

DAY 40.

Jesus is taken down from the Cross.

LET us now see how sad a funeral, and what mournful funeral rites the spotless Virgin, and the other friends of our Saviour, celebrated over the dead body of Christ. Oh! with what desire and devotion did the tender Virgin embrace the Cross of Christ her Son, and reverently receive the blood and water which flowed from His side. Oh! how often did she stretch out her arms towards Him, and desire also to clasp and embrace Him with her outward arms, Him Whom she had already impressed and engraven on her heart! Oh! with what devotion, and how lovingly did she fold Christ's now lifeless body, when it had been taken down from the Cross, in her maternal arms, and press it to her heart! But, at the same time, how were all her inward parts moved with fresh compassion! How was her soul, like wax in the fire, melted in love, and her whole self dissolved in tears! O how she fell upon that disfigured face of His, as it lay there in its shame, and kissed it again and again, and not only washed it, but plentifully watered it with her warm tears! And Christ's faithful lover, too, Magdalene, how devoutly she fell at His feet—at which she had formerly obtained such grace—and washed them again in her tears, and kissed His sacred wounds, showing to His dead body the same kindness and love as when He was yet alive. How great was the compassion of all Christ's friends there present, and how burning was their love, so that they who stood by felt its heat, even as men are warmed by the fire near which they stand. Oh! how sad were the tears that flowed in streams from their eyes over Christ's Body! What groans and sighs they sent up to heaven! how sad a funeral they justly gave our Lord! No song was heard there, nothing but groans, and tears, and lamentations. Oh! how did the worshipful Mother count each limb and wound, and look into it, and kiss it, weeping over each, and washing it with her tears; indeed, engraving each upon her own heart, and weighing with herself and measuring the pains of each limb, and heaving sighs such as pass our understanding; and, at the same

time, according to her heart's desire, making an ointment of the blood and marrow of her heart in her burning love, and anointing all His wounds and sores. Oh! how did the burning tears flow down that tender Mother's sweet face, like gentle streams running one before the other, as if striving which should first reach Christ's Body! Certainly, as blessed Augustine said, "Which of the angels could then have kept from tears, when he saw his King and Lord wasted away by so foul and shameful a death, and beheld, contrary to all nature, how the Maker of nature, the God Who cannot die, in a human nature sought after death? How did the bright Cherubim and burning Seraphim marvel at this unutterable love, when they beheld that Life itself had died for love, that the dead might return to life; for these blessed and heavenly spirits saw before them Christ's Body so inhumanly torn, mangled and lifeless, as well as His tender Mother, as she stood there so anxiously embracing Him, all stained with His Blood, and shedding such streams of pitiful tears that she could not restrain them.

And what shall we say of St. John? Now, as we may imagine, he conformed himself to the sorrowing Mother in his own tears and sorrow, and became her most faithful companion. How gently and tenderly he exhorted her, now for a little while, at least, to lay aside her excessive grief, and leave off weeping. Oh! how he, too, threw himself in his bitter anguish and distress of spirit on Christ's sacred breast, on which he had lately so sweetly rested, pouring back the water of loving tears into that well, from which he had drank the water of saving wisdom.

Then Joseph, and John, and the other friends of Jesus, earnestly begged the Blessed Virgin to allow our Lord's Body to be arranged and made ready for burial, for the sun was near its setting. Then, too, the tender Mother answered with words of lamentation: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends; tear me not away so quickly from my beloved Son; take not away from me so hastily Him Whom I bore in my womb; allow me, at least, to enjoy Him dead, Whom I have not been able to keep alive. Let me, I pray, show to His lifeless Body that love and tenderness which was not

shown to His living Body during His Passion. Let me now water with my tears Him to Whom I was not allowed to give one drop of water, even during His cruel thirst. Let me for a while satisfy my soul with tears and sighs, since I am no longer able to find refreshment in His sweet presence. Do not, do not, I beseech you, tear the Mother from her Son; take not so quickly from me Him Whom I have loved so long, or, at least, bury me along with my most loving Son.”

Thus were they sore distressed, for the sun now going down towards its setting, urged them on to the burial of His Body; yet they were moved to compassion for the exceeding bitter sorrows of His Mother, nor did they wish to overwhelm her already too afflicted heart. Therefore, for a little while, they allowed her love to work, so that she might satisfy for a while, at least, her burning thirst. But afterwards St. John soothed her with sweet and prudent words, and begged her to allow them to bury her Son, and she, not however without grief, consented. But oh! how devoutly, how sorrowfully did she follow that sad funeral of her Son, holding His sacred head, her eyes fixed upon His face, while she kissed it times without number, and watered it with her tears! Whence, I ask, did that sad Mother have all those tears which she shed today? How could her tender heart bear this intolerable anguish and distress? Truly, it was all her burning love, which was stronger than death itself. Oh! with what grief and mourning she bade farewell to so dear and precious a treasure! How lovingly she embraced His tomb, as if she would say, not indeed with her lips,—for how could she, plunged as she was in such anguish of soul?—but in her heart: O sacred monument! O happy tomb! O precious rock! O pearl beyond all price! O admirable ciborium! how noble a treasure, how excellent a prize, how immense a Lord do you contain? O elect vessel! O happy creature, that is found worthy to receive your Creator, and to give hospitality to the King of glory, lay aside now your natural hardness and roughness, and become soft, so as reverently to embrace the tender limbs of my beloved Son. O glorious ark! O excellent temple of God, above all creatures the most like unto myself! For even as I myself was chosen by God to bear His Son in my chaste womb, so has He chosen you to receive Christ’s worshipful Body, the glorious instrument of the most blessed Trinity, by which God worked

so many marvels, the priceless treasure of the world, and its chief good, surpassing the heavens and the earth in its excellence and worth. And even as you are new, nor has ever been polluted by the contact of any body, so I, too, am pure and free from the touch of all creatures. Even as from you, although closed, the Saviour of the world shall rise again alive, so from my closed womb the salvation of the world went forth. And even as you are a rock solid and immoveable, so have I remained unchangeable, and unconquered in faith and all virtue.

Moreover, this sepulcher of our Lord has a certain resemblance in form to the spiritual monument which the Blessed Virgin had made ready for her loving Son in her own heart. For as the sepulcher was cut out and polished with sharp iron, so the glorious Virgin allowed a fitting place to be cut in the inmost parts of her soul by the sword of sorrow, as a monument exceeding suitable for the afflicted and tortured Body of her Son; for God loves a humble and broken heart. And as in this sepulcher no man had as yet been laid, so no strange love or affection had ever stained, even in the least, the Virgin Mother's tender heart. For she is that closed door, which to no man has ever been opened, through which alone the Prince and the King of Israel have gone forth. Moreover, the monument was in a garden; and so, too, the spotless Virgin was the enclosed garden of her Beloved, surrounded by the hedge of prudence and discretion, since she was full of such light and discretion, that never could any evil, under the cloak of virtue, steal into her garden. Nor was there on any side of her garden even the least opening through which the hateful and impure serpent could only once cast his eyes, who had dared not only to enter into the glory of paradise, but even to defile it. And this garden was fruitful, and planted with the herbs of all kinds of virtues, so that there was no place for any kind of weeds to spring up. For the singular glory of this pure Virgin, the flower of the field, and the lily of the valley, grew therein, even the excellent and aromatic flower of Jesse, on which the Holy Spirit has rested, and the pleasant rose of Jericho. And, for a clear sign of her divine and singular benediction, there sprang up that blessed Vine, whose branches stretch up on high, and whose smell drives all poison and all serpents far away; whose wine, rejoices and warms the heart,

and, according to the Prophet, buds forth virgins. Our Lord's holy Mother had also a pure garment of simple obedience, innocence and integral virginity. Nor were there wanting to her the aloes of bitter sorrow, and the myrrh of intolerable affliction. She had also a precious balm, the ointments, and spices of all virtues.

Thus, then, she anointed and wrapped Christ her Son, and buried Him in the sacred monument of her own heart. But now let us consider how sorrowfully the afflicted Mother departed from the monument. How continual was her thought of Him Whom she had lost, and how priceless a treasure she had suffered to be hidden under the stone. Oh! how pitiably was she led away, all exhausted and worn, from the sepulcher, by St. John and her other friends. In truth, whoever has no compassion for one so afflicted, so sorrowing, so grievously troubled, who is, at the same time, the Virgin Mother, indeed, our Lady, is no living child of grace, but an ending, senseless, and dead, and unworthy to draw the milk of grace from his mother's breasts. But we, as has been said, will, together with the Virgin Mother, bury Christ Jesus in our hearts, so that He may also rise again in us, and that we, by Him and in Him, may rise from all dead works, and with Him may mount up in all happiness to the glory of His Father, He Himself being our help, Who is blessed for ever. Amen.