

**...LE. TO FELIX SUBSCRIBONIUS ON THE HONOUR TO BE BES**

Pope Pontianus

## Table of Contents

[THE FIRST EPISTLE. TO FELIX SUBSCRIBONIUS ON THE HONOUR TO BE BESTOWED ON PRIESTS](#)

[Pope Pontianus](#).....1

# THE FIRST EPISTLE. TO FELIX SUBSCRIBONIUS ON THE HONOUR TO BE BESTOWED ON PRIESTS

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PONTIANUS, bishop, to Felix Subscribonius, greeting.

Our heart is exceedingly rejoiced with your goodness, in that you strive by all means in your power to carry out the practice of holy religion, and strengthen sad and destitute brethren in faith and religion. Wherefore we implore the mercy of our Redeemer, that His grace may support us in all things, and that He may grant us to carry out in effect what He has given us to aspire after. In this good thing, therefore, the benefits of recompense are multiplied just in proportion as our zeal for the work increases. And because in all these things we need the assistance of divine grace, we implore with constant prayers the clemency of Omnipotent God, that He may both grant us the desire for these good works which should ever be wrought by us, and give us power also to perform them, and direct us in that way, for the fruit of well-doing which way the Pastor of pastors declared Himself to be so that ye may be able to carry out through Him, without whom nothing can be done, those good works which you have begun. Moreover, with respect to the priests of the Lord whom we have heard you aid against the plots of wicked men, and whose cause you sustain, know ye that in so doing ye please God greatly, who has called them: to the service of Himself, and has honoured them with so intimate a fellowship with Him, that through them He accepts the oblations of others, and pardons their sins, and reconciles them with Him. They also make the body of the Lord with their own mouth (*proprio ore corpus Domini conficiunt*), and give it to the people. For of them it is said: He that hurteth you, hurteth me; and he that doeth you an injury, shall receive again that which he hath done unrighteously.(3) And elsewhere: He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me.(4) Hence they are not to be molested, but honoured. And in them the Lord Himself is honoured, whose commission they execute. They accordingly, if they happen to fall, are to be raised up and sustained by the faithful. And again, they are not to be accused by the infamous, or the wicked, or the hostile, or by the members of another sect or religion. If they sin, they are to be arraigned by the other priests; further, they are to be held in check (*constringantur*) by the chief pontiffs, and they are not to be arraigned or restrained by seculars or by men of evil life. Not slight, therefore, is our grief in hearing that you have to sorrow for your brother's passing away (*transitu*). For which reason we beseech Almighty God to console you by the breathing (*aspiratione*) of His grace, and keep you with heavenly guardianship from evil spirits and perverse men. For if ye have to bear any turmoil of certain adversaries after his disease, do not think it strange though ye, who seek to enjoy good in your own country that is, in the land of the living have to bear evil things at the hands of men in a strange country. For the present life is a sojourning; and to him who sighs after the true fatherland, the place of his sojourning is a trial, however pleasant it may seem. And as to you who seek the fatherland, among the sighs which ye heave I hear the groans also of human oppression rising. And this happens by the wonderful dispensation of Almighty God, in order that, while the truth calls you in love, this present world may cast back your affection from itself through the tribulations which it brings on, and that the mind may be so much the more easily delivered from the love of this world, as it is also impelled while it is called. Therefore, as you have begun, give heed to the duty of hospitality; labour most urgently in prayer and tears; devote yourselves more liberally and freely now to those almsgivings which you have ever

THE FIRST EPISTLE. TO FELIX SUBSCRIBONIUS ON THE HONOUR TO BE BESTOWED ON PRIESTS

THE FIRST EPISTLE. TO FELIX SUBSCRIBONIUS ON THE HONOUR TO BE BESTOWED ON PRIESTS

loved, in order that in the recompense the profit to you for your work may be greater in proportion as your zeal for the labour has risen to higher degrees here.

Furthermore, hailing your goodness with paternal pleasantness, we beg you not to fail in the good works which ye have begun. And may no one be able to turn you from them; but may the clergy and servants of God, and all Christians who sojourn in those parts, fully discover by the love of Christ and Saint Peter the disposition of your charity in all things, and obtain the com-

forts of your favour in every necessity that may arise; to the end that all may be defended and helped by your aid, and that we, too, may owe you thanks, and that our Lord Jesus Christ may make good to you eternal glory, and that the blessed Apostle Peter, the chief of the apostles, in whose cause you spend yourselves, may open the gate of that same glory. Given on the 10th day before the kalends of February (the 23d of January), in the consulship of the most illustrious Severus and Quintianus. (1)