

## **DAY 18.**

### *The burden of the Cross is laid on Jesus.*

NOW that Christ Jesus, our Saviour, had been condemned to death, the soldiers again seized Him, and stripping Him of the purple garment, clothed Him once more in His own garments, that He might be the better recognised in His own dress. Then they hurried Him along to death, for they feared that Pilate might be otherwise persuaded, or repent, and thus recall his sentence. They took, therefore, the heavy beam of the Holy Cross, and laid it upon His sacred shoulders, and its length, as some have observed, was fifteen feet. Moreover, the reason why they did this was, because at that time the cross was the most shameful kind of torment by which the guilty could be put to death. For this reason no one would touch it for fear of confusion and shame. Thus, then, they laid it on Christ, to His great confusion, that He might bear His own shame, and might be an object of mockery and scorn to all men, and that the remembrance of Him might be utterly blotted out of the hearts of men, and that no one might ever dare to make mention of Him again. But our most gracious Lord willingly and gently took its weight upon Him, and carried it with great love for His Father's glory and the salvation of men; nor did He take upon Himself the Cross alone, but the sins of the whole world, and He carried it to Calvary, where He fastened them to the Cross, and destroyed them, and washed them away in His own Blood, and atoned for them by His bitter death. This is what the Prophet said: "All we like sheep have gone astray, every man into his own way;" that is, after his own lusts and delights; "and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Moreover, in doing this, our Lord showed unto us a certain example of perfection, as before He had taught us by word, for He utterly denied and resigned Himself, and bore His Cross with constancy and perseverance. If, then, you would become His disciple, go and do likewise, and follow your

Lord. Yet it was not enough for the Jews to have thus shamefully treated Him, for, to shame Him the more, they led Him along between two thieves, and showed Him far greater contempt than they showed to them, by forcing Him to carry His Cross,—a thing which was never heard to have been done to thieves. O most loving Jesus! What love has overcome You? How exceedingly have You thirsted after my salvation! With what strong desire have You walked along that difficult and painful way for my sake, and suffered such great shame and reproach for the love of me. To call me back to life, You, the Author of life, were led to death! To bring us back out of the path of wickedness, You, the Lord of Sabbath, the Lord holy and just, are dragged to Calvary. To teach us to despise the good things of earth, You have allowed Yourself to be despoiled of all things, and naked have gone up to the Cross to Your Father. To plant us among the angelic choirs, and to join us there, You have been numbered with the wicked; and lastly, that we might be honored by the hosts of heaven, You are held up before the whole world to contempt and scorn. In truth, no criminal ever died by a more shameful death. For, at the time when Christ suffered, the Paschal was being celebrated by the Jews, and a great multitude of people had come together, and all strove one with the other to obtain a sight of Christ. Thus, then, the Lord of glory, Whose is all glory and honor, walked along, crowned with thorns, bound with hard cords, heavy laden with the weight of the Cross, between two thieves, and mocked by every sign of condemnation, of which those wicked men could think.

Let us contemplate, I pray, that you, with sorrowful hearts, how full of agony was that procession. Before our Lord went, the vile crowd, laughing and grinning, desiring to be beforehand with Him, in order to see Him fastened to the Cross. On either side walked the torturers and executioners, afflicting Him at every step in numberless ways, in order to allure and excite the whole people to mock and ill-treat Him. Behind followed the cruel crowd of armed men, and, as we may suppose, the leaders and chief-priests, rejoicing like lions when they have captured their prey, and these heaped upon Christ curses and blasphemies. Thus, then, was the King of glory made the contempt of all; small and great, noble and base-born, shamefully ill-treated Him. This our Lord had long before

foretold by the Prophet, in these words: “They who sat in the gate spoke against Me, and they who drank wine held me up to scorn. All who saw Me, mocked Me; they spoke with their lips, and wagged their heads.”

Let us, then, with inward sorrow, look closely into the torments which our Lord now suffered. Although, as Isaiah said, He was full of wounds, and from the sole of the foot to the top of the head there was no health in Him, yet it had been observed by some, that He was again grievously hurt and wounded in His shoulder. For upon it pressed the great beam of the Cross, which inflicted on it a large wound, making of all the wounds one wound; and the pain thereof pierced His tender Heart. And as some devout doctors teach, this was one of the most grievous of Christ’s pains. For, as we learn by daily experience, if a man be in pain from even some slight wound or ulcer, he can hardly suffer with patience anyone to come near him. What then must have been the torment of our Lord Jesus Christ, when that heavy wood was laid and pressed down upon His bleeding shoulders, and mainly upon that fearful wound; and He had to carry it so long a journey? And because the Cross was too long, He could not carry it all upon His shoulder. Hence it happened, that the end of it, striking against the stones strewn upon the way, made a great and harsh noise, which must have been painful to our Lord beyond all belief. Moreover, as by reason of all those grievous pains and troubles which He had borne all that night and day, He was so weak and injured as to be wholly exhausted and devoid of strength, He walked along so pitiably bowed down to the earth beneath the great weight of the Cross, and with such exceeding agony of heart that every step He took eat, so to speak, into His very Heart. But His burning love for us and our salvation kept urging Him on to suffer beyond His strength. And truly, beyond measure grievous was that affliction, both inwardly and outwardly, when He had taken on Himself not only the burden of the Cross, but the sins of the whole world, as the prince of the apostles said: “He has borne our sins in His own Body on the tree.” Nor could Christ’s Passion be anything but exceeding bitter, since, according to the rigor of justice, it was to outweigh

all the sins of men. Here let every man think in his own heart, how much heavier he himself has made the Cross of Christ by his own sins.

After this, when those bloodthirsty dogs would hasten Christ's death, they both kicked and struck Him, and without any mercy showered down blows upon Him, as if He had been some brute beast in their hands. Nevertheless, this innocent Lamb meekly placed Himself under all their savage blows. Who then can restrain his tears, if he set Christ thus disfigured before the eyes of his soul, and with great compassion consider His pains? For, truly, His Body was utterly exhausted, and yet carried a Heart to suffer. His limbs sank down under His burden, yet when He fell down burning love raised Him up, that He might bear His punishment even to the end. The heavy weight of the Cross pressed Him down to the earth, yet His fiery longing urged Him to go on. For His eager desire to accomplish His Father's will, and to finish our redemption, had so increased within Him, that it compelled Him to suffer more than His nature and human weakness could bear, and so forced Him through all His pains, that He would not have refused to walk under this heavy burden, even to the last judgment day, for man's salvation, if this had seemed good to His Father, and had been to His honor.

Here, therefore, Christ set before all men a mirror, as it were, and form of spiritual life and perfection. For as many as aspire to a true and virtuous life, these must gladly take up their cross with Christ, and faithfully and perseveringly carry the same; and if it shall please God, they must suffer themselves to be stripped naked of all temporal goods, and of all help and comfort of friends, and of inward and spiritual consolation and sensible grace. For this they must cheerfully suffer mockery, and shame, and detraction, and wrong, and reproach, for God's dear sake; and with Christ they must be made a sacrifice pleasing unto God, and like unto their Beloved, by bearing many afflictions and troubles at the hands of men, and temptations of devils, and their own faults and defects. And whoever desires to be a true lover, must never forsake his Beloved, either on the cross, or in death, or

any affliction whatsoever, that can come upon him; but taking his cross earnestly on his shoulders, he must humbly place himself beneath it, and say: “I will follow You, O my Beloved, wherever You shall go.” Nor must he ask to be loosened from the cross, but must desire to bear it, as it shall seem good to his Lord. Nor must he seek any consolation, either earthly or spiritual, which may soften or lessen his cross. No, rather, for the glory of his Beloved, he must be ready to bear it even to his last breath; nor must he seek any other reward for this, but only God’s honor and His good pleasure.

Lastly, those who thus carry their cross, these I call the true lovers and followers of Christ, for they seek not their own, but the things of Jesus Christ; even as St. Paul, that faithful lover of Christ, after those fearful and cruel crosses of which he made mention in his epistle, still desired to be an anathema for his brethren, the children of Israel; that is, to become accursed and separated from God, if only he could gain many to Christ. Moses, in like manner, desired to be blotted out of the book of life. In truth this is perfect charity, which seeks not its own, spares not itself, neither in time nor in eternity, if only God’s honor be increased. They are true lovers and followers of Christ, who repay Christ in some manner for His Death, by exposing their lives to danger, even as Christ laid down His life for them, and who desire their own loss, if they may gain Christ. Nor do such men despise anyone, but themselves rejoice to be despised; they magnify others and think them saints, but think little of themselves, and hold themselves as nothing-worth. These show themselves kind and gracious to all men, rigid and severe only to themselves. From others’ evils they draw forth virtues, and their own virtues they hold for sins, and all others compared with their own sinful selves they earnestly judge to be just and virtuous. Who can hesitate to call such men humble, and lovers and followers of Christ, since they have utterly denied themselves, and follow Christ with His Cross?

Nevertheless it is not enough, if You would perfectly please Your bridegroom Christ, merely to have taken up Your cross. If You would be made in any way like to Him, You must also go forth with Him.

For You read of Your Lord in the Gospel, that He went forth carrying His Cross. And to the virgins in the Gospel it is said: “Behold, the Bridegroom comes, go out to meet Him.” Where then, shall we go out? Out of the city, out of the crowd of men, out of all tumult and disturbance; yes, and so utterly out of our own selves, out of all selfishness, sensuality, pleasure, comfort; out of all unlawful love of creatures, and all that can stain our hearts; and lastly, out of all things in which we seek ourselves more than God’s simple honor, love and pleasure. Moreover, when we have thus gone out, we will then faithfully take our cross upon our shoulders, and keep close to Christ’s footprints; that is to say, we will gladly accept all afflictions and crosses whatever, whenever they come to us by God’s permission, and whenever they may come, whether from the evil spirit, or from our own faults and defects; and will lift them on our shoulders, that is, we will exercise ourselves in them; and so, at last, they will turn to our advantage.

But come now, and let us go back to Christ where we left Him; in the bloody hands, namely, of the cruel Jews. While Christ was walking along full of misery, under the heavy burden of the Cross, there were a few devout persons, mainly certain women, who were deeply moved by compassion for their Saviour, and wept exceeding bitterly. To these our Lord said: “Weep not for Me, you daughters of Jerusalem, but weep for yourselves, and for your children;” as if He would say: “I indeed stand in no need of your prayers, for of My own will I suffer this shameful Death, both for My Father’s glory and the salvation of all of you, and for all your sins and wickedness. It is not Me, therefore, Whom you should weep for, but weep rather for your own sins and those of your children, which cause Me all these pains. For it is your sins, and the contempt which I perceive My Father received from you, which weigh Me down far more heavily than the Cross which I bear. And soon My pain will pass away, but yours will endure for ever. For if your children do this in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? If I, Who never committed any sin, but am evergreen, and fruitful of all virtue, cannot, nevertheless, pass away out of this world without the fire of trouble and affliction, and the bitterness of suffering, what will be the fire, and flames, and the torments of hell, which You must look for,

who are dry and barren of good works, empty of virtue, and full of wickedness?” Here, St. Gregory truly said: “When I weigh with myself the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ, when I consider, too, the afflictions of Job, and the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, my heart shrinks for fear of the punishment prepared for sinners and all wicked men. For if God chastised so terribly His own dearest friends, what will He do to His enemies? If He thus punished their exceeding slight faults, without which this life can hardly be passed, what will be the severity with which He will punish those who, like senseless and thoughtless cattle, live according to the lusts of their own corrupt flesh?”