

/ SACRED PASSION
OF JESUS CHRIST

R. F. CLARKE S.J.

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The Sacred Passion of Jesus Christ

Short Meditations for Every Day in Lent

By RICHARD F. CLARKE S.J.

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Preliminary Meditation

How to Meditate on the Passion

St Bonaventure tells us that if we desire to meditate with fruit on the Passion of Jesus Christ, three conditions are necessary. Our meditation must be:

1. *Humble*; for the Passion is unlike anything else in the world; it is unfathomable to human reason—a bottomless ocean of mystery. Reason must bow its head and confess its inability to grasp the mysteries that even Faith sees only darkly and through a glass. The story of Christ's humiliation is to the proud a sealed book; they see nothing attractive in it. Christ suffering has no beauty that they should admire Him. I must therefore begin by praying for humility.

2. *Full of confidence*; since the Passion is the source of all our confidence. It is the

proof of the exceeding love wherewith Christ loved us. How can I fear, with the sight before me of Christ suffering for love of me?

It is, too, a medicine for every possible evil, for every temptation, for every sin; whatever the malady of my soul, the Passion of Christ can cure it. At the foot of the Cross each mortal wound will be made whole.

3. *Persevering*; the beauty of the Passion does not appear all at once. The world considers it a degradation, the careless and the indifferent pass it by unmoved; even the faithful Christian scarcely penetrates beneath the surface of that divine mystery, unless he prays earnestly and continually to appreciate it, and frequently repeats his meditations on each mystery of the Passion. Only gradually and by degrees are we drawn by the sacred attractiveness of the Cross.

1—*Ash Wednesday*

The Anticipation of the Passion

Read St Matthew xvi. 21; xvii. 21, 22.

1. From the first moment of His Incarnation our Blessed Lord had ever before His eyes the prospect of His approaching Agony and Death. It was present to Him, not vaguely and uncertainly, like pain and suffering to which men look forward, but vividly and distinctly as at the actual time when He suffered. Never for a single moment was it absent from His thoughts. O wondrous Love of our Incarnate God, who thus employed His divine power to protract His sufferings by this continual prospect!

2. Yet in spite of this He was always cheerful and full of brightness and joy of heart. His coming Agony did not weigh

Him down or depress Him. In spite of the bitterness of the chalice, of the unspeakable agony ever present to Him, no cloud overcast His brow, no weakness or dread was manifest to His Apostles, no thought of Self interfered with His perfect sympathy for others. He was a pattern of divine unselfishness; the unselfish always forget their own troubles, and so can comfort and help others.

3. But our Blessed Lord not only was not cast down by the approaching Passion, He actually longed for it. " I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished ? " His love for men was such that He rejoiced in the thought of suffering for us. How can I ever thank Him as I ought ? How can I show my love for Him who loved me with so great a love ?

2—First Thursday in Lent

The Preliminaries of the Passion

Read St Luke xxii. 1-6

1. During the first days of the week in which He suffered, our Blessed Lord had been teaching all day in the Temple. The assembled crowd had cried “Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.” It seemed as if He were going to be acknowledged by the voice of the people as the King of Israel. How deceptive are appearances! How often, when all seems going well and the cause of Christ about to triumph, some grievous disappointment is at hand!

2. Side by side with the enthusiasm of the people grew the range and fury of the chief priests and scribes. Why did they thus hate Him who went about doing good?

In their selfishness and cupidity, they feared lest He should interfere with their influence, and they should thus lose their position, their reputation, their gains. Pride and self-love blinded their eyes, and made them hate with a bitter hatred the Son of God. Am I not sometimes blinded by like feelings ? filled with unjust dislike of others because they seem to interfere with my influence or my personal interests ?

3. The chief priests had a great advantage in the fact that in the little company that surrounded Jesus there was a traitor. Judas, impelled by avarice, had been first a thief, and then had made overtures to betray his Master. O fatal influence of money to harden the heart of man ! How careful must I be not to set my heart on any earthly possessions, since nothing has a more deadly power than this to separate me from the love of Jesus !

3—*First Friday in Lent*

The Supper in Simon's House

Read St Mark xiv. 3-11.

1. The supper in Simon's house was remarkable for St Mary Magdalene's act of devotion to our Divine Lord. She brought an alabaster box of ointment of precious spikenard, and poured it on His Head as He sat at table. Her gift was very pleasing to our Lord for three reasons: (a) she gave of her best; (ā) she gave out of pure love; (c) she gave in presence of the assembled guests, fearlessly and knowing that men would ridicule and blame her. Are the gifts I give to God marked by generosity, supernatural love, absence of all human respect ?

2. Some of those present, instigated by Judas, began to criticize what they regarded

as waste. They had indignation within themselves and showed it in words. They veiled their grumbling under show of charity to the poor. This was very displeasing to Jesus. He hates the spirit that finds fault and criticizes and condemns, and all the more when it hides itself under the cloak of virtue. Yet is not this spirit strong in me ?

3. Notice the gratitude of Jesus. A little box of ointment poured on His Head earns for the donor a commemoration of her gift wherever the Gospel shall be preached in the whole world. And not only this; it obtains for her also many graces on earth and great glory in Heaven. There is no one who is so grateful as Jesus Christ: no one who will reward with such divine generosity everything done from love to Him. Nothing will be forgotten, nothing is too small to be noticed and richly recompensed by Him.

4—*First Saturday in Lent*

The Eating of the Paschal Lamb

Read St Luke xxii. 14-18.

Our Blessed Lord, before He suffered, celebrated the Jewish rite which above all the rest foreshadowed His own sacred sufferings. The paschal lamb was an exact type of Him, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.

1. The paschal lamb was the means employed by Almighty God to deliver His people from Egypt. It was the sprinkling of its blood on the posts of the door which caused the avenging angel to pass by and leave the inmates unharmed. So the Blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on our souls, in the Sacraments and when we make an act of contrition, saves us from the vengeance that would otherwise fall upon us. O Jesus !

sprinkle me with one drop of Thy precious Blood, and I shall be free from sin.

2.The paschal lamb had to be drained of the last drop of its blood. So the Lamb of God shed for us the last drop of His precious Blood. He was not satisfied with merely giving His life for us, but He must needs endure all the intense agony, the burning thirst which came of this draining of His whole Body for love of us. How can I ever thank Him as I ought ?

3.The lamb endures uncomplainingly. It never murmurs against its lot, or struggles against those who lead it here and there; unlike the filthy swine, who grunt and grumble at every attempt to control them. None was ever so submissive as the Lamb of God. “ Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God, I am content to do it.” Can I echo these words ?

5—The First Sunday in Lent

Jesus' Desire for His Sufferings

Read St Luke xii. 49, 50.

1. How are we to account for Christ's desire to suffer? Human nature shrinks from suffering and dreads it, and none of the sons of men was ever so sensitive as He, or had sufferings to look forward to in any way comparable to His. Yet in spite of this, Christ longed for His sufferings. O wondrous love, that not only suffered for us, but longed for the time when His Passion should come !

2. Was it the suffering in itself for which Christ longed ? Impossible. It was for the result of that suffering, for the joy that was set before Him, that He endured the Cross and despised the shame. Even Christ could not work without the prospect of

some reward. So we should encourage ourselves with the thought of the glorious recompense God will give to all who suffer for Him, and who unite their sufferings to the sacred sufferings of the Son of God.

3. But what sort of reward was that to which the Son of God looked forward ? It was no selfish reward. It was the pure, unselfish joy of seeing others happy, of knowing that by all He was to endure millions of mankind would be freed from the eternal misery of hell, and raised to the eternal and unspeakable joy of the Beatific Vision. He knew that it was by sufferings that graces must be won for others. This lesson, too, the saints learned from their Master. How have I learned it ? Do I recognize the necessity, the dignity, the happiness of suffering ?

6—*Monday after the First Sunday in Lent*

The Washing of the Feet

Read St John xiii. 2-20.

1. When the paschal supper was finished our Lord rose from the table and laid aside His upper garment; and girding Himself with a towel, He filled a basin with water and went round from one to another of the Apostles, washing with His sacred Hands the feet of each. This act was intended to teach us the happiness of performing menial services for those around us. To wait on others, especially on our inferiors, for Christ's sake, is far more honourable than to be waited on by them; to make ourselves the servants of others is far more noble than to be served by them. Is this the principle on which I act?

2. In this act were combined the two virtues which are most prominent in our

Lord's life on earth—*charity* and *humility*. Charity takes a pleasure in everything that promotes the happiness or the comfort of our fellow men because they are the brethren of Christ. Humility takes a pleasure in whatever puts us in an inferior position. How sadly wanting I am in these virtues! I dislike charity if it costs me anything, and I positively hate to be humbled, to be despised by men.

3. Yet Christ's words are true: "The disciple is not greater than his master." If our Divine Master was glorious in the sight of the angels as he stooped to wash the Apostles' feet, our road to glory must be by stooping, by ministering in all humility to others. We never can be as great as our Master. We must take care lest our selfishness and pride place us in direct contrast with the Son of God.

7—Tuesday after the First Sunday in Lent

The Institution of the Blessed Eucharist

Read St Luke xxii. 19, 20.

1. St Paul tells us with pointed emphasis that it was on the very night in which He was betrayed that our Lord instituted the Mystery of Mysteries, the Sacrament of His Love. It was worthy of His divine generosity to choose the occasion when He was to be outraged, insulted, betrayed, scourged, and crucified, to invent this wondrous Sacrament of Love. To forgive is always generous, but what shall we say of the generosity of One who not only forgives the most horrible insults and cruelty, but chooses the very day on which He is to suffer them for giving to His enemies a gift compared with which all other gifts are small and insignificant—

a gift, too, which is none other than Himself?

2. What is the primary end of the institution of the Blessed Eucharist? Our Lord Himself tells us in the words: "Do this in commemoration of Me." It is for the sake of putting us in mind of His Sacred Passion that He gives Himself to us, and that we, His Brethren, for whom He died, may not forget Him. He loved us so dearly—He loves us still so dearly—that He cannot bear to be absent from our thoughts; and for this end He invented this means of representing His Passion to us as long as the world should last.

3. But the Blessed Eucharist is more than a commemoration of the Sacrifice on the Cross. It is the same sacrifice: the same Priest, the same Victim, only the manner of offering changed. Christ is still mystically slain each time Holy Mass is said.

8—*Wednesday after the First Sunday
in Lent*

The Farewell Discourse of Jesus

Read St John xiv. 1-3, 27-31

1. Our Lord's farewell to His Apostles begins and ends with words of encouragement. He knew the importance of courage and confidence, and that without these they would never do great things for God. He knew, too, how liable all men are to be discouraged and cast down when troubles and trials arise; how hard it is to struggle on when all seems dark around. To us as well as to the Twelve He says: "Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God; believe also in Me." Why do not we believe more in Christ, trust Him more, appeal more to Him in times of darkness? He will always have a word of comfort for

us. " Let not your heart be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you."

2. Amid all the troubles that our Lord foretells to His Apostles, He promises them one gift that will enable them to rise above all their difficulties and all their sorrows. He promises to leave with them peace. What gift in the world is there which is like this? If we are at peace, we can bid defiance to all our foes; if we are not at peace, we might be lords of the universe, yet we should be miserable. No wonder we pray in holy Mass, *Dona nobis pacem*—Give us peace.

3. The peace our Lord promises is *His* peace; "*My* peace I give unto you." What sort of peace is this? It is the peace He enjoyed all through His life—the peace of perfect union of His will with God's. If we are thus united to God by perfect resignation, we too shall have unalterable and eternal peace.

θ—*Thursday after the First Sunday in Lent*

On the Road to Gethsemani

Read St Mark xiv. 26-34.

1. After singing one of the paschal hymns our Lord and His Apostles went forth to the Garden of Gethsemani. On the way a strange sorrow spread over the countenance of Jesus. His unfailing cheerfulness forsook Him. His disciples wondered at the sudden change. It was the shadow of His Sacred Passion which fell upon Him, the beginning of the black darkness which was to envelop His Sacred Heart. When the shadow of desolation falls on me, may I remember Thee, O Lord, thus downcast on the road to Gethsemani !

2. In mournful words our Lord addresses the Apostles: “You will be scandalized in My regard this night. You will all fly

like cowards when the danger comes. One of you will betray Me, another will deny Me thrice, all will forsake Me." How this thought pierced with anguish the sensitive Heart of Jesus ! Of all who for three years had been His chosen friends and companions, who had seen His miracles and listened to His divine words, not one would be found faithful. My God, how often have I been found unfaithful to Thee !

3. At length our Lord's bitter sorrow breaks out in words still more mournful: " My soul is sorrowful even unto death." The darkness which was gathering round Him was even then like the darkness of death. He began to fear and to be very heavy. He could hardly endure the misery which even then began to fall on Him. Pray for sympathy with Jesus, and the power of appreciating a little the divine love which undertook all this for your sake.

10—*Friday after the First Sunday in Lent*

The Sacred Agony in the Garden

Read St Matthew xxvi. 30-40.

1. During the Agony in the Garden our Lord anticipated all the coming agony of His Passion. He allowed His human Soul to feel in all its intensity each detail of the unspeakable suffering that was now close at hand. Hitherto it had indeed been distinctly present to Him, but now it seemed to take possession of His own Soul. Now it was mortal fear, resulting from a clear, vivid realization of all that He had to endure. When darkness invades our souls, we should remember that none is like the deep, black darkness that spread over the Sacred Soul of Jesus.

2. What relief did Jesus seek in this agony of terror that had come over Him ?

The relief of prayer. He knew that in all desolation and distress the best plan, the only plan, is to throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. There is no imperfection in asking to be delivered from something that we can scarcely endure, whether present agony or the anticipation of it, else Christ would not have prayed: " My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me ! " In our darkest hours, we can at least repeat these sacred words that were spoken as a pattern to us.

3. Yet we must remember the conclusion of the prayer, the act of resignation, which leaves all in the hands of God. " Not as I will, but as Thou wilt ! " These words, spoken from our hearts, will always give us strength to bear what seems unbearable, and will take the bitterness out of our pains.

11—*Saturday after the First Sunday in Lent*

The Intensity of the Sacred Agony

Read St Mark xiv. 32-42.

1.If it is difficult to suffer, it is far more difficult to suffer willingly for those who show no gratitude in return for what we endure for them. But most difficult, nay, impossible, save to one who shares the divine Charity of the Son of God, to suffer for those who requite love with hatred, the favours won for them by outrages and insults. It was this that crushed to the earth the Son of God. Alas ! how ungrateful I am to Him !

2.During His Sacred Agony He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world. Not in a general way, but individually, so that each and every sin, from the first sin of Adam to the last that shall be committed on the eve of the Judgement, was

present before Him: and not only present, but each added its own pang. The great black cloud which passed before His Soul, contained each sin of each individual man, woman, and child, and Christ suffered for each. What a frightful thing it must be to commit deliberately even the least sin, if thereby we add fresh pain to the Agony of Jesus !

3. It was in this way that “ He was made sin for us,” *i.e.*, He identified Himself with sin as far as it was possible for the Immaculate Lamb of God. He took upon Him all the effects of sin except those which necessarily belong to him who is guilty of the act of sin. All the darkness, all the gloom, the despondency, the loss of God, the feeling of hopelessness, the terror, which arise from sin, inundated His Sacred Soul. Thus it was that He saved me from the punishment my sins deserved. O my Jesus ! how can I ever thank Thee as I ought ?

12—*The Second Sunday in Lent*

The Help for the Saints in the Sacred Agony

iRead St Matthew xxvi. 40-44.

1. Our Blessed Lord was not satisfied with taking upon Himself the sins of the world; in His divine mercy and compassion He added to this a further sacrifice of Himself. He also took upon Himself all the sufferings of the just, and especially all that His saints and martyrs would have to suffer for Him. He endured beforehand the thousand forms of agony to which they would be subjected for His sake. Not only would He in His love and mercy redeem them, but “He bore their infirmities and carried their sorrows.” What sufficient thanks can we show to Him for His unbounded goodness?

2. This it is which enabled the martyrs to despise their torments, and made the

Apostles rejoice to suffer shame for His sake. This it is which makes tolerable anguish which otherwise would be intolerable, for if it be borne patiently for love of Christ, He has already in Himself, if not exhausted its bitterness, at least taken the main part of it on Himself. Every pang, every struggle, every throb of agony which should fall to the lot of His servants till the end of the world, He made His own for their relief.

3. For this reason we are taught to unite our sufferings with those of our Lord; for what else does this mean except that He desires to share them with us? In point of fact, the more we do, the more we bear our troubles with a supernatural motive, the lighter they will become, or rather the greater will be our power and willingness to bear them. I will be more resigned, more patient, for Christ's sake; to Him I will offer all my sufferings and unite them to His.

13—*Monday after the Second Sunday in Lent*

The Consolations of the Sacred Agony

Read St Luke xxii. 40-46.

1. No words can tell, no human heart can conceive, the intensity of the Sacred Agony of Jesus. It would have crushed Him out of His very life had He not by means of His Divinity supported His Sacred Humanity, and so enabled it to suffer more. See Him pale, haggard, scarce to be recognized in His abasement and His terror! See the sweat of blood pouring from His Sacred Limbs! Can this be the well-beloved Son of God? My God, make me more contrite at the thought that I have taken part in bringing Thee to this.

2. But He was not without consolation in His Agony. An angel was sent to comfort Him, to present before His vision the innumerable company of the saints won by

His Precious Blood. He saw their joy and happiness to be won by His Sacred Passion, by the labour of His Soul, and seeing it He was satisfied to bear it all. O pure, unselfish joy! O joy surpassing all other joys! The joy of seeing others happy was the promised reward which supported Jesus in His Agony.

3. But He had a still greater and stronger support than this. He beheld the honour and glory that would accrue to His Eternal Father. He saw that all the glory God would reap from His works would be as nothing in comparison with this greatest work to be wrought by His Eternal Son, and seeing this He was satisfied, and more than satisfied. In the head of the Book it is written of Him: "Behold, I come to do Thy will, O my God. I am content to do it." Have I the glory of God at heart as the first and foremost motive of my actions?

14—*Tuesday after the Second Sunday in Lent*

The Sequel of the Sacred Agony

Read St Mark xiv. 41, 42.

1. At length our Lord's mental Agony in the Garden was over; He had accepted the chalice which His Heavenly Father had given Him to drink. Now He is no longer sad and downcast, but He returns to His Apostles full of vigour and courage. He encounters His Passion almost with eagerness. This is always the result of a perfect submission to the will of God and absolute confidence in Him. God will always give us the courage to meet every trial, and when the time comes He will impart strength and force and light-heartedness that make it easy to face the trial.

2. Yet this change has another cause. It was won by prayer; or, rather, our

Lord as our divine example imparted for our sakes to His human nature grace such as earnest prayer alone can obtain for men from God. This is the secret of all spiritual victories; all are won by persevering prayer. Prayer changes the poor, timid, frightened, shrinking soul to one brave and courageous and ready to do great things for God. Without prayer we are sure to fail. Am I earnest in prayer ?

3. We observe, too, that it was not merely prayer, but *repeated* prayer—the same words over and over again, the same entreaty to be spared, joined to the same act of resignation. We sometimes say we cannot pray, but at least we can repeat over and over again some prayer for mercy and for help. Our repetitions will be not vain repetitions, but will bring certain relief from Him who encourages us to importunity in prayer.

15—*Wednesday after the Second Sunday in
Lent*

The Betrayal of Jesus

Read St Matthew xxvi. 47-50.

1. As soon as Jesus had for the third time roused the Apostles from their slumber, the tramp of approaching soldiery is heard, and presently a band is seen escorted by the Pharisees and ancients, and headed by one who acts as their guide. Who is it who has pointed out Christ to His foes? Alas! it is none other than the traitor Judas; one of the chosen Twelve who had lived for three years in familiar intercourse with Jesus, listened to His words of grace, seen His acts of love and mercy. If Judas fell so low, I too am in continual danger. How awful a thing it would be if I too were to turn traitor to Jesus!

2. Our Lord does not shrink away from Judas as we do from those who we think have treated us ill. On the contrary, He advances to meet him with words of friendship, in spite of the deadly wrong He had received. How is it we are so unforgiving, so slow to make friendly advances, so ready to wrap ourselves up in our offended dignity ? It is because we are so ungenerous, so petty, so mean, so unlike to Jesus.

3. Jesus still loved Judas, sought to win Judas, strove by words of gentle remonstrance to bring him to a sense of his wickedness before it was too late. " Whereunto, friend, art thou come ? " He calls this miserable wretch His friend. Jesus meant what He said; for He is the friend of sinners, even the greatest. He then is my friend, so why should I fear ?

16—*Thursday after the Second Sunday in Lent*

The Apprehension of Jesus

Read St John xviii. 2-11.

1. When Judas had given to his Master the traitor's kiss, our Lord, knowing that His hour was come, boldly advanced to meet His enemies, and told them that He was Jesus of Nazareth. At this word they went backward and fell to the ground. If this was the result of our Lord's presenting Himself to them in His humiliation and abasement, what will be the terror and dread of sinners when He comes again in all His glory ? O my God, grant that I may have no sin upon my soul, no debt still to pay when I appear before the judgement-seat of Christ !

2. The soldiers then advanced to seize Jesus. St Peter, with impetuous courage

and loyalty, draws his sword and attacks the servants of the High Priest, and in the affray cuts off the ear of one of them. But our Lord checks him, and bids him put up his sword into the scabbard. His loyalty was natural, not supernatural, and it did not endure long in the face of danger. Natural motives, however good, will not serve the cause of God.

3. When our Lord was in the hands of His enemies, all the Apostles forsook Him and fled. Not one was found to remain by His side in His abandonment. It was the will of God that He should suffer *alone*. "I looked about and there was none to help; I sought, and there was none to give aid." Christ then suffered alone, and He can sympathize with that loneliness in suffering which adds so much to its bitterness.

17—*Friday after the Second Sunday in Lent*

Jesus led away Captive

Read St John xviii. 12, 13.

1. The chief priests and Pharisees had brought with them a coil of rope with which they bound tightly the Sacred Hands of Jesus, and He was led away like a lamb going to the slaughter. This is the beginning of the apparent powerlessness of Jesus. He who before bid defiance to His enemies, put them to the rout by word and work, now seems unable to resist them, feeble and helpless in their hands. Yet under this apparent weakness was hidden a divine force; nay, it was this very weakness which was the means of conquering the whole world.

2. The officers tied the Hands of Jesus, so that He could no longer lay them upon

the sick and the afflicted, to heal their diseases and their miseries. So we too tie the Hands of Jesus by bands far more fatal, in hindering His power to heal the sickness of our soul. When we reject His graces and turn a deaf ear to His counsel, we render Him powerless to assist us; He cannot bestow upon us the blessings He delights to impart; our obstinacy has tied His Hands, so that He cannot help us as He would.

3. Often in our desire to work for others we find our hands tied. Something hinders our charitable designs; some hostile influence renders us apparently powerless. Our prayers seem to avail nothing; our kind acts are rejected; we seem to do the wrong thing when trying our best to do what is right. Yet we must not repine: we are only treading in our Master's steps. The very suffering entailed in this is a sure means of earning the graces we desire.

18_ *Saturday after the Second Sunday in Lent*

In the House of Annas

Read St John xviii. 19-24.

1. Try to picture the scene; watch the persons, listen to their words, observe their actions. Annas, a cunning, bitter, cynical old man, delighted to find his enemy in his power; the Pharisees crowding round in eager excitement, the false witnesses trying to concoct a plausible story, and in the midst Jesus, sorrowful, bleeding, exhausted, yet calm and full of dignity. Hear the insulting questions of Annas, the derisive cheers of the Pharisees, the shouts of the mob, the firm, quiet, gentle words of Jesus. See the angry, eager gestures of the enemies of Christ, the assumed indignation of the judge, the cruel blow struck by the mailed hand of the soldier

on the Face of Jesus, causing the blood to flow from His Sacred Mouth.

2. Christ received this blow upon His Face to atone for our sins of the tongue, for the wicked words, the censorious words, the uncharitable words, the impure words that too often proceed from our mouth. Grant, O Lord, that I may remember Thee suffering this cruel blow, and so may learn to hate my sins of the tongue that inflicted it upon Thee.

3. Our Lord desired to teach us another lesson, viz., to bear with patience and gentleness all outrage and unkindness, all reproaches and ill-usage, and especially such as we endure for His sake. "Blessed are ye," He says, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake." But we must take care to bear it *for Christ's sake*, and for love of Him, if we would earn the blessing.

19—*The Third Sunday in Lent*

In the Palace of Caiaphas

Read St Mark xiv. 55-64.

1. From the house of Annas, Jesus was dragged to the palace of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Notice the bustle and activity that prevail: the chief priests and council searching everywhere for a show of evidence; messengers sent to and fro; bribes offered, all the most worthless summoned to testify against Him. This is always the way: the wicked so much more active in fighting against God than the good in fighting in His behalf. Our Lord's disciples and friends are doing nothing, while His enemies are seeking to destroy Him. When I look at myself, how little I have done, how little I do now, for the interests of Jesus !

2. The false witnesses who came forward had a certain show of truth. The words

they quoted against Him were really spoken. They had learned the ways of their master the Devil; Satan, when he deceives, always mixes up a large element of truth with his deceits. This is why we should never argue with him, for he can represent what is false and unlawful as true and right, if once we listen, by bringing into prominence the element of truth it contains.

3. These false witnesses, in spite of their cunning, could not agree together, but contradicted one another. It is one of the certain tests of error, that it is inconsistent and self-contradictory; the city of confusion and the home of strife always thus betrays its imposture. Jarring discord is the mark of the foes of Christ; peace and concord are the privilege of those who are on His side. How I should thank God that He has caused me to dwell in the City of Truth, the Church of the Living God !

20—*Monday after the Third Sunday in Lent*

The Condemnation of Christ

Read St Mark xiv. 60-64.

1. In the midst of the false witnesses and their lying testimony Jesus remains silent. The High Priest, angry and impatient, urges Him to reply: "Answerest Thou nothing to the things which these witnesses allege against Thee?" Still Jesus answers not a word. How different from our eager anxiety to answer every accusation and every word of blame! How much better if we could hold our peace after the example of Jesus!

2. At length the High Priest rises and asks a direct question; nay, he summons Christ in the name of God to declare the truth: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the

Son of God.” Ordered by authority, Jesus at once says: “I am; and one day I shall come in all the power of God that is now entrusted to you as the High Priest of God.” Another lesson for us. We must obey authority even where he who carries it shamefully abuses it; for those in authority, like Caiaphas, speak in their official capacity as in the place of God.

3. When Christ declares Himself to be the Son of God, the High Priest and the council rise indignantly to protest against such blasphemy. In this they are the type of modern heretics, who accuse the Church of God and the Vicar of Christ of blasphemously usurping divine prerogatives. Pride and jealousy and self-love so blinded the eyes of the Sanhedrin that they called good evil, and evil good; condemned the Son of God to death because He told them the truth. My God, preserve me from ever being thus blinded by sin !

21—*Tuesday after the Third Sunday in Lent*

St Peter's Denial of Jesus

Read St Luke xxii. 55-62.

1. What was the secret of Peter's miserable fall ? He was brave and generous, and loved our Lord dearly. Yet through human respect and fear, he denied all knowledge of Him. The reason why he fell was that he trusted in himself and his natural qualities instead of in God. In the spiritual warfare natural courage and generosity avail not. He who does not rely upon God alone is sure to fall. When dangers are imminent he loses heart, and then all goes wrong.

2. St Peter had not yet learned that natural impulse as a motive of action is sure to lead man astray. It never avails before God. Its excellence, whatever it may be, only avails in the things of this

world, and even there it is a dangerous and untrustworthy motive. In things divine it is the road to ruin. We must never be led by impulse if we are to be safe. We must do more; we must turn our thoughts to God, and seek a divine impulse, an inspiration from Heaven, if we are to remain faithful and avoid frequent faults.

3. St Peter had neglected prayer. Our Lord had expressly warned him to watch and pray and he had allowed himself to sleep while Christ was suffering His Sacred Agony. True, he was weary and his eyes were heavy, but still he could have made the attempt. It might have seemed an unsatisfactory prayer, yet it would have saved Peter from his fall. He might have used vocal prayers and repeated the same words, like our Lord did. I learn from this that mere struggle against heaviness is very pleasing to God.

22—*Wednesday after the Third Sunday in Lent*

St Peter's Repentance

Read St Luke xxii. 55-62.

1. St Peter had thrice denied his Master, and the third time with oaths and curses. He was ashamed of Christ, afraid to own himself a servant of Christ, and all because of a woman's jeering tongue. As I look over my life, how many times there have been when I have been faithless as Peter was! I have not boldly spoken out as I ought. I have perhaps taken part in talk hateful to my Lord and Master. I have been ashamed to run counter to uncharitable or evil conversation, though I knew well enough that it was sinful.

2. After the third denial the cock crew, and at the same time our Lord turned and looked on Peter. It was at the moment when He was being dragged from the

tribunal to the servants' room, amid the jeers and mockery of the soldiers. All this time St Peter had been present to His thoughts, amid all the outrages and insults; and not St Peter alone, but all who, though not at heart disloyal, nevertheless fall through weakness into sin. Remember me, O Lord, when I am in danger of falling, and when Satan desires to have me that he may riddle me as wheat.

3. That look pierced the heart of St Peter with a keen pang of shame and sorrow and repentance. How could he have been faithless to the Lord whom he loved, and for whom he had joyfully given up all! At once he made his way out of the hall, and with tears of anguish begged for pardon. Those tears were not unmingled with the sweet consolation of knowing that he was forgiven, and with a firm resolution not to let this fall discourage him. Here is a model for me when I have sinned.

23—*Thursday after the Third Sunday in Lent*

Jesus in the Guard-room of Caiaphas

Read St Luke xxii. 63-65.

1. After our Lord had been condemned to death, the Sanhedrin rose, and He was handed over for custody during the night to the soldiers and servants, who, taking the cue from their masters, treated their prisoner with every kind of brutal ill-usage. They tied a dirty rag over His Face, and struck Him on the Face, challenging Him at the same time to show His divine power by saying the name of the striker. When He was silent, they mocked and jeered at Him, and at last they spat their filthy spittle in His Sacred Face. O my Lord, King of Heaven and earth, how couldst Thou suffer Thy Divine Majesty to be outraged by these wretches ?

2. Yet our Lord was never more glorious than in the midst of His degradation and contempt. If at His baptism He was the beloved Son of God in whom He was well pleased, much more now. Each blow, each gibe, each insult added to the glory of His Sacred Humanity to all eternity. Truly then does St Peter say: "If you be reproached for the name of Christ, you shall be blessed." Wisely did the Apostles count it joy to suffer shame for His sake. My God, I know it is so; but do I act on this principle, and rejoice in the reproaches and contempt that fall to my lot ?

3. What did Christ specially atone for in the guard-room ? For all the filthy words men speak, for all the obscene jests, for all the mockery of holy things, for all the angry, cruel, uncharitable words. Alas, my Jesus ! have I not taken part in these insults poured upon Thee ?

24—*Friday after the Third Sunday in Lent*

Jesus is dragged before Pilate

Read St Luke xxii. 66-70; xxiii. 1.

1. At daybreak the council assembled, and Jesus was again brought before them and questioned again. The sentence of death passed the night before was confirmed. The whole multitude then hastened to Pilate with their prisoner, that they might obtain from the Roman governor the ratification of the sentence which they could not carry out themselves. They were resolved to have His life—anything to be rid of Him. How strange it seems that they should so hate Him without a cause! Yet it is ever so; men who are proud and covetous and selfish instinctively hate the truth. This is why there prevails all over the world such a deadly enmity to the Church of Christ.

2. To wreak their vengeance, the Pharisees and ancients were ready to rise with the sun. How active men are in promoting worldly interests and criminal designs ! So much more active than in working for God and for Heaven. Might I not contrive to rise a little earlier or more punctually, so as to do something to please our Lord before I begin my ordinary work ? At least I might think of Him, and offer my heart and my life to Him !

3. The Jews actually delivered over one of their own sacred nation to their enemies and oppressors, the Romans. No means are too base to get rid of their enemy. How much unreasoning malice I have shown against those whom I disliked or who interfered with my selfish interests, perhaps against those who are not only brethren of Christ, but very dear to Him ?

25—*Saturday after the Third Sunday in Lent*

Judas' Repentance

Read St Matthew xxvii. 3-16.

1. When Judas heard the unanimous voice of the chief priests and ancients, declaring that Jesus was guilty of death, his soul was filled with a black remorse that made his life intolerable. How he hated the miserable pieces of silver for which he had sold his Master ! How he hated himself ! The sweetness and gentleness of Christ came vividly before him, and only added to his misery. How bitterly he repented his folly ! At least he would rid himself of the accursed money, and declare his guilt. But he had gone too far. He had refused so often to listen to the voice of Jesus that now his hardened heart refused to melt. What a warning to all

who turn a deaf ear to the voice of conscience !

2. Yet he might have been forgiven even now if he had thrown himself at Jesus' Feet, and begged for pardon. But this he would not do. His repentance was a hopeless, black remorse—no element of hope or love or humble sorrow. It was the repentance of the lost in Hell, who cry, "Fools that we were " but yet will not, cannot humble themselves to cry for mercy.

3. How miserable Judas had been from the first ! Had those pilfered grains in early days brought him solid satisfaction ? Had he been happy when he sacrificed his Master's interests to his own ? Are we happy when we knowingly prefer our own selfish interests to those of Christ ? Sin and misery are twin sisters. My God, may I never wilfully betray Thy interests to my own pleasure or gain !

26—*The Fourth Sunday in Lent*

Jesus before Pilate

Read St John xviii. 28-40.

1. Pilate was at first inclined to look with contempt on the charge brought against Christ of setting Himself up as King of the Jews. But he soon changed his tone. He was astonished at our Lord's silence and reserve. His calm dignity made a deep impression on him. How few there are who imitate Christ in this. Our babbling tongues pour forth so many foolish and ill-considered words. Learn of Jesus the dignity of timely silence.

2. Yet Jesus spoke when occasion required. He said enough to Pilate to convince him, not only of His innocence, but of His claim to be king. Pilate was half-inclined to listen. He could not help recognizing in

some degree the divine beauty of the Son of God amid all His humiliations. So the Catholic Church manifests herself to the world in a way that is sufficient to attract men of goodwill. There are few who have not the chance of recognizing her claims. Her beauty even in her humiliations and amid the sins of men shines forth as did the beauty of her Divine Spouse.

3. Pilate's long experience tells him plainly enough that the Jews are all wrong and Christ is right. His practised eye detects the malice of the Jews, their hatred of their victim, their selfishness and unscrupulous cruelty. He longs to release Christ; he knows he ought to do so, but he fears the Jews, lest he be reported as favouring revolt. Human respect overcomes his convictions, and he has not the courage to set Jesus free. How fatal is cowardice in things divine ?

27—*Monday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent*

Jesus before Herod

Read St Luke xxiii. 7-12.

1. When Pilate found that the Jews were determined on the death of Jesus, he tried to get rid of the responsibility by sending Him to Herod. Herod rejoiced to see Him. In his vanity he expected that our Lord would be glad to conciliate him by performing some miracle in his presence. Vain expectation ! It is only for the humble and pure of heart that our Lord works miracles. Yet I expect Him to work for me, proud and selfish as I am, miracles of grace, to enable me easily to overcome long-rooted faults, to attain a spirit of prayer and close union with Him. How can I hope for this while I am so full of the worldly spirit of Herod ?

2. Our Lord was ready enough to speak to Pilate, and even to Caiaphas; but for Herod He had not a word. There is something terrible in this silence in the presence of the sensual, hardened reprobate. There is something in a sensual life that shuts the ears of men so that the whispers of grace never seem to reach them. If I want our Lord to speak to me, the first thing is to see that I do not indulge my body inordinately.

3. Herod was also the incarnation of self-satisfied worldliness. He was munificent, popular, successful; but he was hateful in God's sight, and rejected by Him, so that our Lord showed an aversion to him that He showed to none else. What a lesson for us! The reprobate Herod, surrounded by flatterers and admirers; the Eternal Wisdom of God dressed in a fool's dress and treated as an idiot!

28—*Tuesday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent*

Barabbas or Jesus?

Read St Matthew xxvii. 15-22.

1. Before Pilate sent our Lord to Herod, he had already sought to take occasion to release Him from the custom of setting free at the Pasch some notable prisoner. In order to secure success he had proposed, as an alternative, a noted murderer named Barabbas. To his astonishment, the name of Barabbas had at once been taken up by the multitude. It was not that they loved Barabbas, but they hated Christ. So wretched men now choose what they know is evil, simply because they hate God. They cannot bear the idea of submission. They long to get God out of the way, as the Jews desired to be rid of Christ.

2. The multitude shouted for Barabbas because the chief priests urged them to it.

It was the rulers, the ancients, who were the real murderers of Christ; the ignorant mob did but follow their leaders. What a responsibility it is to be in a position of authority! What an account those who rule will have to give of those subject to them !

3. When Christ returned from the palace of Herod, clad in the fool's garment, Pilate made one more attempt to get Him released. It was a fresh compromise with his conscience, and, like all such compromises, only brought fresh insults on the Son of God. Again the shout rose for Barabbas to be set free, and Christ to be crucified. O Pilate ! why not listen to the whisper within you, and set the Just Man free at any risk ! My God, save me from cowardly compromises and dallying with conscience.

29—*Wednesday after the Fourth Sunday in
Lent*

The Scourging

Read St Matthew xxvii. 27-30.

1. When the Jews had shouted for Barab-
bas, and threatened Pilate to denounce
him as disloyal to Rome if he released
Jesus, the Governor made one more attempt
to save the life of Christ. He ordered Him
to be severely scourged, hoping thereby to
move the pity of the Jews. Vain attempt
at a fresh compromise with his conscience !
Pilate only involved himself in a deeper
guilt, and Christ in a greater agony of
suffering. Nothing ever succeeds except a
bold, fearless obedience to God's holy in-
spirations.

2. Our Lord is handed over to the scour-
gers, who strip Him naked and then begin

their impious barbarity. Blow succeeds blow from their many-lashed, iron-pointed scourges. First His Sacred Flesh becomes red and swollen under the stripes; then the Blood begins to flow; then the iron points lacerate and tear His delicate Body until it is one great wound. Listen as He piteously moans under the anguish! See Him masked in blood! O my Jesus, what must be Thy love to endure this for me!

3. At length the executioners cut the cords, and Christ falls heavily in a pool of His own Blood. What has brought the King of Heaven to this condition of abject misery? It is the sins of men, especially the sinful indulgence of the body. It was to atone for sins of luxury and impurity and drunkenness that the spotless Lamb of God was thus tortured. Alas! how often have I been indulgent to my body! How have I yielded to the cravings of sense!

30—*Thursday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent*

The Crowning with Thorns

Read St Mark xv. 16, 17.

1. Our Lord was covered with a scarlet cloak and crowned with thorns as a travesty or caricature of worldly honour. He desired to exhibit it in its true light. The farce played by the soldiers was in truth no farce, but a reality. It was intended to show how empty and contemptible is all earthly glory. It is worth no more than the mock-respect of the ruffians who bowed the knee by way of insult to Jesus. O Lord, by that mockery of honour Thou didst undergo, grant that I may esteem human honour at its true value.

2. Watch the soldiers at their cruel sport. The crown upon the Head of Jesus is plaited of briars, whose long thorns pierce His

sacred Forehead as they press it down upon Him; the drops of Blood and mingled tears blind His Eyes. One by one they pass before Him and bow the knee, and then, O shame ! they spit in His Sacred Face, that Face before which angels and archangels fall in prostrate homage. O Lord, in return for those insults Thou didst endure, I will always bow before Thee in the Blessed Sacrament with reverent love and adoration; I will seek to wipe the drops of Blood from Thine Eyes by denying myself the free indulgence of my senses even in lawful things.

3. What were the sins for which Christ specially atoned in the crowning with thorns? Evil thoughts and imaginations, uncharitable thoughts, proud thoughts, impure thoughts. It was these rather than the thorns which pierced His Sacred Head, and filled His Eyes with tears of sorrow and of blood.

31—*Friday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent*

Ecce Homo

Read St John xix. 4-6.

1. The scourging and crowning with thorns have brought the Son of God to a condition pitiable to contemplate. We have seen Him, and there is no sightliness in Him that we should desire Him. Pity, contempt, horror, disgust, indignation, are mingled in the hearts of those who behold Him. He is indeed a worm and not a man—He, the fairest among ten thousand! He, the sinless Lamb of God! Oh how frightful must sin be, if it can work such havoc even in the Sacred Person of the Son of God!

2. The sin that did this work, moreover, was the sin of others, not His own. It was something external to Him. He took it indeed upon Himself, He was made sin

for us, but sin was never His own as it was ours. If it could so disfigure and degrade the sinless Lamb of God when laid upon Him from without, what must be the disfigurement and degradation sin works in us, springing up as it does out of ourselves, being a part of our sinful nature producing its natural fruits ?

3. But was the Son of God really degraded by all these consequences of sin ? On the contrary, His Sacred Humanity had never been so glorious or so worthy of honour as it was then. If He was unsightly before men, in the eyes of His Eternal Father He was crowned with honour and glory. There is nothing so pleasing to God as voluntary self-abasement and humiliation, nothing that brings so rich a recompense. How foolish then am I when I seek to avoid humiliation, and hate to be made like to the Son of God by suffering contempt and reproach from others !

32—*Saturday after the Fourth Sunday in
Lent*

The Condemnation to Death

Read St Matthew xxvii. 24-26.

1. Pilate tries first one plan, then another to avoid passing a sentence which he knew to be unjust. One plan after another fails, and now he is brought face to face with a choice on which the salvation of his soul may well depend. It was the turning-point in his life: the grace of God urging him on one side, and on the other the fear of man. So in the life of each there is some turning-point, some occasion when the choice made will decide his future, both in life and eternity. Unhappy those who in such a moment choose as Pilate chose!

2. The motive that led Pilate to condemn Jesus was the fear of man. He did not

dare to face the consequences of doing his duty. He trembled before the opinion of others and the dread of losing his worldly position and honour. To how many has the same motive been a cause of eternal loss? Is it not one before which I have sometimes quailed, loving honour from men, and failing in what I knew was the will of God from a desire to please others?

3. Pilate ordered the sentence to be written out condemning Jesus to death, and then deliberately signed it. But first he washed his hands before the people, declaring himself guiltless of the blood of the Just Man that he condemned. O fruitless ceremony! He could not wash from his soul the black stain of cowardice and of treachery to his conscience. It is no use doing ill and saying we did not mean it. Such an evasion, like Pilate's protest, rather adds to than diminishes the sin.

33—*The Fifth Sunday in Lent*

Jesus sets out on the Way to Calvary

Read St Matthew xxvii. 32.

1. It was not really Pilate who condemned Jesus to death, says St Bernard, it was His love for us. He had been longing all His life through for that moment when He was to carry out His Father's will and redeem the world by dying for us. He knew that the divine mandate had gone forth that without shedding of blood there would be no remission. The voice of Pilate, sentencing Him to death, was but the expression of His own love for sinners, and of His joyful acceptance of the Cross for their sake. O Jesus, may I love Thee in return for such love for me !

2. The Cross has been prepared beforehand, and as soon as the sentence has been

passed they bring it forward to be laid upon the shoulders of their Victim. Jesus takes the Cross, and kisses the instrument of His agony as a welcome friend. He did this not merely because He loved us and therefore loved the Cross, but to teach us to love our crosses, to accept them as gifts from God. How can we dislike them when they make us like to Jesus, and must be borne after Him if we are ever to share His joy in Heaven ?

3. On the shoulder of Jesus was a large, open wound, scarcely covered by the garments thrown upon Him. The weight of the Cross rested on this wound, causing Him the most exquisite agony. It was by this that He was earning for us patience under our bodily sufferings. However keen, they are nothing to what the Son of God endured on His road to Calvary. Jesus, grant me patience under my sufferings !

34—*Monday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent*

Via Dolorosa

Read St Luke xxiii. 27-31.

1. Torn and bleeding, scarcely able to sustain the heavy burden of the Cross, with His long garment entangling His feet, dragged on by the brutal soldiery, Jesus treads the sacred Way of the Cross. After going on a few steps He stumbles and falls; rising with difficulty, He totters on a short distance farther and falls again. O my Lord and my God, I beseech Thee by these Thy most painful falls, grant that I may never again fall into deliberate sin.

2. On the way some women express their grief and compassion with Jesus. His appearance is so pitiable that they cannot restrain their tears. Jesus turns to them, tells them to weep, not for Him, but for

themselves and for their children. If sin has wrought such a work of destruction in the Son of God, in whom evil had nothing to lay hold of, in whom the green wood could be blackened externally but not consumed by the flame, what would be its effects on sinners in whom the fire of sin rages as in the dry tinder? How ought I to fear the least spark of sin which may kindle in me the fire of passion and destroy me utterly!

3. One of those holy women, named Veronica, with a handkerchief, wipes from His Face the blood and sweat. On looking at the handkerchief she sees the impression of His Sacred Countenance stamped upon it. So upon the hearts of all who do acts of kindness for Christ's sake there is imprinted His likeness. Each deed of charity tends to produce in our soul that likeness to Him in which all holiness consists.

35—*Tuesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent*

Jesus Meets His Holy Mother

Read St Matthew xvi. 24-28.

1. Our Blessed Lady, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, goes forth to meet her Son as He drags Himself up the hill of Calvary. With what horror and dismay must she have been stricken through at the sight of her darling Son and her God, His divine beauty obliterated, mangled and torn, covered with blood and filth, unsightly and terrible to behold! Heart-broken anguish fills her soul, and we may well believe that she would have died of sorrow had she not been miraculously supported by the power of God. O Mother of God! obtain for me a share in thy grief and thy intercession!

2. What a fresh pang of sorrow to the gentle Heart of Jesus to see His Holy Mother,

pale and haggard, come to share in His Sacred Passion by her compassion ! None so full of sympathy as He, none so full of acute feeling for the woes of others. If He compassionated the women on the way, how much more His own Mother, whom He loved far better than all the world beside ! O Mary, obtain for me, a sinner, the sacred compassion of Jesus !

3. Our Lady shared in the Passion of Christ in a way in which none else could—none even of the saints—simply because she was sinless. She had not to suffer for herself. She had no sin to expiate. This it is which justifies us in giving her the title of co-Redemptrix. She, too, who knew no sin, was made sin for us. This earned for her the privilege of sharing in all the agony of the sinless Lamb of God.

36—*Wednesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent*

Simon of Cyrene

Read St Mark xv. 21.

1. Our Blessed Lord falls again and again beneath the weight of the Cross, until it becomes evident to the soldiers that He will never be able to drag it to the place of execution. They accordingly lay hold of a heathen passing by, Simon the Cyrenian, and him they compel to carry the Cross. How little Simon knew the happiness in store for him when those rough soldiers seize him and force him to the ignominious task. How often we, too, fail to recognize in the sudden disagreeables and contradictions we encounter God's wonderful designs of mercy to us !

2. Simon at first bore the Cross surlily and reluctantly, chafing under the hardship

inflicted on him. But as he carries it, an unaccountable change comes over him. It has the virtue to change his heart, and to make of him a devoted follower of the Crucified, one of the pillars of the Apostolic Church. Thus many a cross that we carry reluctantly turns out to be really the means of our sanctification and salvation.

3. Before Simon arrives at the summit of Calvary the Cross has endeared itself to him. He has recognized that to carry it for Jesus was no hardship, but a privilege and a happiness. So, too, the saints learn to love the Cross, to embrace it, to seek it, to carry it with all joy, to be almost discontented if they are without it. This is the very height of peace and felicity; for those who find their joy in the Cross, find everywhere around them cause for rejoicing.

37—Thursday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Read St Luke xxiii. 32-34.

1. Arrived at the summit of Calvary our Divine Saviour is roughly stripped of His garments and exposed to the rude gaze of the scoffing multitude. This shame He endured to atone for our most shameful deeds, for our human respect, for our glorying in our shame, for our boasting and love of display before the eyes of men. Yet when we see the King of Glory thus exposed to shame, will not shame be far dearer to us than the empty honours that men bestow ?

2. The executioners then seize Jesus and lay Him down upon the Cross. Holes have been bored in the wood at the extremities of the cross-piece and in the lower part of

the stem, and our Lord's Sacred Limbs are almost dislocated by being dragged until the Hands and Feet reach the parts that have been pierced. Then the long, sharp nails are held by one of the soldiers, while another with a hammer drives them in through the hands and feet of Jesus. The blows are struck; the Blood gushes forth; while the Divine Victim moans piteously under the exquisite pain. O Jesus, grant me a heart-felt compassion with Thee in Thy sufferings !

3. When our Lord is nailed to the Cross the soldiers raise it on high, and let the base of it fall into a hole dug in the ground. The shock renews afresh the agony of Jesus. No word is heard from His Mouth, save one which He repeats again and again: " Father, forgive them ! " Even then He was thinking of others, not of Himself. Was ever love like His? Why do I not love Him more in return?

38—*Friday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent*

The Deriding of Jesus

Read St Matthew xxvii. 39-44.

1. The sight of Jesus hanging on the Cross, so far from melting the hearts of the Jews, only hardened them the more against Him. Instead of feeling pity, they rejoiced over their victim and insulted Him in His misery. When men deliberately refuse to listen to the voice of Jesus, they become quite insensible after a time to His claim on them. They think evil good, and good evil; they are given over to a reprobate mind. Even in little things, those who do not obey the impulses of grace become deaf to its calls, or even feel a positive aversion for that which they once loved but have now rejected.

2. How apparently impotent to save Himself the King of Glory seems to be !

But that weakness is true strength. It is by these outrages and insults, by this passive endurance of their jeers and gibes, that Christ our Lord is doing the wondrous work of our redemption and earning graces for all those who suffer insult for Him, to rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake.

3. But He is doing more than this. He is also preparing for His Sacred Humanity a glory corresponding to all this ignominy. Of Him it is true beyond all others that he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Each taunt, each mocking word, was to earn the praise of the angels and saints to all eternity. Here is an encouragement for us! What matters it if men despise and insult us, if God approves! The just Judge will not forget in the day of account what we have suffered for Him.

39—*Saturday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent*

The Good Thief

Read St Luke xxiii. 39—43.

1. Among those who mocked and derided Jesus were the two thieves crucified with Him. But very soon His unspeakable gentleness and meekness touched the heart of one of the two. First he ceased his words of insult, then he boldly reproofed his companion, and bore testimony to the innocence of Jesus and to His Authority as King and Lord. What a divine power there is in weakness ! The sight of the uncomplaining patience of Christ convinced this robber that He was King of all the earth, and that He who was now dying on the Cross would soon reign for ever and ever. “ Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom ! ”

2. Remember me ! This was his simple prayer. But we know that it was enough. If Christ remembers us, all will be well. What we have to dread is lest He forget us by reason of our having forgotten Him. This prayer should often be on our lips: “ *O* Lord, remember me ! In the hour of temptation, remember me ! When sorrow bears hard on me, remember me ! In sickness and in my last agony, *O* Lord, remember me ! ”

3. Our Lord answers this prayer of the good thief with divine generosity. All his sins are forgiven him; and as soon as his agony is over he is to be received into the company of the blest and to be with Christ in Paradise. What a rich reward for his confession of Christ ! What a glorious answer to his prayer that Christ will remember him !

40—*The Sixth Sunday in Lent*Jesus Commends His Disciples to His Holy
Mother's Care

Read St John xix. 25-27.

1. Our Divine Saviour did not depart from those He loved without providing them with a Mother who should be their consoler, their protector, their advocate with God. In the person of St John, He entrusted them all to Mary's care. If He had simply been providing Mary with a home, He would first have addressed St John and commended to him the pious task of sheltering the Mother of God. By speaking first to Mary, He showed that it was she who was to shelter all those who were desolate and in sorrow. St John was the representative of all who love Jesus, when Jesus said to Mary respecting him: "Woman, behold thy son."

2. This was the occasion when our Lady for a second time became a mother. The birth of her first-begotten Jesus cost her no pang of travail; the birth of her spiritual children, the sinful sons of men, brought to her unspeakable anguish. The Queen of Heaven became the Queen of Dolours before she could earn the right to exercise over each of us a mother's fostering care. How we ought to value the privilege of being her children, when it cost Mary such unspeakable suffering !

3. When Jesus said to Mary, " Woman, behold thy son," He asked our Lady to regard us with a mother's love for His sake. Her love for Him was to be transferred to us, without, however, becoming one whit the less. She was to love us for Jesus' sake; to show her love for Him by loving us. With what perfect confidence can we go to Mary, who sees in each of us, in spite of our sins, the image of her Divine Son !

41—*Monday in Holy Week*

The Dereliction of Jesus on the Cross

Read St Mark xv. 33-36.

1. Our Lord had for a long time been silent. A thick darkness had gathered; most of the spectators had departed in fear. The mocking Pharisees had been awed to silence. Few were left save the soldiers, St John, and a faithful group of holy women. All at once a piercing cry from the Divine Sufferer breaks the silence, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" These words were an expression of the thick darkness which our Lord had permitted to gather round His human Soul, and to hide from Him as it were the face of His Eternal Father. This desolation was by far the greatest of all the unspeakable sufferings of the Son of God.

2. What was its cause? Nothing else but sin. He was made sin for us, and having thus identified Himself with the sins of men so far as was possible for the sinless Lamb of God, He allowed Himself to experience to the utmost degree that He could the awful misery which is the consequence of sin—the black, dark hopelessness (if the word is a lawful one) which results to the sinner whom God forsakes. This consequence of sin Jesus took upon Himself to save men from the eternal remorse and despair which otherwise would have been their lot.

3. This cry of Jesus is a model prayer for us in times of darkness and desolation. We sometimes feel as if God had forsaken us, and cry out in our misery and sore distress. We are always safe in echoing Jesus' words, and He who hears us use them will remember His own dereliction and help us in ours.

42—*Tuesday in Holy Week*

The Thirst upon the Cross

I

Read St John xix. 28, 29.

1. There is nothing that causes such agonizing thirst as loss of blood. The prayer of the wounded soldier upon the battle-field is always for a drink of water; he forgets all other pains in his burning thirst. What must have been the intolerable suffering of our Lord, whose Sacred Body had been gradually drained of every drop of blood? All day long the Blood had been flowing—at the scourging, on the way to Calvary, as He was dragged hither and thither, with the sharp cords cutting His wrists. And now upon the Cross, as from hands and feet a stream bedewed the ground, fiercer and fiercer grew the burning, parching thirst which consumed Him. O my

Jesus, was there none to quench that thirst endured for us ?

2. Our Lord's thirst was to atone especially for the sins of intemperance and self-indulgence in drink. Every sin of drunkenness and excess or self-indulgence in our food and drink added to that thirst and made it still more intolerable. My God, forgive me any such offences, and help me to deny myself some lawful indulgence, that so I may atone for my sins and assuage in some degree that sacred thirst Thou didst endure for me.

3. There was, however, a deeper meaning in our Lord's cry: " I thirst !" He was thirsting for the souls of sinners, thirsting for the love of ungrateful men, thirsting for my love. He thirsts for it still, that I may be more faithful to His grace. O my Jesus, help me to love Thee more !

43—*Wednesday in Holy Week*

The Death of Jesus

Read St Luke xxiii. 45-48.

1. After our Lord has hung in agony for three hours upon the Cross, at last the time approaches when His deliverance is at hand. He has endured every possible form of suffering, bodily and mental. His body has been subjected to a physical torture far worse than the accumulated sufferings of the martyrs; His Sacred Soul has been rent asunder with an anguish and desolation more awful than any save the eternal anguish of Hell. He has sacrificed His honour, His reputation; He has been esteemed a fool and a madman. Now there is only one sacrifice more that he can make to His Eternal Father for man—the sacrifice of His life. He is determined to give up all for us, to be obedient even to death.

2. What was it that caused the death of our Lord? Not the executioners, not the Jews, not the agony on the Cross; they were but instruments. It was sin. Sin had in it a malice sufficient even to rob of life God, our Lord and King. What a strange mystery sin is ! And how strange that we do not hate it more when we see its power to destroy !

3. The death of Jesus is for each one of us the most important fact in human history, or even in the order of the Providence of God. Hence the Sacrament of Sacraments is primarily a commemoration of it. When we receive Holy Communion, we “ show the death of the Lord till He come,” and, therefore, His Sacred Passion and Death should be the chief subject of our thoughts whenever we approach the Holy Table, and especially on the eve of the solemn day when He instituted the Sacrament of His love.

44—*Maundy Thursday*

Jesus' mystical Death in the Blessed Eucharist

Read St John xiv. 34-37.

1. Each time that Holy Mass is said, the Sacrifice of our Blessed Lord upon the Cross is represented in the Sacrifice that takes place upon the altar. Thus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, in the divine decree, continues to be slain mystically, and will continue as long as the world shall last. With such a sight before our eyes, how can we ever forget Him ? How can we ever lose heart or despond with this abiding proof of His tender love before our eyes ?

2. In the Blood and Water that flowed from our Lord's side when pierced by the centurion's spear, were represented the Sacraments of the Church, the Blood of

Christ that inebriates us in Holy Communion, the water that cleanses our souls in Baptism and Penance. His Sacred Heart that was open then is open still; the rich stream of graces still continues; it has flowed even unto me. What countless graces I have received from the love that has been poured upon me from the Sacred Heart of Jesus !

3. The Sacred Host that we receive in Holy Communion reminds us in many things of the dead Body of Jesus as it hung upon the Cross, all the glory hidden—no life to all appearance there; in the power of all to treat it as they choose; reduced to the lowest humiliation. Yet it is our God and our Lord, the object of the adoring love of angels and of men, He whom the Heaven of heavens cannot contain, who condescends to be our Guest and the food of our souls. Meditate on the unspeakable love of Jesus sacrificed for us !

45—*Good Friday*

The Descent from the Cross

Read St Mark xv. 38-46.

1. No sooner is the Sacrifice consummated and the last drop of the precious Blood shed from our Lord's Sacred Heart, than all is changed. That lifeless Body is now treated with the utmost respect and veneration. See how gently and carefully Joseph and Nicodemus wind linen bands around the limbs and lower it to the ground, reverently adoring that Body which had only a few hours before been a laughing-stock and object of contempt. Henceforth no more ignominy, no more contempt, no more ill-usage, but the love and adoration of saints and angels to all eternity.

2. Our Lady receives the body of her Son. What were her thoughts as she gazes

into the five Wounds and sees how from head to foot it is covered with gaping wounds and bruises, battered out of all shape by the cruelty of man ? O Mother of Sorrows, great as an ocean is thy sorrow ! What must be thy hatred of sin when thou seest what it has wrought in the divine beauty of thy spotless Son ! What a mixture of agonized compassion and mournful sorrow, and hope and consolation and gratitude and triumphant joy, fills thy sacred soul while thou lookest on the dead Body of thy Son.

3. The day on which Jesus died is indeed well called Good Friday. It is the day when Jesus consummated His victory over death. While we mourn over His sufferings and our sins which caused them, we must also rejoice exceedingly at the thought of Satan conquered and Heaven opened, and millions of sinners cleansed from sin in His most precious Blood.

46—*Easter Eve*

The Entombment

Read St Luke xxiii. 50-56.

1. When our Lady's mournful task was finished, the Body of Jesus was laid in the new tomb of St Joseph of Arimathea, there to remain until the hour of its joyful Resurrection. Let us contemplate it as it lies there: disfigured by countless wounds and scars, so apparently helpless, yet none the less the joy of God and worthy of our highest adoration. Passive and cold and motionless, but soon to be radiant with the most dazzling beauty; dead, but living with a divine life. Learn from this (1) the glory of suffering; (2) the power of apparent helplessness when God is with us; (3) the beauty of passive obedience; (4) the true life of those who are dead to the world.

2. What was our Lord doing while thus apparently inactive in the silent tomb?

He was beginning His work of triumph, delivering countless souls from Purgatory and from Limbo, consoling the patriarchs and prophets, fulfilling His promise of Paradise to the good thief, trampling on Satan, and changing the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God and of His Christ. So it is with us. When we seem useless and doing nothing, we are often really doing the greatest things for God.

3. The tomb where Christ is laid is to be the model of my soul when I receive Holy Communion; silent from all din of earthly things, cleansed from all stain of sin by a good confession and firm resolution to amend, dedicated to Him alone. His sacred Body embalmed by my love, and wrapped in the clean winding-sheet of purity of intention. Thus will His presence there be the pledge of my resurrection with Him.

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