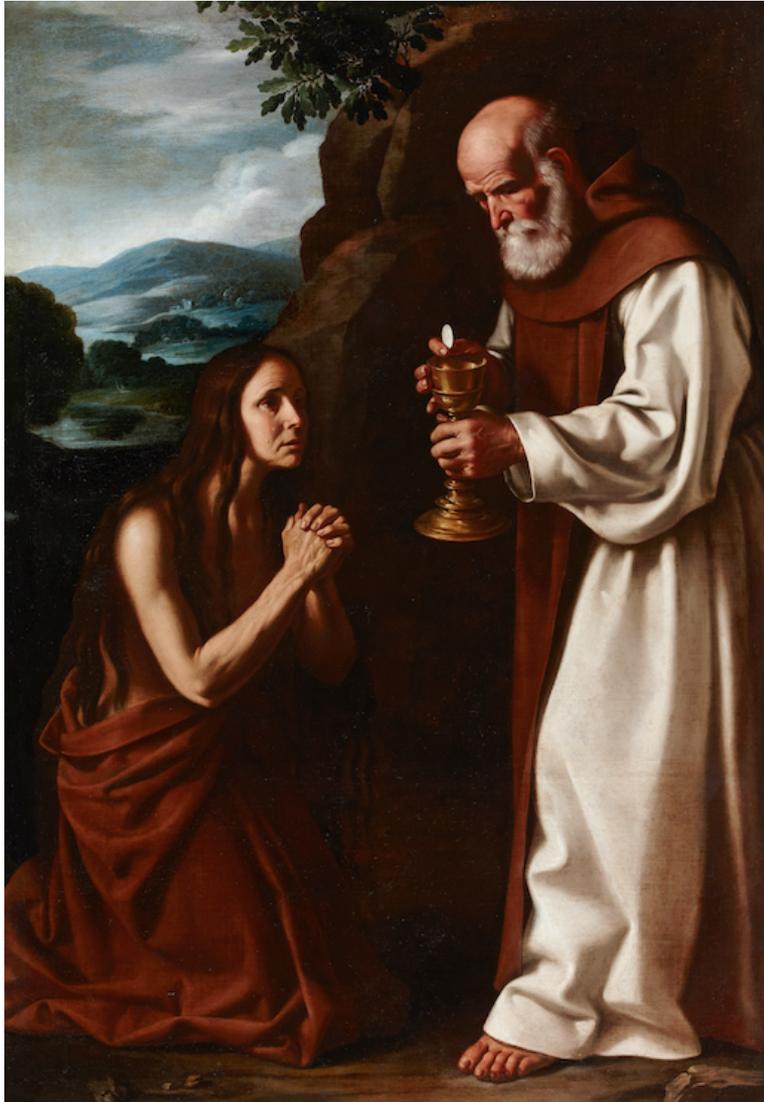


Caylus



PEDRO DE ORRENTE
(Murcia, 1580 – Valencia, 1645)

The Last Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt

Ca. 1616-1617

Oil on canvas

167.8 × 115 cm

PROVENANCE:

Serrano Collection, Madrid 1936.

LITERATURE:

GUINARD, P. *Zurbaran et les peintres espagnols de la vie monastique*. Paris: Ed. du Temps, 1988 (n° 274).

GALLEGO, J. AND GUDIOL, J. *Zurbarán (1598-1664)*. Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1976 (n° 538, fig. 478).

DELEDA, O. *Zurbarán. Vol. II. Los Conjuntos y el Obrador*. Madrid: Fundación Arte Hispánico, 2010, p. 416 (fig. II-138).

Pedro de Orrente was the son of Jaime de Horrente, a Marseille-born merchant who settled in Murcia in 1573 where he married Isabel de Jumilla. Orente was baptised on 18 April 1580 in the church of Santa Catalina in that city. By 1600 he was in Toledo where he was contracted to execute the altarpiece of the Virgen del Saz for the town of Guadarrama (Madrid), a work that no longer survives. Nothing more is known of him until 1604 in Murcia when a certain Jerónimo de Castro agreed to pay the artist's father for a *Saint Vidal* that Orrente had painted for him. It can be inferred that Pedro was away, possibly in Italy, and he is not referred to again in any document until 1607 when, back in Murcia, he contracted the services of a maid. Living in Murcia, he married in 1612 and that same year painted *Joseph's Blessing* (Contini collection), a work clearly influenced by the Bassanos. He also authorised Angelo Nardi to be paid on his behalf for a canvas that he had painted for a Madrid silversmith.

Inclined to "move from place to place" as Jusepe Martínez described him, around 1616 Orrente must have been in Valencia, where he painted the monumental *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (fig.1) for its cathedral and entered into rivalry with Francisco Ribalta. Dating from one year later is *The Miracle of Saint Leocadia* for Toledo cathedral. When receiving payment for it, Orrente described himself as a "resident of Murcia". During one of these trips between Murcia and Toledo, Orrente may have spent time in Cuenca where the painter Cristóbal García Salmerón was clearly a close follower of his work and possibly a pupil.

In 1630 the artist was paid a considerable sum by Toledo cathedral for a *Birth of Christ* for the chapel of the New Kings, competing with *The Adoration of the Magi* by Eugenio Cajés, a rivalry from which Orrente emerged “with much advantage” according to Palomino. There is information on his time in Toledo until 1632, when he was contracted to paint a now lost altarpiece for the convent of San Antonio de Padua. Orrente is next documented in 1638 in Murcia as the owner of two houses. Only a year later, however, he had once again left the city, as a painter called Lorenzo Suárez was obliged to take over the altarpiece of the Conception that Orrente left unfinished. It seems likely that he moved to Valencia where, on 17 January 1645, a prosperous widower with no children, he made his will. He died two days later and was buried in the church of San Martín in that city.

Orrente has been termed the “Spanish Bassano” and a pastoral scene by his hand in the collection of Charles I of England was attributed to “the Spaniard who was an imitator of the style of the Bassanos”. Although influenced by the Bassanos in his subject-matter and in the treatment of his landscapes with their evening light, in the execution of these works Orrente differed from the Venetian style and moved towards a naturalistic tenebrism. Orrente’s work can be divided into his commercial output of large-format, Bassano-like series that must have involved a greater or lesser degree of workshop participation, and the execution of single, commissioned works into which he poured all his skills and creative powers, such as the present *Last Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt*. It reveals an encounter between the different Italian influences that characterise his painting as it is Caravaggesque with regard to the powerful lateral lighting and Venetian in the landscape.

The two monumental figures express both gravity and a powerful naturalism, with the meditative Saint Zosimas about to administer communion to the kneeling Mary of Egypt, whose tear-streaked face conveys her emotion. Aside from the lighting and the characterisation of the figures, Orrente lingers on precise details such as the gilt-copper chalice, the draperies and the oak branch at the top of the composition. The colouristic, bucolic landscape once again looks to models by the Bassanos that Orrente used in his more commercial series.

The theme of the Eucharist is one of the most widely depicted in the iconography of the Counter-Reformation and is associated with images of the Penitent Magdalen and Saint Mary of Egypt. In addition, both these subjects frequently recur in Baroque art due to their

association with another sacrament, that of Penitence, which was called into doubt by the Protestant Reformation. At the same time, in a defence of its doctrinal positions, the Catholic Church popularised these subjects through devotional images, presenting in a didactic manner the Church's doctrine of the sacraments as the means to eternal salvation. Similarly, in terms of Christian piety, Saint Mary of Egypt's repentance offered both a subject of meditation and an example. The present painting can thus be interpreted as an affirmation of Baroque dogma, which exalts penitence as a pathway to the purification of sin and as the prior step to receiving the Eucharist as sacrament, as laid down in sessions 13 and 22 of the Council of Trent.



Fig 1. Pedro de Orrente. *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*.
Oil on canvas, 306 × 219 cm. Cathedral of Valencia.