one fine day the Emperor was told that Albanus had come back with a woman!...

“Greetings, my master,” said Albanus, keeping his emotion under control.

“Where is the doctor,” the Emperor interrupted him.

“Alas, He is no longer alive, He was tortured to death by His own people with the permission of your Viceregent, Pontius Pilate...”

“How could he allow this?” exclaimed Tiberius angrily. “Who will help me now?” he added in a depressed voice.

“He is dead, but He is resurrected!” Veronica, who kept silent till now, uttered in a low voice, and drew near to the sick Emperor’s bed. “He shall heal you.” The Caesar looked at the beautiful young girl with amazement and whispered: “But how, how?”

Veronica unfolded the towel and the gentle features of the God-Man appeared before Caesar’s inflamed eyes.

“Humbly pray and entreat Him, and He will heal you,” said Veronica, confidently.

A strange sentiment enveloped Tiberius and he – the sovereign of half a world – slipped down from the bed, and prostrated himself before Veronica who held in her hands the towel with the features of Christ.

The first miracle before an icon occurred. The leprosy stopped, and its horrible traces disappeared. Tiberius recovered, his strength returned. He immediately left for the Forum, in order that the Romans should see him, and to stop all rumors about this state of health.

Albanus and Veronica were rewarded. The best reward to Veronica was that the Emperor consented to her request: not to persecute the Christians.

This great miracle occurred before the Icon not created by human hands, but given to us by the Savior, Jesus Christ Himself, through His (modest and silent) disciple, Veronica, on the Great Friday.