

DAY 21.

Jesus is again stripped of His garments.

AFTER this they again cruelly tore off the garments of our Lord and Saviour, and left Him as shamefully naked as when He came forth from His Mother's womb. For as Adam had broken the law, so Christ wished to cancel our debts and sins. Adam was overcome by seeking for garments, Christ conquered by being stripped of His garments. Therefore, although our Lord Jesus, both at His birth and His whole life long, was poor indeed, yet on the Cross He desired to offer to us a perfect example and form of true poverty, by thus suffering Himself to be stripped naked, so as not even to have a thread left Him, by which He might cover His pure and modest members, or anything on which to lean His sacred Head. But as naked He had come into the world, signifying by this that He had no dealings with the world, so naked He went out of the world. For He spoke: "The prince of this world comes, and has nothing in Me;" that is, nothing of his own. In truth, He so lived in this wicked world, that not even the slightest dust of the desire of possession clung to Him. Lastly, for His greater shame and dishonor, He was hung up naked in the sight of His bitterest enemies and mockers. For it was not the custom to crucify naked those who were guilty of death, unless they were notorious criminals, who, as an example for others, were obliged to suffer a horrible death. Adam also, when he had lost his innocence, hastened to clothe himself with garments: but Christ was stripped naked that He might preserve the purity of innocence whole and unhurt; nor had He need of any covering.

Look, now, O my soul! with inward compassion and sorrow of heart, upon Your sweet Redeemer and Lover. See, how the King of glory, Who clothed and covered all things, the heaven with clouds, the trees with leaves, the earth with grass and flowers, is Himself stripped of all clothing even to the skin. See, how the Lord of lords is made a pattern of true poverty, and be ashamed after this, to murmur,

and complain, and to be cast down in mind when anything is taken from you, or you are left in inward or outward poverty. Learn from this to follow Jesus, poor, and naked, and forsaken; despise whatever the world has, in order that you may merit to embrace Your naked Savior with your own naked arms, and in turn to be clasped in His embrace, and united to Him in naked love. Observe, I pray, how He, Who is the beauty of heaven, is here disfigured, how the height of heaven is brought low, how the clear mirror of purity is uncovered, because unworthy of any covering, since there was no stain in Him that it was necessary to hide. For our Lord Himself said of Himself: "Which of you convinced Me of sin?" Nevertheless, there is no one who can ever understand the grievous pain which ate into His most pure Heart, when He was forced to bear that great confusion and shame; above all, when He had to hang upon the Cross so shamefully in the sight of His purest Mother. Let us see, I pray for you, with great compassion, with what pitiless rage those cruel dogs tore off our Lord's garments, the very hem of which had healed the woman who labored with a bloody flux. Who does not see how cruel must have been that sorrow and torment, when they tore off with such fury and cruelty the garment which had clung to His wounds, and became fastened to them with His Blood, thus, doubtless, causing all His wounds to bleed afresh? Let every man weigh the greatness of this pain in his own heart. And, as is the opinion of some, they again pressed down on His Sacred Head, with incredible torment, the crown of thorns, which they had torn from it, so that there is no pain which can be compared with this.

Come now, O my soul, and meditate upon the agony of Him Who is the joy of heaven. See how His whole Body was again wounded, all His sacred wounds opened afresh, while they streamed with His purest Blood. Behold how His blessed Head, which even the angelic powers gaze at and tremble, and which the Venerable Baptist, St. John, shrunk from touching, was afflicted and tortured by those savage dogs; while the thorns, which again had been placed upon it, inflicted new wounds, so that wound was added to wound. Observe, I beg of you, how that Royal Blood of His, mingled with brain, flowed down in streams from all His wounds over His face and neck, even to the ground; and

how that disfigured Body, so pitiably cut and torn, and which was but one large gaping wound, was now exposed to the wind and cold, and was stiffened thereby. Yet that most meek Lamb bore all this cruel and horrible agony, not only with patience, but with great desire. Oh! how He stood there trembling with cold, and streaming with blood! Oh! how were all His wounds made larger and deeper, when they madly tore away His garments, and forced one wound to flow into the other, so that our tender Lord Jesus Christ, ever to be embraced with all love, became but one bleeding wound. Here, indeed, was that living well of measureless loving-kindness, from which flows to us in all abundance whatever we may desire. Truly, out of His Sacred Body there flowed forth rivers of His precious Blood, which is the price of our salvation and redemption; out of His mouth there came forth sacred words to be the food of our minds; out of His eyes there flowed forth tears of love in torrents, as a proof of His loving-kindness; out of His Heart there sprang that burning love, which forced Him to undergo all that cruel pain; in a word, out of all His actions there flowed forth, in rich abundance, instruction, discipline, and moral teaching for ourselves, whereby we may draw from His Passion not only the payment of our debts, but also a perfect and absolute rule for our life. Who has such a heart of stone, as not to be moved by these immense benefits, indeed, drawn to love?

Lastly, our Lord Jesus was not only stripped naked, but so utterly stripped of all things, as never again to be clothed any more, but to die in that poor nakedness, and naked poverty. Come now, all you faithful, and let us mourn in every limb of our body, since our Lord stands here before us, streaming with blood from all His members. Certainly, that innocent Lamb desired to be stripped so shamefully naked, in order to clothe our deformity, and to give us back again the robe of innocence, which of old we had lost through the treachery of a certain wicked servant. Oh! what crosses our sweet Jesus underwent in His Heart, when He saw the hatred, and rage, and deceit, and bloodthirstiness of the Jews, how they made exceeding haste to adjust the Cross, and to urge on the executioners, so as to hurry on Christ's death; for to them it was a great inward cross to be forced to see our Lord and Saviour for so long a time moving before them.

Come then, O my soul, and set Your Lord and Saviour before the eyes of Your heart, and imagine that you see Jesus, the Bridegroom and delight of Your soul, standing before you so pitifully crimsoned with blood, and mangled with wounds, and disfigured, and heart-broken, in order to espouse you in Your foulness as His bride, and to cleanse, heal, and adorn you, and to free you from all Your debt. How can't you suffer to see the Beloved of Your heart so miserably treated? Will you not desire with Your whole heart to be utterly dissolved in tears, in order to wash the all-wounded Body of Your Beloved, and to cleanse it from all its disfigurement? O happy you, if all the marrow of Your bones, and Your very heart's blood, could be distilled in ointment so as to anoint all Your Bridegroom's wounds! Oh! that Your heart itself might be melted in the fire of love, and be changed into grateful food for the sweetening of the mouth of Your Beloved, which has been made so bitter by the vinegar and gall. And although you can't do none of these things in reality, yet in desire you will do them, and that is enough for Your Beloved, Who weighs Your heart rather than Your deeds. Therefore, when you have thus washed and anointed Your Bridegroom, lay Him to rest with great devotion and reverence on the sweet bosom of God His Father, as on the most pleasant bed that you can think of; place His worshipful Head, which has been so cruelly punctured by sharp thorns, and which hung so long upon the Cross without anything to rest upon, on the tender breast of God, as on the softest pillow that you can find, that He may take His rest.

But let us go back to our sweet Lord, Whom we left standing in such wretched plight, and worn away by such cruel pains. Let us, I pray, impress so deeply upon our hearts this His pitiable image, that never more it may be blotted out of our remembrance. There, too, we may imagine, as some affirm, how Christ Jesus—Who never allowed His spirit to rest from prayer and desire of work—when the executioners were busied in preparing for His death, knelt down with His bare and bleeding knees upon the ground, and lifting up His Heart, and eyes, and hands towards heaven, to God His Father,

offered Him the noble sacrifice of His Passion, for the reconciliation of the human race, in these or like words:

“O Father of heaven, Eternal God, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all creatures, I pray to you, I beseech you, you Who always hears Me, accept now the sacrifice and oblation of Your only Son; accept My most bitter Passion and My guiltless death, which now out of love I desire to suffer for all the sins and trespasses of the world. I come not into Your presence with another’s blood, or with the blood of sheep, but My own Blood do I shed as full payment for the debts of fallen man. Look down, I beseech you, Holy Father, on My humble prayers, on My labor and My sorrow, and on this cruel Passion of Mine, and graciously accept My death, which I have never deserved, but which in My great love I desire to undergo for the sins of all men, so as to destroy death, which Adam brought into the world by his sin. Let Your anger, I beseech You; be turned into mercy, and open to lost man the gate of heaven, which for his sin You have utterly closed for so many thousand of years, and give him in Your fatherly mercy a place in Your everlasting kingdom, that by him the ruins of the wicked angels may be built again, and Your house filled, and Your Holy Name praised and blessed for ever and forever! Amen.