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by Rev Jerome Mahony S.J.



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THE PASSION II.

Thoughts For Lent

By

REV. JEROME MAHONY, S.J.

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VII. "NOT THIS MAN, BUT BARABBAS"

INNOCENCE OF JESUS REAFFIRMED

(Bov. 316)

Pilate must have been filled with dismay when Jesus reappeared before him, and a messenger informed him that Herod regarded "Christ the King" as a mere fool. The Roman governor was already quite convinced of Our Lord's innocence. He was, however, afraid to release Him. The Jews had complained of his high-handed acts to the reigning emperor, Tiberius, who "censured him severely and ordered him to respect the national customs of the people under his jurisdiction" (Prat). He now feared that if he set Jesus free, similar charges might be brought against him, and that he would be dismissed from his office. On the other hand, while he never hesitated to massacre rebellious Jews,¹ "he was not the man to commit a cold-blooded judicial murder which would yield him nothing in return" (Prat). He seems, moreover, to have been profoundly impressed by the dignity and lofty character of the Divine Prisoner. He therefore steered a middle course by endeavouring to persuade Our Lord's enemies either to demand, or, at least, to acquiesce in, the release of Jesus. The priests quickly detected his policy and succeeded in defeating it.

Having failed to shift the responsibility of Our Lord's acquittal or condemnation upon the shoulders of Herod, Pilate now makes his first attempt to procure the release of Jesus. Before stating his plan, he reaffirms in the most solemn and formal manner his previous verdict of "Not Guilty." "And Pilate calling together the chief priests, and the magistrates, and the people, said to them:

"You have presented unto me this man, as one that perverteth the people, and behold I, having examined him before you, find no cause in this man in those things wherein you accuse him.

"No, nor Herod neither. For I sent you to him, and behold nothing worthy of death is done to him.

"I will chastise him therefore, and release him."²

This iniquitous proposal of Pilate to punish a man, whom he had just declared innocent, was apparently received by the

1. Lk. 13 : 1. 2. Lk. 23 : 13-16.

assembly in complete silence. But at this moment a new situation developed, which promised to afford a solution to the problem that confronted Pilate.

“BARABBAS OR JESUS”

(Bov. 317, 319)

“Now upon the solemn feast day, the pasch, the governor was accustomed to release to the people one of the prisoners, whomsoever they demanded.”¹ Learning that Pilate was conducting a public trial, a great crowd gathered at the Pretorium, “and began to desire that he would do, as he had ever done unto them.”² It would appear from the Gospels that, on this occasion, the people had not exercised their right of choice, but merely desired the Roman governor to grant them their annual privilege. Now “there was a notable prisoner, a robber called Barabbas, who was put into prison with some seditious men, who in the sedition made in the city committed murder.”³ Pilate saw his opportunity. He would allow the people to choose between Barabbas, a murderer, and Jesus, the long-expected Messiah of the Jews. Pilate acted unjustly in thus treating Our Lord as a criminal, after he had solemnly proclaimed His innocence; but he was, doubtless, convinced that there could be but one possible choice, and that the people would demand the release of Jesus.

Full of confidence in the result, “for he knew that the chief priests had delivered him up out of envy,”⁴ Pilate addressed the people: “You have a custom that I should release one unto you at the pasch. Will you therefore that I release to you Barabbas, or Jesus that is called Christ, the king of the Jews?”⁵

“For a few moments it seemed as if the appeal to popular feeling on behalf of Jesus might have been successful.” (Edersheim). There was a short interval during which “the chief priests and ancients persuaded the people, that they should ask Barabbas, and make Jesus away.”⁶ The crowd then announced their decision: “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.”⁷

1. Mt. 27 : 15, Mk. 15 : 6, Jn. 18 : 39. 2. Mk. 15 : 8. 3. Mk. 15 : 7, Mt. 27 : 16, Lk. 23 : 19, Jn. 18 : 40. 4. Mk. 15 : 10. 5. Jn. 18 : 39, Mt. 27 : 17). 6. Mt. 27 : 20. 7. Lk. 23 : 18.

“CRUCIFY HIM! CRUCIFY HIM!”

(Bov. 320, 321)

Pilate must have been astounded at the wholly unexpected answer of the Jews. “Desiring to release Jesus,”¹ and hoping perhaps, that the people might also ask for His liberation, “Pilate said to them: What will you that I do to Jesus that is called Christ, the king of the Jews?”² The fanaticism of the crowd, inflamed by the priests, again defeated his purpose. “They all cried out again: Crucify him, crucify him.”³

Death by crucifixion was the penalty inflicted by the Romans on the lowest criminals; and now the mob was demanding this extreme form of punishment for an innocent man. Pilate very naturally protested. “He said to them the third time: Why, what evil hath this man done? I find no cause of death in him.”⁴ He then declared that he would carry out his original plan,⁵ saying: “I will chastise him therefore, and let him go.”⁶ But the chief priests and the mob would not be satisfied with such half-measures. “They were more instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified.” Alluding to the ultimate condemnation of Jesus, St. Luke adds: “and their voices prevailed.”⁷

IX. THE SCOURGING AND CROWNING WITH THORNS

THE SCOURGING

(Bov. 322)

Seeing that the Jews had not demanded the release of Jesus, Pilate decided to carry out his original plan of scourging Our Lord, hoping that His enemies would be satisfied with the infliction of this cruel punishment, and would consent to His liberation. With this object in view, “Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him.”⁸

Flogging was prescribed by the law of Moses, provided that the strokes “exceed not the number of forty: lest thy brother depart shamefully torn before thy eyes.”⁹ It was customary to limit the punishment to thirty-nine lashes—“forty stripes save one”¹⁰—for fear of infringing, through an error of cal-

1. Lk. 23 : 20. 2. Mt. 27 : 22, Mk. 15 : 12. 3. Mk. 15 : 13, Mt. 27 : 22, Lk. 23 : 21. 4. Lk. 23 : 22. 5. Lk. 23 : 16. 6. Lk. 23 : 22. 7. Lk. 23 : 23. 8. Jn. 19 : 1. 9. Deut. 25 : 3. 10. 2 Cor. 11 : 24.

culatation, the strict letter of the law. "But such cautions," says Fr. Prat, "were unknown to the Romans. Scourging was usually the prelude to crucifixion, and the executioners considered that no moderation was called for in the case of a man about to die. The instrument used was made up of thongs of hardened leather" or small chains "studded with pieces of bone and morsels of lead, and sometimes with sharp points called scorpions." The Holy Shroud enables us to picture the full horror of the scourging. "The man whose body was wrapped in this linen shroud," says Dr. Hynek, "had been terribly scourged and tortured before death. The whole body, both front and back, is covered with innumerable wounds: in front, on the chest, on the abdomen, hands thighs, legs: at the back, on both shoulders, on the shoulder-blades, the lumbar region, the gluteal muscles and the calves. All these wounds cross and recross, so that there is not one whole left on the body." "Itself a punishment at once degrading and terrible, the scourging was, indeed, one of the most cruel episodes of the Passion" (Lebreton).

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

(Bov. 322)

When Jesus had covered His mangled body with His garments, "the soldiers of the governor, taking him into the court of the palace, gathered together unto him the whole band."¹ "The cohort of auxiliaries that formed the garrison of the Antonia was composed entirely of Samaritans and Greeks from Syria, that is to say, of the worst enemies of the Jews. What a fine piece of luck for these mercenaries to have a chance of humiliating and tormenting a King of the Jews, or anyone who calls himself that!" (Prat). And so they proceed to deck out Jesus for their sport. "Stripping him, they put a scarlet cloak about him. And plating a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand."² "The *Sagum*, or short woollen military cloak, scarlet or purple (the two colours are often confounded), fastened by a clasp on the right shoulder. It was also worn by Roman generals, and sometimes (in more costly form and material) presented to foreign kings" (Edersheim). The crown was

1. Mt. 27 : 27, Mk. 15 : 16. 2. Mt. 27 : 28, 29.

woven from thorny plants which served as firewood; and the reed was a substitute for the sceptre, the symbol of royal authority.

Then began the solemn derision of Jesus as a king. "Bowing the knee before him, they mocked him, saying: Hail, king of the Jews. And spitting upon him, they took the reed, and struck his head."¹ From these words of St. Matthew it would appear that each soldier advanced towards Jesus, genuflected on one knee, and in accordance with the customary manner of saluting the Emperor, said: "Hail, king of the Jews!" He would then spit into His face, and snatching the reed from His hand, strike Him across the head with it. "And they gave him blows," says St. John.² The word used by the evangelist means a slap in the face or a box on the ear, which, when given to an adult, are intended as an insult rather than as a physical injury.

"BEHOLD THE MAN!"

(Bov. 323)

"Pilate had given orders that Jesus should be scourged. He did not concern himself about his soldiers' amusements; there were other things for him to attend to" (Lagrange). But the indignities heaped upon Jesus by His brutal tormenters admirably served his purpose. Our Lord had been reduced to such a state of physical weakness and degradation that Pilate must have been convinced that the Jews would no longer insist on the death of such a miserable wretch, and would consent to His release.

"Pilate therefore went forth again" to the crowd which was awaiting the death-sentence of Jesus; and with a voice, in which a note of confidence is distinctly perceptible, he said to them: "Behold I bring him forth unto you, that you may know that I find no cause in him." After a moment of breathless silence, "Jesus therefore came forth bearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. And he saith to them: Behold the Man."³

"*Ecce Homo!*" "Behold the Man!" The words of the prophet Isaias vividly portray what the painter would not dare reproduce on canvas. "There is no beauty in him, nor

1. Mt. 27: 29, 30. 2. 19 : 3. 3. Jn. 19 : 4, 5.

comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him. Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised. Whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought him as it were a leper, and one struck by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our iniquities: he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him: and by his bruises we are healed."¹ Now, indeed, was fulfilled the prophetic utterance of the Psalmist: "I am a worm and no man: the reproach of men and the outcast of the people."²

X. THE DEATH SENTENCE

"THE SON OF GOD"

(Bov. 323-4)

"When the chief priests therefore and the servants had seen him, they cried out, saying: Crucify him, crucify him."³ The governor's hopes were again dashed to the ground. "Pilate did not know," says Toletus, "that they (the Jews) were animated by diabolical influences." Aroused to anger by this unexpected outburst of the priests and their servants, Pilate exclaimed: "Take him, you and crucify him; for I find no cause in him."⁴ Interpreting these words, perhaps, as a definite refusal on the part of Pilate to put Our Lord to death as a political agitator, the Jews were obliged to bring forward the accusation upon which Jesus had been declared guilty by the Sanhedrin. "We have a law; and according to that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."⁵

The Romans respected Jewish customs; and Pilate could have escaped the responsibility of crucifying Jesus, by handing Him over to the Jews to be executed by them for a crime which, according to Jewish law, incurred the death-penalty. But when he "had heard this saying, he feared the more,"⁶ the title "Son of God" apparently increasing the mysterious awe, inspired perhaps by divine grace, with which

1. 53 : 2-5. 2. Ps. 21 : 7. 3. Jn. 19 : 6. 4. Jn. 19 : 6.
5. Jn. 19 : 7. 6. Jn. 19 : 8.

he seemed to regard Jesus. "A Son of God! What if this Man were so, after all!" (Lebreton).

Withdrawing into the Pretorium, Pilate again summoned Jesus into his presence. With fear in his heart, and dreading, perhaps, the answer he may have been expecting, he said to Jesus: "Whence art thou?"¹ Jesus remained silent. "What was the use of replying? A pagan who, a short time before, would not wait for the answer of Jesus to his question: 'What is truth?' is not prepared to hear what he could have told him concerning His divine origin" (Durand).

Angry at being thus ignored, the Roman magistrate reasserted itself in Pilate. "Speakest thou not to me?" he said with his accustomed arrogance. "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and I have power to release thee."² Jesus answered: "Thou shouldst not have any power against me, unless it were given thee from above. 'Therefore he that hath delivered me to thee, hath the greater sin.'³ These words of Our Lord are thus explained by Dr. Leonard: "You, Pilate, a pagan under God's permissive providence an instrument in this crime, partly unwillingly, though sufficiently responsible to be a sinner, have sin indeed, but for the very reason of your lesser and *his* greater responsibility, the spiritual ruler of Israel," namely, the High-Priest Caiphas, "who handed Israel's Messiah over to you has greater sin."

THE SURRENDER OF PILATE

(Bov. 325)

Deeply impressed by the Person and words of Jesus, and seeing that the scourging which he had inflicted on Him had not placated the Jews, Pilate again "sought to release him."⁴ The evangelist does not tell us what methods he adopted for this purpose. He may possibly have urged Our Lord's claims as "Son of God," for the Jews now abandoned this line of attack, and renewed their accusation against Jesus of aiming at political sovereignty, formulating their charge so as to convey a serious threat against Pilate himself. "The Jews cried out, saying: If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar."⁵

1. Jn. 19 : 9. 2. Jn. 19 : 10. 3. Jn. 19 : 11.
4. Jn. 19 : 12. 5. Jn. 19 : 12.

Pilate at last made up his mind. "Under the Roman emperors 'Caesar's friend' was a title of honour given to the most trusty counsellors and highest officials in the provinces. The statement, 'thou art not Caesar's friend' conveys a charge of disloyalty, coupled with a threat of an accusation of treason" (Poelzl). Now Tiberius Caesar was extraordinarily severe in all matters of treason, and encouraged informers. The Jews would not petition for the release of Jesus. Pilate must therefore condemn or acquit Him. If he acquitted Him, he would, in all likelihood, be denounced to the Emperor by the Jews as an abettor of treason, and thereby run the risk of losing his office and even his life. "There may have been something divine about Jesus to Pilate's way of thinking," says Fr. Lagrange; "but he was more certain of the divinity of Caesar, who was a god still more to be feared, and to be satisfied whatever the cost." Jesus, then, must be condemned to the death of the cross.

INTERVENTION OF PILATE'S WIFE

(Bov. 318)

"Now when Pilate had heard these words,¹ he brought Jesus forth; and sat down in the judgment-seat, in the place that is called Lithostrotos, and in Hebrew Gabbatha."² "And as he was sitting in the place of judgment, his wife sent to him, saying: Have thou nothing to do with that just man. For I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."³

According to Christian tradition, the name of Pilate's wife was Claudia Procula. It is not unlikely that she was a proselyte, that is, a pagan converted to the Jewish religion. She must have heard of Jesus, of His preaching and miracles, and of the religious movement which He had inaugurated. "If, as the best authorities think, her dream was neither a trick of the imagination nor an illusion of the evil spirit, we may well believe that her charitable intervention was not wasted in the eyes of God" (Prat). She may have later become a Christian. She is venerated as a saint in the Greek Church. Her message, indeed, may have disturbed Pilate, for the Romans were very superstitious, and put faith in dreams; but he paid no heed to it.

1. Jn. 19 : 12.

2. Jn. 19 : 13.

3. Mt. 27 : 19.

"HIS BLOOD BE UPON US!"

(Bov. 325-6).

Jesus now stood before the judgment-seat of the Roman governor. St. John carefully notes the day and hour of this momentous event in the history of the world. "It was the parasceve [i.e. the eve] of the pasch, about the sixth hour," that is, midday.¹ Before pronouncing the death sentence, Pilate made a last desperate effort to extort from the Jews a request for Our Lord's release, saying to them: "Behold your king,"² meaning, as it would seem from the following verse: "You will surely not allow your king to be put to death." "But they cried out: Away with him, away with him, crucify him, crucify him."³ Then, giving explicit utterance to his thought, he asks: "Shall I crucify your king?" This appeal to national loyalty was effectively met by the Jewish authorities in a manner which Pilate could not afford to gainsay. "The chief priests answered: We have no king but Caesar."⁴

"And Pilate seeing that he prevailed nothing, but that rather a tumult was raised, taking water, washed his hands before the people, saying: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man. Look ye to it."⁵ "And the whole people"—not merely the priests and their servants—"answering, said: His blood be upon us, and on our children."⁶

By these words the Jews became responsible for the death of Jesus. Retribution will be swift and terrible. Within forty years "foreign war and fratricidal strife, famine and plague and every sort of evil will at once engulf them. Their country devastated, their Sanctuary in flames, their capital in ruins, there will remain to them only a city of the dead . . . The abomination of desolation will reign forever over the Temple, and the miserable remnants of Israel will be dispersed throughout the whole universe, to carry, to the end of time, the weight of this mysterious malediction." (Prat).

Seeing that nothing was to be gained by further parley with the Jews, "Pilate, being willing to satisfy the people, gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them Barabbas, who for murder and sedition had been cast into prison; but Jesus he delivered up unto them to be crucified."⁷

1. Jn. 19 : 14. 2. Jn. 19 : 14. 3. Jn. 19 : 15. 4. Jn. 19 : 15.
5. Mt. 27 : 24. 6. Mt. 27 : 25. 7. Mk. 15 : 15, Lk. 23 : 24, 25.
Mt. 27 : 26.

XI. THE WAY OF THE CROSS**"BEARING HIS OWN CROSS"**

(Bov. 327)

"They took off the purple cloak from him, and put his own garments on him, and led him out to crucify him."¹ It was customary to read the death-sentence to signify that it was irrevocable, a common formula, in the case of crucifixion, being: "Thou shalt go to the cross." The condemned man carried the transverse beam of the cross tied on his shoulders, the upright being already erected at the place of execution. It is, however, widely maintained that Our Lord carried the entire cross, as depicted in the "Stations." "And there were two other malefactors led with him to be put to death."² Surrounded by armed soldiers "and bearing his own cross, he went forth to that place which is called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgotha,"³ a little over half a mile from the Pretorium.

Commenting on the words: "Bearing his own cross, He went forth," St. Augustine writes: "A truly wonderful spectacle! To the eyes of the impious, a great mockery; to the eyes of the pious, a great mystery. To the eyes of the impious, a great exhibition of ignominy; to the eyes of the pious, a great bulwark of faith. The impious scoff at a king who carries, as the sceptre of his rule, the instrument of his death; the pious contemplate a King carrying the wood to which He will be crucified, but which, in future ages, will adorn the brows of kings. The hearts of the saints will glory in the cross, which to the impious is an object of scorn and contumely."

JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

"Our Lord's own Mother (as tradition says) awaited Him on this painful journey, and pushed her way up to Him to exchange but one glance, one word, one gesture of reverence and sympathy, grief, comfort, and love. Who can fathom the anguish of these two hearts at this moment? This is the noblest and most sublime participation in our Saviour's Cross, because nothing could equal the courage and love of His Mother, and her desire to suffer with her Son. Mary is

1. Mk. 15 : 20, Mk. 27 : 31. 2. Lk. 23 : 32. 3. Jn. 19: 17.

here already the highest model of all cross-bearing souls." (Meschler).

JESUS AND VERONICA

There is also a tradition that Our Lord was met on His way to Calvary by a woman named Veronica, probably a disciple of Jesus. "She pushes her way through the crowd to Him and hands Him her veil that He may wipe His face. It was a slight service, but a courageous confession of her discipleship; it was all she could do at this moment, and she did it with a generous and loving heart. And how magnificently our Saviour rewards her for this act of charity! Tradition says that He took the veil, wiped the blood and perspiration from His Face, and gave it back to her; and when she reached home and unfolded it, she beheld His Face miraculously imprinted on its folds." (Meschler). The veil of Veronica "is now one of the most precious relics in St. Peter's" (Poelzl).

SIMON CARRIES THE CROSS

(Bov. 327)

Exhausted by lack of nourishment, His dreadful suffering and loss of blood, Jesus soon became exhausted. Fearing, perhaps that He might die before He reached Calvary, the Roman soldiers "laid hold of one Simon of Cyrene, who passed by, coming from the country, the father of Alexander and of Rufus, and they laid the cross on him to carry after Jesus."¹ It is generally supposed that Simon was a Jew—the Jews had a flourishing colony at Cyrene in Lybia, N. Africa—who had come to Jerusalem for the Pasch. Being "forced to take up his cross,"² we may assume that Simon undertook this task unwillingly. As, however, St. Mark speaks of his two sons as prominent members of the early Church, it is very reasonably supposed that their father Simon received the grace of faith through the virtue which came from the cross of Jesus which he carried.

JESUS AND THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

(Bov. 328)

"And there followed him a great multitude of people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him."³ Relieved from the burden of His cross, "Jesus, turning to them, said:

1. Lk. 23 : 26, Mk. 15: 21.

2. Mt. 27 : 32.

3. Lk. 23 : 27.

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold the days will come, wherein they will say: Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains: Fall upon us; and to the hills: Cover us. For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"¹

"This prophecy will be fulfilled to the letter within some forty years, and many of the women there present will be able to see its accomplishment with their own eyes." During the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans "many mothers will regret their motherhood; others will escape the horrors of famine except by voluntary death. . . . Like the dry wood, Israel as a people will receive the chastisement of its crimes." (Prat).

XII. THE CRUCIFIXION

"THEY CRUCIFIED HIM"

(Bov. 329)

"And they bring him into the place called Golgotha, which being interpreted is The place of Calvary."² Golgotha (a modification of the Hebrew word for a skull, its Latin equivalent signifying 'bald') "was the name for the mound, rising about fifteen ft. from the surrounding soil, just outside the city-walls and about half a mile from the Antonia." (Jones). "And they gave him wine to drink mingled with myrrh"³—the word "gall," employed by St. Matthew, means in general something bitter to the taste. This drink, supplied by charitable ladies, was supposed to produce intoxication and unconsciousness. "And when he had tasted it, he would not drink."⁴ He thereby acknowledged the thoughtfulness of the donors; but He would drink the chalice of suffering to the dregs.

"They crucified him."⁵ Crucifixion is described by the Roman orator Cicero as "the most cruel and horrifying of deaths," "the last, extreme punishment of slaves." St. Augustine, in like manner, says that "nothing is worse than this death." From the evidence of the Holy Shroud it appears that Our Lord's hands were nailed to the cross at the point where they join the wrists, thus enabling them to

1. Lk. 23 : 28-31.
4. Mt. 27 : 34.

2. Mk. 15 : 22.
5. Mk. 15 : 25.

3. Mk. 15: 23.

support the weight of the body. The feet were fastened either one over the other by one nail, or side by side by two nails.

"And it was the third hour.¹ And with him they crucify two thieves, the one on his right hand and the other on his left, and Jesus in the midst. And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith: And with the wicked he was reputed."²

THE TITLE ON THE CROSS

(Bov. 330)

It was customary to inscribe on a placard the name of the criminal and the cause of his condemnation; and then to affix the notice to the cross over the victim's head. "And Pilate wrote a title also, and he put it upon the cross. And the writing was: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."³ The inscription "was written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin,"⁴ the first being the language of the Jews, the second, spoken universally in the Eastern provinces of the Empire, the third, the language of the masters of the world. The chief priests objected to the title and said to Pilate: "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am the King of the Jews. Pilate answered: What I have written, I have written."⁵ "And so, by divine ordinance, the inscription, written by the Roman governor, proclaimed to the world the fact that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews" (Poelzl).

"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM"

(Bov. 329, 331)

"And Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."⁶ Our Lord here prays principally for the Jewish people, who are the cause of His death, and then for all who in any way have a part in it. "In every sin there is a foundation of darkness. The man who sins does not entirely know all that he does. The Jews did not understand the full enormity of their crime. This ignorance,

1. According to St. John it was "about the sixth hour" (19 : 14), when Our Lord stood at the judgment-seat of Pilate. It is probable that both numbers are approximate. "S. Mark, then, says that the time was the forenoon (i.e. between 9 a.m. and midday); S. John says it was round about noon" (Barton). 2. Mk. 15: 27, 28, Jn. 19 : 18. 3. Jn. 19 : 19. 4. Jn. 19 : 20, 5. Jn. 19 : 21, 22. 6. Lk. 23: 34.

inasmuch as it was due to their resistance to grace and to voluntary blindness, did not absolve them from their crime. But Jesus puts it forward before His Father as an attenuating circumstance, as later did St. Peter and St. Paul." (Valensin). Thus, while saying outright to the people of Jerusalem: "The author of life you killed,"¹ Peter adds: "Brethren, I know that you did it through ignorance, as did also your rulers."² St. Paul, in like manner, when speaking of the Christian revelation, says that it was a doctrine "which none of the princes of this world knew. For if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory."³ "Jesus, in pleading their cause before His Father, does not ask for their pardon absolutely and unconditionally. He implores for them the grace to repent and a time of delay for their repentance. And His prayer is not in vain. God will wait for forty years before making His hand heavy upon this unbelieving people; and in the interval, the members of the Levitical priesthood and the Pharisees will flock into the Church in such great numbers that they will threaten to falsify its spirit and to disturb its peace." (Prat).

The executioners were allowed to appropriate the garments of the condemned person. We learn from the gospels that they divided the clothes of Jesus into four parts, "casting lots upon them, what every man should take."⁴ As Our Lord's "coat was without seam, woven from top throughout,"⁵ they agreed not to cut it, but to cast lots for it. Thus, says St. John, was fulfilled the prophecy: "They have parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they have cast lot."⁶ "And they sat and watched him."⁷

XIII. THE THREE HOURS OF AGONY

INSULTS AND MOCKERY

(Bov. 332)

The hill of Calvary stood near two great public highways leading from Jerusalem. A constant flow of people to and from the city passed close to Jesus as He hung upon the cross, and assailed Him with insults and sarcasm. "They that passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, and saying: Vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three

1. Acts 3 : 15. 2. Acts 3 : 17. 3. I Cor. 2 : 8. 4. Mk. 15 : 24. 5. Jn. 19 : 23. 6. Jn. 19 : 24. 7. Mt. 27 : 36.

days dost rebuild it: save thy own self. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."¹ On Calvary itself "the people stood beholding,"² apparently in awed silence. But it was the hour of triumph for the Jewish leaders, and they exulted in their success. "The chief priests, with the scribes and ancients, mocking, said to one another," within the hearing of Jesus, but not condescending to notice Him: "He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the king of Israel come down now from the cross, that we may see, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him now deliver if he will have him; for he said: I am the Son of God."³ Joining in the game, "the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying: If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself."⁴

THE PENITENT THIEF

(Bov. 333)

"And one of those robbers⁵ who were crucified with him blasphemed him, saying: If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying: Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation?"⁶ that is, "Do you not even have the fear of God, you who endure the same punishment?" (Lagrange). Then the dying robber makes a humble confession of his evil deeds, and bears witness to the innocence of Jesus. "And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done no evil."⁷ He doubtless had heard of Jesus, of His gospel, and of His mighty works. Within his penitent spirit the divine light of faith is kindled, and burns with purest ardour. Not presuming to make a formal request for admission into fellowship with Christ, he begs this boon with words that are matchless in their delicacy and humility. "And he said to Jesus: Lord, remember me," or according to the original Greek, "Jesus, remember me, when

1. Mt. 27 : 39, 40. 2. Lk. 23 : 35. 3. Mt. 27 : 41-43, Mk. 15 : 31, 32. 4. Lk. 23 : 36, 37. 5. "It is possible that both robbers at first joined in insulting him (Christ), but that one of them later repented of his conduct. More probably the plural 'robbers' in Mk. and Mt. 27 : 44 is indefinite. The evangelists simply mention another quarter from which insults were offered to Jesus without intending to specify the exact number of those who took part." (O'Flynn). 6. Lk. 23 : 39, 40, Mk. 15 : 32. 7. Lk. 23 : 41.

you shalt come into thy kingdom.”¹ Commenting on this prayer of the Good Thief, St. Augustine writes:—

“To faith like this what can be added, I know not. For while those are shaken who saw Christ raise the dead, he believes, though he sees Him crucified by his side. Truly no faith like this hath Our Lord found in Israel; nay, nor in the whole world.”

“A contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”² The poor outcast criminal, nailed to a cross, receives the assurance of a part with Jesus in eternal life. “And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.”³

“BEHOLD THY MOTHER!”

(Bov. 334)

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen.”⁴ Conducted by St. John and accompanied by three of the holy women, Mary came to Calvary, and took her place by the cross of her Son. In this hour was fulfilled the prophecy of Simeon: “Thy own soul a sword shall pierce.”⁵ The silent sympathy of her mother’s heart must surely have brought comfort to Jesus amidst the jeers and mockeries of His enemies. In the midst of His unspeakable torments, Our Lord makes provision for Our Lady’s welfare. “When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son.”⁶ John heard these words, and fully understood their meaning; but Jesus, desiring to emphasise the sacredness of the charge committed to him, “saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own.”⁷

“Behold thy Mother.” “The role of coredemptrix,” says Fr. Prat, “is the principle of the spiritual maternity of Mary. At the foot of the cross, she offers to the heavenly Father His divine Son, who offers Himself on the cross for our salvation. She offers Him with the authority of a mother, whose consent God asks for. Jesus, in dying for us, adopts us as His brothers; and Mary, by sacrificing her Son for us, gives us as brothers to Jesus and adopts us as her children. The *Fiat* of

1. Lk. 23 : 42. 2. Ps. 50 : 19. 3. Lk. 23: 43. 4. Jn. 19 : 25.
5. Lk. 2 : 35. 6. Jn. 19: 26. 7. Jn. 19 : 27.

the Redemption, pronounced from her heart by the Blessed Virgin on Golgotha, answers the *Fiat* of the Incarnation, and, in some way, fulfills it.”

DARKNESS OVER THE LAND

(Bov. 335)

“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened.”¹ During the three hours that Jesus hung on the cross, darkness covered “the whole earth,” or, more correctly, “the whole land,” that is Judea, and in particular Jerusalem. It was not due to an eclipse of the sun, as the full moon of the Pasch was in the opposite quarter of the heavens. Fr. Lagrange suggests that it may have been caused by the ‘black sirocco,’ which occurs annually at Jerusalem at the beginning of the month of April, and which on the present occasion blew “with miraculous intensity.” “The darkness was a sign of mourning for all, and a mark of Heaven’s reprobation of the deicides” (Durand).

AGONY OF BODY AND SOUL

(Bov. 335)

And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice: Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabacthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”² Jesus endured the most intolerable physical suffering as He hung for three hours on the cross. The nails were driven through the wrists and feet where highly-sensitive nerves meet. His “arm muscles were contracted in an extremely exhausting manner, which gave rise to spasms that affected the arms, the shoulders and the muscles of the back, as well as the thighs and legs” (Hynek). The prolonged extension of the arms “impedes breathing and hinders the circulation of the blood. . . . The cause of death on the cross was asphyxia and spasms. This meant that the crucified died, fully conscious, in the most terrible pain.” (ibid.).

Far more intense were the spiritual sufferings of Jesus on the cross, which impel Him to utter “with a loud voice” the opening words of the twenty-first Psalm: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” “The words are a cry of distress wrung from the just man by the taunts and sufferings which God allows his enemies to inflict on him. There is no

1. Mt. 27 : 45, Lk. 23 : 45.

2. Mk. 15: 34, Mt. 27 : 46.

note of despair in that cry: confidence in God remains unshaken. Christian tradition recognises the Messianic sense of the Psalm, which finds complete fulfilment only in Christ: 'it contains the whole Passion of Christ' (Tertullian). The desolation felt in the human soul of Christ is given expression in the Psalmist's words. But there is no question of despair or of abandonment of the humanity by the divinity. Christ was abandoned by God only in the sense that God did not spare him the sufferings of the Passion and Crucifixion, but allowed his enemies to work their will on him." (O'Flynn).

"And some of the standers by hearing, said: Behold he calleth Elias."¹ "This may have been a genuine mistake, though the Scribes who were present could scarcely have failed to recognise the words of the Psalm. It was a common belief² that the prophet Elias would return to anoint the Messiah and make him known to the world. The idea that Jesus, as He hung on the cross, was calling to Elias for assistance, gave a fresh opportunity for sarcastic jibes." (ibid.).

"I THIRST"

(Bov. 335)

"Afterwards Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said: I thirst."³ "Thirst was, perhaps, the most intolerable torture of the crucified, for the prolonged tension of the nerves and muscles together with the inflammation of the wounds exposed to the air produced a burning fever" (Prat). "Now there was a vessel set there full of vinegar,"⁴ a kind of thin wine supplied to soldiers on duty. "And immediately one of them running; took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar; and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink."⁵ His companions protested: "Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to deliver him"⁶ But the man replied: "Stay," that is, do not hinder me, "let us see if Elias come to take him down."⁷ "The good fellow dared not show even this kindness without joining in the raillery of the others." (Lagrange). Thus was fulfilled the prophecy: "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."⁸

1. Mk. 15 : 35. 2. Mk. 9 : 8-12. 3. Jn. 19: 28. 4. Jn. 19 : 29.
5. Mt. 27 : 48. 6. Mt. 27: 49. 7. Mk. 15 : 36.
8. Ps. 68 : 22.

XIV. DEATH AND BURIAL OF JESUS

DEATH OF JESUS

(Bov. 336)

"Jesus therefore when he had taken the vinegar, said: It is consummated."¹ "The work of redemption is completed; the earthly career of Jesus is coming to a close. The *consummatum est* finds its commentary in the words of the priestly prayer: 'Father, I have accomplished the work that thou hast given me to do'; in the saying of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that he has been *consummated*, that is, he has been raised to the summit of perfection by his sufferings." (Prat).

"And Jesus again crying with a loud voice, said: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit. And bowing his head, he gave up the ghost."² "The last words of Christ are the echo of those He spoke in the temple at the age of twelve years. In His last hour, as in His first manifestation at Jerusalem, He is entirely at the disposal of His Father who is in heaven. In returning to Him His spirit, He accepts death by an act of the most holy abandonment." (Valensin). He had said: "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it away from me; but I lay it down of myself, and I have power to lay it down."³ And so, bowing His head, by an act of His will, He freely laid down His life, "a redemption for many,"⁴ that is, for the whole world.⁵

MOURNING OF NATURE

(Bov. 337)

"And behold the veil of the temple was rent in two, in the midst, from the top even to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent. And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had slept arose. And coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, came into the holy city, and appeared to many."⁶ There were two veils in the Sanctuary of the Temple, one at the entrance of the Holy Place, which could be seen by all Jewish worshippers, the second at the entrance of the Holy of Holies, visible only to the priests who ministered in the Holy Place. If, according to the more common opinion, the Gospels speak

1. Jn. 19 : 30. 2. Mt. 27: 50, Lk. 23 : 46, Jn. 19 : 30. 3. Jn. 10 : 17, 18. 4. Mt. 20 : 28. 5. Jn. 1 : 29. 6. Mt. 27 : 51-53, Lk. 23-45.

of the latter veil—an enormous Babylonian curtain woven in many colours—its miraculous rending at the death of Christ was “the visible sign that the cult of the Old Law had lapsed, that the sacrifices of the Old Covenant were henceforth void of all meaning. Figure and promise yield to reality. For the Jewish cult, attached to one Temple alone, reserved to one people alone, and celebrated by the offering of a victim without intelligence, is substituted a cult as universal as is the kingdom of God, the worship in spirit and in truth, of which Christ is the altar, the victim, and the priest” (Huby). The fissure in the rock of Golgotha can still be seen. The opening of the tombs apparently occurred at the same time that the saints arose from the dead, namely, as the evangelist states, after Our Lord’s resurrection.

“THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD”

(Bov. 338-39)

The spectators on Calvary were profoundly impressed by these events. “The centurion seeing what was done, glorified God, saying: Indeed this was a just man.”¹ “The centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus, seeing that crying out in this manner he had given up the ghost, having seen the earthquake and the things that were done, were sore afraid, saying: Indeed this was the Son of God. And all the multitude of them that were come together to that sight, and saw the things that were done, returned, striking their breasts.”²

A large number of Our Lord’s friends witnessed His crucifixion and death. “All his acquaintance, and the women that had followed him from Galilee, stood afar off beholding these things. Among whom was Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joseph, and Salome the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Who also when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered to him, and many other women that came up with him to Jerusalem.”³

THE PIERCED HEART OF JESUS

(Bov. 340)

“Then the Jews (because it was the parasceve⁴), that the bodies might not remain upon the cross on the sabbath-day

1. Lk. 23 : 47. 2. Mt. 27 : 54, Mk. 15 : 39, Lk. 23: 48.
3. Lk. 23 : 49, Mk. 15: 40, 41, Mt. 27 : 56. 4. “The parasceve, i.e. in Jewish usage, the preparation for the Sabbath or a feast, in this case for both, since the Pasch fell on a Saturday.” (Barton).

(for that was a great sabbath-day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken,” which would cause their death, “and that they might be taken away.” Pilate gave the necessary permission; and the legs of the two thieves were broken. “But after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side, and immediately there came out blood and water.” John solemnly testifies to the truth of what he had witnessed, seeing therein the fulfilment of scripture: “You shall not break a bone of him,” and “They shall look on him whom they pierced.”¹

“The evangelist,” says St. Augustine, “uses a very significant word. He would not say, he struck His side, or he wounded it; but he opened it, that there the door of life might stand open.” And St. Bernard writes: “Therefore was the side wounded, that by the visible wound the invisible wound of love might be revealed.” “This passage is the biblical and historical basis of devotion to the Sacred Heart” (Leonard). “The opening of Jesus’ side is the last mystery in the Passion, and by it His Heart was laid bare, so to speak, and revealed as the seat of love, the hidden mainspring of life and all mysteries, the source of all virtues and merits, the last sacrifice for us, and, by means of devotion to this Sacred Heart, an important instrument of the graces in the meriting of which It has played such an exceptionally prominent part” (Meschler).

BURIAL OF JESUS

(Bov. 341-43)

It was now evening; and at sunset the feast of the Pasch, which in that year fell on the Sabbath day, would begin. Now “there was a certain rich man named Joseph, of Arimathea, a city of Judea.” He was “a good and just man, a noble counsellor,” who “had not consented to their counsel and doings.” He “was also himself looking for the kingdom of God,” and “was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews.” He “came and went in boldly to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.” Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead; but when he ascertained this fact from the

1. Jn. 19 : 31-37.

centurion, "he commanded that the body should be delivered to Joseph."¹

Joseph, buying fine linen, took the body of Jesus from the cross. Nicodemus came, "bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight." The two men "took therefore the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths, with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury." Close to Calvary was a garden, in which Joseph had "his own new monument, which he had hewed out in a rock, wherein never yet any man had been laid." Having placed the body of Jesus in this tomb, Joseph "rolled a great stone to the door of the monument, and went his way."²

"And there was there Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre." The holy women from Galilee "saw the sepulchre, and how the body was laid. And returning, they prepared spices and ointments; and on the Sabbath-day they rested according to the commandment."³

THE GUARD AT THE SEPULCHRE

(Bov. 344)

"The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."⁴ Unlike His own followers, the enemies of Jesus had marked the words which He had spoken regarding His resurrection. Hence, on the day after His death, "the chief priests and the Pharisees came together to Pilate, saying: Sir, we have remembered that that seducer said, while he was yet alive: After three days I will rise again. Command therefore the sepulchre to be guarded until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come, and steal him away, and say to the people, he is risen from the dead: and the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said to them: You have a guard; go, guard it as you know. And they departing, made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting guards."⁵

1. Mk. 15 : 43, 45, Lk. 23 : 50, 51, Mt. 27 : 57, 58, Jn. 19 : 38.

2. Mt. 27 : 59, 60, Jn. 19 : 39-41. 3. Mt. 27 : 61, Lk. 23 : 55, 56.

4. Lk. 16 : 8. 5. Mt. 27 : 62-66.

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