

Paradise Canto 25

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-06-18 — 1 clipping

[Christianity Index](#) [Divine Comedy Index](#) [Previous: Paradise Canto 24](#) [Next: Paradise Canto 26](#)

Canto XXV

Argument

St. James questions our Poet concerning Hope. Next St. John appears; and, on perceiving that Dante looks intently on him, informs him that he, St. John, had left his body resolved into earth, upon the earth, and that Christ and the Virgin alone had come with their bodies into Heaven.

If e'er the sacred poem, that hath made
Both Heaven and earth copartners in its toil,
And with lean abstinence, through many a year,
Faded my brow, be destined to prevail
Over the cruelty, which bars me forth
Of the fair sheep-fold,[1] where, a sleeping lamb,
The wolves set on and fain had worried me;
With other voice, and fleece of other grain,
I shall forthwith return; and, standing up
At my baptismal font, shall claim the wreath
Due to the poet's temples: for I there
First enter'd on the faith, which maketh souls
Acceptable to God: and, for its sake,[2]
Peter had then circled my forehead thus.

[1: Florence, whence he was banished.]

[2: For the sake of that faith.]

Next from the squadron, whence had issued forth
The first fruit of Christ's vicars on the earth,
Toward us moved a light, at view whereof
My Lady, full of gladness, spake to me:
"Lo! lo! behold the peer of mickle might,
That makes Galicia throng'd with visitants." [3]

[3: "At the time that the sepulchre of the apostle St. James was discovered, the devotion for that place extended itself not only over all Spain, but even round about to foreign nations. Multitudes from all parts of the world came to visit it. Many others were deterred by the difficulty of the journey, by the roughness and barrenness of those parts, and by the incursions of the Moors, who made captives many of the pilgrims. The canons of St. Eloy, afterward (the precise time is not known), with a desire of remedying these evils, built, in many places along the whole road, which reached as far as to France, hospitals for the reception of the pilgrims."]

As when the ring - dove by his mate alights;
In circles, each about the other wheels,
And, murmuring, coos his fondness; thus saw I
One, of the other^[4] great and glorious prince,
With kindly greeting, hail'd; extolling, both,
Their heavenly banqueting: but when an end
Was to their gratulation, silent, each,
Before me sat they down, so burning bright,
I could not look upon them. Smiling then,
Beatrice spake: "O life in glory shrined!
Who^[5] didst the largess of our kingly court
Set down with faithful pen, let now thy voice,
Of hope the praises, in this height resound.
For well thou know'st, who figurest it as oft,
As Jesus, to ye three, more brightly shone."
"Lift up thy head; and be thou strong in trust:
For that, which hither from the mortal world
Arriveth, must be ripen'd in our beam."

[4: "One , of the other." St. Peter and St. James.]

[5: 'Who.' The Epistle of St. James is here attributed to the elder apostle of that name, whose shrine was at Compostella, in Galicia.]

Such cheering accents from the second flame^[6]
Assured me; and mine eyes I lifted up^[7]
Unto the mountains, that had bow'd them late
With over - heavy burden. "Sith our Liege
Wills of His grace, that thou, or e'er thy death,
In the most secret council with His lords
Shouldst be confronted, so that having view'd
The glories of our court, thou mayest therewith
Thyself, and all who hear, invigorate
With hope, that leads to blissful end; declare,
What is that hope? how it doth flourish in thee?
And whence thou hadst it?" Thus, proceeding still,
The second light: and she, whose gentle love
My soaring pennons in that lofty flight
Escorted, thus preventing me, rejoin'd:
"Among her sons, not one more full of hope,
Hath the Church Militant: so 'tis of him
Recorded in the Sun, whose liberal orb
Enlightened all our tribe: and ere his term
Of warfare, hence permitted he is come,

[6: "The second flame." St. James.]

[7: "I lifted up." "I looked up to the apostles." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." - Psalm cxxi. I.]

From Egypt to Jerusalem,[8] to see.
The other points, both which[9] thou hast inquired,
Not for more knowledge, but that he may tell
How dear thou hold'st the virtue; these to him
Leave I: for he may answer thee with ease,
And without boasting, so God give him grace."

[8: From the lower world to Heaven.]

[9: One point Beatrice has herself answered: "how that hope flourishes in him." The other two remain for Dante to resolve.]

Like to the scholar, practised in his task,
Who, willing to give proof of diligence,
Seconds his teacher gladly; "Hope," said I,
"Is of the joy to come a sure expectance,
The effect of grace divine and merit preceding.
This light from many a star, visits my heart;
But flow'd to me, the first, from him who sang
The songs of the Supreme; himself supreme
Among his tuneful brethren. 'Let all hope
In thee,' so spake his anthem, 'who have known
Thy name;' and, with my faith, who knows not that?
From thee, the next, distilling from his spring,
In thine epistle, fell on me the drops
So plenteously, that I on others shower
The influence of their dew." Whileas I spake,
A lamping, as of quick and volley'd lightning,
Within the bosom of that mighty sheen[10]
Play'd tremulous; then forth these accents breathed:
"Love for the virtue, which attended me
E'en to the palm, and issuing from the field,
Glows vigorous yet within me; and inspires
To ask of thee, whom also it delights,
What promise thou from hope, in chief, dost win."

[10: "That mighty sheen." The spirit of St. James.]

"Both scriptures, new and ancient," I replied,
"Propose the mark (which even now I view)
For souls beloved of God. Isaias[11] saith,
'That, in their own land, each one must be clad
In two - fold vesture;' and their proper land
Is this delicious life. In terms more full,

[11: "Isaias." "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness. - Chap. lxi. 10.]

And clearer far, thy brother[12] hath set forth
This revelation to us, where he tells

Of the white raiment destined to the saints."
And, as the words were ending, from above,
"They hope in Thee!" first heard we cried: whereto
Answer'd the carols all. Amidst them next,
A light of so clear amplitude emerged,
That winter's month were but a single day,
Were such a crystal in the Cancer's sign.

[12: "Thy brother." St. John in the Rev. vii. 9.]

Like as a virgin riseth up, and goes,
And enters on the mazes of the dance;
Though gay, yet innocent of worse intent,
Than to do fitting honour to the bride:
So I beheld the new effulgence come
Unto the other two, who in a ring
Wheel'd, as became their rapture. In the dance,
And in the song, it mingled. And the dame
Held on them fix'd her looks; e'en as the spouse,
Silent, and moveless. "This[13] is he, who lay
Upon the bosom of our Pelican:
This he, into whose keeping, from the Cross,
The mighty charge was given." Thus she spake:
Yet therefore naught the more removed her sight
From marking them: or e'er her words began,
Or when they closed. As he, who looks intent,
And strives with searching ken, how he may see
The sun in his eclipse, and, through desire
Of seeing, loseth power of sight; so I[14]
Peer'd on that last resplendence, while I heard:
"Why dazzlest thou thine eyes in seeking that,
Which here abides not? Earth my body is,
In earth; and shall be, with the rest, so long,
As till our number equal the decree
Of the Most High. The two[15] that have ascended,

[13: St. John, who reclined on the bosom of our Saviour, and to whose charge Jesus recommended his mother.]

[14: "So I." He looked so earnestly, to descry whether St. John were present there in body, or in spirit only; having had his doubts raised by that saying of our Saviour's: "If I will, that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"]

[15: Christ and Mary, described in Canto xxiii. as rising above his sight.]

In this our blessed cloister, shine alone
With the two garments. So report below."

As when, for ease of labour, or to shun
Suspected peril, at a whistle's breath,
The oars, erewhile dash'd frequent in the wave,
All rest: the flamy circle at that voice
So rested; and the mingling sound was still,
Which from the trinal band, soft - breathing, rose.
I turn'd, but ah! how trembled in my thought,
When, looking at my side again to see
Beatrice, I describ'd her not; although,
Not distant, on the happy coast she stood.