

DAY 39.

Jesus is pierced with the lance.

AFTER this, by reason of the Paschal solemnity, on which it was inappropriate that the bodies should remain on the Cross, the Jews asked of Pilate, that the legs of those who had been crucified might be broken, and their bodies taken away: and when permission had been given, they first of all broke the thieves' legs. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that He was already dead, they broke not His legs; but one of the soldiers, Longinus by name, opened His right side with a lance, and straightaway there flowed forth blood and water. O fearful cruelty of the Jews! O pitiless and unquenchable thirst, which after so much blood-shedding was still not quenched! While His Body was yet alive you heaped upon it torments greater than any tyrant would have done, and now when it is lifeless you spare it not. This the Jews did out of craft and singular wickedness; for they knew that dishonour shown to the dead, would be held to be the same as if done to the living; and they wished to persuade all men that our Saviour's wickedness and guilt were so great, that they could not be adequately punished in His living Body, and therefore that it was necessary cruelly to torture His dead Body. They sought also by this to obtain the favor of the chief-priests, who wished to have sure proof of His death.

Moreover, although our Lord's Body felt nothing of this, since it was dead, and without feeling; yet in another certain way our Lord was afflicted; that is, in the same way in which He even now suffers and is afflicted at the hands of many, who swear by His sacred wounds and Passion, and who, by their grievous crimes, both wrong and insult Him, more bitterly than they who crucified Him in the Body. For He receives far more insult to His divine Majesty, where He is one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, than by those outward torments inflicted on Him during His Passion.

Yet who can grasp in thought how fearfully this lance pierced and wounded the devout soul of His tender Mother Mary, whose soul and heart dwelt, indeed, in the Body of her dear Son, Who was her whole love and treasure? For if we are to believe Augustine, “there is more of the soul in loving than in living.” Moreover, Bernard also said: “In truth, O sweet Mother, the sword of sorrow pierced your soul rather than the cruel lance tore the Body of your Son, for there was your soul rather than His. Therefore you are the chief of martyrs, for your measureless inward sorrow surpassed the outward torments of the martyrs.”

We have a certain kind of figure of this in Saul, who was first chosen by God, but afterwards was cast off for his sins, and who is a type of the Jewish people. The Jewish people desired to pierce David with a lance, but David, that is the Soul of Christ, fled away through the gate of death; and the lance remained fixed in the wall, that is, in the side of Christ’s Body, which was sorely wounded by that. So also we read of Absalom, that as he was hanging from the tree, he was pierced by three lances. And this, too, can be applied to Christ, Who was beautiful above the sons of men. For He, too, was pierced by three lances. The first was His great suffering from His outward affliction. The second was His measureless sorrow, arising from His compassion for His tender Mother. The third was His inward cross, because of our exceeding ingratitude, and because He foresaw that His bitter Passion and immense labors and torments would be without effect for a great part of men. O, how many, alas! are to be found at the present day, who, like the Jews, persecute our Lord, and, moreover, when they have crucified Him, fearfully wound Him. This is done by those who, after that they have once crucified our Lord by deadly sins, and have witnessed signs and wonders; after that their earth has trembled at the voice and inspiration of God, and their stony heart has been softened, and the filthy sepulcher of their conscience has been opened, and the foul bones of their sins have been cast out by contrition and confusion; after that the worms have been driven out by absolution and forgiveness;

after that they have received the enlightenment of heavenly grace, and striking their breasts have said: “What have we done? truly this was the Son of God Whom we have crucified!” again wound Christ, and persecute Him by shameful mockery and indignities. For is not this to mock Christ, when they confess His power and majesty, and then so lightly despise the commandments of so powerful and high a Lord, and resist His will?

Moreover, the Evangelist said of this lance, in a marked manner, not that it wounded Christ, but that it opened His side, signifying thereby that the gate of life was opened to us. For the wound in Christ’s side is the gate of the Sacraments, without which we have no access to the life of bliss. Therefore, also, the Evangelist added: “And straightaway there flowed forth blood and water.” From this it is easy to perceive that although Christ’s nature was mortal, yet in certain respects it was different from the nature of other men. For in others, when they give up their souls, the blood congeals, but from Christ’s side, not without miracle, as from a living well, there flowed forth true blood and water, thus showing Him to be the living well-spring from which the life of all of us has flowed. Of this we read in Zachary: “In that day there shall be an open fountain for the house of David, and to those who dwell in Jerusalem, for the washing of the sinner, and the unclean woman.” Now this is fulfilled by the Blood and water flowing from Christ’s side. For by the Blood, which is the price of our redemption, we are washed from sins; and by the water, which is the figure of our baptism, we are cleansed from all the stains of original sin, even as our Lord said by Ezekeil: “I will pour forth upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your iniquities.”

Christ’s side was also, doubtless, opened, that we might have access and entrance into His Heart. Hence Augustine said: “Behold the door in the side of the ark, through which enter in all the creatures that are saved from the deluge. Behold your source, your father, who has regenerated you to

life! For even as our mother Eve was formed out of the side of the sleeping Adam, so out of the side of Christ dead upon the Cross the Church arose.”

Lastly, Christ’s side was opened, and straightaway there flowed forth the Sacraments. From this is seen Christ’s incomprehensible love towards us, since He has spent His whole self upon us. He has hidden nothing in His Heart, which He has not wholly given to us. What more could He have done for us than He has done? His own Heart He has opened to us, as His most secret chamber, where to introduce us as His elect bride. For His delights are to be with us; and in the peacefulness of silence, and in silent peacefulness, to take His rest amongst us. He has given us, I say, His Heart fearfully wounded, that we may dwell in there, until utterly purified, and cleansed, and conformed to His Heart, we may be made fit and worthy to be led with Him into the divine Heart of the Eternal Father. He gives His own Heart to be our dwelling, and asks in return for ours, that it may be His dwelling. He gives us, I say, His Heart, even as a bed adorned with the red roses of His own purple Blood; and He asks in return for our heart, even as a bed decorated for Him with the white lilies of clean works. Who will dare to refuse Him what He Himself, in His rich bounty, has bestowed upon us? Behold! He invites us into His sweet wounds, and into His loving and open side, even as into a rich wine-cellar flowing with all delights, saying to us in the words of the Canticle: “Come, My sister, My dove, into the holes of the rock; that is, into My Sacred Wounds.” Who has a heart so iron and so stony, as not to be touched by such love and kindness, when He, Who is the King Almighty, immense, eternal, embraces us with such mighty love, who are but dust and ashes? And yet, Oh! the shame, the sorrow! we turn our back upon Him, and despise so great a Majesty. This is why Augustine cries out in the person of Christ: “Weigh yourself, O man, of what kind and how great was the suffering which I underwent for your salvation. When you were still My enemy, I led you back into My Father’s favor. When you were wandering as a lost sheep, I sought you for long with much sweat and labor, and when I had found you I brought you back upon My shoulders with great suffering to My Father. I submitted My head to the crown of thorns, I laid My hands and feet open to

the nails, I bent My whole Body patiently to scourges, I shed My Blood even to the last little drop, I gave My Soul for you that I might join you unto Me by love; and yet you withdrew, and are separated from Me. Lastly, I opened My Heart to you, and gave you the rosy Blood of My Heart to drink. What more do you ask of Me? Tell Me, I pray, how I may soften, and turn, and draw you to My love, and, truly, I will do it unto you.”

Let us then approach with longing thirst and love unto this living well, for He will give unto us the water of life, and that freely, without price and without exchange. See! how readily He invites us, saying: “He who is thirsty, let him come; and whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” See here the pure well springing forth in the midst of paradise, whereby the whole earth is watered. Come, then, with the loving soul of the Canticle, and in all the temptations, and miseries, and afflictions of this life, let us flee into the holes of the rock. “Of which rock?” you asked. Of Jesus Christ our Lord. For He is the Rock, which was struck by Moses, that is, by the Jewish people, by the rod of the Cross, and gave forth plentiful waters, so that we may draw not water only, but even, as the Scripture testifies, oil from this rock. Hence the prophet Jeremiah said: “O you that dwell in Moab, leave the cities,” that is, the noise and disturbances of the people, “and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that makes her nest in the highest mouth of the hole,” that is, in Christ’s open side. Christ is the stone which Jacob the patriarch set up for a title, and over which he poured oil, for a sign of abundant mercy and loving-kindness. What can be wanting to us in this rock? In truth we are safe here, and secure from all our enemies. Here the old serpent, the trailing snake cannot come. Here we are lifted up from earth, and placed on the path of heaven. Let the world tempt, and enemies threaten, and the flesh complain, we have, indeed, no need to fear, for we are founded on a rock. Never are we so safe as in our Saviour’s Wounds. “I take,” said St. Bernard, borrowing from St. Augustine, “I take with confidence what I want, I take it from the depth of being of my Lord, for they overflow with mercy;” nor are the holes wanting through which they flow: “They have dug My hands and My feet, and they have pierced My side with a lance;” and through these holes I can suck honey from the rock,

and oil from the hard rock; that is, taste and see how sweet the Lord is. He thought of peace, and I knew it not. But an opening nail, the piercing nail was made for me, that I might see the will of the Lord. What do I see through the hole? The nail cries out, the wound cries out that God is truly in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The iron has gone through His Soul; it has come near His Heart, so that He knows no more how to feel for my infirmities. But the secret place of His Heart is open to me through the holes of His Body; the great sacrament of love is open; the depth of God's mercy are open, wherein the Orient from on high has visited us. Why are Your deepest parts seen open through Your Wounds? Why? Because in what could it shine forth more clearly than in Your wounds, that You, Lord, are meek, and gentle, and of great mercy? Augustine also said: "Longinus opened for me Christ's side with a lance, and I have entered in," Here I dwell with confidence; here I refresh myself with gladness; here I rest in sweetness; here I feed on delights.

But oh! what was the sorrow, what the pain with which God's worshipful Mother, the Virgin Mary, was seized, when she saw her only solace, and the whole delight of her heart, hanging dead on the Cross? Oh! how that fearful cry pierced her tender heart, when that same beloved and only-begotten Son of hers cried out with a loud voice, and gave up the spirit! How was her soul then melted away in her burning love for Christ, even as wax is melted in the fire, and, like a seal of wax, received upon itself the pitiable image of her crucified Son! For perfect love has three conditions, or effects, or works. Its first work is forcibly to carry the lover out of himself, for love is strong as death, and even as death violently tears away the soul out of the body, so does perfect love draw a man utterly out of himself, so that in himself he wholly falls away. Another work of love is to attract, or inwardly draw. For as, in the first place, it draws the lover out of himself, so, in the second place, it joins and makes him one with the beloved, and attracts him towards the beloved, even as our Lord said to the loving soul: "With everlasting love I have loved you, therefore I have drawn you and shown pity upon you." Now this is also done by love, so truly, that the lover lives not where he stands or walks, but where he loves. For where our treasure is, there also is our heart. And Augustine said: "A man is such as the

thing that he loves.” They who love earthly things are worms, not men. They who love the pleasures of the flesh, are beasts devoid of reason. They who love heavenly things are angels, for their conversation is in heaven. They who embrace God with perfect love, become God, as David said: “I have said, you are Gods, and all of you sons of the Most High.” For what God is by nature, that we are made by grace and transforming love. The third work of love is transformation itself; and this is its chief and peculiar work, and renders the lover conformed and like unto the beloved; even as fire changes into itself both iron, and whatever it can act upon. Hence also God, Who is uncreated love, in His immense and bountiful love, has made man according to His own image and likeness; and again, impelled by the same love, His most high and loving Godhead has so cast itself down and humbled itself, as to take upon it the form and likeness of man, whom It loved so much.

Thus, also, the Blessed Virgin Mary, as became such a Mother, loved her dear Son, from her very inmost heart, and surpassed all in love. Therefore, utterly drawn out of herself by the force and efficacy of love, she was both rapt into Christ her Beloved, and so transformed by Him, that she became wholly like to Him. For, like soft wax, she was so impressed with the lifeless and crucified image of her Son, and made like that, being likewise crucified with her only begotten Son, wounded, slain, and fearfully tormented in every part together with Him, that she lived no more in herself, but in Christ her Beloved, and He in her. For if the strength of Christ’s love so absorbed St. Paul that he could say: “I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me;” and again: “I am fastened with Christ to the Cross, and I bear about the wounds of the Lord Jesus in my body;” how much more must we believe that this happened to the Blessed Virgin, whose love surpassed the love of all men, even as the vast sea some little brook. Who, then, can understand those bitter pains and torments, which that most sorrowing Mother felt, when the lance pierced Christ’s adorable side with a dreadful wound. Truly, this was the sword of grief, of which just Simeon had prophesied long before. O blessed they, who are made partakers of this wound; whose hearts are so pierced by the blessed lance of Christ’s love, that henceforth they glow with the everlasting fire of love!

