

DAY 22.

Jesus is fastened on the Cross.

AFTER this those inhuman butchers cruelly dragged Jesus towards the Cross, and when He beheld it, the Innocent Lamb saluted it with longing desire, saying in His Heart: “O Blessed Cross! how long have I desired to embrace you; for three-and-thirty years have I been held fast by the love of you, that on you I might work the salvation of men. O precious Wood! by which justice shall be done, and the debt of the liars paid. O most fruitful Wood! blessed among all trees of the earth, you alone have been found worthy to bear the fruit of life. O chosen Tree, chosen above all trees to bear the world’s ransom, become now the servant of your Creator, Who made you out of nothing.” ‘Then they laid the wounded Body of that innocent Lamb flat upon the rough Cross, and one hand they fastened by a thick nail, with repeated blows, so as to cause Him exceeding cruel agony. Oh! how beyond all power of suffering was this pain to our gentle Redeemer, Whose complexion was so tender and delicate, and Who was so utterly weak and exhausted by all the pains which He had already undergone. Oh! how those blows of the hammer, and the cruel nailing, pierced into the very inmost marrow of His Heart! What must have been His Heart’s pain, how measureless must have been His agony, when that great and blunt nail was hammered down with unutterable torment, through the veins, and nerves, and little bones which meet in the hand! Let every man weigh with himself, what must have been His agony! And because the nail was very blunt and heavy, it drew in the skin with it into the wound, which became so filled and blocked up, that the blood could not flow from it. And straightway they stretched the other hand towards the hole made in the other arm of the cross, in order to nail it in like manner. But because the hole was far off, and Christ’s Body was not a little contracted from cold, and blood-shedding, and all the pains He had already suffered, they stretched that hand with a rough rope, holding down, meanwhile, His other hand with extreme force. Thus did they stretch Christ’s sacred

arms with horrible pain, until they brought the hand to the place they desired, and there, in like manner, they pierced it with a great nail. After this, they first most cruelly stretched His sacred feet, and then fastened them with a horrible nail.

Look then, O my soul, on your Bridegroom, Who is both your God and your Maker, and see how He has gone up to the bed of His love; how wide He has stretched out His arms to embrace you; and how lovingly He has invited you to Himself, making use, as it were, of the words of the Song of Songs: “Come to Me, My sister, My bride, My dove; come, I say, into the holes of the rock, into My own sweet wounds. Come, for behold! I am ready, and our bed is covered with flowers, adorned with the roses of My wounds, and of My own precious blood. Come then, O my soul, with your whole self, and see all that your God has suffered for you. Behold, but with great compassion, how His sacred limbs have been stretched, and disjoined, and torn, and pulled, and disturbed far and wide out of their joints, so that not one cleaves to its own place, and they can all easily be numbered. Can there be any one who is not moved to compassion by such unutterable pain? Oh! how all His sacred limbs and nerves were stretched and bent like bows, as they were drawn one towards the other. Oh! how entirely He offered Himself for us, when He had not even one limb which was not tortured in horrible agony and labor, and wholly busied in the work of our salvation. For so inhumanly was He stretched, that one limb could bring no help to another, because all alike were tortured with suffering and pain beyond all comprehension. We, indeed, if we are visited with some slight wound, can hardly suffer any one even gently to touch it; yet the whole weight of Christ’s sacred Body pressed upon the wounds of His hands and feet. Oh! how pitifully were all His limbs and nerves contracted! how were all His inward parts troubled, and hurt, and worn away? This pain surpassed all grasp of human understanding; it was simply intolerable, yet it lasted for so long a time. Hence Venerable Bede said: “Christ hanging upon the Cross, His hands and feet fastened by nails, was consumed and worn away by a slow death, and He continued in pain, not because it was a pleasure for Him still to live, but lest His Passion might too soon be over.”

Let us, for a little while, be made partakers of this bitter Passion, for it was our sins which inflicted it upon the Son of God. Let us repay, in some poor way at least, our tender Lord for His Passion, so far as we are able. This surely will we do, if we wish to be conformed to His Crucifixion, and as St. Paul said, we will crucify the flesh with its damnable vices and concupiscences, by resisting them even to blood, and so wear it away by the afflictions of the Cross, that sin may no more reign in our mortal body, and the power of concupiscence may be held ever strongly bound by the fear of God. We will so conform ourselves to Christ's Crucifixion, as if we too lay stretched upon the Cross, by taking and drawing it into our hearts with all love, so that we may say with Andrew the Apostle: 'O good Cross, so long desired, and now, at last, prepared for a soul that loves you; behold, safely and gladly I come to you, so that you, too, may receive me with rejoicing, as a disciple of Him Who hung upon you; for ever have I been your lover, and ever have I desired to embrace you.'

Now this is to be understood not only of the cross of outward affliction, but of all distress and affliction, whether outward or inward, which shall happen unto us by God's permission; whether it be persecution, or annoyance, or contempt on the part of men, or the loss either of those who are dear to us, or of temporal things, or the temptation of the enemy, or inward anguish of mind on account of our want of progress; and all these crosses we will gladly take from God's hands, and stretch ourselves upon them, saying with holy David: "My heart has waited for reproach and misery." And not only these crosses will we suffer to be laid upon us, but we will, of our own accord, go further still, by crucifying ourselves, and holding ourselves up to contempt and mockery, and making ourselves out of no account; in a word, by stripping and scourging ourselves. Now this means that, when we are despised by others, we will slight our own selves, as of no account, and heartily confess that we are a hundredfold more vile, and more worthy of contempt and scorn, than all men can bring upon, us; indeed, that we are unworthy even to be despised by such noble creatures. Moreover, we

will scourge, and afflict, and crucify ourselves; that is, we will make our cross heavier, and we will plant it deeper within us, by exercising ourselves in it, as holy Job said: “I will speak in the trouble of my spirit, and I will hold converse with the bitterness of my soul.” For example: when we are utterly desolate and troubled in heart because of the sins of our past life, and our exceeding great negligences and various vices, and because our progress in virtue is simply nothing at all; then we will not straightway hurry to confession, in order to be relieved of all this trouble—for this would be to throw away the cross, and it is ever the devil’s counsel to us to say: “Come down from the cross, and save yourself,”—but bravely we will cling to the cross, to which we have been fastened with Christ, by even increasing our own cross, so as to consider within ourselves how little is this distress of ours, when compared with all the wrongs and contempt which we have inflicted on the Lord of majesty, by our exceeding great iniquities, and by very often having dared, vile worms though we are, to resist so great a Lord, and transgress His will, and by not having feared to offend so loving and faithful a Father, Who is ever embracing us with such Fatherly love, and heaping upon us so many benefits.

Moreover, we will think of God’s immense goodness, in that so mighty a Lord, Who might at once have avenged the wrong done to Him, has borne all this our contempt and shameless wickedness, with so much gentleness and long-suffering. The very elements cannot bear to see their Maker wronged, but, like David’s servants, when he was cursed and reviled by Shemei, lift themselves up and cry for vengeance on the wrongs done to their King. But our tender Lord commanded them to cease, saying: “Allow them to heap all this contempt upon Me; gladly will I bear it, that perhaps they may be converted and repent. For I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that they should turn from their wickedness, and live.”

Thus, then, our Lord Jesus Christ hung upon the Cross in all His immense pain, and with constancy endured His affliction; nor would He come down from the Cross either because of the curses and blasphemies of the Jews, or the immensity of His pain. But He made His torment still more grievous, by recalling to mind all the ingratitude of men, and all the wrong and contempt done and shown to His Father, and all the vengeance that would be visited upon them, and that in many His Passion would have no effect at all. Further, we will conform ourselves, to our Beloved on His Cross, that as He was lifted up from the earth, so we, too, may say with holy Job: “My soul has chosen to be hanged up, and my bones death;” and all our members; our hands, and feet, and hearts, and all the powers of our soul we will lift up, and stretch forth to God, as if to show Him praise, and love, and thanksgiving, and honor, and reverence, whereby all our inward parts may bless God, and all our bones cry out: “Lord, who is like unto you?”

Moreover, when we have thus, with our whole strength and our whole power, been lifted from earth towards heaven, and when we shall wait with a loving thirst for the heavenly dew and sweet influence of the Holy Ghost, saying with David: “Let my soul be filled with fat and good things, and my mouth shall utter praise with lips of rejoicing;” then, indeed, will our Lord teach us to sing a far different song from that which of old He taught the children of Israel in Babylon. For our jubilee will be turned into mourning, and our joy into grief, and instead of the songs of Sion, we shall sing with sorrowful voice: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me; I will call upon you in the day-time, and you shall not hear.” And this is that blessed hanging up which Job chose, and this the death which he desired, so as to be able to reach neither heaven nor earth, but to hang suspended between both. For to such a man earth is a cross, and he loathes it; and heaven is closed, and the clouds are forbidden to give their rain. So also did the same Job hang in his wretchedness and desolation, when he said: “If I go to the east, He appears not; if to the west, I shall not understand Him. If I go to the left, what shall I do? I cannot reach Him. If I turn to the right, I shall not see Him. But He knows my way, and He shall prove me like gold which passes through the fire. O truly blessed cross and holy

hanging!” And while we persevere in this pitiable thirst, and in crying and groaning towards heaven, our thirst will be quenched with vinegar and gall; that is, instead of the sweetness of devotion, we shall suffer bitter and unclean thoughts, and then again we shall say with Job: “The things which formerly my soul refused to touch, have now, in my distress, become my meat.” And again: “If I shall say, my bed shall comfort me, and I shall be refreshed, speaking with myself on my couch, you shall frighten me with dreams, and shake me with horror by visions;” that is, if we wish to return to our exercises on the bed of our retired and tranquil heart, where, with a loving soul, we were won by night to seek our God, and to receive many secret kisses, here you will terrify us with horrible forms and images, and phantoms of hell and darkness. Being, then, so utterly desolate, and not having anywhere, even for a moment, where to lay our head, how shall we contain ourselves? Where shall we receive consolation, except on our cross, saying with holy Job: “This is my consolation, that when He afflicted me with sorrow, He should not spare; and that He Who began, Himself should crush me.”

This danger, then, will we clearly incur, and expose our lives for His love, Who laid down His life for us, and in this desolation we will resign ourselves wholly to God, saying: “Lord, into your hands and your will I commend my soul, now and forever.”

But now let us go back to our Beloved’s bed, that is, the Holy Cross, where our Love was pitiable stretched and lifted up. Oh! in what anguish was God’s sweet Virgin-Mother Mary! How each blow of the hammers, as she heard it during her Son’s crucifixion, beat down her tender heart! How perfectly did she bear in herself the image of the Cross, being herself impressed with its form, and, as it were, transformed into it. Nor can we doubt that through her great compassion she was fastened with her Son to the Cross, and that she suffered inwardly, what Christ suffered outwardly. Let us, too, stand for a little while with our most loving Mother by the Cross. It is good for us to stand here for a

little while, for from there flow rivers of graces and gifts. And let us also, together with our afflicted Mother Mary,—if we be the children of grace—be wounded by sorrow and compassion in our inmost souls, towards Christ’s cruel Passion; for He is our brother, our own flesh and blood, and all that is ours is the sins for which He is thus afflicted. Let us mount up with burning love and devotion upon our Beloved’s bed, for He is waiting for us with exceeding great desire, and His arms are wide open to receive us. In order to kiss us, He has bowed down His Head; let us, then, lift up all the powers of our soul, and all our members towards Him, that we may clasp Him in a loving embrace, and with devout reverence let us press Him to our hearts, saying with the spouse in the Cantic of Canticles: “A bundle of myrrh is my Beloved to me. He shall dwell between my breasts.” Our heart, let it be His pleasant pillow, where He may rest His Sacred Head, which has hung so long in such grievous pain, without anything to bear upon. Oh! I pray of you, let us not pass by this blessed bed of the Holy Cross, for it is our bed; but with the spouse of the Cantic, let us seek, by the light of the torches of love, on our own bed for Him Whom our soul loves. For whatever we see weak in Him, He has taken on Him for the love of us, and from us, and His infirmity is our health and medicine.

Now, with our whole understanding, let us search out the high mystery of this venerable bed of the Cross.

So great and so measureless is the glory of the Cross, that there is nothing in it without mystery. First of all, it was made of two pieces of wood, which signify the two Testaments. For whatever the Old Testament foretold by writing and in figure, all that the New Testament announced as truly fulfilled. Moreover, these two pieces of wood are joined together by Christ’s firm faithfulness as by a strong nail, and are sealed with Christ’s seal. And the Holy Cross itself, like a true bed, has four corners, towards which the sacred members of the Son of God were stretched, that thereby it might be given us clearly to understand, that He embraced the whole race of man; that is, all men, in one common

love, and that He, as a true lover, desires to draw them all to Himself upon His bed, from the four corners of the world. For He died for all, and desired all men, without distinction, to be saved. And this, too, is set forth and hinted by the very form of the Cross. For its upper part signifies that He wished to restore the ruins of the angels; the lower part, that He redeemed the Fathers from Limbo. The right-hand side, that He protected His own friends, and blessed them. The left-hand side, that He wished to draw to Himself, and convert His enemies, and all sinners. By the upper end is signified the opening of heaven; by the lower, the overthrow of hell; by the right arm, the diffusion of grace; by the left, the forgiveness of sins. Let us, then, according to the Apostle's instruction, be of like mind with Christ Jesus; that is, let us conform ourselves spiritually to the Cross, so as to prepare a pleasant bed for Christ in our souls, a bed constructed with four corners, of which one shall look upwards, and another downwards, and the third within, and the fourth without. These are the four paths of life, which not only lead us to paradise, but adorn us with such pleasant beauty, that we are made a paradise of delights to God Himself, and that, as from the earthly paradise, four rivers exceeding pleasant may go forth from us, leaping up into life everlasting.

The highest corner, indeed, of this bed, or the highest extremity, is to open and stretch forth our hearts and all our desires, with our whole strength, towards God in love, gratitude, praise, reverence, lowly resignation, obedience, and subjection, so that at all moments we desire to pay to God as great a tribute of praise and honor as all creatures could wish to offer throughout endless ages. Yet not even with this, ought our burning thirst to be satisfied, but we ought also humbly to pray to God, that He would Himself perfect His own praise, which no creature can perfect or even understand. The lowest extremity is to cast ourselves down so deeply in great humility, and to humble and drown ourselves therein, and to hold ourselves of such little moment, as not only to deem ourselves the vilest and most worthless of sinners in the whole world, but to desire to be esteemed such by all men, and that such may be the opinion of all men with regard to us. For truly, every man ought so to cast himself down into the lowest depths, as not even to be able, by all the gifts and graces of God, to be lifted up,

but the more bountiful and abundant the gifts and graces which God pours out upon him, so much the more ought he to humble himself, and to esteem himself of no moment, and to tell of and praise God's goodness, making it his whole care to wonder how God, who is so high and glorious, should have remembered even for one moment so useless, worthless, poor, and utter a worm, and that He should grant to work through him even anything at all. And the outward extremity is to be widely stretched out towards all creatures, so as to embrace all things, and all beings in heaven and on earth, and in purgatory.

And first, indeed, let us embrace the blessed spirits of heaven with loving fervor, by congratulating them on their glory, and by giving God thanks for the same, as if we ourselves enjoyed it. Then, too, let us embrace the souls imprisoned in purgatory, by suffering with them as greatly in their pains and torments, as if we ourselves bore their pains, and let us help them to the utmost of our power. Thirdly, let us be stretched out towards the rest of men, by embracing them all with love, and excluding no one, and by helping every one, and lightening every one's burden so far as we are able; and this with such love of our hearts, as to grieve that there should be even one who is beyond our help; and by performing all our works with such great love, as to wish to be of as much service to all men as to ourselves. Thus, then, let us so turn ourselves to what is outward, as ever to abide within, or at least to be able without hindrance to return within, and that thus our going out may be in reality our coming in. For, fourthly,—and this is that extremity which looks within,—we ought, with Moses, deeply to press down all our faculties into the inward recesses, in the secret and only solitude or desert of our quiet heart, until we have passed beyond, and lost all multiplicity and unrest, and may reach, together with the same Moses, unto the adoring gaze of God's face, where in silence we will do homage to our Lord. There we shall hear God's inward voice crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." Of this wilderness our Lord speaks in Hosea: "I will lead her," He said, that is, the loving soul, "into solitude, and there I will speak to her heart." These are the four corners or four horns of the Holy Cross and Bed of Love. And truly, whoever has

constructed and made ready his bed, may with confidence invite his Lover, Christ, in the words of the loving soul, and say: “Come, my Beloved, for our bed is green with flowers.”