

DAY 24.

Jesus with the Cross is lifted up on high.

WHEN, then, they had fastened Jesus to the Cross, straightaway His cruel executioners raised Him, together with the Cross, with great rage, and they savagely placed the Holy Cross in the hole of the rock, and they let it fall down into its place, so that by this fall all Christ's members and inward parts were shaken with cruel pain, and all the more cruel for having before been so tightly stretched. And again the Sacred Wounds of His hands and feet broke forth like fountains, and began to flow in streams. In truth, these are the four rivers of paradise, that go forth from the garden of pleasure, and water the whole earth.

O all you that thirst! come to the waters, and draw with joy from the Saviour's fountains. Suck honey from the rock, and oil and wine from the hard rock. Buy without silver, and without any price, wine and milk. For truly this is that cornerstone, firm, and which cannot be shaken, rejected indeed by the Jews, but chosen by the Gentiles, which Jacob, that is to say, the Father of Heaven, raised as a sign of grace and mercy and peace, and anointed with the oil of mercy. Come all you, as many as love God, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, for it is exceeding fertile, and rich, and abounds with all delights. The river of pleasure, which goes out from the midst of paradise, that is, from Christ's wounded side, flows through the whole of it. This is truly the land of promise, flowing with milk and honey. Here is seen the cluster hanging on the staff. Here is the rock twice struck with the rod, which pours forth not only living waters, but rivers of oil; so that as many as go up this mountain may be sanctified, and may say with the loving soul in the Canticle of Canticles: "Your name is as oil poured out." Here, also, is the vessel full of the oil of grace, which was sent by the Father upon earth, that the sick man might be healed, who going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, and

was left half dead from his wounds; in which also is contained the price of our salvation. And this vessel was not only pierced in many places, but its end was also knocked out, so that every man may draw from there as it pleases him. And this Christ testifies concerning Himself, when He said, "I was poured out like water." Moreover, although the vessel is small, yet it is ever full, having been blessed by God, so that never will the oil fail, as long as there are empty vessels to receive it.

Now for this reason was Christ lifted up, that the enemy, with his whole strength, might be thrown down. He was taken and lifted up from the earth, that He might draw us after Him, far away from every earthly lust. He was lifted up on high, that, looking upon us, His sheep, wandering afar off, He might bring us back to Him by a look of grace and mercy. Moreover, He was lifted up into the air, that He might purify it from demons, as He had purified the earth by His precious Blood-shedding, and at the same time might open to us a safe road to heaven. He was lifted up, one part of His Cross being raised on high, the other resting on the earth; and thus He hung between the two, that He might unite earth with heaven; that is, men with angels, peace between them not as yet having been established, and might show to us that He will be the Eternal Mediator and Peace-Maker between His Father and man. Hence, as a solid wall for the house of Israel, He set Himself against God's anger, and took upon Himself all the weapons of divine wrath and vengeance, so that He was covered with deadly wounds.

Come, then, all you faithful, and behold how your Saviour, Leader, and King fought for you, and delivered you from your enemies, and restored you to your first freedom. Now is the standard of victory, the trophy of the Cross, lifted up, under which we must fight, and which we must guard from all who may oppose it or come in its way. Let us be glad, then, let us rejoice, let us glory in the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, despising every kind of arms, by this Cross alone He willed to cast down His enemy. And He so loved it, that He came down to earth to seek it, for heaven bore not

this kind of tree; and He feared not to become a stranger to His glory and His joy, and an exile from His own kingdom, and to undergo all ignominy, and pain, and trouble, that He might embrace this Cross. Thus St. Paul said: “Let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, Who, when joy was proposed to Him, bore the Cross, and despised the shame, indeed, and all affliction that could happen to Him.”

Moreover, by the fact that our Lord was crucified, not within the city, or inside a house, but outside in an open plateau, is signified to us that He came to redeem, not merely the house of Israel, and that He died not only for the Jewish people, but the whole world. Thus, in the Canticle of Canticles, when He said: “I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valley,” He did not call Himself the lily of the garden, planted and brought up by the care of men, for He sprang from untilled earth, that is, from the untouched womb of His Virgin-Mother. He is also the Lamb without spot, and the white lily, the offspring of the valley of tears, which, was accursed in the past, brought forth only thorns and briars, but which now offered its first-fruits to God, with a new benediction. Now, we may observe, that our Lord has given us His own loving-kindness, for our earth has brought forth its fruit, and truth has arisen out of this same earth of ours. Surely, He is that fair lily of our valley, of sparkling whiteness, that lights up the whole world with its splendor, and fills it with the sweet odor of its scent, that is, of His virtue; and there go forth from it rays of gold, that is, His Godhead, which lies hidden under the white leaves of His most pure manhood. Let, then, our earth rejoice at being adorned with so fair a fruit: let our valley cease from mourning; nor let it be called any more the valley that has been forsaken, and left barren and accursed, but the valley of fruitfulness, and the soil of fatness, and the field of plenty, which the Lord has blessed. For what of old had become tainted by the taste of the serpent’s poison, has now been purified again by the balm of Christ’s Precious Blood, and has been watered by heavenly dew, through the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, so that it has brought forth not one only, but numberless lilies, amongst which the loving soul declares that her Beloved walked and fed. For as many as there are men on earth of a clean heart, who love God, so many lilies have our

valley brought forth. And among these the Spouse feeds with delight; here He walks with exceeding pleasantness; here He dwells with great desire; here it is His delight to be; and here, too, is the food on which He most gladly feeds from, namely, that His Father's will may be accomplished. But what are all these other lilies compared with that single Lily, from whose seed all the rest have sprung, and borrowed their beauty, form, and odor,—by the very odor of which serpents and all corrupt things are driven away?

Closer, then, like the busy bee, let us fly, passing from Wound to Wound, nor let us enjoy any other food, for these flow with honey. And what else are Christ's sacred and honeyed words upon the Cross, but flowers flowing with honey, which springs up from the cup of the lily, that is, the Holy Cross? Now, if we diligently press these, we shall be able to suck honey from there.

So also our Lord Jesus is that Divine Light, which the Father of heaven has sent on earth, and which lay so long hidden under the bushel of Christ's lowly Humanity, but which was now taken up, and set upon the candlestick of the Cross, that as many as are in the house of the Church may be enlightened thereby. The Jews, indeed, broke the bushel in many places, and the Light began to pour itself forth through its openings, so that a certain dark house which stood very near it was all lit up with its rays, and a voice came forth from there, and cried: "Lord, remember me when You come to Your kingdom." But if the power and efficacy of this light was so great when it shone only through the small cracks, what would it have done when the whole bushel had been utterly broken, and it was able to shed forth its splendor without any hindrance? Surely, we should have seen not one, but many enlightened, beating their breasts, crying out; mourning, groaning, and saying: "Truly, this Man was the Son of God!" For as we read that after the death of Joseph the children of Israel were multiplied, so also, after Christ's death, the number of those who believed was increased.

But let us go back to Christ's wounded Body, and with a certain sensible, affectionate compassion, let us behold the torment by which He is surrounded; for, indeed, there was not one member which was not torn out of its place with pain unutterable. Oh! how full of pain were those arms of His so fearfully stretched! How did the torments of those wounds pierce His Heart, as they bore up for so long a time the whole weight of His Body! How great was the anguish of His sacred Soul, when, deprived of all comfort and light, it bore all this Cross and pain in its own weight! Truly, the scale was laden as much as it could bear, and the other scale carried the sins of the whole world. Now, if there be in us one little spark of love, if any depth of compassion are left us, we cannot but compassionate for our Maker and our Saviour, when we see Him hanging here so pitifully before our eyes. For who would not have compassion even on some brute beast, if it was thus treated? And, indeed, our tender Jesus not only hung there in intolerable pain, in order to move us to tears and compunction, but to inflame and provoke us in like manner to love, by every proof and sign of love. He was lifted up on high that He might be seen by all: He stretched out His arms wide that He might embrace us all. He was fastened with hard and rough nails to the Cross, that He might lead us by longsuffering to penance. From His whole Body there flowed forth blood, that in all abundance He might give us to drink of His best medicine, His own precious Blood. Great and deep were His Wounds, that we might have ever open access to Him, and a safe hiding and resting-place from every attack of temptation and affliction. His Side He suffered to be pierced, that we might have an open way into His Heart. With a loud voice He cried out that He might be heard by all. Bitterly He wept, that He might move us all to compunction, devotion, and compassion. His Head He bowed down, that He might give us the kiss of reconciliation and of love. Who then, after this, can be of so wicked and perverse a heart, so hardened in sin, as not to be moved by all these signs of love, and inflamed to love Him in return as much as he can, and, indeed, with his whole strength, for His love is beyond all understanding?

Who is there who will not wholly turn to Him, Whom he sees thus wholly turned to himself, especially if he observes Who He is Who asked for this love, and from whom it is asked? Marvelous, indeed, it is, that the heart of a man who weighed these things as they deserve, should not be turned within itself for exceeding wonder, and wholly melt away with love. Who will despair of forgiveness when he sees all these proofs and signs of mercy?

As many, therefore, of us, as have been bitten, and wounded, and tainted by the pestilent serpent, let us fly beneath the Cross of our Lord Jesus. Let us look, not on the brazen serpent hanging on a pole, but on Jesus, the true Son of God, hanging on the Cross, Who offered us the health-giving balm of His precious Blood. Let us say with a mournful voice, like St. Bernard: “Of what are You guilty, sweet Boy? What have You done, O loving Youth? What is Your crime? What is the cause of Your condemnation?” Truly, I am the cause of Your pain. That which the wicked servant has done, his Lord has undone; the debt which the unjust man has contracted, the Just One has paid. O, Son of God! to what depth have Your lowliness descended, when for me You have been made obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross? Concupiscence drew me to what is unlawful: holy love has drawn You, for my sake, to the Cross. I took an apple, You are torn with nails. I tasted that apple’s sweetness, You tasted the bitterness of gall. Eve rejoiced with me in my wretchedness; Mary, weeping, had compassion on You at the Crucifixion. I lifted up my head proudly towards the forbidden fruit, You have bent Your Head to the crown of thorns. O Jesus, the Eternal health of all who believe in You, the Redeemer of all who hope in You, may Your Cross be for me a sure protection against all my enemies. May Your wounds be for me a sure refuge in every temptation; hide me therein, until the concupiscence and heat of sin shall have passed away. May Your innocent Blood, flowing from Your sacred hands, wash away the foulness of my sinful acts; and again, I raise up my hands and all my members to You in devotion, prayer, love, praise, thanksgiving, and an accomplishment of Your most gracious will. May the Wounds of Your feet wipe away the

remembrance of the wanderings of my perverse journeys, and afterwards direct my feet into the way of everlasting life, and allow me not to wander from the paths of Your commandments. Amen.