Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Book 8: Philemon and Baucis

The myth of Philemon and Baucis is a story of piety rewarded. Jupiter and Mercury come to earth disguised as men to test the humanity of mortals. When they seek refuge as strangers, they are driven from village to village until they are received by a kindly old couple, Philemon and Baucis, who share their humble cottage and meager supply of food with the gods.

Ovid weaves an intimate picture of their modest peasant life, focusing on the preparation, and selection of food and a humorous scene of goose-chasing after the elderly pair has come to believe they have offended their guests and pursue their only suitable offering as a recompense.

The gods reveal themselves and ask Philemon and Baucis to accompany them up the mountain. When the old pair look down at their village, they see it has been flooded except for their own cottage which the gods have turned into a marble-columned temple. Because of their kindness and humanity, Jupiter asks the astonished couple to request anything and it will be granted.

Philemon and Baucis confer, and in the excerpt which follows the aged husband speaks for both of them.

**Text and Translation**

“Esse sacerdotes delubraque vestra tueri
“We ask to be priests and to watch over

poscimus, et quoniam concordes egimus annos,
your shrine, and since we have spent (our) years in harmony,

auferat hora duos eadem, nec coniugis umquam
let the same hour take (us) two away (to death), and don’t let me ever see

1. **sacerdotes**: sacerdos, -dotis, m/f: priest/priestess  
   **delubrum**: delubrum, -i, n.: shrine  
   **tuere**: tueor, tueri, tuitus (deponent verb): watch over

2. **poscimus**: posco, -ere, poposci: ask  
   **concordes**: concors, -ordis: compatible; here, in harmony

3. **auferat**: aufero, auferre, abstuli, ablatum: take away  
   **duos**: duo, duae, duo: two (accusative plural)  
   **coniugis**: coniunx, -iugis, m./f.: spouse
busta meae videam, neu sim tumulandus ab illā.”
the tomb of my spouse nor let me have to be buried by her (hand).”

Vota fides sequitur: templi tutela fuere,
Fulfillment follows (their) wishes: they were the guardian(s) of the temple,

donec vita data est; annis aevoque soluti
as long as life was given; weakened by years and age,

ante gradūs sacros cum starent forte locique
when they were standing before the holy steps and by chance

narrarent casūs, frondere Philemona Baucis,
were relating the history of the place, Baucis (saw) that Philemon was growing

4. **busta**: bustum, -i, n.: tomb; here, translate as singular
   **neu** = *neve*: nor
   **tumulandus**: tumulo (1): bury

5. **vota**: votum, -i, n.: wish
   **fides**: fides, -ei, f.: trustworthiness; here, fulfillment (of a promise)
   **sequitur**: sequor, sequi, secutus (deponent verb): follow
   **tutela**: tutela, -ae, f.: guardianship; here, guardian(s)
   **fuere** = fuerunt

6. **donec** (adverb): as long as
   **aefo**: aevus, -i, m.: age
   **soluti**: solvo, -ere, solvi, solutum: loosen; here, weaken

7. **gradūs**: gradus, -ūs, m.: step; ancient temples often had steps leading up to them
   **sacros**: sacer, -cra, -crum: holy
   **starent**: sto, stare, steti, statum: stand
   **forte**: foris, fortis, f.: chance

8. **casus**: casus, -ūs, m.: event; in plural, “history”
   **frondere**: frondeo, -ere, frondui: grow leaves
   **Philemona**: Philemon, -onis, m.: man’s name; Greek accusative
Baucida conspexit senior frondere Philemon.
leaves, (and) Philemon, the older (of the pair), saw that Baucis was growing leaves.

Iamque super geminos crescente cacumine vultūs
And now, with a tree-top growing above both (their) faces,

mutua, dum licuit, reddebant dicta “Vale”que
while it was permitted, they exchanged words back and forth and said, “Farewell,

O coniunx!” dixere simul, simul abdita texit
O spouse!” at the same time, (and) at the same time bark covered

ora frutex: ostendit adhuc Thyneius illic
(their) mouths, (now) hidden; even now an inhabitant of Bithynia shows

9. Baucida: *Baucis*, -idis, f.: woman’s name; Greek accusative
   conspexit: conspicio, -ere, -spexi, -spectum: see
   senior: senior, -oris, m.: elder

10. gemino: geminus, -a, -um: twin, two-fold
    crescente: cresco, -ere, crevi, cretum: grow
    cacumine: cacumen, -inis, n.: top; here, tree-top
    vultus: vultus, -ūs, m.: face

11. mutua: mutuus, -a, -um: back and forth
    licuit: licet, licere, licuit, licitum est (impersonal verb): it is permitted
    reddebant: reddo, -ere, -didi, -ditum: return; here, exchange
    dicta: dictum, -i, n.: word

12. dixere = dixerunt
    simul (adverb): at the same time
    abdita: abdo, -ere, abdidi, abditum: hide
    texit: tego, -ere, texi, tectum: cover

13. ora: os, oris, n.: face
    frutex: frutex, -icis, m.: shrub; here, bark
    adhuc (adverb): even now
    Thyneius: Bithynian, of Bithynia; Bithynia is in Asia Minor
    illic (adverb): in that spot
incola de gemino vicinos corpore truncos.
in that spot tree trunks next to each other (made) of a two-fold body.

14. **incola**: *incola, -ae*, m.: inhabitant  
**vicinos**: *vicinus, -a, -um*: next to each other  
**truncos**: *truncus, -i*, m.: tree trunk; torso