

DAY 32.

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

ABOUT the ninth hour our Lord Jesus cried with a loud voice: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He cried with a loud voice, that He might easily be heard by all, and, at the same time, by this wonderful word, might shake off the slumber of sloth from our souls, and cause them to marvel and be astonished at God’s immense goodness towards us. He said, therefore: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Why? For the sake of vile sinners, for the sake of wicked and ungrateful servants, for the sake of sinful and disobedient liars, You have forsaken Your Beloved Son, and most obedient Child. That the vessels of wrath, Your enemies, might be changed into the children of adoption, You have slain Your own Son, and, as a sinner, have delivered Him over to death. O My God, why, I pray to You, have You forsaken Me? For the very reason why men ought to praise and thank You, for the very reason why they ought to love You with everlasting love; because, namely, You have delivered Your dear Son to death for their redemption, and gladly sacrificed Him, for this reason they will draw matter for blasphemy and shameful reproach against You, saying: “He said, He is the Son of God, and that He hoped in God. Let God deliver Him now if He will.” Why, My God, have You desired to spend so precious a treasure for such vile and adulterated merchandise?

Moreover, this word may be taken to mean that it was spoken by Christ against those who endeavor to lessen the glory of His Passion, by saying that it was not so bitter or terrible after all, because of the great help and support He derived from His Godhead. Now those who say and think this, let them know that they renew His Passion, and crucify Him afresh; and, therefore, to prove the error of these men, our Lord cried with a loud voice, and said: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” as if He said these words to His own divine nature, with which He formed one Person—and the

Godhead of the Father and of the Son is one and the same—marveling, Himself, at His own love, which had so cast Him down, and worn Him away, and humbled Him, and that He, Who brought help to all men, should have forsaken Himself, and exposed Himself to every kind of pain, led to do this, and conquered by love alone.

Nor, again, should we be wrong, were we to interpret this word which Christ spoke out of the immensity and vehemence of His sorrow in this sense: namely, that this Spirit and inward man, taking upon itself God's severe judgment upon all sinners, and, at the same time, clearly seeing, and perfectly feeling and measuring in Himself the intolerable weight of His Passion, on this account cried out with sorrowful voice to His Father, and poured forth tender complaints, because He had been plunged into these horrible torments; as if His Father's goodness had become so embittered against the sins of men, that in the heat of justice He had utterly forgotten the inseparable union between His passible Humanity and His impassible Godhead, and therefore, in the fiery zeal of justice, had delivered His passible nature wholly up to the cruelty and malignity of savage men, and had given it over to them, that they might waste it away, and bring it down to nothing. For this reason, then, He said: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

This word has, besides, an inward meaning; according to which Christ, in His sensitive parts, made a complaint to His Father, that He had been forsaken by Him. For as many as contend for His honor, and bear in patience the adversities of this world, our tender God so moderates and temperates their crosses and afflictions by the in-pouring of His Divine consolation, that by this sensible grace He rendered their whole cross nearly insensible: but He left His own Beloved Son utterly without any comfort, and so stripped Him of every consolation and light, that He suffered as much in His human nature, as the Eternal Wisdom had determined and decreed, according to the rigor of justice, and as much as was required, according to the same rigor, to atone for so many sins. And, indeed, our

salvation was so much the more nobly and perfectly repaired, as it was accomplished and finished without any light whatsoever, in utter resignation and abandonment. For the chief cause of Christ's Passion was to show clearly how great was the wrong and contempt brought upon His most high Godhead by the sins of the human race. Now, as Christ's knowledge was higher and more subtle than that of all beings, whether in heaven or on earth together, so much the greater, therefore, and heavier, was His sorrow and anguish. Indeed,—and this is the most marvelous of all—whatever afflictions have been experienced by all the saints, as Christ's members, existed in far greater abundance in Christ their Head, as in the source of all sorrow: but this, of course, I wish to be understood according to the spirit and according to reason. For all the saints that have ever been, have suffered no more than flowed in upon them through Christ united to them His members; Who communicated to them His own afflictions. Truly it was He Who suffered in them, rather than they themselves. For He drew upon Himself the affliction of all the saints, out of His great love for His members, and marvelous compassion, and He felt them with far more interior agony than any of the saints; indeed, more than even the most blessed Virgin Mary, God's Mother, felt her own sharp sorrow and sickness of soul. For if an earthly father loves his child so much, that in his fatherly compassion he takes upon him his child's sorrows, so as to grieve for them as if he suffered them himself, what must have been Christ's Cross and Christ's compassion, at the affliction of His members, above all, of those who suffered for His Name's sake? Truly, He bore clear witness to His members, how much He suffered from their afflictions, how great was His inward compassion for their pains, when He took all their debt upon Him, and did away with all the punishments they had deserved, so that they might go free. The same is more than sufficiently borne out by the words He addressed to St. Paul, when He said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" For the persecution which Paul had stirred up against the disciples, that is, the members of our Lord, was no less grievous unto Him than if He had borne it Himself. Hence He said to His friends and members: "He who touches you, is as one who touches the apple of My eye." For is there anything suffered by the members which the Head does not suffer with them, Whose nature is goodness, and Whose property is to have mercy and to spare?

After our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary was of all the most desolate, because, above all others, He had given her a share of His own sorrow and abandonment, so that, so far as was possible, her cross might be conformed to His own Cross and affliction, and that, at the same time, she might feel as great woe for the Death of so great a Son, as was pleasing unto God, and as became so great a Mother. Most true, therefore, were the words which Isaiah spoke concerning her: “The Lord has called you a woman that is forsaken, and is in sorrow.” Thus, too, our Lord’s abandonment is spoken of in the person of Elisha: “With zeal was I inflamed for the Lord God of Hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken the covenant of the Lord. They have destroyed Your altars, they have slain Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I, am left alone, and behold they seek my life to take it away.” Moreover, this word of Christ may be taken to express Christ’s acknowledgment and confession of His own spotless innocence, and perfect justice, and also His wonder at the severe sentence of God His Father; so that, in the excess of His wonder, He broke out into that sad cry: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” My God, Whose nature is goodness, and Whose property is to have mercy, and to help the oppressed and the innocent, why have You allowed Me to waste away by a bitter death, giving Me over into the hands of My enemies, and delivering Me over to their cruel will, although never, even for one moment, I have departed from the path of Your justice, but have most perfectly performed all virtues, in accordance with Your Divine will; as if He had said: “I, indeed, find no cause in Me, nor do I acknowledge any fault, by reason of which You ought, even for a moment, to forsake Me, for I have ever worshiped You and adored You with due homage. Yet, if You wish to glorify Yourself through Me, and to declare unto men Your Fatherly goodness, Your Divine mercy, and Your immense love, by this, Your abandonment of Me, Your will be done; into Your hands I wholly commend Myself.”

Lastly, we may suppose that this word expressed the twofold nature of Christ's Humanity, and therefore our Lord said twice: "My God, My God," as if both His Manhood and His Godhead made complaint to God. First of all, indeed, His rational or inner nature cried out, both from the immensity of His anguish and from natural affection and love and compassion towards His sensitive part; "My God, why have You forsaken Me, and left Me in such horrible pain and intolerable anguish, deprived of comfort and relief?" Then, too, in its turn, His sensitive nature cried out from the agony of these unutterable pains: "My God, why have You left Me in such cruel torments? Why have You cast off from You, as if in anger, Your purest instrument, whereby You have worked so pleasantly, and delightfully, and marvelously, and which was ever obedient to You in all things?" In truth, the greatness of Christ's inward and outward affliction no man has ever known, save Christ Himself. Hence it is that no man knows how to compassionate Him. Yet He, besides all His own grievous torment, was compelled to feel and bear the sorrows and pains of all who suffer with Him. Now if many, not from grace but from nature, suffer not a few grievous things with a light heart, this is because they are hard as iron, and insensible, and therefore their hard and stony hearts are touched with no sorrow or compassion either for their own or others' afflictions. But Christ, because He was of all men the tenderest and most merciful, in nature too, and character, and complexion, the gentlest and the noblest, had exceeding great compassion for Himself, for no one could measure or know the bitterness and weight of what He suffered, save Himself alone. Hence this twofold sorrow and pressure of Christ's Passion and compassion, like two sea-waves tempest-tossed, surging and striking one against the other, so beat against every part of Christ, inwardly and outwardly, and wore Him away, and racked and tortured Him, as to pass all understanding, and indeed, that this was so, He Himself declared at the very outset of His Passion, when the sensitive and rational parts of His nature, like two torrents, rushed one upon the other with mighty force, and so afflicted our Lord, that in His exceeding anguish His sweat was both of blood and water. For even as then His sensitive nature cried out from great compassion: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me;" so, too, now it said: "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And even as His rational nature added: "If

this chalice cannot pass from Me, except I drink it, Your will be done;” so, too, now it cries out: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit.” Now not a little weight was added to Christ’s sorrows, because, even to His last breath, He had the sense of feeling in all His members, and this sense was alive and perfect; nor was it dulled or extinguished by any stupor; as may easily be seen from the fact that it was with a loud voice that He cried out, and gave up the ghost. And so, to the very last moment of His life, He suffered in like manner in all His members.