



THE PASSION AND CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE SEVEN LAST WORDS FROM THE CROSS

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Selections from ***The Passion and the Death*** ***of Jesus Christ***

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I. The Scourging

St. Paul writes respecting Jesus Christ : *He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.*¹ On this text St. Bernard remarks, "He took not only the form of a servant, that he might obey, but that of a slave, that he might be beaten."² Our Redeemer, who is the Lord of all, was willing not only to take upon him the condition of a servant, but even that of a bad servant, that he might be punished as a criminal, and thus make satisfaction for our sins.

It is certain that the scourging was the most cruel of the tortures that shortened the life of our Redeemer; for the great effusion of blood (already foretold by him, when he said, *This is My blood of the New Testament, which shall*

1 "Semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens." - Phil. 2.7.

2 "Non solum formam servi accepit, ut subesset, sed etiam mali servi, ut vapularet." - *Serm. de Pass. Dom.*

[257] *be shed for many*,¹ was the principal cause of his death. It is true that this blood was first poured forth in the garden, and was also poured forth in the crowning with thorns, and by the driving-in of the nails; but the largest portion was shed in the scourging, which was also a cause of great shame and insult to Jesus Christ, because this was a punishment inflicted only on slaves. On this account, also, the tyrants who condemned the holy martyrs to death scourged them after their condemnation, and then slew them; while our Lord was scourged before he was condemned to death. He had himself particularly predicted the scourging to his disciples during his life : *He shall be given up to the Gentiles, and mocked and scourged*.² Thus he signified to them the great anguish which this torture would inflict upon him.

It was revealed to St. Bridget that one of the executioners first commanded Jesus Christ to strip himself of his garments. He obeyed, and then embraced the pillar to which he was bound, and was then so cruelly scourged that his whole body was lacerated.³ The revelation stated that the scourges not only struck him, but ploughed into his most holy flesh. He was so torn open that, as the same revelation declares, his ribs appeared laid bare.⁴ With this agrees what was written by St. Jerome: "The scourges cut the most holy body of God,"⁵ and also what St. Peter Damian wrote, that the executioners exhausted themselves with fatigue ⁶ in scourging our Lord. All

1 "Hic est enim sanguis meus novi testamenti, qui pro multis effundetur." - Matt. 26.28.

2 "Tradetur enim Gentibus, et illudetur, et flagellabitur." - Luke 18.32.

3 "Jubente lictore, seipsum vestibus exuit, columnam sponte amplexens ligatur, et flagellis, non evellendo, sed sulcando, totum corpus laceratur." - Rev. Bk. 4, ch. 70.

4 "Ita ut costae viderentur." - Rev. Bk. 1, ch. 10.

5 "Sacratissimum corpus Dei flagella secuerunt." - In Matt. 27.

6 "Usque ad defatigationem."

[258] this was already foretold by Isaiah in the words, *He was bruised for our iniquities*,¹ the word bruised signifying

the same as being broken to pieces, or as being pounded in a mortar.

Behold me, O my Jesus! I am one of Your most cruel executioners, who have scourged You with my sins; have pity upon me. O my loving Savior! a heart is too little with which to love You. I desire no longer to live for myself, I desire to live only for You, my love, my all. Wherefore I say to You, with St. Catherine of Genoa, "O love! O love! let there be no more sins. It is enough that I have already offended You so much! now I hope to be entirely Yours, and with Your grace I desire to be ever Yours through all eternity."

II. The Crowning with Thorns

Our heavenly Mother revealed to the same St. Bridget that the crown of thorns surrounded the whole sacred head of her Son, as far down as the middle of his forehead; and that the thorns were driven in with such violence that the blood gushed out in streams over all his countenance, so that the whole face of Jesus Christ appeared covered with blood.²

Origen writes that this crown of thorns was not taken from the head of the Lord until he had expired upon the cross.³ In the meantime, as the inner garment of Christ was not sewed together, but woven all in one

1 "Attritus est propter scelera nostra." - Isa. 53. 5.

2 "Quae (corona) tam vehementer caput Filii mei pupugit, ut ex sanguine affluente replerentur oculi ejus. - Ad medium frontis descendebat, plurimis rivis sanguinis decurrentibus per faciem ejus, ut quasi nihil nisi sanguis totum videretur." - *Rev.* Bk. 1, ch. 10; Bk. 4, ch. 70.

3 "Corona spinea, semel imposita, et nunquam detracta." - *In Matt.* tr. 35.

[259] piece, on this account it was not divided among the soldiers, like his outer garments, but it was given by lot, as St John writes: The soldiers, therefore, when they had crucified Him, took His garments, and made four parts, to

every soldier a part, and also His coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said then one to another: Let us not cut it; but let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be.¹ As this garment, then, must have been drawn off over the head, many authors write, with great probability, that when Jesus was stripped of it, the crown of thorns was taken from his head, and was replaced before he was nailed to the cross.

In the book of Genesis it is written: *Cursed is the earth in your work; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you.*² This curse was inflicted by God upon Adam and upon all his posterity; and by the earth here spoken of we must understand, not only the material earth but the flesh of man, which, being infected by the sin of Adam, brings forth only the thorns of sin. In order to remedy this infection, says Tertullian, it was necessary that Jesus Christ should offer to God in sacrifice this great torment of the crowning with thorns.

This torture also, besides being in itself most acute was accompanied by blows and spitting, and by the mockings of the soldiers, as St. Matthew and St. John relate: *And plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head and a reed in His right hand. And bowing the knee before Him, they mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the*

1. Milites ergo, cum crucifixissent eum, acceperunt vestimenta ejus (et fecerunt quatuor partes, unicuique militi partem), et tunicam; erat autem tunica inconsutilis, desuper contexta per totum; dixerunt ergo ad invicem: Non scindamus eam, sed sortiamur de illa cujus sit. - John 19.23, 24.

2 "Maledicta terra in opere tuo . . .; spinas et tribulos germinabit tibi."
- Gen. 3.17.

3 "Hunc (Christum) enim oportebat pro omnibus gentibus fieri sacrificium."
- Adv. Judaeos.

[260] *Jews! And spitting upon Him, they took the reed, and struck His head.*¹ *And the soldiers plaiting a crown of thorns, put it upon His head; and they put on Him a purple garment. And they came to Him and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they kept striking Him.*²

O my Jesus! what thorns have I added to this crown with my sinful thoughts to which I have consented! I wish I could die with grief! Pardon me, through the merit of this grief, which You did then accept in order to pardon me. O my Lord, thus bruised and thus despised! You have taken upon Yourself all these pains and mockeries in order to move me to have compassion upon You, that, at least through compassion, I may love You, and no more displease You. It is enough, O my Jesus; cease to suffer more : I am convinced of the love that You have for me, and I love You with all my heart.

But now I see that it is not enough for You; You are not satisfied with thorns, until You find Yourself dead with anguish upon the cross. O goodness! O infinite love! Miserable is the heart that loves You not.

III. Jesus Carries His Cross

The cross began to torture Jesus Christ before he was nailed upon it; for after he was condemned by Pilate, the cross on which he was to die was given to him to carry to Calvary, and, without refusing, he took it upon his shoulders.³ Speaking of this, St. Augustine

1 "Et exeuntes eum, chlamydem coccineam circumdederunt ei; et plectentes coronam de spinis, posuerunt super caput ejus, et arundinem in dextera ejus; et genu flexo ante eum, illudebant ei, dicentes: Ave, Rex Judaeorum. Et expuentes in eum, acceperunt arundinem, et percutiebant caput ejus. - Matt. 27.28-30.

2 "Et dabant ei alapas." - John 19. 3.

3 "Et bajulans sibi crucem, exivit in eum, qui dicitur Calvariae, locum." - John 19.17.

[261] writes: "If we regard the wickedness of his tormentors, the insult was great; if we regard the love of Jesus, the mystery is great";¹ for in carrying the cross, our Captain then lifted up the standard under which his followers upon this earth must be enrolled and must fight, in order to be made his companions in the kingdom of heaven.

St. Basil, speaking of the passage in Isaiah, *A child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder*,² says "that earthly tyrants load their subjects with unjust burdens, in order to increase their own power; but Jesus Christ chose to take upon himself the burden of the cross, and to carry it, in order to leave life for us in that manner, that he might obtain salvation for us." He further remarks that the kings of the earth found their sovereignties in the force of arms and in the heaping-up of riches; but Jesus Christ founded his sovereignty in the insults of the cross - that is, in humbling himself and in suffering - and on this account he willingly accepted it, and carried it on that painful journey, in order, by his example, to give us courage to embrace with resignation every cross, and thus to follow him. Wherefore, also, he said to his disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.³

It is useful here to note the beautiful expressions applied to the cross by St. John Chrysostom:

He calls it 1) *the hope of the despairing*;⁴ for what hope of salvation would sinners have were it not for the cross on which Jesus Christ died to save them?

1 "Si pectet impietas, grande ludibrium; si pietas, grande mysterium."
- *In Jo. tr.* 117.

2 "Factus est principatus super humerum ejus." - Isa. 9.6.

3 "Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me." - Matt. 16.24.

4 "Spes Christianorum, desperatorum Via."

[262] 2) *The guide of the voyager*;¹ for the humiliation of the cross (that is, of tribulation) is the cause which, in this life that is like a sea of dangers, gives us grace to keep the divine law, and to amend ourselves after our transgressions; as the prophet says, *It is good for me that You have humbled me, that I might learn Your decrees*.²

3) *The counsellor of the just*;³ because in adversities the just learn wisdom, and gain motives for uniting themselves

more closely to God.

4) *The rest of the troubled*;4 for where can the troubled find relief but in beholding that cross on which their Redeemer and God died of pain for love of them?

5) *The glorying of the martyrs*;5 because in this consists the glory of the holy martyrs, that they were able to unite their deaths to the pains and death which Jesus Christ suffered on the cross; as St. Paul says, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*.6

6) *The physician of the sick*;7 and great indeed is the remedy of the cross to those who are sick in spirit; tribulations make them repent, and detach them from the world.

7) *The fount for the thirsty*;8 the cross, that is, suffering for Jesus Christ, being the desire of the saints, as St. Teresa was accustomed to say, "Oh that I might suffer! oh that I might die!" and as St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi said, "May I suffer, and not die;" meaning that she would

1 "Navigantium Gubernator."

2 "Bonum mihi quia humiliasti me, ut discam justificationes tuas."
- Ps. 118.71.

3 "Justorum Consiliarius."

4 "Tribulorum Reques."

5 "Martyrum Gloratio."

6 "Mihi absit gloriari, nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi." - Gal. 6.14.

7 "Aegrotantium Medicus."

8 "Sitientium Fons."

[263] refuse to die and to go to rejoice in heaven, in order that she might continue to suffer upon this earth.

Finally, to speak of all alike, both the just and sinners, every one has his own cross. The just, though they enjoy peace of conscience, yet all have their vicissitudes; at one time they are comforted by visits of divine mercy, at another they are afflicted by bodily vexations and in-

firmities, and especially by desolation of spirit, by darkness and weariness, by scruples and temptations, and by fears for their own salvation. Much heavier are the crosses of sinners, through remorse of conscience, through the terrors of eternal punishment, which from time to time affright them, and through the pains they suffer when things go wrong with them. The saints, when adversities befall them, unite themselves with the divine will, and suffer them with patience; but how can the sinner calm himself by recollecting the divine will, when he is living at enmity with God? The pains of the enemies of God are unmixed pains, pains without relief. Wherefore St. Teresa was accustomed to say "that he who loves God embraces the cross, and thus does not feel it; while he who does not love him drags the cross along by force and thus cannot but feel it."

IV. The Crucifixion

It was revealed to St. Bridget that when the Savior saw himself laid upon the cross, he stretched out his right hand to the place where it was to be nailed.¹ They then immediately nailed the other hand, and then his sacred feet; and Jesus Christ was left to die upon this bed of anguish. St. Augustine says that the punishment of the cross was a most bitter torment, because, upon

¹ "Voluntarie extendit brachium, et, aperta sua dextera manu, posuit eam in cruce; quam tortores crucifixerunt." - *Rev.* Bk. 7, ch. 15.

[264] the cross, death itself was prolonged, lest the pain should be speedily ended.¹

O God! what horror must then have struck heaven, at the sight of the Son of the Eternal Father crucified between two thieves! Such, in truth, was the prophecy of Isaiah: *He was reputed with the wicked.*² Therefore St. John Chrysostom, contemplating Jesus upon the cross, cried out, full of amazement and love, "I see him in the midst, in the holy Trinity; I see him in the midst,

between Moses and Elijah; I see him in the midst, between two thieves."³ As though he had said, "I see my Savior first in heaven between the Father and the Holy Spirit; I see him upon the Mount Tabor, between two saints, Moses and Elijah; how, then, can I see him crucified upon Calvary between two thieves?" How could this come to pass, but through the divine decree, that thus he must die, to satisfy by his death for the sins of men, and to save from death, as Isaiah had foretold: *He was reputed with the wicked, and He has borne the sins of many.*⁴

The same prophet also asks, *Who is this that comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra; this beautiful one in His robe, walking in the greatness of His strength?*⁵ (Edom signifying a red color, though somewhat dark, as is explained in Gen. 25.30); and he gives the

1 "Mors ipsa protendebatur, ne dolor citius finiretur." - *In Jo. tr.* 36.

2 "Et cum sceleratis reputatus est." - Isa. 53.12.

3 "Medium in Sancta Triade, medium inter Moysen et Eliam, medium inter Latrones!"

4 "Et cum sceleratis reputatus est, et ipse peccata multorum tulit." - Isa. 53.12.

5 "Quis est iste qui venit de Edom, tinctis vestibus de Bosra? iste formosus in stola sua, gradiens in multitudine fortitudinis suae." - Isa. 63.1.

[265] answer, I that speak justice, and am a defender to save.¹ The person who thus replies is, according to the interpreters, Jesus Christ, who says, I am the promised Messiah, who have come to save men, by triumphing over their enemies.

Then, further, he is again asked, *Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like theirs that tread in the wine-press?*² And he answers, *I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the Gentiles there is not a man with Me.*³ Tertullian, St. Cyprian, and St. Augustine explain the wine-press to mean the Passion of Jesus Christ, in which his garments - that is, his most holy flesh - was covered with blood and wounds, according to what St. John wrote : *He was clothed with a garment sprinkled with blood; and His name is called the Word of God.*⁴ St. Gregory, explaining

the expression *I have trodden the wine-press alone*, says, "He trod the wine-press, and was himself trodden."⁵ He trod it, because Jesus Christ, by his Passion, overcame the devil; he was trodden, because, in his Passion, his body was bruised and broken, as the grapes are broken in the wine-press, and, as Isaiah expresses it in another text, *The Lord was pleased to bruise Him in infirmity*.⁶

And now behold this Lord, who was *fairest among men*,⁷ appears on Calvary with his form so disfigured by torments, that it struck horror into all who saw it. Yet this deformity makes him seem more beautiful in the eyes

1 "Ego, qui loquor justitiam, et propugnator sum ad salvandum." - Isa. 63.1.

2 "Quare ergo rubrum est vestimentum tuum, et vestimenta tua sicut calcantium in torculari?" - Isa. 63.2.

3 "Torcular calcavi solus, et de gentibus non est vir mecum." - Isa. 63.3.

4 "Et vestitus erat veste aspersa sanguine, et vocatur nomen ejus Verbum Dei." - Apoc. (Rev.) 19.13.

5 "Torcular in quo calcatus calcavit." - *In Ez. hom.* 13.

6 "Et voluit Dominus contere eum in infirmitate." - Isa. 53.10.

7 "Speciosus forma prae filiis hominum." - Ps. 44.3.

[266] of souls that love him, because these wounds, these marks of the scourging, this lacerated flesh, are all tokens and proofs of the love he bears them; upon which the poet Petrucci beautifully sings, "O Lord, if You suffer scourgings for us, to the souls that are bound to You, the more deformed You are, the more fair do You appear."

St. Augustine adds, "He hung in deformity upon the cross, but his deformity is our beauty."¹ And truly so, because this deformity of Jesus crucified was the cause of the beauty of our souls, which, when they were deformed, were washed with his divine blood, and became fair and lovely, according to what St. John wrote, *Who are these that are clothed in white garments? These are they who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their garments, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*.² All the saints, as being children of

Adam (with the exception of the Blessed Virgin), were at one time covered with a foul garment, and soiled with Adam's sin and with their own; but being washed with the blood of the Lamb, they became white and agreeable in the sight of God.

Well, then, did You say, O my Jesus, that, when You should be lifted up upon the cross, You would draw everything to You;³ "and this he said, signifying by what death he should die." Truly You have left undone nothing to draw all hearts to You. Many are the happy souls who, in seeing You crucified and dying for love of them, have abandoned everything -

1 "Pendebat in cruce deformis, sed deformitas illius pulchritudo nostra erat." - *Serm.* 27.

2 "Hi qui amicti sunt stolis albis, qui sunt? ... Hi sunt qui venerunt de tribulatione magna, et laverunt stolas suas et dealbaverunt eas in sanguine Agni." - *Apoc. (Rev.)* 7.13.

3 "Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum." - *John* 12.32.

[267] possessions, dignities, country, and kindred, even to the embracing of torments and death - in order to give themselves entirely to You. Unhappy they who resist Your graces, which You have gained for them with Your great labors and sorrows. O my God, this will be their great torment in hell, to think that they have lost a God who, to draw them to love him, gave his life upon a cross, that of their own choice they have perished, and that there will be no remedy for their ruin through all eternity. O my Redeemer, I have already deserved to fall into this ruin, through the sins I have committed against You. Alas, how often have I resisted Your grace, which sought to draw me to You, and, in order to cleave to my own inclinations, have despised Your love, and turned my back upon You! Oh that I had died before I had offended You! Oh that I had ever loved You! I thank You, O my love, that You have borne with me with so much patience, and that, instead of abandoning me, as I deserved, You have repeated Your calls, and increased

Your lights and Your loving impulses upon me. *I will sing the mercies of God forever.*¹ Oh, cease not, my Savior and my hope, to continue to draw me, and to multiply Your graces upon me, that I may love You in heaven with more fervor, remembering the many mercies that You have shown me, after all the offences that I have committed against You. I hope for all, through that precious blood which You have shed for me, and that bitter death which You have endured for me.

O holy Virgin Mary, protect me; pray to Jesus for me.

V. Jesus upon the Cross

Jesus upon the cross was a spectacle which filled heaven and earth with amazement, at the sight of an Almighty

¹ "Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo." - Ps. 88.2.

[268] God, the Lord of all, dying upon an infamous cross, condemned as a criminal between two other malefactors. It was a spectacle of justice, in displaying the Eternal Father, in order that his justice might be satisfied; punishing the sins of men in the person of his only-begotten Son, loved by him as himself. It was a spectacle of mercy, displaying his innocent Son dying a death so shameful and so bitter, in order to save his creatures from the punishment that was due to them. Especially was it a sight of love, in displaying a God who offered and gave his life to redeem from death his slaves and enemies.

It is this spectacle which ever was and ever will be the dearest object of the contemplations of the saints, through which they have counted it little to strip themselves of all earthly pleasures and goods, and to embrace with desire and joy both pain and death, in order to make some return of gratitude to a God who died for love of them.

Comforted by the sight of Jesus derided upon the

cross, the saints have loved contempt more than worldly people have loved all the honors of the world. At the sight of Jesus naked and dying upon the cross, they have sought to abandon all the good things of this earth. At the sight of him all wounded upon the cross, while the blood flowed forth from all his limbs, they have learned to abhor sensual pleasures, and have sought to afflict their flesh as much as they could, in order to accompany with their own sufferings the sufferings of the Crucified. At the sight of the obedience and conformity of will retained by Jesus Christ to the will of his Father, they have labored to conquer all those appetites which were not conformed to the divine pleasure; while many, though occupied in works of piety, yet, knowing that to be deprived of their own will was the sacrifice the most welcome to the heart of God which they could offer [269] have entered into some religious Order, to lead a life of obedience, and subject their own will to that of others. At the sight of the patience of Jesus Christ, in being willing to suffer so many pains and insults for the love of us, they have received with satisfaction and joy injuries, infirmities, persecutions, and the torments of tyrants. At the sight of the love which Jesus Christ has shown to us in sacrificing to God his life upon the cross for us, they have sacrificed to Jesus Christ all they possessed - their property, their pleasures, their honors, and their life.

How is it, then, so that many Christians, although they know by faith that Jesus Christ died for love of them, instead of devoting themselves entirely to love and serve him, devote themselves to offend and despise him for the sake of brief and miserable pleasures? From where comes this ingratitude? It comes from their forgetfulness of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ. And, O my God, what will be their remorse and shame at the day of judgment, when the Lord shall reproach them with all that he has done and suffered for them?

Let us not, then, cease, O devout souls, ever to keep before our eyes Jesus crucified, and dying in the midst

of torments and insults through love of us. From the Passion of Jesus Christ all the saints have drawn those flames of love which made them forget all the good things of this world, and even their own selves, to give themselves up entirely to love and please this divine Savior, who has so loved men that it seems as if he could not have done more in order to be loved by them. In a word, the cross, that is, the Passion of Jesus Christ, is that which will gain for us the victory over all our passions and all the temptations that hell will hold out to us, in order to separate us from God. The cross is the road and ladder by which we mount to heaven. Happy he who embraces it during his life, and does not [270] put it off till the hour of death. He that dies embracing the cross has a sure pledge of eternal life, which is promised to all those who follow Jesus Christ with their cross.

O my crucified Jesus! to make Yourself loved by men You have spared nothing; You have even given Your life with a most painful death; how, then, can men who love their families, their friends, and even animals from whom they receive any token of affection, be so ungrateful to You as to despise Your grace and Your love, for the sake of miserable and vain delights! Oh, miserable that I am, I am one of those ungrateful beings who, for things of no worth, have renounced Your friendship, and have turned my back upon You. I have deserved that You should drive me from Your face, as I have often banished You from my heart. But I know that You do not cease to ask my heart of me : *You shall love the Lord your God.*¹ Yes, O my Jesus, as You desire that I should love You and offer me pardon, I renounce all creatures, and henceforth I desire to love You alone, my Creator and my Redeemer. You do deserve to be the only object of my soul's love.

O Mary, Mother of God, and refuge of sinners, pray for me; obtain for me the grace of loving God, and I ask for nothing more.

1 "Diliges Dominum Deum tuum." - Deut. 6.5.

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VI. THE INSULTS OFFERED TO JESUS CHRIST WHILE HE WAS HANGING UPON THE CROSS

1. Agony of Jesus on the Cross

Pride, as we have said, was the cause of the sin of Adam, and, consequently, of the ruin of the human race. On this account Jesus Christ came to repair this ruin by his own humiliation; not refusing to embrace the shame of all the insults that his enemies offered him, as he had himself predicted by David : *Since for your sake I have endured reproach, confusion has covered My face.*¹ The whole life of our Redeemer was filled with shame and insults which he received from men; and he did not refuse to accept them, even to the extent of death itself, in order to deliver us from eternal shame : *Who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.*²

My God, who would not mourn with pity, and love Jesus Christ, if he would consider that he suffered for the three hours during which his crucifixion lasted, and he was in agonies upon the cross? Every one of his limbs was stricken and tormented, and one could not relieve the other. The afflicted Lord on that bed of pain could not move, being fastened with nails in his hands and feet; all his most sacred flesh was full of wounds, while those of his hands and feet were most painful, and were

1 "Quoniam propter te sustinui opprobrium, operuit confusio faciem meam." - Ps. 68.8.

2 "Qui, proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta." - Heb. 12.2.

[272] compelled to sustain his whole body; so that where-soever he rested upon that cross, whether on his hands or

his feet, there his pains increased. It maybe truly said, that in those three hours of agony Jesus suffered as many deaths as he passed moments upon the cross. O innocent Lamb, who have suffered such things for me, have mercy upon me! Lamb of God, Who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy upon me!¹

Yet these outward pains of the body were the least bitter; the inward pains of the soul were far geater. His blessed soul was all desolate, and deprived of every drop of consolation and sensible relief; all was weariness, sorrow, and afflictions. This he uttered in the words, *My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?*² Drowned in this sea of inward and outward griefs, our Savior, so worthy of our love, thought fit to end his life, as he had foretold by the mouth of David : *I have come into the depths of the sea, and the storm has sunk Me.*³

2. "If You be the Son of God, come down from the Cross."

Behold also, that, at the very time when he was thus in agonies upon the cross, and was drawing near to death, all they who stood near him, priests, scribes, elders, and soldiers, wearied themselves in adding to his pain with insults and mockeries. St. Matthew writes, *They that passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads.*⁴ This was already prophesied by David, when he wrote,

¹ "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi! miserere mei."

² "Deus meus! Deus meus! ut quid dereliquisti me?" - Matt. 27.46.

³ "Veni in altitudinem maris, et tempestas demersit me." - Ps. 68.3.

⁴ "Praetereuntes autem blasphemabant eum, moventes capita sua." - Matt. 27.39.

[273] in the person of Christ, *All they that saw Me reviled Me, they spoke with their lips, and wagged their head.*¹

They who passed before him said, *Ah, You that would destroy the temple of God, and in three days rebuild it, save Your own self; if You be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*² You have boasted, they said, that You

would destroy the temple, and rebuild it in three days. Yet Jesus had not said that he could destroy the material temple, and raise it again in three days; but he had said : *Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.*³ With these words he indeed intended to express his own power; but he really (as Euthymius and others explain it) spoke allegorically, foretelling that, through the act of the Jews, his soul would be one day separated from his body, but that in three days it would rise again.

They said, *Save Yourself*.⁴ O ungrateful men! If this great Son of God, when he was made man, had chosen to save himself, he would not voluntarily have chosen death.

*If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*⁵ yet, if Jesus had come down, he would not have accomplished our redemption by his death; we could not have been delivered from eternal death. "He would not come down," says St. Ambrose, "lest when he came down, I should die."⁶ Theophylact writes that they who said this spoke by the instigation of the devil, who

1 "Omnes videntes me deriserunt me, locuti sunt labiis et moverunt caput." - Ps. 21.8.

2 "Vah, qui destruis templum Dei, et in triduo illud reaedificas!" - Matt. 27.40.

3 "Solvite templum hoc, et in tribus diebus excitabo illud." - John 2.19.

4 "Salva temetipsum!"

5 "Si Filius Dei es, descende de cruce." - Matt. 27.40.

6 "Noluit descendere, ne descenderet sibi, sed ut moreretur mihi." - *In Luc.* 23.

[274] sought to hinder the salvation which was about to be accomplished by Jesus by means of the cross.¹ And then he adds that the Lord would not have mounted the cross, if he had been willing to come down from it without accomplishing our redemption.² Also St. John Chrysostom says that the Jews uttered this insult in order that Jesus might die insulted as an impostor in the sight of all men, and be proved unable to deliver himself from the

cross, after he had boasted that he was the Son of God.³

St. John Chrysostom also remarks that the Jews ignorantly said, *If You be the Son of God, come down from the cross*; for if Jesus had come down from the cross before he had died, he would not have been that Son of God who was promised, and who was to save us by his death. On this account, says the saint, he did not come down from the cross until he was dead, because he had come for the very purpose of giving his life for our salvation.⁴ St. Athanasius makes the same remark, saying that our Redeemer chose to be known as the true Son of God, not by coming down from the cross, but by continuing upon it till he was dead.⁵ And thus it was foretold by the prophets that our Redeemer must be crucified and die, as St. Paul wrote, *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, that cursed is every one who hangs on a tree*.⁶

1 "Diabolus incitabat illos ut dicerent : Descendat nunc de cruce - quia cognoscebat quod salus per crucem fieret." - *In Marc.* 15.

2 "Si voluisset descendere, neque a principio ascendisset."

3 "Volebant enim ut tamquam seductor in conspectu omnium vituperatus decederet." - *In Matt.* hom. 88.

4 "Qui Filius Dei est, ideo non descendit de cruce; nam ideo venit, ut crucifigeretur pro nobis." - *De Cruce et Latr.* hom. 2.

6 "Neque descendendo de cruce voluit Filius Dei agnosci, sed ex eo quod in cruce permaneret." - *Serm. de Pass, et Cr.*

6 "Christus nos redemit de maledicto legis, factus pro nobis maledictum; quia scriptum est: Maledictus omnis qui pendet in ligno." - Gal. 3.13.

3. "He saved Others, Himself He cannot save."

[275] St. Matthew goes on to relate the other insults which the Jews offered to Jesus Christ : *He saved others, Himself He cannot save*.¹

Thus they treated him as an impostor, by referring to the miracles which had been performed by him in the

restoration of the dead to life, and by treating him as one who was unable to save his own life.

St. Leo replies to them, that this was not the proper hour for Jesus to display his divine power; and that he would not hinder the redemption of man in order to confound their blasphemies.²

St. Gregory suggests another motive why Jesus would not descend from the cross: "If he had then come down, he would not have shown to us the virtue of patience."³ Truly could Jesus Christ deliver himself from the cross and from these insults; yet this was not the time for making a display of his power, but to teach us patience in our toils, in order that we may fulfil the divine pleasure; and therefore Jesus would not deliver himself from death before he had fulfilled his Father's will, and in order that he might not deprive us of this great example of patience. "Because he taught patience, he laid aside his power,"⁴ says St. Augustine.

The patience which Jesus Christ exercised in enduring

1 "Alios salvos fecit, seipsum non potest salvum facere." - Matt. 27.42.

2 "Non vestrae caecitatis arbitrio, O stulti Scribae, ostendenda erat potentia Salvatoris; nec secundum preces blasphemantium linguarum, humani generis redemptio debebat omitti." - *De Pass.* serm. 17.

3 "Si de cruce tunc descenderet, virtutem nobis patientiae non demonstraret." - *In Evang.* hom. 21.

4 "Quia patientiam docebat, ideo potentiam differebat." - *In Jo. tr.* 37.

[276] the shame of all the insults which were offered him by the Jews obtained for us grace to endure with patience and peace of mind all the humiliations and persecutions of the world. Therefore St. Paul, speaking of the journey of Jesus Christ to Calvary when he carried the cross thus exhorts us to accompany him, *Let us, therefore, go forth to meet him outside the camp, bearing his reproach.*¹

The saints, when they received injuries, did not think of avenging themselves, nor were they disturbed; they were even comforted at seeing themselves despised, as Jesus

Christ was despised. Therefore let us not fear to embrace, for the love of Jesus Christ, all the insults that were offered to him, since Jesus Christ has suffered so many insults for love of us.

O my Redeemer, for the time past I have not done this. For the future I desire to suffer everything for love of You: give me strength to put my desires into action.

4. "If God loves him, let him deliver him now."

The Jews, not satisfied with the injuries and blasphemies which they had offered to Jesus Christ reproached him with the name of his Father, saying, *He trusted in God, let Him now deliver Him, if He will have Him; for He said, I am the Son of God.*² This sacrilegious expression of the Jews was already foretold by David when he said in the name of Christ, *All they that saw Me derided Me; they spoke with their lips, and shook their head saying, He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him, let Him save Him; for He desires Him.*³ These very men who thus

1 "Exeamus igitur ad eum extra castra, improperium ejus portantes.
- Heb. 13.13.

2 "Confidit in Deo; liberet nunc si vult eum; dixit enim: Quia Filius Dei sum." - Matt. 27.43.

3 "Speravit in Domino, eripiat eum : salvum faciat eum, quoniam vult eum. - Ps. 21.9.

[277] spoke were called bulls, dogs, and lions, by David in the same Psalm: *Fat bulls encompassed me. Many dogs surrounded me. Save me from the mouth of the lion.*¹ Thus, when the Jews said, *Let Him now deliver Him, if He will have Him,*² they truly showed that they were these bulls, dogs, and lions which had been foretold by David.

These very same blasphemies, which were one day to be spoken against the Savior and against God, were already foretold by the Wise Man with even more exactness: *He declares that He has the knowledge of God, and calls Himself the Son of God, and He glories that He has God*

*for His Father. If he is the true Son of God, let Him accept Him, and deliver Him from the hands of His adversaries. Let us try Him with insults and torments, that we may know His reverence, and prove His patience; let us condemn Him to a most shameful death.*³

The chief priests were stirred up by envy and hatred against Jesus Christ thus to insult him; but, at the same time, they were not exempt from the fear of some great punishment, as they could not deny the miracles performed by the Lord. Wherefore all the priests and chiefs of the synagogue continued disturbed and in terror, and therefore desired to be present at his death, in order to be freed from this fear which tormented them. Seeing him then fastened upon the cross, and that he was not delivered from it by his Father, they proceeded with increased audacity to taunt him with his impotence and his persuasion that he was the Son of God. They said,

1 "Tauri pingues obsederunt me. . . . Circumdederunt me canes multi Salva me ex ore leonis." - Ps. 21.13, 17, 22.

2 "Liberet nunc, si vult eum." - Matt. 27.43.

3 "Promittit se scientiam Dei habere, et Filium Dei se nominat . . . , et gloriatur Patrem se habere Deum. Si enim est verus Filius Dei, suscipiet illum, et liberabit eum de manibus contrariorum. Contumelia et tormento interrogemus eum, ut sciamus reverentiam ejus, et probemus patientiam illius; morte turpissima condemnemus eum." - Wisd. 2.13, 16, 18-20.

[278] "He trusted in God, that he was his Father; why, then, does not God deliver him if he loves him as his Son?" But grievously were these malicious men in error, for God did truly love Jesus Christ, and loved him as his Son; and he loved him for this very reason, that Jesus was sacrificing his life upon the cross for the salvation of men, in order to obey his Father. This Jesus himself had said, *I lay down My life for My sheep . . . therefore has the Father loved Me, because I lay down My life.*¹ The Father had already destined him to be the victim of this great sacrifice, which would bring to him an infinite glory, as the God-man would be sacrificed, and which would ensure the salvation of all men; but if the Father

had delivered him from death, the sacrifice would have been imperfect, and then the Father would have been deprived of that glory, while men would have been deprived of their salvation.

Tertullian writes that all the insults that were offered to Jesus Christ were a secret remedy for our pride; for these injuries, which were unjust, and unworthy of him were nevertheless necessary to our salvation,² and worthy of a God who chose to suffer so much in order to save man. And then, speaking of the reproaches laid against Jesus, he adds: "Of him they were unworthy, but to us they were necessary, and therefore they were worthy of God, because nothing is so worthy of God as the salvation of man."³

Let us, therefore, who boast that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, be ashamed of angrily resenting the in-

1 "Animam meam pono pro ovibus meis. . . . Propterea me diligit Pater, quia ego pono animam meam." - John 10.15, 17.

2 "Totum denique Dei mei penes vos dedecus, sacramentum est humanae salutis."

3 "Sibi quidem indigna, homini autem necessaria: et ita jam Deo digna, quia nihil tam dignum Deo, quam salus hominis." - *Adv. Marc.* Bk. 2.

[279] injuries which we receive from men, because a God-made-man suffered the same for our salvation with so much patience. And let us not be ashamed of imitating Jesus Christ in pardoning those who offend us, as he himself declares that in the day of judgment he will be ashamed of those who in this life have been ashamed of him.¹

O my Jesus! how can I grieve for any insults that I may receive, who have so often deserved to be trodden under foot by the devils in hell! Oh, by the merits of all the insults which You did suffer in Your Passion, give me grace to suffer with patience all the insults which may be offered to me, through love of You, who have embraced so many for love of me. I love You above all things, and desire to suffer for You, who

have suffered so much for me. I hope for everything from You, who have bought me with Your blood. And I also hope in your intercession, O my mother Mary.

VII. THE SEVEN WORDS SPOKEN BY JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS

1. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."2

O loving tenderness of Jesus towards men! St. Augustine says that when the Savior was injured by his enemies, he besought pardon for them; for he thought not so much of the injuries he received from them, and the

1 "Qui me erubuerit et meos sermones, hunc Filius hominis erubescet, cum venerit in maiestate sua." - Luke 9.26.

2 "Pater! dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt." - Luke 23.34.

[280] death they inflicted upon him, as upon the love which brought him to die for them.1

But some may say, Why did Jesus pray to the Father to pardon them, when he himself could have forgiven their injuries? St. Bernard replies that he prayed to the Father, not because he could not himself forgive them, but that he might teach us to pray for them that persecute us.2 The holy abbot says also in another place: "O wonderful thing! He cries, Forgive; they cry, Crucify."3 Arnold of Chartres remarks that while Jesus was laboring to save the Jews, they were laboring to destroy themselves; but the love of the Son had more power with God than the blindness of this ungrateful people.4 St. Cyprian writes, "Even he who sheds the blood of Christ is made to live by the blood of Christ."5 Jesus Christ, in dying, had so great a desire to save all men, that he made even those enemies who shed his blood with torments partakers of that blood.6 Look, says St. Augustine, at your God upon his cross; see how he prays for them that crucify him; and then deny par-

don to your brother who has offended you!

St. Leo writes 7 that it was through this prayer of Christ so that many thousands of Jews were converted

1 "Illis petebat veniam a quibus adhuc accipiebat injuriam non enim attendebat, quod ab ipsis moriebatur, sed quia pro ipsis moriebatur." - *In Jo. tr.* 31.

2 "Non quia non posset ipse relaxare, sed ut nos pro persequentibus orare doceret."

3 "Mira res! ille clamabat: Ignosce!- Judai : Crucifige" - *S. de Pass. Dom.*

4 "Cum ipse ad hoc nitatur ut salventur, Judai ad hoc ut damnentur. Plus debet apud Deum posse Filii charitas, quam populi caecitas." - *De 7 Verbis.*

5 "Vivificatur Christi sanguine, etiam qui fudit sanguinem Christi." - *De Bono pat.*

6 *Serm.* 49.

7 "Impetravi! quod petierat Christus, multaque statim de Judaeis millia crediderunt." - *Ad Hedib.* q. 8.

[281] at the preaching of St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles; while (says St. Jerome) God did not will that the prayer of Jesus Christ should continue without effect, and therefore at that very time he caused many of the Jews to embrace the faith. But why were they not all converted? I reply that the prayer of Jesus Christ was conditional, and that they who were converted were not of the number of those of whom it was said, You have resisted the Holy Spirit.¹

In this prayer Jesus Christ further included all sinners; so that we all may say to God:

O Eternal Father, hear the prayer of Your beloved Son, who prayed to You to pardon us. We deserve not this pardon, but Jesus Christ has merited it, who by his death has more than abundantly satisfied for our sins. No, my God, I will not be obstinate like the Jews; I repent, O my Father, with all my heart, for having offended You, and through the merits of Jesus Christ I ask for pardon. And You, O my Jesus, You do know that I am poor and sick, and lost through my sins; but You have come from heaven on purpose to heal the

sick, and to save the lost, when they repent of having offended You. Of You Isaiah said, *He sent me to heal the contrite of heart.*² And of You St. Matthew writes, *The Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*³

2. "Amen I say to you, this day you shall be with Me in paradise."⁴

St. Luke writes that of the two thieves who were cru-

1 "Vos semper Spiritui Sancto resistitis." - Acts 7.51.

2 "Misit me, ut mederer contritis corde." - Isa. 61.1.

3 "Venit enim Filius hominis salvare quod perierat." - Matt. 18.11.

4 "Amen dico tibi: Hodie mecum eris in paradiso." - Luke 23.43.

[282] cified with Jesus Christ, one continued obstinate, the other was converted; and seeing his miserable companion blaspheming Jesus Christ, and saying, *If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us*, he turned and reproved him, saying that they were deservedly punished, but that Jesus was innocent. Then he turned to Jesus himself and said, *Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom*; by which words he recognized Jesus Christ as his true Lord and the king of heaven. Jesus then promised him paradise on that very day; *Amen I say to you, this day you shall be with me in paradise.*¹ A learned author writes that, in conformity with this promise, the Lord, on that very day, immediately after his death, showed himself openly, and rendered the repentant thief blessed, though he did not confer on him all the delight of heaven before he entered there.

Arnold of Chartres, in his treatise on the seven words, remarks upon all the virtues which the good thief exercised at the time of his death: "He believed, he repented, he confessed, he preached, he loved, he trusted, he prayed."²

He exercised faith when he said, *When You come into Your kingdom*; believing that Jesus Christ, after his death,

would enter into his glorious kingdom. He believed, says St. Gregory, that he whom he saw dying was about to reign.³

He exercised penitence together with the confession of his sins, saying, *We indeed justly; for we received the due reward of our deeds*. St. Augustine observes that before

1 "Si tu es Christus, salvum fac temetipsum et nos... Et nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus; hic vero nihil mali gessit... Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum... Amen dico tibi : Hodie tecum eris in paradiso." - Luke 23.39-43.

2 "Ibi credit, timet, compungitur et poenitet, confitetur et praedicat, amat, confidit, orat." - *De 7 Verbis*.

3 "Regnaturum credidit, quem morientem vidit." - *Mor.* 1. 18, ch. 25.

[283] his confession he had not boldness to hope for pardon; he did not dare to say *Remember me*, until, by the confession of his guilt, he had thrown off the burden of his sins.¹ On this St. Athanasius exclaims, O blessed thief, you have stolen a kingdom by that confession!²

This holy penitent also exercised other noble virtues; he preached, declaring the innocence of Jesus Christ, *This man has done no evil*. He exercised love to God, receiving death with resignation, as the punishment due to his sins, saying, *We receive the due reward of our deeds*. Hence St. Cyprian, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine do not scruple to call him a martyr; and Silveira says ³ that this happy thief was a true martyr, as the executioners broke his legs with increased fury, because he had declared the innocence of Jesus; and that the saint willingly accepted this torment for the love of his Lord.

Let us also in this circumstance remark the goodness of God, who always gives us more than we ask for, as St. Ambrose says, "The Lord always grants more than we ask; the thief prayed that Jesus would remember him, and Jesus said, Today you shall be with Me in paradise."⁴ St. John Chrysostom further remarks that no one merited the possession of paradise before this thief.⁵

Thus is confirmed what God said by Ezekiel that, when the sinner heartily repents of his sins, God pardons him in the same way as if he had forgotten all the sins

1 "Non est ausus ante dicere, 'Memento mei,' quam, post confesionem iniquitatis, sarcinam peccatorum deponeret." - Serm. 155.

2 "O beatum latronem! rapuisti regnum ista confessione." - *Serm. contra omn. haer.*

3 Lib. 8, ch. 16, q. 12.

4 "Semper plus Dominus tribuit, quam rogatur. Ille rogabat ut memor sui esset: Dominus autem ait, 'Hodie mecum eris in paradiso.' " - *In Luc. 23.*

5 "Nullum ante Latronem invenies repromissionem paradisi meruisse."

[284] he had committed.¹ And Isaiah gives us to understand that God is so urgent for our good, that when we pray he instantly hears us.² St. Augustine says that God is ever prepared to embrace penitent sinners.³

And thus it was that the cross of the wicked thief, being endured with impatience, became to him a precipice leading to hell; while the cross endured with patience by the good thief became to him a ladder to paradise. Happy were you, O holy thief, who had the fortune to unite your death to the death of your Savior.

my Jesus! henceforth I sacrifice to You my life, and I seek for grace to enable me, at the hour of my death, to unite the sacrifice of my life to that which You did offer to God upon the cross, and through which I hope to die in Your grace, and, loving You with pure love stripped of every earthly affection, to attain to love You with all my powers through all eternity.

3. "Woman, behold your son. . . . Behold your mother."⁴

We read in St. Mark that on Calvary there were present many women, who watched Jesus on the cross, but from afar off, among whom was Mary Magdalen.⁵ We believe, also, that among these holy women was also the holy mother Mary; while St. John says that the Blessed Virgin stood, not afar off, but close to the cross, together

- 1 "Si autem impius egerit poenitentiam . . . , omnium iniquitatum ejus . . . non recordabor." - Ezek. 18.21, 22.
- 2 "Ad vocem clamoris tui, statim ut audierit, respondebit tibi." - Isa. 30.19.
- 3 "Paratus in amplexus peccatorum." - *Man.* ch. 23.
- 4 "Mulier, ecce filius tuus. . . . Ecce Mater tua." - John 19.26, 27.
- 5 "Erant autem et mulieres de longe aspicientes, inter quas erat Maria Magdalene." - Mark 15.40.

[285] with Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalen.¹ Euthymius attempts to reconcile this discrepancy, and says that the Holy Virgin, seeing her son drawing nearer to death, came from among the rest of the women close up to the cross, overcoming her fear of the soldiers who surrounded it, and enduring with patience all the insults and repulses which she had to suffer from these soldiers who watched the condemned, in order that she might draw near her beloved Son.² Thus also a learned author, who wrote the life of Jesus Christ, says, "There were his friends, who watched him from afar; but the Holy Virgin, the Magdalen, and another Mary stood close to the cross, with John; and so Jesus, seeing his mother and John spoke to them the words above mentioned. Truly it was the mother who not even in the terror of death deserted her Son.³ Some other mothers fly when they see their children dying; their love does not permit them to be present at their death without the power of relieving them; but the holy mother, the nearer her Son approached to death, the nearer she drew to his cross." The afflicted mother thus was standing close to the cross; and as the Son sacrificed his life, so she offered her pangs for the salvation of men, sharing with perfect resignation all the pains and insults which her Son suffered in his death. A writer says that they who would describe her fainting at the foot of the cross dishonor the constancy of Mary. She was the strong woman, who neither fainted nor wept, as St. Ambrose writes: "I read of her standing, but not of her weeping."¹

1 "Stabant autem juxta crucem Jesu Mater ejus, et soror Matris ejus, Maria Cleophae, et Maria Magdalene." - John 19.25.

2 "Tunc Dei Mater propinquius cruci astitit, quam caeterae mulieres, Judaeorum vincens timorem." - *In Matt.* ch. 67.

3 "Plane Mater, quae nec in terrore mortis Filium deserebat." - *In Ass. B. M.* Serm. 4.

4 "Stantem lego, flentem non lego." - *Or. de ob. Val.*

[286] The pain which the Holy Virgin endured in the Passion of her Son exceeded all the pains which a human heart can endure; but the grief of Mary was not a barren grief, like that of other mothers who behold the sufferings of their children; it was a fruitful grief, since through the merits of her so great grief, and through her love (according to the opinion of St. Augustine), as she was the natural mother of our head Jesus Christ,¹ so she then became the spiritual mother of us who are his faithful members, in cooperating with him by her love in causing us to be born, and to be the children of the Church.

St. Bernard writes that upon Mount Calvary both of these two great martyrs, Jesus and Mary, were silent, because the great pain that they endured took from them the power of speaking.² The mother looked upon her Son in agony upon the cross, torn with compassion for the pains he suffered, and the Son looked upon the mother in agony at the foot of the cross.

Mary and John then stood nearer to the cross than the other women, so that they could more easily hear the words and mark the looks of Jesus Christ in so great a tumult. St. John writes: *When Jesus then saw His mother and the disciple standing, whom He loved, he said to His mother: Woman, behold your son.*³ But if Mary and John were accompanied by other women, why is it said that Jesus beheld his mother and the disciple, as if the other women had not been perceived by him? St. John Chrysostom writes that love always makes us look more

1 "Plane mater membrorum ejus, quod nos sumus; quia cooperata est charitate ut fideles in Ecclesia nascerentur, qui illius Capitis membra sunt." - *De S. Virg.* ch. 6.

2 "Tacebant ambo illi Martyres, et, prae nimio dolore, loqui non poterant." - *De Lam. V. M.*

3 "Cum vidisset ergo Jesus Matrem et Discipulum quem diligebat . . ."
- John 19.26.

[287] closely at the object of our love.¹ And St. Ambrose in a similar way writes, It is natural that we should see those we love before any others.² The Blessed Virgin revealed to St. Bridget that in order that Jesus might look upon Mary, who stood by the side of the cross, he was obliged first to compress his eyebrows in order to remove the blood from his eyes, which prevented him from seeing.³

Jesus said to her, *Woman, behold your son!* with his eyes pointing out St. John who stood by his side. But why did he call her woman, and not mother? He called her "woman," we may say, because, drawing now near to death, he spoke as if departing from her, as if he had said, Woman, in a little while I shall be dead, and you will have no Son upon earth; I leave you, therefore, John who will serve and love you as a son. And from this we may understand that St. Joseph was already dead, since if he had been still alive he would not have been separated from his wife.

All antiquity asserts that St. John was ever a virgin, and specially on this account he was given as a son to Mary, and honored in being made to occupy the place of Jesus Christ; on which account the holy Church sings, "To him a virgin He commended his Virgin Mother."⁴ And from the moment of the Lord's death, as it is written, St. John received Mary into his own house, and assisted and obeyed her throughout her life, as if she had been his own mother.⁵ Jesus Christ willed that this beloved disciple should be an eye-witness of his death, in order that he might more confidently bear witness to it in his

1 "Semper amoris oculus acutius intuetur." - *Serm.* 78.

2 "Morale est ut, quos diligimus, videamus prae caeteris." - *De Jos. patr.* ch. 10.

3 "Nec ipse me adstantem cruci videre potuit, nisi sanguine ex-

presso per ciliorum compressionem." - Rev. Bk. 4, ch. 70.

4 "Cui Matrem Virginem virgini commendavit." - *Off. de S. Jo.*

5 "Et ex illa hora accepit eam Discipulus in sua." - John 19.27.

[288] Gospel, and might say, *He that saw it has borne witness*;¹ and in his Epistle, *What we have seen with our eyes, that we both testify and make known to you*.² And on this account the Lord, at the time when the other disciples abandoned him, gave to St. John strength to be present until his death in the midst of so many enemies.

But let us return to the holy Virgin, and examine more deeply the reason why Jesus called Mary *woman*, and not *mother*. By this expression he desired to show that she was the great woman foretold in the Book of Genesis, who would crush the serpent's head: *I will put enmities between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed: she shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for her heel*.³ It is doubted by none that this woman was the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, by means of her Son, would crush the head of Satan - if it be not more correct to say that her Son, by means of her who would bear him, would do this. Naturally was Mary the enemy of the serpent, because Lucifer was haughty, ungrateful, and disobedient, while she was humble, grateful, and obedient. It is said, *She shall crush your head*, because Mary, by means of her Son, beat down the pride of Lucifer, who lay in wait for the heel of Jesus Christ, which means his holy humanity, which was the part of him which was nearest to the earth; while the Savior by his death had the glory of conquering him, and of depriving him of that empire which, through sin, he had obtained over the human race.

God said to the serpent, *I will put enmities between your seed and the woman*. This shows that after the fall of man, through sin, notwithstanding all that would be done

1 "Qui vidit, testimonium perhibuit." - John 19.35.

2 "Quod vidimus oculis nostris . . . , testamur et annuntiamus." - 1 John 1.1.

3 "Inimicitias ponam inter te et Mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius :

ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus." - Gen. 3.15.

[289] by the redemption of Jesus Christ, there would be two families and two posterities in the world, the seed of Satan signifying the family of sinners, his children corrupted by him, and the seed of Mary signifying the holy family, which includes all the just, with their head Jesus Christ. Hence Mary was destined to be the mother both of the head and of the members, namely, the faithful. The Apostle writes: *You are all one in Christ Jesus; and if you are Christ's, then you are the seed of Abraham.*¹ Thus, Jesus Christ and the faithful are one single body, because the head cannot be divided from the members, and these members are all spiritual children of Mary, as they have the same spirit of her Son according to nature, who was Jesus Christ. Therefore, St. John was not called *John* but the disciple beloved by the Lord, that we might understand that Mary is the mother of every good Christian who is beloved by Jesus Christ, and in whom Jesus Christ lives by his Spirit. This was expressed by Origen, when he said, "Jesus said to Mary, Behold your son, as if he had said, This is Jesus, whom you have borne, for he who is perfected lives no more himself, but Christ lives in him."²

Denis the Carthusian writes that in the Passion of Jesus Christ the breast of Mary was filled with the blood which flowed from his wounds, in order that with it she might nourish her children. And he adds that the Mother of God by her prayers and merits, which she especially acquired by sharing in the death of Jesus Christ, obtained for us a participation in the merits of the Passion of the Redeemer.³

1 "Omnes enim vos unum estis in Christo Jesu; si autem vos Christi, ergo semen Abrahae estis." - Gal. 3.28.

2 "Dixitque Jesus Matri : 'Ecce filius tuus;' perinde ac si dixisset : Ecce hic Jesus quem genuisti. - Etenim, qui perfectus est, non amplius vivit ipse, sed in ipso vivit Christus."

3 "Promeruit ut, per preces ejus ac merita, meritum passionis Christi communicetur hominibus." - *De Laud. V. M.* Bk. 2, a. 23.

[290] O suffering Mother! You know that I have deserved hell; I have no hope of being saved, except by sharing the merits of the death of Jesus Christ; You must pray for me, that I may obtain this grace; and I pray you to obtain it for me by the love of that Son whom you saw bow his head and expire on Calvary before your eyes. O queen of martyrs, O advocate of sinners, help me always, and especially in the hour of my death! Even now I seem to see the devils, who, in my last agony, will strive to make me despair at the sight of my sins; oh! abandon me not then, when you see me thus assaulted; help me with your prayers, and obtain for me confidence and holy perseverance. And because then, when my speech is gone, and perhaps my senses, I cannot invoke your name, and that of your Son, I now call upon you; Jesus and Mary, I recommend my soul to you.

4. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"¹

St. Matthew writes that Jesus uttered these words with a loud voice. Why did he thus utter them? Euthymius says that he thus cried out in order to show us his divine power, inasmuch as, though he was on the point of expiring, he was able thus to cry aloud, a thing which is impossible to dying men, through their extreme exhaustion. Also, he thus cried out in order to show us the anguish in which he died. It might, perhaps, have been said that as Jesus was both God and man, by the power of his divinity he had diminished the pains of his torments; and in order to prevent this idea, he thought fit in these words to declare that his death was more

1. "Deus meus! Deus meus! ut quid dereliquisti me?" - Matt. 27.46.

[291] bitter than that which any man had endured, and that while the martyrs in their torments were comforted with divine sweetness, he, the king of martyrs, chose to die deprived of every consolation, satisfying the utmost rigor of the divine justice for all the sins of men. And

therefore Silveira remarks that Jesus called his Father God, and not Father, because he was then regarding him as a Judge, and not as a son regards his father.¹

St. Leo writes that this cry of the Lord was not a lamentation, but a doctrine,² because he thus desired to teach us how great is the wickedness of sin, which, as it were, compelled God to abandon his beloved Son without a comfort, because he had taken upon him to make satisfaction for our sins. At the same time, Jesus was not abandoned by the divinity, nor deprived of the glory which had been communicated to his blessed soul from the first moment of his creation; but he was deprived of all that sensible relief by which God oftentimes comforts his faithful servants in their sufferings; and he was left in darkness, fear, and bitterness, pangs which were deserved by us. This deprivation of the sensible consciousness of the divine presence was also endured by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani; but that which he suffered on the cross was greater and more bitter.

Eternal Father, what offence had this Your innocent and most obedient Son ever given You, that You should punish him with a death so bitter? Look at him as he hangs upon this cross, with his head tortured with thorns, as he hangs upon the three iron nails, and is supported by his own wounds! All have abandoned him, even his own disciples, all deride him upon the cross, and blaspheme him; and why have You abandoned him, who have so greatly loved him? We must under-

1 "Jesus, pendens in cruce, erat satisfaciens de toto rigore justitiae suo Parenti, tamquam Judici, pro peccatis generis humani." - *Lib.* 8, ch. 18, q. 3.

2 "Vox ista doctrina est, non querela." - *De Pass.* serm. 16.

[292] stand that Jesus had taken upon himself the sins of the world, although he was himself the most holy of all men, and even sanctity itself; since he had taken upon himself to satisfy for all our sins, he seemed the

greatest of all sinners; and having thus made himself guilty for all, he offered himself to pay the price for all. Because we had deserved to be abandoned forever in hell to eternal despair, therefore he chose to be given up to a death deprived of every relief, that thus he might deliver us from eternal death.

Calvin, in his commentary on St. John blasphemously asserts that Jesus Christ, in order to appease his Father, experienced all the wrath which God feels towards sinners, and felt all the pains of the damned, and particularly that of despair. O blasphemy and shocking thought! How could he satisfy for our sins by committing a sin so great as that of despair? And how could this despair, which Calvin imagines, be reconciled with the other words which Jesus uttered, *Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*?¹ The truth is, as St. Jerome and others explain it, that our Savior uttered this lamentation to show not his own despair, but the bitterness which he endured in a death without consolation. And, further, despair could only have been produced in Jesus Christ by a knowledge that he was hated by God; but how could God hate that Son who, to obey his will, had offered himself to satisfy for the sins of men? It was this very obedience in return for which the Father looked upon him, and granted him the salvation of the human race, as the Apostle writes, *Who in the days of His flesh, offering with loud crying and tears, prayers and supplications to Him who could save Him from death, was heard because of His reverence*.²

1 "Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum." - Luke 23.46

2 "Qui in diebus carnis suae, preces supplicationesque ad eum, qui possit illum salvum facere a morte, cum clamore valido et lacrymis offerens, exauditus est pro sua reverenda." - Heb. 5.7.

[293] Further, this abandonment of Jesus Christ was the most dreadful suffering in all his Passion; for we know that after suffering so many bitter pangs without com-

plaining, he lamented over this; he cried with a loud voice, and with many tears and prayers, as St. Paul tells us. Yet all these prayers and tears were poured forth in order to teach us how much he suffered to obtain the divine mercy for us; and to enable us at the same time to comprehend how dreadful a punishment it would be to a guilty soul to be driven from God, and to be deprived forever of his love, according to the divine threat, *I will cast them forth from My house, I will no more love them.*¹

St. Augustine also says that Jesus Christ was agitated at the sight of his death, but that he was so for the comfort of his servants; in order that if ever they should find themselves disturbed at their own death, they should not suppose themselves reprobates, or abandon themselves to despair, because even he was disturbed at the sight of death.²

Therefore, let us give thanks to the goodness of our Savior for having been willing to take upon himself the pains which were due to us, and thus to deliver us from eternal death; and let us labor henceforth to be grateful to this our deliverer, banishing from our hearts every affection which is not for him. And when we find ourselves desolate in spirit, and deprived of the sense of the divine presence, let us unite our desolation to that which Jesus Christ suffered in his death. Sometimes he hides himself from the souls that he most loves, but he does not really leave their hearts; he aids them with his

1 "De domo mea ejiciam eos; non addam ut diligam eos." - Osee (Hosea) 9.15.

2 "Si imminente morte turbaris, non te existimes reprobum, nec desperationi te abjicias; ideo enim Christus turbatus est in conspectu mortis suae."

[294] inward grace. He is not offended, if in such an abandonment we say, as he himself said in the garden to his divine Father, *O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.*¹ But at the same time we must add, *Yet,*

*not as I will, but as You will.*² And if the desolation continues, we must continue the same acts of conformity to the divine will, as he himself repeated them for the three hours during which he prayed in the garden.³ St. Francis de Sales says that Jesus is as worthy of love when he hides himself as when he makes himself seen. Further, he who has deserved hell, and finds himself out of it, should say only, *I will bless the Lord at all times.*⁴ O Lord, I do not deserve consolations; grant that through Your grace I may love You, and I am content to live in desolation as long as it pleases You. If the damned could thus in their pains unite themselves to the divine will, hell would be no longer hell to them.

*But You, O Lord, remove not Your help away from Me; look towards my defence.*⁵ O my Jesus, through the merits of Your desolate death, deprive me not of Your help in that great struggle which, in the hour of my death, I must maintain with hell. At that hour all things of earth will have deserted me and cannot help me; do not You abandon me, who have died for me, and can alone help me in that extremity. Do this through the merits of those pains which You did suffer in Your abandonment, by which You have merited for us that we should not be abandoned by the divine grace, as we have deserved through our sins.

1 "Pater mi! si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste." - Matt. 26.39.

2 "Verumtamen, non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu." - Ibid.

3 "Et oravit tertio, eundem sermonem dicens." - Matt. 26.44.

4 "Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore." - Ps. 33.2.

5 "Tu autem, Domine, ne elongaveris auxilium tuum a me; ad defensionem meam conspice." - Ps. 21.20.

5. "I thirst."¹

[295] St. John writes, *Jesus then, knowing that all things were accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: I thirst.*² Scripture here refers to the words of David, *They gave Me gall to eat, and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.*³

Severe was this bodily thirst, which Jesus Christ endured on the cross through his loss of blood, first in the garden, and afterwards in the hall of judgment, at his scourging and crowning with thorns; and, lastly, upon the cross, where four streams of blood gushed forth from the wounds of his pierced hands and feet as from four fountains. But far more terrible was his spiritual thirst, that is, his ardent desire to save all mankind, and to suffer still more for us, as Blossius says, in order to show us his love.⁴ On this St. Laurence Justinian writes: "This thirst came from the fount of love."³

O my Jesus! You have thus desired to suffer for me; and I, when my sufferings at all increase, become so impatient that I am insupportable both to others and to myself. O my Jesus! through the merits of Your patience, make me patient and resigned in the sicknesses and crosses which befall me; make me like Yourself before I die.

1 "Sitis." John 19.28.

2 "Postea, sciens Jesus quia omnia consummata sunt, ut consummaretur Scriptura, dixit: Sitis." - John 19.28.

3 "Et dederunt in escam meam fel, et in siti mea potaverunt me aceto." - Ps. 68.22.

4 "Habuit et aliam sitim, puta, amplius patiendi atque evidentius suum nobis demonstrandi amorem." - *Marg. sp.* Pt. 3, ch. 18.

5 "Sitis haec de ardore nascitur charitatis." - *De Tr. Chr. Ag.* ch. 10.

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6. "It is finished."¹

St. John writes, *Jesus, therefore, when He had taken the vinegar said, It is finished!*¹ At this moment Jesus, before breathing out his soul, placed before his eyes all the sacrifices of the old law (which were all figures of the sacrifice upon the cross), all the prayers of the patriarchs, and all the prophecies which had been uttered respecting his life and his death, all the injuries and insults which it was predicted that he would suffer; and, seeing that all was accomplished, he said, *It is finished.*

St. Paul encourages us to run generously and encounter with patience the struggle which awaits us in this life with our enemies, in order to obtain salvation: *Let us run with patience in the contest which is set before us, looking to Jesus the author and the consummation of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.*³ The Apostle thus exhorts us to resist temptations with patience to the end, after the example of Jesus Christ, who would not come down from the cross while life remained. On this St. Augustine says, "What did he teach you, who, when he hung upon the cross, would not come down, but that you should be strong in your God?"⁴ Jesus thought fit to complete his sacrifice even to death, in order to convince us that the reward of glory is not given by God except to those who persevere

1 "Consummatum est." - John 19.30.

2 "Cum ergo accepisset Jesus acetum dixit: consummatum est." - Ibid.

3 "Per patientiam curramus ad propositum nobis certamen, aspicientes in Auctorem fidei et Consummatorem Jesum, qui, proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem." - Heb. 12.1.

4 "Quid te docuit pendens; qui descendere noluit, nisi ut sis fortis in Deo tuo?" - *In Ps. 70* serm. 1.

[297] to the end, as he teaches us in St. Matthew: *He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.*¹

Therefore, when, through inward passions, or the temptations of the devil, or the persecutions of men, we feel ourselves disturbed and excited to lose our patience, and to abandon ourselves to displeasing God, let us cast our eyes on Jesus crucified, who poured forth all his blood for our salvation, and let us reflect that we have not yet poured forth one drop of blood for love of him : *You have not yet resisted to blood, striving against sin.*²

When, therefore, we are called to yield up any point of human esteem, to abstain from any resentful feeling, to deprive ourselves of any satisfaction, or of anything we are curious to see, or to do anything which is unpleasant to our tastes, let us be ashamed to deny this gift to Jesus Christ. He has treated us without holding anything back;

he has given his own life, and all his blood; let us, then, be ashamed to treat him with any reserve.

Let us oppose to our enemies all the resistance that we are bound to make, and hope for victory from the merits of Jesus Christ alone, by means of which alone the saints, and especially the holy martyrs, have overcome torments and death : *In all things we overcome, through Him who loved us.*³ Therefore, when the devil paints to our thoughts any obstacles which, through our weakness, seem extremely difficult to overcome, let us turn our eyes to Jesus crucified, and, entirely trusting in his help and merits, let us say, with the Apostle, *I can do all things through Him that strengthens me.*⁴ By myself

1 "Qui autem perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit." - Matt. 10.22.

2 "Recogitate enim eum. . . . Nondum enim usque ad sanguinem restitistis, adversus peccatum repugnantes." - Heb. 12.3, 4.

3 "In his omnibus superamus propter eum, qui dilexit nos." - Rom. 8.37.

4 "Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat." - Phil. 4.13.

[298] I can do nothing, but by the help of Jesus I can do everything.

Thus let us encourage ourselves to endure the tribulations of the present life, by the sight of the pains of Jesus on the cross. Behold, says the Lord from this cross - behold the multitude of the pains and the wrongs which I suffer for you upon this tree. My body hangs by three nails, and rests alone upon my very wounds. The people who surround me blaspheme me and afflict me, and my spirit within me is more afflicted than my body. I suffer all for love of you; behold the affection I bear you, and love me; and be not wearied at suffering anything for me, who, for you, have lived a life so afflicted, and now am dying so bitter a death.

O my Jesus! You have placed me in the world that I might serve You and love You; You have given me so many lights and graces that I might be faithful to

You; but, in my ingratitude, how often, in order that I might not deprive myself of my own satisfaction - how often have I been willing to lose Your grace and turn my back upon You! Oh, through Your desolate death, which You did accept for my sake, give me strength to be grateful to You for what remains to me of life, while from this day forth I intend to drive from my heart every affection which is not for You, my God, my love, and my all.

Mary, my mother, help me to be faithful to your Son, who has so much loved me.

7. "Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." ¹

¹ Pater! in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum. - Luke 23.46.

Eutychius writes that Jesus uttered these words with a [299] loud voice, to make all men understand that he was the true Son of God, calling God his Father.¹ But St. John Chrysostom writes that he cried with a loud voice to teach us that he did not die of necessity, but of his own free will,² uttering so strong a voice at the very moment when he was about to end his life. This was in conformity with what Jesus had said during his life, that he voluntarily sacrificed his life for his sheep, and not through the will and malice of his enemies : *I lay down my life for my sheep. . . . No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself.*³

St. Athanasius adds that Jesus Christ, in thus recommending himself to the Father, recommended at the same time all the faithful, who through him would obtain salvation, since the head with the members form one single body.⁴ On which the saint remarks that Jesus then intended to repeat the prayer that he had before offered : *O holy Father, keep them in Your name, that they may be one, as We are one.* And then he added, *Father, I will that those whom You have given me should*

*be where I am, and that they should be with me.*⁵

This made St. Paul say, *I know in whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until that day.*⁶ Thus the Apostle wrote,

1 "Clamavit voce magna, ut omnes scirent quod Patrem Deum appellaret." - *In Matt.* ch. 67.

2 "Ut ostenderet haec sua potestate fieri." - *In Matt.* hom. 89.

3 "Et animam meam pono pro ovibus meis. . . . Nemo tollit eam a me, sed ego pono eam a meipso." - John 10.15.

4 "In eo homines apud Patrem commendat per ipsum vivificandos; membra enim sumus, et membra unum corpus sunt. . . . Omnes ergo in se Deo commendat."

5 "Pater sancte! serva eos in nomine tuo quos dedisti mihi, ut sint unum sicut et nos. Volo ut, ubi sum ego, et illi sint mecum." - John 17.11,24.

6 "Scio enim cui credidi, et certus sum quia potens est depositum meum servare in illum diem." - 2 Tim. 1.12.

[300] while he was in prison, suffering for Jesus Christ, into whose hands he committed the deposit of his sufferings and of all his hopes, knowing how grateful and faithful he is to those who suffer for his love.

David placed all his hope in the future Redeemer when he said, *Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit, for You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.*¹ And how much more ought not we to trust in Jesus Christ, who has now completed our redemption? Let us say with great courage, *You have redeemed me, O Lord; into Your hands I commend my spirit. Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit.* Great comfort do these words bring to the dying at the moment of death, against the temptations of hell, and their fears on account of their sins.

But, O Jesus, my Redeemer! I would not wait for death to recommend my soul to You; I commend it to You now; permit me not to turn my back upon You again. I see that my past life has only served to dishonor You; permit me not to continue to displease You for my days that yet remain. O Lamb of God, sacrificed upon

the cross, and dead for me as a victim of love, and consumed by all griefs, grant by the merits of Your death that I may love You with all my heart, and be entirely Yours while life remains. And when I shall reach the end of my days, grant me to die glowing with love for You. You have died through love of me : I would die for love of You. You have given Yourself entirely to me; I give myself entirely to You : *Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.* You have poured forth all Your blood; You have given Your life to save me; permit not that through my fault all should be lost to me. O my Jesus, I love You, and I hope through Your merits that

1 "In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum; redemisti me, Domine Deus veritatis." - Ps. 30.6.

[301] I shall love You forever. *In You, O Lord, I have hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.*¹

O Mary, mother of God, I trust in your prayers; pray that I may live and die faithful to your Son. To you I would say, with St. Bonaventure, "In you, O Lady, I have hoped; I shall not be confounded forever."

1 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." - Ps. 30.2.