



The Suffering Christ

Lenten Meditations

by

BLESSED STANISLAUS OF JESUS AND MARY DAPCZYŃSKI

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PREFACE

We are happy to introduce our Confreres and the English-speaking venerators of Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski to yet another work of our Blessed Founder. This time it is a collection of Lenten meditations, titled *Christus Patiens – The Suffering Christ*. The full Latin title of this collection reads: *Christus Patiens, Septem Discursibus Quadragesimali Paenitentiae accomodatis, Devotae Piorum considerationi Propositus per Patrem Stanislaum a Iesu Maria Sacerdotem Polonum*. This short work was first printed during its author's lifetime and through his personal effort at the K.F. Schreiber's print shop in Warsaw, Poland, in 1690. The title and author's name is clearly printed on its front page, and we can see that it was written by "Father Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary, a Polish priest." It is true that the last name of the author was not mentioned, but it seems that in his earlier published works, Fr. Stanislaus did not provide his surname, supplying only his religious name. The *Suffering Christ* appears on the list dated May 29, 1769, that contained Fr. Stanislaus Papczynski's writings submitted to the Roman Congregation of Rites for reviewing purposes as part of his beatification process.

A number of comments found in *The Suffering Christ* prove that these Lenten meditations were composed over a lengthy period of time before their author published them in 1690. In 1677, Stephen Wierzbowski, Bishop of Poznan, gave the Congregation of Marian Fathers the Church of Our Lord's Cenacle in Nowa Jerozolima (Góra Kalwaria). The church stood at the beginning of the Way of the Cross that the Bishop planned. This gift entailed new obligations of serving the pilgrims, which included also delivering sermons on the Lord's Passion. Consequently, this led Fr. Stanislaus to refine them during this time and to publish them eventually in a book format. He dedicated this work to John Stanislaus Witwicki, the new bishop of Poznan,

who was not initially sympathetic for the new Marian religious community, and at some point, his attitude even put in doubt the very existence of the Order. By dedicating *The Suffering Christ* to the bishop of the diocese where both Marian monasteries stood, our Founder wished to gain his benevolence and protection for the Marian Congregation.

The Suffering Christ contains seven discourses which – as it transpired from certain statements – Fr. Papczynski originally used for his Lenten sermons. Thus, the author meditates consecutively on Christ praying in the Olive garden (discourse I), Christ being captured (discourse II), the flagellation of Christ (discourse III), the crowning with thorns (discourse VI), the carrying of the cross (discourse V), the crucifixion (discourse VI), and Christ's death of the cross (discourse VII). Every individual discourse follows the same paradigm. Each meditation has for its motto a quote from the Gospel that lends a basis to the meditation. Then a brief introduction specifying the goal of that meditation follows. The principal part of the meditation is divided into four, five, and even six sections, in which the author explains the passage from the Scriptures describing Christ's sufferings. The Passion of Christ is presented, on the one hand, as a result of our sins; and on the other, as an act of Christ's love for mankind. This way, Blessed Stanislaus wishes to move the readers of his discourses to repent and to convert, as well as to show gratitude to the One who suffered so much for us and who – by the example of His Passion – showed us how to amend our ways. The author concludes the principal part by encouraging his readers to abide by those counsels with contrite heart, trust, and love. No sinner, however great, should doubt his salvation, because everyone in this life may have recourse to The Divine Mercy; what is more, they ought to do so. As a true apostle of mercy, Fr. Papczynski addresses the sinners in these words: "Are you afraid, whoever you are, crushed with the burden of vast sins, at the edge of the abyss of hell, and its punishments, terrible, incurable, and unending? Sigh, flee, and hasten to the scourges of the Savior with true contrition: «Hoping in the Lord» (Ps 31:10, Vulgate), lest justice punish, «His mercy will surround [me]»" (discourse III, 5).

Blessed Stanislaus Papczynski does his best to support the teaching contained within these discourses upon biblical arguments, using the interpretation and commentary of contemporary exegetes and other important writers. He also frequently refers to the Doctors of the Church, such as Sts. Ambrose, Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, Hieronymus, Jerome, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, Peter Damian, Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, and Lawrence Justinian. Father Stanislaus also quotes the celebrated preachers and writers on spiritual life, such as Tertullian, Anastasius Sinaita, Vincent Ferrer, Peter of Alcantara, Jacques Marchant, Catherine of Siena, Theresa of the Infant Jesus, and Kinga. He frequently illustrates his meditations with examples borrowed from daily life. Basing his teachings on the Scriptures and recognized authorities, as well as skillfully using principles of the rhetoric that the Blessed knew well, he achieves such a result that – in spite of the flowery Baroque language – his sermons or meditations do not raise any doctrinal doubts and remain not weary but alive, dynamic, and convincing.

Since the publication of this work by Fr. Stanislaus in 1690, no subsequent reprints were produced until the present day. For the first time, *The Suffering Christ* was typeset from an old print and printed on the mimeograph in Rome, in 1959, for the purpose of reviewing Fr. Stanislaus's writings for his beatification. Next time this short work in its original Latin was printed in its critical edition in Warsaw, in 1998, through the efforts of Fr. Casimir Krzyzanowski, MIC. This text became the basis of the present translation.

To close, I would like to extend my warm thanks to my Conferes Richard Drabik, Thaddaeus Lancton, Seraphim S. Michalenko, and Martin Rzeszutek for their work of translating this work from Latin and adapting it to the modern English.

Andrew R. Maczynski, MIC

Vice-Postulator
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*The horns of the crescent moon shine with two stars;
but its center is held fast by an arrow.
The crescent moon means a pious, wise [person],
and the two stars indicate strength of character.
The straight arrow depicts an ardent heart.
Since the crown shines by triple virtue,
why would not the Bishop also shine by it?*

LETTER OF DEDICATION

Having come out of my hermitage in hiding from the world together with *The Suffering Christ*, I immediately admired the wanderers' friendly star. For at the forefront of your coat-of-arms, most noble and most venerable Bishop¹, I find the crescent. [You were] placed in the firmament of the Church and the Polish Parliament to lead [us during] the night. Those who refuse to accept whatever is true and honest wander in the deepest darkness of night. You, noblest and most venerable Bishop, supply them with the light of firm wisdom, authentic virtue, and unblemished life. [You were] born with dignity into the old and glory-covered Witwicki family that takes pride in

¹ Stanislaus Jan Witwicki (ca 1630-1698), of the sas coat-of-arms, was in turn the bishop of Kiev, Luck, and Poznan. He was also a writer on moral theology and ascetics. At the onset of his priestly life, he served as a secretary at the court of King John Casimir, becoming later the regent of the royal chancellery. In 1665, he became a member of the Gniezno Chapter. In 1671, he was made the mitred superior of the collegiate church in Olyca, and in 1676, the commendatory abbot in Plock and the canon of Warsaw. At the royal chancellery, he consecutively served kings John Casimir, Michael Korybut, and John III Sobieski. The latter named him the bishop of Kiev. Bishop Witwicki combined his fervent devotion to diocesan matters with political involvement. In 1681, he became the bishop of Luck, where he undertook administrative measures aimed at improving the clergy. In 1688, he was transferred to Poznan. Bishop Witwicki died in Warsaw, which was his usual place of residence. (Cf. H.E. Wyszawski, Witwicki Jan Stanislaw, in: *Słownik Polskich Teogogow Katolickich*, t. 4, ed. H.E. Wyszawski, OFM, Warszawa, 1983, pgs. 449-451.)

the triple star dispersing the darkness. Oh, if only all those who must would always look to you with attentiveness and openness of mind, there would not be any erring sheep in your flock! You radiate forth as many bright and fiery rays as there are principles of eternal life you propose in your books. You impart as many enlightenments for the mind as the many words you utter. You carry in front of you as many torches as there are the many deeds highly worthy of imitation, which you exhibit to the most prominent ones. In your own opinion, your lamp is small, but in the opinion of all others who pass their judgment on you, it is much greater, as it should be.

I come [to that lamp], filled with admiration but free of fear, to be further enlightened. If something is unclear in this small pious work that I humbly offer you, noblest and most venerable Bishop, in place of my homage, I trust that it will become illuminated through your stars. Surely, if your triple star will guide me, I won't err and won't feel threatened by the wild beasts of the night. Similarly, I shall ignore the barking dogs, should they attack me as can happen in moonlight, having been strengthened by my trust in your light. Moreover, thanks to the proximity of your stars (as heaven smiles down upon me) I shall happily put down my graying head here. This way, we shall always respect you who are ever more noble, honored, and more famous thanks to God's graces.

Your noblest and most venerable Excellency's
most devout servant,

Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary

DISCOURSE I

THE BATH IN THE GARDEN

[When he had said this,] Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered (Jn 18:1).

Susanna, well-known from Sacred Scripture, daughter of Hilkiah, had a famous bath in her husband's orchard. She was seeking refreshment by washing herself, since she felt tired on account of the great heat. Then, "One day, while they [the wicked elders] were waiting for the right moment, she entered the garden as usual, with two maids only. She decided to bathe, for the weather was warm" (Dan 13:15). But, it so happened that through an unfortunate turn of events, she was charged with adultery, having been startled and caught by the most corrupt old men.

I hope that I will lead you, pious mortals, with better success into the Garden of Gethsemane. There, I will prepare for you a bath, or rather, I will point out the one that has already been prepared from the bloody sweat of Christ, so that you may be freed from the restlessness of your anxieties and worldly cares and that you may be cleansed from the filth of your sins with which your souls are infected. At least, [you may] certainly cleanse the spots of your more trifling faults, if you are not contaminated with more serious ones. Follow me at a brisk pace, to the place where I follow Christ Himself who leads the way.

1. Going into gardens usually serves the owners by relaxing [their] spirit. Here, they free themselves from their anxieties and disperse the commotion of oppressive thoughts by the very pleasant sight of various types of trees, flower beds, as well as symmetrically laid out paths. Thus, one day, King Ahasuerus¹ of

¹The modern research indicates that Ahasuerus was, in fact, Xerxes I, Persian monarch (485-465 BC); Ancient Greek: Xerxes; Hebrew: Ashverosh or

the Assyrians, who was angered by the malice and cruelty of the most deceitful counselor Haman towards the Hebrews, rushed forth from the banquet and entered the palace garden. We read: “The king left the banquet in anger and went into the garden of the palace” (Est 7:7).

John recounts that our Savior, being dismayed by the crime of Judas the traitor, arose in a similar manner from that most holy supper, in which He drew His most beloved band of disciples to Himself. He thereupon entered the Mount of Olives (where there was a garden), with the three principal [disciples]: “Jesus went out with his disciples...” (Jn 18:1, above). One might have believed He did this for the sake of alleviating His sorrow, which He Himself had confessed was tormenting Him: “Then he said to them, ‘My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch’” (Mk 14:34). But on the other hand, the [Church] Father St. Cyril² teaches something different: “After the supper the Lord departed to the Mount of Olives,” he says, “where there was a garden: so that from where the fall derived its origin, from there would the redemption have its birth.” Human nature, in the midst of the most beautiful verdure of Eden, had been horribly blackened through original sin. To this first stain, almost every mortal has added his own many faults. Therefore, the Repairer of our race is entering the Garden of Olives to prepare the bath that not only washes away but thoroughly destroys our sins: “From where the fall derives its origin... etc.” Who would refuse to rush into this place? Who would not want to bathe here?

2. Saint Matthew, describing the behavior of the Lord of Heaven in this garden, says, “He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will’” (Mt 26:39). Did not even the strongest Samson fall to the ground in this

Latin: Assuerus. The Assyrian Empire collapsed and was ruled by the Persian Achaemenid Empire as Artihura from 539 to 330 BC.

² Cyril of Alexandria (ca 376 – 444) was the Patriarch of Alexandria from 412 to 444, defender of the true faith, a central figure in the First Council of Ephesus in 431, an exegete, a prolific writer, and a Father of the Church.

manner? Did He, through whom all things stand firm, thus fall on His face? Why? Our sins crushed and overwhelmed Him (as Isaiah foretold). “But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all.” Vatable³, translating from the Hebrew, says, “And God made the sin of us all fall upon him” (Is 53:6). Our iniquities, like a very numerous and powerful army, attacked our Lord praying in the garden, and crushed Him to the ground. And so, the holy interpreter of the prophet, Ferrer⁴, rightly addresses every one of us here: “Christian, consider closely how your sins and mine prove to be a part of that army, which rushed upon Christ.”

3. Therefore, when we hear that Jesus declared war against the almost infinite legion of our sins, should we expect something other than blood? Ah! Truly, the bloody sweat flows, not only from His red forehead, but it flows from nearly the whole body of our Atlas⁵, bent down under the weight of the guilt of the whole world! For, as St. Luke records, “Now an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him” (Lk 22:43). The ancient world was at one time astounded to look upon or hear about a statue of Hercules⁶ bathed with sweat. Who among us, witnessing so much, such excellent sweat, could refrain from tears, hearing that dark red streams flowed from the limbs of the true God-man and beholding this with the eyes of a devout mind?

In truth, I have such great compassion for You, O so good and so sweet Jesus, for this battle taken up against our sins was so intense for You that this shower of Your Blood was so abun-

³ François Vatable (late 15th century – 16 March 1547) was a French humanist scholar, a Hellenist and Hebraist. His remarks on the translation of the Bible are the model of clarity and precision.

⁴ Vincent Ferrer, O.P., (23 January 1350 – 5 April 1419) was a Valencian Dominican friar, who gained acclaim as a missionary and a logician. As a wandering preacher, he traveled throughout Europe calling people to repent. He died in Vannes in Brittany. He left a few works, among them *De vita spiritali*.

⁵ In Greek mythology Atlas was the son of the Titan Iapetus and Clymene (or Asia), and brother of Prometheus. Zeus punished Atlas for his part in the Titanomachy and made him to bear the weight of the heavens.

⁶ Hercules was the greatest of the Greek heroes, particularly known for his labors. Thanks to his merits, he was made immortal by gods.

dantly drawn out from Your divine Body. But even so, I rejoice within my heart, and I am glad with the whole human race, that in the solitude of Gethsemane, Your Blood sprang forth to become a bath, in which we may be washed from our filth. Here, hasten to this place, all you Ethiopians (as I call you, sinners). Yet, in order that you may become white (clean), do not enter this bath without the discipline of penance.

4. The repentant King (David) aspired toward this bath in spirit, when he sang with sighs: “Purify me with hyssop⁷, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps 51:7). Among the Jews, spring water, sprinkled with the ashes of heifers and the blood of bulls, was used for purifying oneself in the place of the cleansing water. David esteemed less this kind of purification, and was mindful of the more efficacious one, which for us is in the sweat of Christ, prepared for us in the bloody bath of the Garden of Olives. Certainly, the King of Jerusalem in great wisdom sighs with longing for this. Paul, the heavenly orator, says, “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ” (Heb 9:13, 14).

5. The doctors advised Constantine the Great⁸, the emperor of the world, to make use of the repulsive bath of the blood of infants in order to heal his leprosy with which he was infected. The clement and gentle Ruler spurned this medicine. How many

⁷ Hyssop is a semi-woody, aromatic plant native from the east Mediterranean to central Asia. Hyssop is also often used to fill the Catholic ceremonial *Aspergillum*, which the priest dips into a bowl of holy water and sprinkles onto the congregation to bless them.

⁸ Constantine the Great (Latin: Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus; ca 27 February 272 – 22 May 337), also known as Constantine I or Saint Constantine was Roman Emperor from 306 to 337. Well known for being the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, Constantine and co-Emperor Licinius issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which proclaimed tolerance of all religions throughout the empire. Constantine built a new imperial residence at Byzantium, naming it New Rome. However, in Constantine’s honor, people called it Constantinople, which would later be the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for over 1,000 years. Because of this, he is thought of as the founder of the Eastern Roman Empire.

of us are leprous Constantines now! How many sinners are we! “Leprosy spreads through man’s whole body” (the purple-clad Hugo⁹ asserts). “Similarly, sin (also) grows in the whole man after the manner of cancer.” For removing (this) leprosy, the most advantageous (way) is (taking) a bath: the bloody sweat of the innocent Christ (and even Constantine benefited from it). This sweat was salvific not only during the time (in which) it was poured out, but even more so now (if only we want and beg for it most eagerly): up to now it is offered for us by the most merciful Son to the eternal Father.

Regarding the matter (just) related, St. Paul states most appropriately: “But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him” (Rom 5:8-9).

6. What further remains then, except that I exhort you with the Prophet?

“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight.
Cease to do evil; learn to do good;
seek justice, reprove the ruthless,
defend the orphan, plead for the widow.
Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD,
“Though your sins are as scarlet,
they will be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they will be like wool” (Is 1:16-18), – washed in the bloody bath of sweat of the Son of God.

Although one drop is sufficient for us all,
Now we ask for one drop: do not refuse, merciful Christ!
Many baths lay hidden in one drop of sweat,
The whole world in this will be washed — only give (it).

⁹ Hugh of Saint-Cher, O.P., (ca 1200 – 19 March 1263) was a French Dominican friar who became a cardinal (this is why Blessed Stanislaus calls him “purple-clad”). He was also noted Biblical commentator.

DISCOURSE II

THE FREELY ACCEPTED BONDS

*So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers
of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him (Jn 18:12).*

The most holy Bishop Paulinus of Noli¹ handed himself over to be sold [as ransom] for a poor widow's son who had been kidnapped by the Vandals, so that he might restore him to liberty and to his mother. Of his own accord, he went to Africa; he voluntarily offered himself to chains and to slavery. What fervent love of neighbor blazed within that episcopal heart! Yet, the far greater and almost infinite love of the Son of God for the human race has been manifested. He saw that we, bound and fettered by the tyrant of the netherworld, are held bound by the obligation of debt due to our sins. He was able to use six other means of restoring liberty for us: He did not will it. Instead, having been made in the likeness of the guilty, He Himself desired to be bound in order to free us from our chains. First, He betook Himself from heaven to earth, subsequently to Jerusalem as the hour of His death (in truth, the hour of our life) already loomed. Willingly, He permitted Himself to be captured and bound, preparing for us eternal liberty. O, what immense charity! O, what unprecedented goodness! What words can I use to describe you? What eloquence will I employ to express you? At least, I will show in these few words that these bonds were voluntary. I kiss them with tenderness, because through them, we were set free.

¹ Paulinus of Nola (also known as Paolino di Nola; full name, Pontius Meropius Anicius Paulinus) (ca 354 Bordeaux – 22 June 431 Nola) was a Latin poet and letter-writer, and a convert to the Christian faith. His renunciation of wealth and a senatorial career in favor of a Christian ascetic and philanthropic life was held up as an example by many of his contemporaries. He became Bishop of Nola and was invited to help resolve the disputed election of Pope Boniface I.

1. Our Savior had not yet finished the banquet of His supreme love, when still amid this heavenly bread and divine chalice of nectar, He was kindled with the greatest desire of suffering and dying for us. He was anxious to be bound as soon as possible in order that He may be offered to the eternal Father without delay. According to the testimony of John, He Himself thus goaded His traitor to carry out his intended crime without any delay: “What you do, do quickly” (Jn 13:27). Already the hardened disciple was turning over and over in his mind the time and the manner of the betrayal of his Teacher. The hardened disciple even violated and defiled the sacred supper with these wicked thoughts. He was wholly intent upon this (crime), so that he might fill up his purse with the payment for the betrayal and so satisfy the madness of Christ’s enemies through his nefarious betrayal. The One who searches hearts saw it, He before whom nothing is hidden, considering that this delay of the betrayer would exceedingly hurt both Him and us. Some criminals hasten as much as possible slow executioners to cut their throats, because they are ashamed of life. But Jesus urged Judas to hasten the betrayal, since He was weary of life. For, indeed, He desired to be bound for us as quickly as possible; for us, He desired to produce liberty from His captivity, to produce life from death without any delay. From this heart of Etna², burning with the greatest flames of charity for us, was bursting out this fiery desire of being handed over as soon as possible: “What you do, do quickly.”

What do such words mean to me, that already as the betrayer was leaving the Cenacle, Jesus (whom the most beloved disciple remembers) rushed forth, almost triumphant in the tremendous glory attained by such a tremendous disgrace: “Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified in him’” (Jn 13:31). Bernard³, pausing here to gaze upon Christ,

² Mount Etna, is an active stratovolcano on the east coast of Sicily, close to Messina and Catania. It is the tallest active volcano in Europe, currently standing 10,922 ft high, though this varies with summit eruptions. It is the highest mountain in Italy south of the Alps.

³ Saint Bernard de Clairvaux, born in 1090, at Fontaines, near Dijon, France; died at Clairvaux, 21 August, 1153. He was Doctor of the Church and a fervent venerator of Mary.

says, “He rejoices, and He dances, He is gladdened and exults, and says, ‘Now is the Son of man glorified.’”

O unfathomable love of the Son of God for us most miserable and most ungrateful mortals! For them, He decided to hand Himself over in bonds voluntarily accepted, and He saw (this act) as His highest and exceptional glory. For their liberty, He so greatly desired to be bound that, out of regard for the bonds and the cohort, He released the traitor. And as the traitor was leaving, Jesus jumped and danced with joy. So then, who can deny to me that these voluntary bonds, by which our Redeemer and Savior was bound, were not for our sake?

2. After He had prayed for the third time in the Garden and had most willingly offered to the eternal Father the chalice of the most bitter suffering, which He Himself had to drink to the dregs, He noticed that Judas was already hastening near, and that by then the soldiers of the Praetorium, sent by the priests, were approaching. Indeed, almost as if He felt nothing, since He feared nothing, He urged His sleeping disciples to advance toward the enemy: “Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays me is at hand!” (Mt 26:46). He searches not for a hiding place, nor does He prepare defenses: He goes voluntarily to meet the enemies, in order that He would not be seized grudgingly and bound unwillingly; and, all this is for our sake! For this is what the Teacher of the world, writing to the Romans, very strongly affirms and testifies: “Jesus [...] was handed over for our transgressions” (Rom 4:25). “Christ loved us and handed himself over for us” (Eph 5:2).

Let a secular story give a pale illustration to a sacred deed. To prove his faithfulness to his friend (who was) in an extreme situation, a certain philosopher⁴, went to jail in his stead so that the latter could settle his last affairs. But the tyrant (Dionysius⁵

⁴ This is a reference to Pythias and his friend Damon, followers of the philosopher Pythagoras, whose friendship became a symbol of trust and loyalty.

⁵ Dionysius I or Dionysius the Elder (ca 432 – 367 BC) was a Greek tyrant of Syracuse, in what is now Sicily, southern Italy. He was regarded by the ancients as an example of the worst kind of despot – cruel, suspicious, and vindictive.

the Sicilian, as Valerius Maximus⁶ relates) granted him leave from jail on the condition that the hostage would be executed unless he would return at the time allotted for the punishment. The day arrived on which the deadly decree of the tyrant had to be carried out. They went to prison to get the victim for death, and since the guilty one was not present, the guarantor was led out to be killed for his most trusted friend. Do you think he shuddered at the sight of the executioners? Not at all. Do you think he regretted his promised faithfulness? Not in the least. Indeed, the most steadfast (friend) would go forth to the undeserved punishment, even to his own death, unless the other, who was sentenced to death, would not hasten back, having settled his affairs, and thus would halt the tyrant, filling him with admiration – and his friend with joy – for such a heroic act, and earning freedom for himself on account of such a close friendship.

The ancient world is astounded at such a splendid deed, but not I; it admires the remarkable friendship of Damon and Pythias, but not I. Indeed, why should I admire a philosopher who goes to prison for another philosopher, by whom he didn't doubt he would be released from those (chains)? Rather, I admire, and exceedingly admire, the Son of God who was willingly encircled by chains for man, for sinful, ungrateful man, stained with every sort of crime. And further, [these were] the chains from which He was not disentangled and in no way released – but was rather escorted all the way up to that most shameful and most severe punishment. Cyril says: “When, however, they captured the Lord, they dragged with chains Him, who came to us for this reason: That He might release us from the chains of the devil.” O, what unprecedented charity! O, what inexplicable love of the Son of God for miserable mortals!

⁶ Valerius Maximus was a Latin writer and author of a collection of historical anecdotes. He worked during the reign of Tiberius (14 AD to 37 AD), to whom he dedicated his book *Nine Books of Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, which is a collection of loosely arranged stories about the religious and cultural life of Romans and other peoples.

3. How exactly did our Liberator fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, speaking of His captivity through him in this way:

“The Spirit of the LORD GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and freedom to prisoners” (Is 61:1).

In what way does He speak of release to those confined (prisoners)? However, He was always accustomed to teaching with deeds rather than words. When He was seized, the liberty to break free from diabolical bondage was granted to us. When He was confined in the dark prison at the house of Caiaphas, the prison of hell was opened for us. By those dreadful chains, which were thrown around His most sacred hands, we have been stripped of the snares both of the devils and of sins. By those (most) weighty shackles, by which He desired His divine neck to be encircled and then to be imprisoned, He shattered from us the fetters of all evils.

O truly heavenly Orator! O truly most wise and most eloquent, most holy Mercury⁷! So efficaciously did He beg for our liberty, that He deprived Himself of His own liberty for ours. Legal defense did not purchase this, by which we were redeemed; neither was it obtained by a compliance of votes, that we were acquitted from all slavery, whether on account of guilt or of punishment. As soon as our Advocate allowed His most merciful hands to be bound, the human race was immediately freed from captivity to the netherworld. “He who was delivered over because of our transgressions” (Rom 4:25) cheerfully and willingly, regained for us the golden, heavenly, and eternal liberty. The entire bulk of all our chains broke down, when this heavenly Giant reached the earth to be freely bound.

⁷ Mercury was a messenger who wore winged sandals and was a god of trade, thieves, and travel, but most of his characteristics and mythology were borrowed from the analogous Greek god, Hermes.

Quite pertinently, the Doctor [of the Church] Leo⁸ says, “Although the ferocious mob accomplished what it intended and rejoiced in the execution of its crime, nonetheless, greater was the strength of the One captured than those who arrested Him. For the blindness of the Jews obtained nothing, except to destroy themselves by their own impiety; Christ acted with such patience in order to free all by His Passion” (*Sermon 6 on the Lord’s Passion*).

Behold, what an excellent deed this Orator sent from heaven undertook for our liberty: As He was chained by the impious, He brought forth the race of man from Gehenna into freedom; hereafter, He left no one to be surrendered to the power of the ministers of Tartarus, unless he foolishly will have desired to return. Indeed, although, our humanity groans even now in the prisons of eternal death – it is not through any defect of the chains of Christ – but rather, on account of the intentional desire of the reprobates that they bring that death upon themselves.

4. But now, let us come to the matter itself, not (just) looking at it closely, but almost touching it with our hands. When under the leadership of Judas, the Praetorians were rushing with the other most wicked attendants of the Synagogue into the fateful garden, our Savior, “knowing all the things that were coming upon him, went forth and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They responded in crowds: ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ However, as soon as He gave back [the answer]: ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (Jn 18:6). And that was the second time that it happened once again.

Someone will interrupt here and cry out to me: O, how unfavorably our affairs proceed a second time! Liberty has been

⁸ Pope Leo I, also known as Leo the Great (c. 391 or 400 – 10 Nov. 461) was the Bishop of Rome from 29 Sept. 440 to his death on 10 Nov. 461. He was the first pope to have been called “the Great.” He is perhaps best known for having met Attila the Hun in 452 and persuading him to turn back from his invasion of Italy. He is a Doctor of the Church, most remembered theologically for issuing the *Tome of Leo*, a document which was foundational to the debates of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. He was battling heresies of the Pelagians, Manicheans, and Priscillianists.

lost, while He, who crushed all the enemies onto the ground and knocked them over with (His) word, must be bound for it (i.e., our freedom). Let no one become frightened of evil, who understands this mystery here contained. He frightens the enemies, and our Savior forces them to the ground in order that He might reveal to them His power (and) unveil to us His immeasurable charity. He was able with that omnipotent, divine word of His to expel them to Tartarus itself; yet, because He desired to pluck us up from there, He raised erect those who were prostrate and revived again those who were almost dead. He fortified all those lacking strength (and) gave His permission to be assaulted, to be seized, and for whatever (else) pleased their hostile profanity and arrogance. Luke, skillfully depicting all this with his sacred pen, shows Jesus speaking a second time in this manner to the already standing enemies: “Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, ‘Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber? While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours’” (Lk 22:52-53).

He (St. Luke) rightfully rebuked the wicked servants who came to seize as though a criminal the One, who being without any personal crime of His own, had decided to be bound for any and all criminals! For only thieves and malefactors flee from the chains, inasmuch they can, and they do not allow themselves to be captured since they are guilty of the crimes and are certain of punishment. They seek hiding places; furthermore, they protect themselves with weapons as long as they are able. He (Christ) would allow Himself to be captured, to be led, and to be sacrificed by anyone! On account of our evil deeds and sins, He who committed no evil at any time, whom no one dared to accuse of sin, desired to be captured; He desired to be bound, He desired to suffer, He desired to die. The eternal Father ratified this most holy will of the eternal Son and: “...did not spare his own Son” as the Apostle taught the Romans, “but handed him over for us all” (Rom 8:32) to be bound tightly, to be crucified, and to be put to death.

Indeed, when I contemplate this freely undertaken captivity of Christ the Lord, I reckon it to be held in preference to the similarly voluntary captivity of a certain Trojan soldier. The two men, Nisus and Euryalus⁹, were the fellow comrades of Aeneas, united to him with the closest bond of love. Those men set forth from the encircled camp and passed to their leader through the watches of the Rutulians.¹⁰ Seeing that a battalion of the enemy was coming against them, they separated from each other and were evading the entirely unexpected crisis with the help of darkness. However, Euryalus, the younger, was caught. So now, Nisus, pitying the flight of his comrade who was dearer to him than his own life, determined to either deliver him from the enemies or to die himself, shouted as he jumped forth from his hiding place: “I, here I am, I did it! Direct the sword to me, O Rutulians, since all the trickery is my own; this one would not dare anything, nor was he able; I call to witness the sky and the stars are aware of this.”

Nisus was fearing, as it finally occurred, that the oppressors would enact a punishment of death on Euryalus for the deed done while the Rutulian sentinels were fast asleep. Therefore, the true friend tried to undertake the evil, diverting it from his most dear companion to himself, to transfer the most insolent madness of the furious enemy to his own shoulders.

This is either a very splendid testimony of the most steadfast friendship or a tale (because the greatest Roman poet¹¹ sings of tragic themes). Nevertheless, He accomplished (it), as our Fellow Man, of the same nature as us, the incarnate Son of God, dared

⁹ Nisus and Euryalus were a pair of friends serving under Aeneas in the *Aeneid*, the Augustan epic by Virgil, who presents their deaths as a loss of admirable loyalty and valor.

¹⁰ The Rutuli or Rutulians (ancient Italic *Rudbuli*, ‘the red ones’ with the meaning of ‘the blond ones’) were members of a legendary Italic tribe. The Rutuli were located in territory whose capital was the ancient town of Ardea, located about 35 km (about 22 miles) southeast of Rome.

¹¹ Publius Vergilius Maro (Oct. 15, 70 BC – Sept. 21, 19 BC), usually called Virgil or Vergil in English, was an ancient Roman poet of the Augustan period. He is known for three major works of Latin literature, the *Eclogues* (or *Bucolics*), the *Georgics*, and the epic *Aeneid*. Virgil is traditionally ranked as one of Rome’s greatest poets. His *Aeneid* has been considered the national epic of ancient Rome from the time of its composition to the present day.

greater and more real things. For our sake, He offered Himself to be seized, to be tightly bound in a most savage manner, to be violently dragged off toward suffering; and (He did) all this willingly, resolutely, and without delay. He did not wish to either destroy His enemies, though He could, nor to save us in any other manner, which was easily attainable to Him, except through His own chains. He, therefore, gave an opportunity to the henchmen to take a hold of Him, so that we may slip away from the hands of hell's servants. He allowed Himself to be chained, in order that our chains may be cut asunder. He carried the crime of us all, as if neither Adam nor his unhappy posterity had offended God most grievously. Thus, for us all, He threw Himself before the divine justice, voluntarily making Himself guilty, while guilty of nothing. "[He was] made in the likeness of men" (Phil 2:7) in order that, as a man He may be seized, tortured, condemned, scourged, and killed for us. "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross" (Heb 12:2), as the teacher of the Gentiles astonishingly noted. "Teaching us," which Gregory¹² adds, "to hold prosperity in contempt and to fear it, and to love and to bear adversities for the sake of the truth." For this is the liberty of the sons of God, freed from the slavery of the devil through the voluntary bondage of Christ.

5. I advance even further in this arena of our heavenly Hercules. Already He was seized, by then they had thrown the chains on the One arrested, when mindful of the loyalty sworn at the table, to confirm his words with deeds, the most zealous Peter – like another Theseus drew the sword from its sheath to protect his most beloved Teacher and to disperse the enemy with his weapon. Accordingly, he attacked Malchus, who was nearby (he was a slave of the high priest); he struck the ear which despised the divine Teacher. He held back the rest of the bold attackers.

¹² Pope Gregory I (ca 540 – 12 March 604), better known in English as Gregory the Great, was pope from 3 September 590 until his death. Gregory is well known for his writings, which were more prolific than those of any of his predecessors as pope. Throughout the Middle Ages, he was known as "the Father of Christian Worship" because of his exceptional efforts in revising the Roman worship of his day.

Do you believe that Christ praised this act of defense? In fact, looking with severity upon the (as it were) importunate defender: “Put,” He was saying, “the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?” (Jn 18:11).

When I hear the heavenly King saying these words, the heroic deed of Vladislaus Jagiellonian III¹³ comes to my mind. This most valiant king of Poland and Hungary whose example is appropriate to illustrate the deed of [our] Lord. As it was, Vladislaus broke the peace treaty with the Turks, on account both of the advice and the authority of the Roman Pontiff, obedience to whom he considered to be his most holy duty. He caused and made war against those who were pillaging Europe anew. He recovered much (from them), and also regained entire kingdoms. He succeeded in the battle line several times. Finally, the sultan gathered the strength of the entire Orient and crossed the sea on the ships of Christian merchants (what a shame! let’s not name this thrifty nation that provided him with the ships). The sultan stopped Vladislaus who was on his way to Asia with a most victorious army, in the Caucasus mountains. There, the fighting was the fiercest: The enemies were cut down, and all the horses were flung into the most disorderly flight. Only the foot soldiers protected the sultan (there was, at that time, the glory of the Turkish military, which we call the Janissaries¹⁴, grown full of power). For Vladislaus, intent upon completely destroying them, attacked with the most chivalrous spirit. John Hunyadi¹⁵, the leader of the Hungarian

¹³ Vladislaus Jagiellonian III – Władysław III (31 Oct. 1424 – 10 Nov. 1444), also known as Władysław of Varna was King of Poland from 1434, and King of Hungary from 1440, until his death at the Battle of Varna.

¹⁴ The Janissaries were infantry units that formed the Ottoman sultan’s household troops and bodyguards. The force was created by the Sultan Murad I in the 14th century and was abolished by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826 in the Auspicious Incident. (For more information see *Wikipedia*.)

¹⁵ John Hunyadi (Hungarian: Hunyadi János) (ca 1407 – 11 Aug. 1456), nicknamed The White Knight was a general (1444–1446) and Regent-Governor (1446–1453) of the Kingdom of Hungary. He was a successful and powerful generalissimo and an outstanding and iconic military opponent of the Ottoman Empire. He was also a Voivode of Transylvania (1440–1456), and father of the Hungarian king, Matthias Corvinus. Hunyadi is often considered the bell-

army, seeing the most evident danger threatening the king, besought him many times to return to camp. However, disregarding death for the defense of the Christian people, he (Vladislaus) said boldly: "It is a shameful thing to draw back from the advancing war; I sacrifice my life and blood willingly and with pleasure for the defense of the most holy Faith and the protection of my kingdoms." He said this and then fought with great bravery; he was among the first to be killed.

This king's piety is great and worthy of the catalogue of the saints, and his great love of Hungary deserves perpetual recognition. But this is only a shadow in comparison to the eternal Sun (meaning Christ). For He raised His enemies crushed to the ground; He gave them a chance to arrest him. He did not let Peter force into flight His captors who were binding His holy hands. By a severe rebuke, He restrained Peter who was attacking the servants with the sword. He did not desire to withdraw from the danger, nor did He allow the enemy to be struck, because they could do nothing against Him without His consent, He freely allowed the atrocities they desired to commit against Him. In complete freedom, He desired to be seized, to be held, to be bound; and all these things for us, Christians, for us.

For this reason, I will close with Paul's words: "... as beloved children, walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma" (Eph 5:2). Truly, we are able to show no greater or more manifest love to our Savior than by remembering continuously and perpetually that He voluntarily accepted His bonds. By His captivity, He destroyed our own; by His bondage, He brought eternal freedom to us.

Therefore, let us in spirit, if we are not able with lips, fondly kiss those consecrated bonds, which were drawn tightly and

wether of the European post-Roman professional standing army. He is renowned as one of the greatest Medieval field commanders: His victory over Mehmed II at the Siege of Nándorfehérvár (now Belgrade) in 1456 against overpowering odds is regarded as a seminal piece of European military history.

most dreadfully around Christ in whom divinity is joined to humanity. Let us adore with tears those most sacred bonds, which burdened Him who is the Holy of Holies. In short, let us beseech the kind Savior, that would not permit us to be led away to hell with the bonds of our sins, but to be most lovingly released (from our sins). May He bestow the most perfect, the most sure freedom that will know no end in the heavenly Homeland.

O [You], who were captured for me of [Your] own accord,
and for me were bound,
You suffered! Free me if only from my bonds,
That I may be captive to nothing, and bound by nothing –
I desire only to be Your slave, O Christ.

DISCOURSE III

THE SCOURGING OF THE SINNER

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged (Jn 19:1).

Once, having departed with the divine permission, “Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD and smote Job” (Jb 2:7) that man, not only the most happy, but also the most just under the sun, “with severe boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.” Who could gaze with dry eyes upon such misfortune of the most well-known and holiest Prince? Who would not be moved to compassion by that foul pus flowing forth from every part of his body? The friends of Job fulfilled their obligation admirably well. For, when they came to visit him, “They raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky. Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great” (Jb 2:12-13).

Behold! before our eyes, Christians, a more dreadful spectacle is daily observed: the Son of God was far more violently wounded. The Leader of all the just, that King and Source of all the Saints, that Head of all the Elect, who, descending from heaven, put on human flesh to veil the Majesty of His divinity, so that He may allow the cruelty of the most degenerate of men, who were instruments of the demons, to torture Him more freely. Look upon Him, the most forsaken of men (cf. Is 53:4), mangled from the heel of the foot, all through the body up to the crown of the head (cf. Jb 2:7); look upon Him, and meanwhile, as I describe in detail His most dreadful scourging, make ready loving tears for cleansing the wounds. For the scourges, by which He was struck, have especially come from your and my sins.

1. Alas! Where shall I begin? Or what shall I utter regarding the incredible slaughter of our Lord and Savior? Let me employ here at the beginning a few words of the pious Patriarch of Venice, St. Lawrence Justinian¹: “He is bound,” he says, “Jesus is scourged, and His whole body is completely destroyed by the scourges; now the shoulders, now the abdomen, now the arms, now the legs they surround: They add wounds to wounds, blows to fresh blows.”

At one time, on account of the insistence of the Jews, the tribune ordered Paul to be whipped with scourges and to be tortured. “But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?’[...] Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains” (Acts 22:25-29). He (Paul) was so greatly esteemed that he was written down in the records of the city of Rome.

The only begotten Son of the Lord and eternal Author of all things, the all-powerful King of all kingdoms, of men and Angels, and moreover all the heavens, while fettered to a pillar of marble, is most cruelly struck to pieces by the most wicked servants of the devils. The sun never beheld such an excellent man neither in the deadly array of criminals, nor among those seated upon a royal throne. What is (the significance of) the Roman citizen (Paul) compared to this One? What (is the significance of) the leaders, kings, and caesars of all the centuries? Together, they are but shadow and dust. Yet no one is found who would cry out, while the most holy, the Son of God in person and by nature, is placed under the most dreadful scourges in the very bloody hands of the most bloodthirsty henchmen: Hebrews, what are you doing? Is it permissible to hand over the promised Messiah, whom you ought to receive

¹ St. Lawrence Justinian (Lorenzo Guistiniani) Bishop and first Patriarch of Venice, b. in 1381, and d. 8 January, 1456. He wrote 15 works on ascetics and pastoral ministry, one of them was *De triumphali agone mediatoris Christi* that supplied the quotation.

with the greatest gratitude and adore with the highest worship, to be tortured by wicked men, to be torn to pieces in a way worthy of tears? He, whom your patriarchs were begging for from the Heavenly Father in the most fervent prayers, whom the most faithful prophets were foretelling was to come, whom the holiest kings greatly desired to see – who for your salvation, instruction, consolation, and glory was sent down from heaven, is it Him you so irreverently, impudently, and ungratefully despised? Do you rejoice when He, with unheard of cruelty, is lashed on His whole body, is torn apart, and is pulled to pieces with the most dreadful whips, as if He was the most vicious evildoer?

Alas, is it permissible for you to whip the Son of God? No one said these words when our most merciful Savior suffered at the pillar. Scarcely anyone could be found who was moved by pity for Him, and no one who would weep over Him. Indeed, as many as were present, absorbed by this horrible spectacle, displayed such a cheerful countenance, as if wanting to testify that by His wounds they were particularly invigorated. The scourged Jesus, predicting this beforehand through the mouthpiece of the prophet King, said: “They rejoiced and gathered themselves together against me, they slandered me without ceasing” (Ps 35:15). And undoubtedly they cried: “Aha, just what we wanted!” [...] “We have devoured that one!” (Ps 35:25).

Therefore, while the Chosen People take this wicked delight from the cruel and nearly lethal scourging of Christ our Lord, at least we, who are adopted into His family, should groan in compassion over such a deadly scourging of His, and should sigh with the most devout Bishop of Hippo²: “Lord Jesus, when I see You all scourged, I do not desire (my own body) to be without scourges.” It is a consolation for the unfortunate to have allies in their suffering. Whenever I see You bleeding, I would desire to pour out an ocean of tears. When I see You wounded from

² Augustine of Hippo (Nov.13, 354 – Aug. 28, 430), was Bishop of Hippo Regius (present-day Annaba, Algeria). He was a Latin philosopher and theologian from Roman Africa, generally considered one of the greatest Christian thinkers of all times.

top to bottom, I consecrate to You most humbly all the blows of my afflictions, disasters, pains, toils, sorrows, temptations, insults, injuries, and any adversities whatever, annoyances, hardships, mortifications, even all the anxieties of duties and all worries, all pricks and all wounds of my soul and my heart. From this moment on, I desire to be bound with you to the pillar: If You would unite me to You through charity, who will wrench me from You? If you will join me to You through mercy, who will sever me from You? Let my spirit cleave to You, let Your most merciful right hand support me. May the unworthiest member cling to the Head, and may this small atom suffer along with the entire sacred, afflicted body.

2. Let us examine, then, the cruel instruments of such unheard of torture and the hateful means of slaughter. The holy Vincent Ferrer, the extraordinary torch of the Dominican family, reveals this: “First, they scourged Christ with briars and thorns, then with sharp whips, and finally they used chains, to the ends of which they attached barbed iron. So He was harshly whipped with thorns, then more harshly with whips, and finally in the harshest manner with chains” (*Serm. de paras.*³)

However, Lanspergius⁴, the pious author, weighing this most dreadful scourging, says: “After they bound the Lord to the pillar, six robust men came forward to scourge Christ with whips, with rods, and with small scorpions (in which were hooked pieces of iron).”

³ From his sermon for Good Friday: *In die Parasceve – Sermo inicus* by St. Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419). He loved the Passion of Christ very much. He would help the poor and distribute many alms to them. He began his classical studies at the age of eight, his study of theology at 14. at the age of 18, Ferrer entered the Order of Preachers, commonly called the Dominican Order. He eventually became a Master of Sacred Theology and was commissioned by the Order to deliver lectures on philosophy. For 21 years he was said to have traveled to England, Scotland, Ireland, Aragon, Castile, France, Switzerland, and Italy, preaching the Gospel and converting many. Many biographers believe that he could speak only Catalan, but was endowed with the gift of tongues.

⁴ Lanspergius (John Justus of Landsberg) was a Carthusian monk and ascetical writer, born at Landsberg in Bavaria in 1489, died at Cologne, Aug. 11, 1539. His family name was Gerecht, of which Justus is merely a Latin translation.

These tools were employed to cut the divine, most Sacred Body; this mode of horrible scourging was revealed to the holy Fathers during their loving contemplation. He who is the delight of heaven and earth, the most beloved, only begotten Son of the heavenly Father and immaculate Mother, was certainly beaten with rods by two lictors. And if we accept St. Vincent's testimony, He was thereupon beaten with the same number of barbed scourges, and at last, either with sharpened chains or with hooked scorpions.

In the past, the foolish Rehoboam, the offspring of the most wise king (Solomon), is said to have answered the people who were asking him to lighten their burden: "He spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions'" (1 Kgs 12:14). He so greatly displeased the free-born Israelites with his hard-hearted, insensitive response that they would defect tribe by tribe to Jeroboam, having repudiated forever the house of David. O wicked people! They were not able to bear the scourges of Rehoboam, which were not even inflicted on their backs; indeed, they were only threatened. And now, they nonetheless maltreat with the barbarity of wild beasts the Son of God, the royal offspring of David according to the flesh! Where is that natural precept that teaches one to love one's neighbor: That you should not do another what you would not want done to yourself?

But, let us leave behind the executors of such incredible savagery: Rather, let us admire the long-suffering of the most innocent and most holy Lord to the end. The torturers were being changed, but not He; the muscles of those (who were) scourging (Him) were becoming weak, but His were strengthening. He was standing more motionless than His own pillar. Cheerful and light-hearted, He pondered in spirit the words of the prophet: "Behold, I am prepared for the whips" (Ps 37:18, Vulgate).

O unconquerable fortitude of spirit! O inexplicable ardor and readiness to suffer for us!

Eyewitnesses relate, that you may find among Turkish commoners such excellent flatterers, who, in honor of the sultan passing-by, would cut their own body, face, and sometimes chest or would seriously wound their arms. However, they would completely recover soon after by pouring ointment into the open wounds. Indeed, for a very small price, they squandered their blood. I condemn the misers, I condemn the cruelty, intended as flattery, against their own bodies. I kiss the scourged wounds of my Emperor, Christ the Lord, because they bring salvation to me; I embrace the scourges, because they are undertaken for my life, for my honor, for my eternal glory.

3. Nevertheless, I have said nothing, when I have only said that Christ was scourged for us, whomever we may be. Those very scourges, by which His most handsome and most holy Body was furrowed (at the sight of which anyone would tremble and rightly lament), what were they, if not our sins? He Himself spoke through the mouth of David regarding this: “They gathered around me with scourges, yet I did not take notice” (Ps 35:15, Douay-Rheims). The Archbishop of Canterbury Anselm⁵, both an eloquent and astute scholar of the holy Scriptures, ponders and explains those words: “The Lord heard the raging strokes of the whip,” he says, “but He did not know of the scourges which touched Him.”

How could He not know? To impute a lack of knowledge to Christ, who is Eternal Wisdom, would be very mistaken and very inappropriate, I believe. He did know in His heart by whom and for whom He was flogged by such instruments. So, the true God from eternity was not ignorant of His lashes. Nevertheless, He was truly innocent, to such an extent unworthy of injuries, that it was justly proclaimed through David: “They gathered around me with scourges, yet I did not take

⁵ Anselm of Canterbury (Aosta c. 1033 – Canterbury 21 April 1109), also called of Aosta for his birthplace, and of Bec for his home monastery, was a Benedictine monk, a philosopher, and a prelate of the Church who held the office of Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. Called the founder of scholasticism, he is famous as the originator of the ontological argument for the existence of God.

notice” (Ps 35:15). It is as if He had said, in our own way of speaking: “I am conscious of no fault of my own, of not even the smallest imperfection. I do not know of any personal transgression, for which I am lashed so violently.” Who can tell us, then, if He who knows everything, says He does not know?

Let the heavenly Father Himself respond through Isaiah: “For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due” (Is 53:8), the Son of God was altogether “pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by His scourging we are healed” (Is 53:5).

Thus, let everyone individually own up to their responsibility, since Christ was flogged for our sins. And even more, let everyone mourn, weep most bitterly, and cry over for them (sins) until at death their eyes won’t be needed anymore (for weeping). Let everyone shed tears into the blood of the Lord, both so that they would declare their genuine love for Him and obtain pardon of sins more quickly: “So that he who merits punishment by himself” (I use the words of Augustine) “may through His atonement merit His pardon; and in Him who survived hell for sins, may yet have confidence to be recalled by such a leader to the homeland. For what kind of evil has man accomplished that the Son of God become man did not redeem?”

4. I was wishing to finish but contemplation holds me bound to the column of my bound Lord. Consequently, give your pardon, and devote your attention for a while longer to this most cruel scourging, and further (give) your good will, that we might progress in unfolding our contemplation and not let it be lost.

Very severe thirst was pressing the Hebrew people after their departure from Egypt into the desert. However, no spring was be found there, no flowing or standing waters to sprinkle upon their parched and almost dead lips: The rocks and crags had indeed overtaken them on every side. Consequently, God, filled with pity for that nation, although stubborn and rebellious, charged the leaders Moses and Aaron to bring forth water from

the rocks: “Speak to the rock before their eyes,” He was saying, “that it may yield its water” (Num 20:8). Moses, in fact, dared too much, “Behold, he struck the rock so that waters gushed out, and streams were overflowing” (Ps 77:20).

(Let us turn) now to Christ, whose dew was implored by the thirsty souls of the just (men) in limbo. They prayed with sighs almost incessantly throughout so many ages. Although the eternal Father was able to refresh and quench this thirst in many ways, nevertheless, in order to manifest an example of more eminent charity, He “struck the rock so that waters gushed out” (Ps 78:20). “And the rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4). Am I dreaming that waters flowed forth from this Rock? Blood, such abundant blood flowed forth; so much gushed forth that the Holy Father (of the Church) Gregory of Nazianzus⁵ did not hesitate to compare this gushing Blood to the four rivers of Paradise: “The blood flowed,” he said, “and from this paradise, rivers of heavenly blood sprung forth” (*Sermon on Christ Suffering*).

Hereafter, the mellifluent Teacher⁶ converted this Blood of Christ into oil, which is a symbol of mercy, to show that it flowed from His infinite charity as propitiation of our sins. “O Jews,” (St. Bernard⁷ uttered with a loud cry against the enemies of the most innocent Savior) “you are the rocks, but you are striking the meeker rock! From whom resounds the ringing of forgiveness, and pours forth the oil of mercy!” (*Sermon 4*). Surely, how great is the loyalty of the Son of God to us, miserable ones, that we were not most deservedly scourged for our crimes. He de-

⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus (ca 329 – January 25 389 or 390) (also known as Gregory the Theologian or Gregory Nazianzen; was a 4th-century Archbishop of Constantinople. He is widely considered the most accomplished rhetorical stylist of the patristic age. As a classically trained orator and philosopher, he infused Hellenism into the early Church, establishing the paradigm of Byzantine theologians and Church officials. Gregory made a significant impact on the shape of Trinitarian theology among both Greek- and Latin-speaking theologians, and he is remembered as the “Trinitarian Theologian.” Much of his theological work continues to influence modern theologians, especially in regard to the relationship among the three Persons of the Trinity. Along with the brothers Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, he is known as one of the Cappadocian Fathers.

⁷ In other words, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

sired so ardently, so clemently, so mercifully to be most unjustly scourged for these same people, in order that His most sacred Blood (being converted into the oil of mercy), which gushed forth from His mangled body in the form of rivers, might be reckoned as most suitable for healing the wounds of our souls.

Bound to the marble pillar, Jesus was inundated with deep red liquid, being most cruelly cut to pieces for every sin of every sinner, so that any sinner whosoever might “suck honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock” (Dt 32:13). As you see, the most bitter scourging of our Lord is transformed for us into the sweetest honey, and the most sacred Blood becomes like the oil of mercy.

In order that I may explain more in depth, I have recourse to three miraculous founts, which even today are seen in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome. When I tasted the water from the first one, it had the taste of blood. Water from the second had the taste of milk, and from the third the water had its very own individual taste. Moreover, sacred history testifies that when the sacred head of the Prince of the Church (St. Paul) was cut off at that place, falling to the ground three times, it skipped three times and immediately there came forth three springs of blood, milk, and very clean delicious water. The color is the same today, but the taste, as I related, surprised me as being entirely different. Also, it is not without great mystery, because the source of blood signifies the most impetuous zeal of the Apostle in preaching, loving, and confessing Christ up to the point of giving his blood, according to words of Christ about him: “He is a chosen instrument of mine, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15-16). How much (must he suffer)? Hear the Apostle himself, as he gives evidence, enumerating how much [this] servant of Christ was tried more than the others: “I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. I have been constantly on the move.

I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches” (2 Cor 1:23-28). So finally the neck (was) placed under the sword. These are the characteristics of the fount of blood.

To the milk fount is connected the idea of maternal tenderness with which he brought forth children to Christ, brought them up with such wonderful, admirable sweetness, that becoming everything for everyone, he seemed to be completely milk. And he did not deny this, speaking in this way to the Corinthians: “As to infants in Christ I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it” (1 Cor 3:1-2), like those to whom milk is beneficial, not solid food.

The third font signifies the water of the salvific wisdom, which the Teacher of the Gentiles gives to everybody for drinking and points out: “We do use wisdom when speaking to people who are mature in their faith. But it isn’t the wisdom of this world or of its rulers, who will soon disappear. We speak of God’s hidden and mysterious wisdom that God decided to use for our glory long before the world began” (1 Cor 2:6-7).

Therefore, as Paul’s mysterious founts – which have the color of water – are reminiscent in taste of blood, milk, and pure water, so also the rivers that gushed forth most abundantly from the scourged body of Christ, our Lord and Savior, have the power and efficacy of honey and oil, although they are perceived to be red in color. (This is) the honey of gentle kindness for all sinners whose salvation and conversion the Redeemer of all longs for the most. But recall to mind the different tastes of blood, milk, and water. (This is) the oil of mercy, by which He forgives our sins, and He most graciously removes our punishments, both temporal and eternal, on account of His blood,

which flowed out at the pillar, so even the most hardened criminal may “suck honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock” (Deut 32:13).

5. This is probably what the penitent King (David) had in mind, when he sang: “Many are the sorrows of the wicked, But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him” (Ps 32:10). How many scourges do they merit through their crimes that is, the proud, the greedy, the lustful, the furious, the murderers, the adulterers, the robbers, the drinkers, the hostile, the spiteful, the liars, the blasphemers, the impious, the sacrilegious, and other criminals deserving of that name?

All these things, the most innocent Son of God bore alone in His most sacred Body up to the end for all men, bound to the column not so much by chains of iron, as much as with the ropes of charity: In order that we may acquire mercy, placing all our confidence without presumption in this His most dreadful flagellation that He accepted out of utmost love.

Are you afraid, whoever you are, crushed by the burden of many sins, of the abyss of hell, and its punishments, terrible, incurable, and unending? Sigh, flee, and hasten to the scourges of the Savior with true contrition: “Hoping in the Lord,” lest justice punish, “his mercy will surround [me]” (Ps 31:10, Vulgate).

Are even you afraid, those who have a more tender conscience, of being sent one day to the purifying prison, since you are not yet free from sins (committed or good acts omitted)? Have recourse to the scourged Jesus: “Hoping” in Him, “mercy will surround [you].” For, “If, as it is right,” the saintly Augustine thus perceives, “the just Heavenly Father disdains you with sin, may He gaze upon you at least mercifully out of the charity that He has for his beloved Son” (cf. *Contemplation 8*).

But if, by chance, anyone may be yet lovingly scourged by God for some time, in order not to be scourged eternally, may he actually lie prostrate before the scourged Jesus; and Jesus either may remove his scourges or diminish them, or so spice them with heavenly sweetness, so that, even while still among

them, he may sing with the most fortunate tongue the praises of the omnipotent God!

O Jesus! As I do not know how to count up Your wounds:

So I do not know how to count the wounds of my soul!

But I do know this:

for the healing of these, those are more than sure;

They suffice; therefore, I ask for the same thing

that I know.

DISCOURSE IV

THE CROWN OF THORNS

Twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on him (Mk 15:17).

Those who have attended the most auspicious inauguration of our graciously reigning king¹ can tell us about many things, (and) how the coronation of kings is not only festive but glorious. We saw him clothed in a golden cloak, his head encircled with a diadem glittering with precious gems, illustrious with the powerful scepter placed in his right hand. We saw the Sarmatian² Eagle and sword carried before him, and we gazed upon him completely surrounded with remarkable splendor. Hereafter, the joy of the nobles watching him and the crowds jumping with joy were so great, that not being able to hold it locked within themselves, they burst out in the loudest innumerable cries: “Long live the King!”

However, in this brief time granted to us by Divine Providence, let us ponder again the coronation of the Immortal King, carried out in the royal capital of Judea some 1,630 years ago³. Alas! With what abundance of words, with what magnificence of inflection will I relate this to you? One’s voice and life ought to stop at the sight of this astonishment combined with the enormity of its pain. However, I will make an effort, while the pain is enclosed within the threshold of silent pity, to weave the thread of this sermon I have begun with whatever strength that can be provided (albeit the weakest). All the responsibility for this most inhuman spectacle, this most ignominious pomp, and this most painful torture of our King (Jesus), is to be laid upon our sins.

¹ Blessed Stanislaus speaks of the coronation of King Michal Korybut Wisniowiecki (1669-1973), which took place in Krakow on Sept. 26, 1669.

² By ‘Sarmatian Eagle,’ Blessed Stanislaus described the emblem of the Polish State. The word ‘Sarmatian’ defines the culture and fashion of the Polish nobility of the time (for more information about Sarmatism, see Wikipedia.)

³ This work was first published in 1690.

1. After this Prince of Peace, Christ the Lord, was already most frightfully flogged with scourges, and when the rage of the Rabbis was not yet satisfied, “The soldiers took him away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium), and they called together the whole Roman cohort. They dressed him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on him” (Mk 15:16-17).

You remember quite well what the heads of the plot, the leaders of the Synagogue, held against Jesus before the very wicked Praetor, Pilate.⁴ “And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a King’” (Lk 23:2). Therefore, in order that He might be afflicted with greater contempt, they mockingly worshiped this king, indeed remarkable, but [like one] from the theater, covered with royal purple, but worn out and torn; with a royal diadem, but fashioned out of thorns; with a royal scepter but composed of reeds, and they saluted: “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Mk 15:18).

Now, what Christian heart is harder than diamond, that it will not be moved with such bitter mourning by the inhuman and infamous crowning of the Lord of Lords? What eyes are so dry, from which this most sorrowful and frightful spectacle would not at least elicit as many drops of tears as they see have flowed from the bloodied head and face of the Savior? Whose feelings are so savage, and further inhuman, that even the contempt and the stains of blood (ah! how many!) of the God-Man would still not soften hard hearts?

2. If it is His purple cloak, more than any other symbol of mockery and cruelty, that we look upon with admiration that flows not out of curiosity but out of piety, and if we embrace it not with the bodily eyes but with the light of a devout mind,

⁴ Pontius Pilate was Prefect of the Roman province of Judaea. His primary functions were military, but as a representative of the empire, he was responsible for the collection of imperial taxes and also had limited judicial functions.

will we not perceive a more splendid beauty flowing forth in the midst of disgrace and contempt of the sons of men?

Once, the Israelite Mordecai, through Haman, the highest leader in the royal city of Susa, was richly adorned with the royal robe, shining with the royal crown, and seated atop the royal horse. He was led, by command of King Ahasuerus, with great honor through all the cross-roads of the city, so much that the entire people turned their eyes to the most magnificent pomp of such a joyful spectacle. Even Haman, in the place of the herald, proclaimed with an unwilling tongue: “Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor!” (Est 6:11).

Such great honor was accorded and furnished to Mordecai as a reward for discovering the plot of two of the eunuchs directed against the King. How many (even) greater benefits have we all, together with the wicked Synagogue, received from the Son of God, above all Kings the most excellent and the most dignified? With what honor was He endowed by us? “He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle” (Is 59:17). The eternal Father punishes in His Son the evil deeds we have committed; the wounds and penalties which we deserve are inflicted upon Him; the anger we should bear is poured upon Him.

One of the Phoenician Kings, whom Josephus⁵, the Hebrew Livy⁶, remembers in the fourth book of the Antiquities: “Designated his son to be dressed in purple as sacrifice” to placate the gods.

⁵ Titus Flavius Josephus (37 – ca 100), also called Joseph ben Matityahu was a 1st-century Romano-Jewish historian and hagiographer who recorded Jewish history, with special emphasis on the 1st century AD and the First Jewish–Roman War, which resulted in the Destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70. His most important works were *The Jewish War* (ca 75) and *Antiquities of the Jews* (ca 94).

⁶ Titus Livius Patavinus (59 BC – AD 17)—known as Livy in English—was a Roman historian who wrote a monumental history of Rome and the Roman people. *Ab Urbe Condita Libri, Books from the Foundation of the City*, covering the period from the earliest legends of Rome well before the traditional foundation in 753 BC through the reign of Augustus in Livy’s own time.

Regarding our Savior, the Doctor (of the Church) Jerome says: “Before the people, He was seen clothed in purple, to indicate the uniqueness of the sacrifice” (cf. Mt 25). But what is the uniqueness of this sacrifice? Truly, the Prince and Author of Sacrifices, the Creator of Priests and the High Priest, was designated to be sacrificed. The most just wrath of God had to be appeased for human wickedness, which was justly judged. Who is worthy to appease God if not God Himself? Therefore, in order to be satisfied, the very angered heavenly Father “designated (His) Son,” who willingly and freely offered Himself to it (the wrath of the heavenly Father), “to be clothed in purple for sacrifice.”

3. The immensity of such kindness overwhelms me! I cannot understand, I cannot (grasp) such love. And so, I go further. I pass from the purple (cloak) to the crown of the heavenly King. To the crown – I say – both abject and at the same time cruel: abject, for it is made of thorns; cruel, for it is sharp, frightfully pressed, and hammered into the head.

Some time ago, one of the young brides of Jerusalem invited some girls to witness the coronation of Solomon: “Go forth,” she said, “O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of his gladness of heart” (Sgs 3:11). How much greater than Solomon is (the One) here, to whose coronation Isidore⁷ summons us: “Go forth,” he says, “to see the crown of thorns, which the Synagogue placed upon the head of Christ.”

Both Solomon and Christ were crowned in Jerusalem; but the former was crowned with a golden diadem and shining gems, the latter with a frightful crown of pricked thorns; the former for glory, the latter for disgrace; the former by a most beloved mother, the latter by the worst stepmother, the Synagogue; that first on the day of his betrothal, this One on the

⁷ Saint Isidore of Seville (ca 560 – 4 April 636) served as Archbishop of Seville for more than three decades and is considered, as “the last scholar of the ancient world”. Indeed, all the later medieval history-writing of Hispania (modern Spain and Portugal) was based on his histories.

day of (His) murder; the first in great joy of the heart, this One in great sorrow of the heart.

Who would come forth to contemplate such a sad spectacle, such calamitous and mournful splendor? However, it is necessary to come forth. Why? So that we may acknowledge our sins with which the heavenly Solomon is crowned. Yet, how can this be accomplished? Surely, it is well known to us that the origin of the thorns and of sin is one and the same. Why, for instance, did God curse the earth, so that it would yield thorns and thistles, if not because He was most grievously offended by that sin of pride and rebellion of our common parent, Adam, and by us all in Adam! (It was a sin) of pride, because we were wanting to be gods, knowing good and evil; (it was a sin) of rebellion, because we most shamelessly violated the admonition of our most holy and most kind Creator in regards to not eating the deadly fruit of the forbidden tree.

Consequently, original sin is punished by the sowing of thorns upon the earth; moreover, the crown of thorns is likewise plaited for Christ for the same reason (original sin). There would not be this shameful and cruel crowning if our sin didn't sow the thorns in the earth, since it was the origin of that most disgraceful crowning. Therefore, Basil the Great⁸ says with the most loving and just lament: "Indeed, the rose is beautiful," he says, "but it inflicts sadness upon me; for whenever I behold this flower, I am reminded of my sins, on account of which, the earth is cursed to yield thorns and thistles" (*Oratio: de Paradiso*).

Still, not only that original sin, but all the other sins of mortal men are thorns as well. Most appropriately, the golden-mouthed Bishop (St. John Chrysostom)⁹ mentions this, saying, "Whoever

⁸ Basil of Caesarea, also called Saint Basil the Great (329 or 330 – Jan. 1, 379) was the Greek Bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). He was an influential theologian who supported the Nicene Creed and opposed the heresies of the early Christian Church, fighting against both Arianism and the followers of Apollinaris of Laodicea. His ability to balance his theological convictions with his political connections made Basil a powerful advocate for the Nicene position.

⁹ John Chrysostom (ca 347–407), Archbishop of Constantinople, was an im-

has sinned is full of thorns like a hedgehog” (cf. Ps 90). Since none of us are without sin, we are such hedgehogs, and we sinfully provide the thorns (set) on the sacred and majestic head of Christ, piercing it and drawing blood. Nevertheless, He sustained this unheard of torture so doggedly and cheerfully according to His own great love for us, that He asked for more and more painful things, so much so, that these thorns aroused in Him a new zeal for suffering. This is just as the most learned Tertullian¹⁰ indicated: “In the times of our Lord (Jesus) Christ”, this ancient author says, “the thorns indeed tore into (Him) with deadly wounds; but love sustained Him in His intense zeal for new punishments.”

O unheard of love! On account of which death is delayed, life is prolonged, so that greater things will be suffered for the lost ones! The deadly tips of thorns, penetrating at every point the enclosure of the brain, divert the King from the death to be died on the cross; the blood flowing forth from there becomes food for the mighty spirit, lest God who is destined to rule from the cross die before the hour of death in the trappings of the coronation. Doubtless, it was necessary that the Renewer of the World must gather “flowers and fruit of glory and virtue” (Eccl 24:23, Douay-Rheims), not only from the thorns, but equally from the tree of fate.

When Christ pondered this in His heart (and) – like a boxer who has just entered into battle not thinking about his wounds, although they are life-threatening – He was becoming more

portant early Church Father. He is known for his eloquence in preaching and public speaking, his denunciation of abuse of authority by both ecclesiastical and political leaders, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, and his ascetic sensibilities. After his death in 407 (or, according to some sources, during his life) he was given the Greek epithet *chrysostomos*, meaning “golden mouthed” in English, and Anglicized to Chrysostom.

¹⁰ Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, anglicised as Tertullian (ca 160 – ca 225 AD), was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He is the first Christian author to produce an extensive corpus of Latin Christian literature. He also was a notable early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy. Tertullian has been called “the father of Latin Christianity” and “the founder of Western theology.”

courageous and more vigorous due to the wounds suffered in battle. The more difficult it was to finish what remained to be accomplished, the more zealously He desired the battle which was to bring Him greatly distinguished glory and splendid honor. This way, “love sustained Him in His intense zeal for new punishments.”

4. We come at last to contemplate that scepter of the King, a theatrical king for the Hebrews, but for us and those living in heaven, the Most High. “They put,” says Matthew, “a reed in His right hand” (Mt 27:29). Is He adorned by this royal staff, with which kings rule, princes command, the powerful determine justice? Indeed, it is so. Why? So that through His humility He may completely destroy our pride. The symbol of humility is the reed: For as this reed is moved by every movement of wind without any resistance, so the humble spirit gives reverence to all.

He was the most humble man, about whom Truth says: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?” (Mt 11:7). Therefore, Anselm says most truly about Christ Himself: “In order that the account written against us because of sin, (I supposed it to be pride) may be completely destroyed, He assumed a reed.”

No one was permitted to come near the Assyrian kings unless called. For this reason, when Mordecai was urging Esther to go to Ahasuerus to beg for the salvation of her own people, she responded: “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king in the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days” (Est 4:11).

Jesus fled, when the people desired to choose (Him) our Savior as king, as they had been fed by Him to satiety. Indeed, He was alone in solitude. Now, however, He rejoices to be crowned with thorns, and to take up the scepter of reeds, and

“love sustained Him in His intense zeal for new punishments.” So that to each sinner who approaches Him as a beggar, He stretches out this scepter of reeds as a sign of clemency, and accepts him completely absolved by grace.

May our most gentle King live forever! Long live Jesus! He who desired to be disdained, that He may restore us to honor; to be clothed with a tattered purple cloak, so that He may adorn us with vestments of glory; to be encircled with the diadem of thorns, so that He would give the undying laurels (the immortal crown of victory); to be adorned with the reedy scepter so that through His humility, we, having been mercifully raised, may inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the beginning of the world. He turns His own contempt into honor for us, His own punishment into our pardon, His fear into our security, His torments inflicted by us into our beatitude.

Therefore, hail! However abject is the purple
that clothes You,
Although the head is covered with thorns,
with the reed in the hand,
Hail, King of Kings! Let the Jews choose Caesar,
Besides You, Jesus, no one will be King for me!

DISCOURSE V

THE LIGHT BURDEN

*And bearing his own cross, he went forth to the place
which is called the place of the Skull (Jn 19:17).*

God desired to test both the obedience and the faith of Abraham, the first of the holy Patriarchs. So, He granted to the parents in their feeble, old age a single little son (which is nothing short of a miracle of nature). That child was the one in whose seed all nations were destined to be blessed and through whom the Hebrew nation was (to become) comparable to the number of the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. So, God commanded Isaac to be offered to Himself as a victim in sacrifice: “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac,” He said to the old man, “and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you” (Gen 22:2). That righteous parent obeyed the divine voice. Immediately, he began the destined journey: “Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac’s shoulders” (Gen 22:6). Go forward, under the most favorable signs, most divinely inspired old man! For already, you made God so bound to you through your loyal obedience, faith, and especially love, that while sparing your son Isaac, He intended His own Firstborn to be immolated for the salvation of the whole human race.

Behold! Now, “bearing His own cross,” at the command of the Father, out of His own volition, condemned to execution by the sentence of Pilate, “He went forth to the place which is called Calvary” (Jn 19:17, Douay-Rheims). Let us accompany Him, Christians, but let us not accompany Him without sorrow. For, though the cross imposed upon Him seems a LIGHT BURDEN on account of (His) love for us, we will have made it lighter still, if we acknowledge that it has been fashioned from

our sins. We will support Jesus when He stumbles under the cross, by stirring up a sincere disgust for our sins, and by making a firm intention not to commit them anymore.

1. David, the King of Jerusalem, reflecting in spirit what we consider now, sang of these considerations about Christ carrying the cross: “He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way: His going out is from the end of heaven” (Ps 18:6-7, Douay-Rheims). Truly, we ought to admit that the Lord had the shoulders of a giant, given that He was decidedly carrying the most burdensome, lethal wood. It was recorded to be heavy to such an extent that, I believe, two men would have fallen under that cross. “Certainly that cross was a heavy burden to Him,” (Marchant¹ piously reflects) “on account of the weakness of His body, which was completely exhausted from so many gashes, and from which such a copious amount of blood poured forth. (It was heavy) secondly, on account of the length and width of the cross and its roughness because it was unfinished due to the haste with which it was fashioned. The weight was also producing a wound more serious than all the wounds of the entire body. The cross was like a wine press, under which His flesh was once more pressed as grapes, so that the streets of Jerusalem might be spotted with His bloodstained footprints.”

Therefore, when such a heavy cross, so described, has been cast upon the Lord, why or how is He said to have rejoiced beneath it? The reason is in (His) willingness. A burden taken up for another is carried most eagerly; therefore, He does not feel its weight. For all labor seems light, which is voluntarily taken up; lighter still, if it is taken up for the sake of friends; lightest, if for rewards. All these (reasons) transformed the weight of the cross upon our Savior to make it very light. In that cross, (according to the testimony of Isaiah), “Surely our griefs he himself

¹ Jacques Marchant flourished in the Low Countries at the beginning of the 17th century. He was an eloquent preacher. His great work, the *Hortus Pastorum* (*The Garden of Pastors*, 1638), contains the notes of his sermons and catechetical instructions. After serving as the Professor of Theology in the Benedictine monastery of Floreffe, He was made the Dean of Couvin and flourished in the Low Countries at the beginning of the 17th century.

bore, and our sorrows he carried” (Is 53:4). Freely, however, He accomplished what was claimed in like manner through the royal musician and psalmist: “Then I will offer you generous sacrifice and give thanks to your name, LORD.” (Ps 53:8). He accomplished it out of love for us: “because He loved us” (says the prophet in Revelation) “He washed us from our sins” (Rev 1:5, Douay-Rheims). Finally, He did it for the sake of a reward: in the cross, you see, were stored up all of His glory and power, as I will elaborate on in somewhat greater detail.

2. Isaiah, the prophet mentioned (above), speaking prophetically of many things concerning Christ, even sketched this journey of His carrying the cross to the sacrifice in these words: “And the dominion,” he says, “will rest on His shoulders” (Is 9:6). The dominion calls for the gibbet to be hurled upon Christ. For what reason? I don’t know whether I discovered the real cause of this matter; I imagine it to be truly so, which I propose to be further explained.

I see four ways by which the power may be acquired: by heredity, by election, through arms, or by (paying) the price. That Christ is the heir of the Kingdom of Heaven, nay, of the whole universe, is testified to by what St. Paul says: “In these last days He has spoken to us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the world” (Heb 1:2). Sirach confirms in these words that Christ (under the figure of Moses) rightly delights in His election: “Because of his trustworthiness and meekness, God selected him from all flesh” (Sir 45:4). Solomon suggests that the right applies to Him through weapons, also: “He will sharpen his severe wrath for a spear, and the whole world shall fight with him against the unwise” (Wis 5:21, Douay-Rheims), in order to specifically gain the leadership of the whole world, which the haughty Lucifer ambitiously desired to usurp. Finally, to the three (above-discussed) ways our Lord (as Ruler of the whole earth) added a price: and not a little one, but infinitely, inestimably, inexhaustibly huge – (the price) of His life, His blood, His passion, and His death. Indeed, He paid for this fully when He expired upon the cross. He Himself

predicted this beforehand, when He said: “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw everyone to myself” (Jn 12:31-32).

When the Son of God was carrying the cross, on which He was to be lifted up, He was then carrying the dominion upon His shoulders, as the prophet (Isaiah) alluded to quite well. For no one, without rejoicing, seizes the domination, and neither would it be appropriate for the Son of God to be sad under the weight of the cross, on which, lifted up as if on a royal throne, He was to draw all things to Himself. “*He therefore rejoiced as a champion to run the course carrying the cross, carrying the dominion* [that came from it]. He would have walked slower, if not for the beam, which – like a feather of feathers and a wing of charity fastened to His most holy shoulders – was carrying the weight of the tortured body, instead of being carried (by Him)” (Lawrence Justinian, *De triumphali agone*, 16).

3. Although we see that Son of God, proceeding to the place of execution, exults under the most heavy burden of the cross, nevertheless, it is an abomination for us to be in the midst of such a horrible and cruel spectacle without tears: Especially because we are precisely those who have constructed such a dreadful and cruel gibbet, which we hurled on His most sacred shoulders without mercy. “The plowers plowed upon my back,” (so complains our most meek Lamb to each one of us through the mouth of David). “They lengthened their furrows” (Ps 128:3). Every crime already committed and yet to be committed since the expulsion of man from paradise to the present day, to the moment of which I speak, everything has been placed upon the shoulders of the most holy and courageous Atlas². All of this is embodied in the cross that He carries; all of this is placed on a triumphant chariot, which He is guiding. All of our sins have been placed together on Him. We are the builders of His most

² Atlas is a figure from Greek mythology. He is the son of the Titan Iapetus and Clymene (or Asia), and brother of Prometheus. Atlas was punished by Zeus and made to bear the weight of the heavens (the idea of Atlas carrying the Earth is not correct according to the original myth) on his back.

savage gibbet; we are the murders of this gentlest Prince. "All of us like sheep have gone astray," testifies the prophet Isaiah, "Each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him" (Is 53:6).

Will we not expiate such a great crime through the sincere renunciation of our sins? But if we are so stubborn that we are not at all moved by this, our cruelty and ingratitude, then at least the utterly pitiable sight of Him ought to move us, who was as though having nothing human in Him. "He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him" (Is 53:2).

To a bride, "his head" looked once "like gold, pure gold" (Sgs 5:11), now it is completely covered with thorns. Once, "his locks" were "like clusters of dates and black as a raven," now they are falling down, torn out, and defiled. Once, "his eyes were like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, and reposed in their setting" (Sgs 5:12), now they are full of discharge. Once, "his cheeks" were "like a bed of balsam, banks of sweet-scented herbs" (Sgs 5:13). Now, they are pale, heaving spittle, and swollen. "his lips" were "lilies dripping with liquid myrrh." Now, (they are) discolored, darker than coal. Once, "his hands" were "rods of gold set with beryl," but now, they are bound by chains of iron. Once, "his abdomen" was "carved ivory inlaid with sapphires" (Sgs 5:14), now (it is) cut all over with gashes. Once, "his legs" were "pillars of alabaster set on pedestals of pure gold" (Sgs 5:15), now, they waver, stagger, dash against the ground. Once, "his stature" was "like the trees on Lebanon, imposing as the cedars" (Sgs 5:16), now it is like a worm, a source of reproach, and an outcast. Once, he was "all delight," now entirely heartbreaking. "He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to him" (Is 53:2-3). I plead with you: (is there) anyone with a heart harder than stone whom this beauty without beauty of the King of Angels and men would not (be moved to) feel contrition (for his sins)? From whomever would it not squeeze out a river of tears from the heart and eyes?

4. Let us turn, then, and gaze upon His most Immaculate Mother. She, as testified by St. Bernard, “seeing Him burdened with such a great cross, the likes of which she never saw before, she was breathless on account of anxiety, nor was she able to say a word” (*Contemplations*, chapt. 77). And certainly no one among us could relieve such a sad spectacle with laughter! Ah, may our eyes perish, if they will not see such a tragic carrying of a cross with tears!

It is testified to in the Sacred Scriptures most clearly, that the Hebrews stirred up and spilled their own tears seated upon those banks of the rivers of Babylon, as they remembered their most beloved Zion. The unhappy exiles speak of these tears in the Psalms with great eloquence: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion” (Ps 137:1). The remembrance of the fatherland elicited weeping from the captives. Does it not elicit ours at the sight of the heavenly homeland of the Father, of our Savior, of our Redeemer? Christ carried His cross built out of our sins, so that He could be transfixed on it for us; He does not have the appearance or beauty of men for He is the one who was so dreadfully scourged, so shamefully exhausted, and so enormously disfigured.

But in fact, you say, it may be objected to weep over His situation, for He Himself thus spoke to some of the women who were affectionately grieving in sorrow, when He passed them by: “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Lk 23:28). I am not opposing the truth. But, together with St. Leo, I do not consider as proper the reason for tears in the present situation. This very holy and most eloquent Bishop says: “For the weaker sex is accustomed to cry over the death of those who are guilty and sympathize with their fate because of our common nature. The Lord Jesus scorned that lament of theirs to be directed toward Him, because grief was not proper for a victory parade, nor mourning for a triumph. Then, turning toward them, He said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem: Do not weep over me, weep instead for yourselves and your children’” (Lk 23:28). He was willing

to suffer the cross, and His own death, as He permitted Himself to be put to death, which He was about to destroy. He did not wish women to weep for the one dying for the redemption of the world, whom the women will see as the one judging in the majesty of the Father.” These weak women were without a doubt weeping aloud, not over Christ burdened with their sins, but over one beneficent and innocent man inflicted with the penalty of death.

Truly, it is not right for us to refrain from tears, because on the back of the incarnate Son of God, we have laid an enormous pile of evil deeds. We have constructed out of our crimes the gibbet for Him, and we have stretched out our iniquities upon Him. Although out of love for us, He Himself most bravely carried and fully expiated them, yet we still decline to carry out of love for Him (our) little crosses, insignificant afflictions. Either we avoid them, or we rush through them with many complaints and sometimes shameful impatience. Did we expect that we would enter into a different glory while partying, drinking, indulging ourselves, when even the King Himself obtained glory through His suffering? Or did we wholly forget His words and salvific warnings, which He made so clearly for us through the writer of His deeds that no explanation is needed? “If anyone wishes to come after me,” He said at another time, “he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24).

The cross is an accepted affliction of the body; the cross is uninterrupted, serious penance; the cross is infamy, contempt, injury, and any kind of tribulation; the cross is infirmity, lack of goods, hardships, forfeiting temporal goods, loss of wealth; the cross is the lack of necessities, the pruning off of the superfluous, the subtraction of success, the entrance of adversity, and whatever either in the spirit or in the body causes difficulty. To carry such a cross out of love for Christ with an eager and joyful heart, we are all called by Christ Himself through His word and example – particularly, through the most bitter carrying of the salvific wood of the cross – so that, ultimately, we may attain together with Him the eternal inheritance of everlasting joy and glory by following after our Predecessor on the way of the cross.

Christ, I go there, wherever You call me:
through hostility and fire,
And through waters, and deserts, rocks, and thorns,
Under Your leadership,
all difficult roads will be made easier
Especially if the companion Love will impart wings.

DISCOURSE VI

THE GLORIOUS CROSS

It was the third hour when they crucified him... (Mk 15:25).

In times past, nothing proved to be more disgraceful than the punishment of the cross, as the accounts of the preceding ages have taught us most clearly. In the annals of the kings, there is recorded a most infamous and odious example of such a shameful death. A great famine for three continuous years afflicted the territories under the stewardship of King David. Having consulted the oracle of the Lord, the King learned that the Israelites were to be punished with that affliction on account of the slaughter of the Gibeonites¹ accomplished through the foolish zeal of Saul. For which reason, in order to placate the wrath of God, he called the Gibeonites to ask what they desired to be done to the wicked for their unjust destruction. He endeavored (to carry it out): “So they said to the king, ‘The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel, let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them’ and ‘they were put to death’” (2 Sam 21:5-6; 9, RSV). There couldn’t have been a more severe revenge of the slaughter of innocent people than by the most calamitous punishment of the lineage of Saul raised on the crosses. Indeed, it was ordained that this most justified disgrace fell upon the sons and descendants of Saul who did not have the honor of perishing by the sword (as befits heroes in battle) but died on the cross.

And what kind of crime did the Son of God, our Lord and Savior, commit that the punishment of the cross would be most

¹ Gibeon was a Canaanite city north of Jerusalem that was conquered by Joshua. Joshua 10:12 and 2 Samuel 21:2 describe the Gibeonites as not being Israelites but as Amorites.

insistently demanded for Him by the Jewish people? He did nothing that deserved punishment by the cross – nothing. But He wished to destroy by His death the ignominy of the cross and to render it most glorious by repairing the damage of the tree (in Eden) on the tree (of the cross). By His Blood, He consecrated it and rendered it exceedingly noble.

1. God sent among the Hebrew people fiery (i.e., venomous) serpents, in order to punish their murmuring. And when the wild beasts had struck very many with wounds and death, then, prompted by regret for their offense, they besought on their knees their leader Moses that by his prayers, he would avert this severe punishment and placate the divine anger against them. “So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.’ So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, who would look at the bronze serpent and live” (Num 21:7-9, RSV).

Eternal Wisdom – Christ our leader and lawgiver – saw that the whole of mankind was perishing through the fruit infused with the venom of the hellish serpent, which it (the serpent) enticed our first parents into eating. Consequently, out of His own immense love for mankind, preparing and holding out to us a most efficacious antidote for that original fault, He taught us about this accordingly: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that whoever believes in him will have eternal life” (Jn 3:14-15).

O most glorious cross, on which was lifted up the Son of God after the manner of the snake, that quenched the venom of the ancient serpent and truly brought to us life immortal! O most blessed wood on which the salvation of the world hanged! O most noble wood, which made way for the King of glory on [His] throne! Once infamous, now the cross is *the throne and the chariot of God*. As you see, so great is the majesty of the cross – how much majesty, how much courage, how much fortitude, how much patience, how much love the Crucified One has for us! For who occupies this most sacred cross?

Our King. For what reason does He embrace it? Our salvation! With what disposition does He occupy it? One that is full of sweetness and courage.

In a few brief words, but most pregnant (with meaning), St. Isidore has summed up all these things: “On account of us,” he says, “the Son of God suffered, yet He was not moved by anger against these, by whom He was afflicted with so many injuries. He did not respond with anything, and remained immobile similar to the bronze serpents” (Orat. 25).

And finally, since it is not the place that makes a man noble but the man who makes noble the place, ponder carefully if you can: What respect should now the once ignoble wood of the cross enjoy, which was made noble by the hanging (on it) of the One, whose dignity, excellence, and splendor no one can fully understand. For this reason, St. Jerome writes, “The image of the salvific cross embellishes the purple robes of kings and brilliant gems of crowns.” Turn your attention to the glory of the Cross itself: “So, on the heads of kings is placed that Cross, which His enemies had insulted,” adds St. Augustine.

2. However, I suppose that you desire to know, on account of your devotion to the crucified King of glory, the manner of His crucifixion. Matthew, describing this very briefly, says: “And when they had crucified him, they divided up his garments among themselves by casting lots” (Mt 27:35; cf. Ps 21:19). From these words, we can easily infer that the sacred robe of Christ our Lord was stripped of Him before He was fastened to the fatal beam. Not without reason does the Doctor (of the Church) Anselm invoke Christ’s most holy Mother, as if speaking to herself of these things: “When He had come to the most ignominious place of Calvary, they totally stripped Jesus, my only Son, of His clothing, and I was almost without any breath (on account of terror); however, taking the covering of my head, I wrapped it around his loins” (said Anselm or whoever was the author of this dialogue of the Passion).

The Seraphic Doctor (Bonaventure)² agreed, as he said: “Therefore He was despoiled and now was naked for the third time in the presence of the whole crowd,” namely, Jesus, who is to be crucified. “The wounds were reopened because of the tunic that adhered to His flesh.”

This, truly, was permitted by the divine will in order to fulfill the prophecy of the royal psalmist (King David). Yet, it was by no means accomplished by the murderers in any different intention except that they might afflict on Him greater dishonor when they thus exposed Him to be seen by His enemies naked on the cross. But what the perverse and cruel men did for the sake of shame, the greatest meekness and love transformed into the ultimate glory for Christ.

For Christ consecrated that cursed wood by touching it with His most sacred body. This is so much so, that after the most sacred Eucharistic bread, nothing is held to be holier, nothing is honored more reverently, nothing is acknowledged as more glorious than the Cross. And (this is) not without reason. For the place where God appeared to Moses in the burning bush was so holy to God that it was said as he tried to come near to Him: “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5).

How much holier should be considered that Cross, to which Christ’s human flesh was affixed with the most cruel nails? That Cross described by the (burning) bush, on which the Incarnate Deity burned with love for us and was not consumed; He burned surrounded with the fire of hatred, blasphemy, envy, the anger of His enemies, and He was not consumed. For this reason, when the form of His own Cross, through which we remember the Passion of our Lord, is venerated on the day of that sacred mystery, the faithful are bidden to offer the duty of veneration

² Saint Bonaventure, Friar Minor, (1221 – 15 July 1274), born John of Fidanza, was an Italian medieval scholastic theologian and philosopher. The seventh Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, he was also the Cardinal Bishop of Albano. He was canonized on April 14, 1482, by Pope Sixtus IV and declared a Doctor of the Church in the year 1588 by Pope Sixtus V. He is known as the “Seraphic Doctor” (Latin: Doctor Seraphicus).

only on bent knees and with the shoes taken off. Moreover, it is wrong if we bestow too little adoration upon that most blessed Cross, on which the Lord of life and death most lovingly laid down for us, fastening it to His own body and making it very holy with the sprinkling of His most Precious Blood.

3. Certain masters of sacred contemplation recount that the blood poured forth most abundantly from the wounds of Christ stretched out on the Cross. There are some who assert that the Cross, when it was raised the first time, slipped and fell upon the ground together with Christ. When it was erected the second time, then immediately from (His) four wounds, pierced with the tips of the nails, poured forth in the most plentiful currents, the four streams of the most Precious Blood, sprinkling that sacred beam most bountifully.

Certainly, it seems to be credible what St. Peter Alcantara,³ commended by many but most exceptionally by the testimony of the St. Teresa (the Great) to be a most recommended friend of Christ, affirmed of His Passion in (his) most devoted little book: “The murders and torturers of Christ were roused to such a frenzy of malice that they lifted the Cross on high with mighty racket and noise. They allowed the Cross to fall into the ditch, and the body of Christ our Lord, which was hanging firmly by the nails, shook in the most horrible manner. His wounds, which were already insufferable because of the torture, were enlarged even more.” Thereupon, you would have seen “rivers of blood running from His hands and feet.”

And so, who would doubt that the cross was any less drenched (in His blood) than the pillar at which He was flogged by the most monstrous scourges? Our orthodox (Catholic) Church perceives this, when she sings, lifting up the Cross of the Lord:

³ Saint Peter of Alcántara, O.F.M., (Spanish: San Pedro de Alcántara) (1499 – October 18, 1562) was a Spanish Franciscan friar. He was ordained a priest in 1524 and began to preach, especially to the poor; his sermons, taken largely from the Prophets and Sapiential Books, breathe the tenderest human sympathy. He composed a short treatise on prayer, which has been translated into a number of European languages. This paraphrased fragment is borrowed from his book *Treatise of Prayer and Meditation*.

“Which the holy blood shed from the body of the Lamb thoroughly anointed.” Away with the ancient impiety – rather than a devotion – that dedicates a rose to Venus since it was stained with her blood! To me, the holiest is that wood (of the cross), “which the holy blood shed from the body of the Lamb thoroughly anointed.” Indeed, God Himself appears to esteem the salvific wood (of the cross) so much that He Himself venerates it.

Let us recall here the fragment from the Sacred Scriptures, which is most deserving of admiration and particularly relevant to our topic. The Almighty God commanded the Hebrews to smear the doorpost and lintels of their houses with the blood of a lamb (which they were to slaughter and eat as a sign and token of God’s passage through Egypt). What was it for? “Seeing the blood,” He Himself says, “I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:13).

O, what a mystery! The angry Lord of hosts passed over, and treated with respect, as it were, the homes of the Hebrews, marked by the blood of a lamb. Does He not venerate and honor even more so the cross, anointed with the blood of His own Son? This very cross, the one, “which the holy blood shed from the body of the Lamb thoroughly anointed?” Not any lamb, but the genuine, heavenly, and immaculate Lamb: “He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth” (Is 53:7), among those who were killing him. And will not this Wood (of the cross) be sacred to us, thanks to which benefit we would escape free from the edict of eternal damnation that struck the unfaithful Egyptians? Would this wood not be most glorious to us, because the King of glory ascended upon it, which the Lamb of God ennobled and even consecrated with His own blood?

4. We learned from the holy historiographers of our Savior that He was hanged in the middle cross between two thieves. “There they crucified him,” says the beloved Evangelist, “and with him two other men, one on either side, and Jesus in be-

tween” (Jn 19:18). O Lord of infinite majesty! Are You so despised that You are to die between two thieves? O most Holy of Holies! Are You hanged among evildoers and criminals? Are You “reputed to be among sinners?” (Mk 15:18). You decided to be born among beasts of burden and to exhale the sacred Spirit among men inferior to beasts? Are Your honor, glory, and majesty nearly forgotten?

Not at all, says Athanasius⁴: “He raised the body on the cross,” (these are words of the saintly Father), “yet He was not humiliated through this but remained glorious in Himself, producing such signs that revealed Him at that time not as a human being but as the Word of God.” Let the King of glory hang and die on the gibbet of the cross, (placed) between the thieves. Let Him entrust His spirit into the hands of the Father, and hand over His spirit. On His command, let the sun darken, the sky thunder, the earth shake, the rocks burst, hell quake violently, phantoms of the dead come forth from the tombs, the veil of the temple be torn, and all of nature be stuck dumb. Let the crowds, striking their chests, come back to their senses and return together to the city. And let the unmerciful centurion who drew from the side of the Crucified the light of faith and the river of redemption recognize as the Son of God the One whom he pierced through. May he further seal with his own death and blood the testimony of his faith and love for the Crucified.

However, since it was on the cross and nowhere else or at any other time, that He, Jesus Crucified did exercise such power – who would deny that this (power) was obtained through the cross? Because it was not before His death but after His resurrection, that He was glorified before His disciples, and that He, the most omnipotent, was (recognized as) King of heaven and earth. As He said: “All authority has been

⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria (born ca 296-298 – died 2 May 373), also referred to as St. Athanasius the Great was the 20th bishop of Alexandria. His episcopate lasted 45 years (ca June 8, 328 –May 2, 373), of which over 17 were spent in five exiles ordered by four different Roman emperors. He is considered to be a renowned Christian theologian, a Church Father, the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, and a noted Egyptian leader of the fourth century.

given to me in heaven and on earth” (Mt 28:18). “And if He openly said this, – this is the most remarkable astuteness of Athanasius of Sinai⁵ – “that the origin of glory is the cross, through the death inflicted on the cross; because, never before during His whole life, did He reveal His power more. This happened in order that already the cause of His glory may manifestly be revealed as the cross.”

5. This being the case, let us give honor and continue to show supreme veneration to this wood (of the cross), which our most loving and most merciful Savior made most glorious, most noble, and most sacred by affixing His body to it, by pouring His blood, by suffering the most painful death, by the display of His greatest power. Nay more, it is the cross through which He Himself was made more glorious and more powerful. On the other hand, let us not avoid the crosses prepared for us, because one day we will attain through them glory, nobility, true sanctity, and a certain omnipotence.

Therefore, the cross, I repeat after the purple-clad (the Cardinal) Damian⁶: “Whoever desires to be freed from all chains

⁵ In fact, Fr. Papczynski speaks here of Anastasius I the Sinaite who lived 100 years earlier and was the Greek Patriarch of Antioch twice (561–571 and 593–599). He was a friend of Pope Gregory I and aroused the enmity of the Emperor Justinian by opposing certain imperial doctrines about the Body of Christ (Justinian favoured the Aphthartodocetae). He was to be deposed from his See and exiled when Justinian died; but Justin II carried out his uncle's purpose five years later in 570, and another bishop, Gregory of Antioch, was put in his place. But when Gregory died in 593, Anastasius was restored to his See. This was chiefly due to Pope Gregory the Great, who interceded with the Emperor Maurice and his son Theodosius, asking that Anastasius be sent to Rome, if not reinstated at Antioch. He was killed by a Jewish mob[1] in 599. His feast day is 21 April. From some letters sent to him by Gregory, it is thought that he was not sufficiently vigorous in denouncing the claims of the Patriarch of Constantinople to be a universal bishop. Anastasius died in 598, and another bishop of the same name is said to have succeeded him in 599, to whom the translation of Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis* is attributed, and who is recorded as having been put to death in an insurrection of the Jews. Nicephorus (Hist. Eccl., XVIII, xlv) declares that these two are one and the same person. The same difficulty occurs with regard to certain *Sermones de orthodoxae fide*, some ascribing them to the latter Anastasius; others claiming that there was but one bishop of that name.

⁶ Saint Peter Damian, OSB (ca 1007 – February 21/22, 1072), was a reforming monk in the circle of Pope Gregory VII and a cardinal. In 1823, he

of the curse and to acquire a full blessing of new grace – I say – let him love the cross, from which, one may see, emanates forth the beauty of this blessing. Through the cross, may he commit himself to the commandments of God. Through the cross, may the melody of the unbridled (passions of) the flesh be restrained.”

My crucified Jesus, I do not spurn the cross, but
clasping with both arms, I give You a thousand kisses.

My Jesus crucified, I wish to be nailed on
the cross with You.

Do (this), since You have bidden me to do (it), so that
I may do (it).

was declared a Doctor of the Church. Dante placed him in one of the highest circles of Paradiso as a great predecessor of Saint Francis of Assisi.

DISCOURSE VII

THE DEATH OF DEATH

Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last (Mk 15:37).

Finally, the *Word made flesh* fell silent, and by His own will, He closed his mouth as He ended His life. The King and Creator of time has ended His days among mortals, and the Spirit, who gives life to all, has returned to the Father. The heavenly pilgrim has traversed His difficult journey on the earth, the all consuming Fire has been extinguished, the River flowing forth from the heavenly Paradise to irrigate the earthly paradise has dried up, the champion who descended from the highest heaven to run the course grows faint, the Sun of justice has suffered an eclipse, the Teacher who spoke the words of eternal life has been destroyed by death, the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for His sheep.

Jesus “uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.” What a fate!

Lament, O hard marble,
Let the stones and rocks split into pieces:
Let the sun with the cloud of sorrow
clothe the cloudless day:
Let the violently shaken earth
cry out mightily,
All of nature, let it not restrain
its heavy pain.

You alone, o mortal, prepare the triumph. For indeed death, that murderer of our race, that tyrant of the whole world, suffered total defeat by the death of Life. O what joy! It is most beneficial to expound more eloquently upon this most blessed fight and most glorious victory.

Resound the trumpets, O men; the Leader of Life, fastened upon the cross, clashes with death. All others, watch the duel.

1. The most illustrious author Valerius Maximus recalls that a region of Attica, weakened by the vast army of the enemy, was ravaged by sword and by fire. Distrustful of people's aid, its king (Codrus) sent envoys to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, asking through them how to bring this bitter war to an end. The answer was: It will only end when the king himself should die at the hand of the enemies. What do you think King Codrus did? (He did) what love for the fatherland dictated. He decided to die. But the clever and devious enemies declared that no one was to raise a hand against Codrus, even if he were to throw himself at them. They wanted him to live. They wanted victory. However, shrewdness discovered a way, by which (he) obtained the glory of courage and saved the fatherland. Having taken off his royal finery, Codrus dressed himself as a slave. He threw himself before the horde of an insolent enemy. He struck one with his curved blade, so that through revenge he might find death. He perished as a worthless [slave], not as the King of Athens, but he conquered the enemy with his own death.

I said this so the man's greatest deed may make it easier to understand God's action. I absolutely do not allow any comparison between Codrus and Christ; I am simply helping our minds to understand with less difficulty the mysteries of heaven. Therefore, this King was Christ, but, as it said so often, an immortal King. Christ was King, but not of one people, but King of all men and angels: And because He possessed infinite majesty and omnipotence, He was King and God at the same time. Indeed, we are His people and the sheep of His pasture; but very unhappy ones because rapacious wolves, death, and hell were attacking, mangling, and destroying (us). These enemies can be overcome in no other way except by Him; He who, since He is our King, desired to willingly be put to death for us.

The high priest of the Hebrews, Caiaphas himself, although most enraged with our Lord, nevertheless brought forth this prophecy concerning Him in the council of his colleagues: "Nor

do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, so that the whole nation not perish.’ Now, he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that he might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (Jn 11:50-52). Therefore, Christ our King had to die when He had determined to conquer and annihilate death, to which we all yield as prey. But God could not die: Who could stand up against God? Who could threaten Him with the sword? Who could attempt (His) murder? “Therefore, the all powerful Lord” (the words are of St. Leo the Great) “came face to face with the most ferocious enemy not in His Majesty, but in our lowliness, presenting to it the same form and same nature, a partner in our mortality, entirely innocent of any sin.” For that reason, then, He clothed Himself in human flesh, in the style of slaves that He might die. But He desired that His flesh have no stain of any sin, lest death, which came into the world on account of sin, would seem to accuse Him of any little breakage of the law. Hence (death) would have reckoned to be engaging in battle with its slave and not (its) Lord.

Therefore, armed with our weakness, more truly, I should say, covered with the garment of slavery, our Codrus, our Christ attacked death; and dying, He conquered death, and by that strike by which He was struck, He conquered it. “Death underwent defeat as the dead body gave to it its fatal blow.” Most insolent death was hoping to be the future conqueror by our King’s death on the cross when, behold, it was conquered and vanquished; the death of the King brought forth eternal salvation for His people.

2. David, not yet having left his youth, entered the camp of Saul, the King of the Israelites, with the provisions he carried for his fighting brothers. There, he noticed that Goliath the Philistine was insulting the Hebrew army, since no one among them (the Hebrews) desired, nor did anyone dare, to enter into a one-on-one match. In view of the fact that a duel had been

proposed, that if someone put him down on the ground, he could consider all the Philistines vanquished and slaves in the one Goliath. This arrogance of the wicked enemy provoked the heart of this noblest and most courageous adolescent. So, offering himself to enter the sacred duel with Goliath on behalf of the sacred altars and hearths of the godly people, he demanded to be admitted into the battle. “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” David said to Saul, “Let no man’s heart fail on account of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine” (1 Sam 17:26, 32). Accordingly, he is armed like a king: The helmet of Saul protects his head, a chain mail his chest and back, a shield in hand, a sword at his side. Behold the soldier! He advances. But, suddenly, he stops. Why? ““I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them.’ And David took them off” (1 Sam 17:39). Therefore, having thrown off all these things, “He picked up five smooth stones from a stream. Then, armed only with his shepherd’s staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine. Thus David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and he struck the Philistine” (1 Sam 17:40;50).

Hurrah, the triumph! The giant has been conquered, the boy has conquered! But that boy who conquers prefigures Christ; the giant, who represents death, is conquered. For what is the staff of David, if not the Cross of Christ? What are the five stones, if not the wounds of Christ? With these weapons, He prostrated the most fierce and arrogant Goliath – death, I mean – that was insulting us all.

The parent of the human race swallowed death in the forbidden apple and was, in turn, devoured by it. Indeed, it was said to him: “But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). But the one, scorning the mandate of God, ate the worst apple, and in the apple got the worst, death. And further, Paul testifies in this way, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death

through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12).

That terrible Goliath, which is death dreaded by all, prowled around the whole earth. Everywhere, it was the victor; everywhere, it was the conqueror. No one dared to oppose it, because no one was able. Yet, it pursued all, and it killed all. For this reason, men are now said to be mortal, since they are subject to death (in Latin, the similarity between *mors*, death, and *mortalis*, mortal, is clearly seen). Finally, the new David came into the camp of men, into this world under the moon. I refer to Christ, our King and Savior, who took up the staff, the wood of the cross, and went forth to battle against death. But what of the voracious beast (death)? Is it also sharpening its teeth? I see it, moreover, having come forth from the wood (of the cross), and through this wood, it must be killed. This little boy, on whose shoulders is placed the authority, rightly ought to be dreadful to it. Till now it has devoured even giants, but now, it cannot even swallow a little boy. Indeed, He, “humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8), truly not only undergoing it, but destroying, extinguishing, and eradicating it.

Do you (death) hear how this humble crucified one insults you, the proud mocker? “From the hand of death I will free them” (us, I say, us whom you have destroyed until now), “I will redeem them from death: I will be your death, O death” (Hos 13:14, Douay-Rheims). What is said, is done. “Death, which entered through a tree, has been conquered by a tree (wood of the cross)” (St. Augustine, *Sermon 10, On the Saints*). And yet, we who thus were prisoners, slaves to sin, what is more: indeed, fuel for death; but now we were freed from this tyranny through the cross, through the wounds, through the death of our King Jesus Christ. Already, we are made His coheirs, sons of God. O death of Christ most victorious, which brought death to death, and has brought to us immortality. “The dead,” in truth, “in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thes 4:16).

3. Three Evangelists come together to a conclusion that Jesus “uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last” (Mk 15:37). Being about to vanquish death, He cries out? Why? I reckon that this most terrible beast began to flee because it felt its own annihilation was near. However, He, the lion of the tribe of Judah, checked it with His roar and killed it. Evidently, it was usual for Christ to rise up against death with a great cry.

Lazarus – Christ’s friend, whom you well remember – fell asleep with the sleep of death and was giving an offensive odor, after being already four days in the tomb (cf. Jn 11). However, so to stir up the one sleeping and to expel the sleep of death from his eyes, “Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb,” and “cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’ The man who had died came forth” (Jn 11:38, 43-44). At the intimidating voice of the Lord of life and death, death abandoned Lazarus, and life was restored: He “who was dead” lived again.

The infernal fury must be overcome this way (in defeat), the nocturnal thief ought to be thus exposed, the tyrant of our race is to be thus overthrown, “when he uttered a great shout.” This, the prophet Isaiah foresaw, and predicted regarding the eternal God wrestling against death on the mount of Golgotha. He was promised certain victory over it in these words: “And on this mountain he will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time. And he will remove the reproach of his people from all the earth. ... Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” (Is 25:7-9). Now this prophecy became at last a reality: Death is conquered; we are to be immortal, if only we do not receive the grace of Christ in vain.

4. John the beloved (disciple) of Christ, both the most trustworthy disciple and a friend until death, describes His most sacred death: “And he bowed his head,” he says, “and gave up his spirit” (Jn 19:30). There is no lack of those who firmly be-

lieve that Christ inclined His sacred head (shortly) before exhaling His mighty and divine spirit, in order to lure fearful death by this nod (of the head), and, having enticed it, to suffocate (it) by dying. For just as the death of Christ is medicine for us, so it is poison to death. Because death already smelled it out and trembled to come near to the One already greatly worn out and half-alive through (His) sufferings. For what, death was saying to itself, will I do with this mouthful? Shall I swallow it? I'd be afraid lest I burst in half, and I have to give up everything I have eaten up until now.

What death feared was what completely took hold of it. For as it gave its own venom to Christ, with His head lowered, it itself astonishingly perished, having been breathed upon by Him. We ought to listen here to (St. John) Chrysostom who perceptively explains in these words, what has just come to our attention: “Just like those who take food but cannot keep it (down), they vomit together with it not only that food but what they have eaten before. Thus it happened in the death of Christ. Since death accepted the body, which it was not able to digest, it actually vomited what it had swallowed. Since it had swallowed Christ, it was suffering and was tortured until it spewed Him forth.”

Allow me to join to the words of such a great orator a bit of history; seeing that I deliver these words to the Poles, I will render the present subject matter clearer through a Pole's deed. At the base of Wavel Hill, on which the citadel of Krakow is placed, to this day exists a cave, commonly called the Dragon's cave. Among writers of Polish history, also the Bishop of Warmia¹, records that this beast – called a dragon by our writers,

¹ Marcin Kromer or Martin Cromer (1512 – 23 March 1589) was Prince-Bishop of Warmia (Ermland), a cartographer, diplomat, and historian in Poland and later in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He was personal secretary to two Kings of Poland, Sigismund I the Old and Sigismund II Augustus. In 1533–37, he worked at the Royal Chancellery in Krakow. Thereafter, he went to Italy, where he studied law for two years. Returning to Poland in 1540, he became secretary to Archbishop Peter Gamrat. As the latter's personal advisor, he was also his envoy and representative to Rome, where he spent two years until 1544. He then became a canon in Kraków. In 1545, upon the death of his mentor, Kromer accepted the latter's post as personal secretary to Poland's

but which Solinus² calls a water snake – inhabited this cave and violently afflicted the entire neighborhood with continual slaughters of men and domestic animals. Therefore, Kracus, a man no less strong than prudent (from whom Krakow, our capital has its name and draws its origin) devised an easy and equally very ingenious plan to do away with the impetuous beast. He ordered that the animal carcasses to be stuffed with tar, sulphur, and chips of kindling, be thrown before the dragon. As the dragon ate them most ravenously, the fire ignited and convulsed the beast’s insides with so much heat, that the thirsty beast swallowed so much of the pure water of the nearby Vistula River that it (the beast) burst asunder.

This is not unlike the deed of Daniel put on record in the Sacred Scriptures. The great dragon was venerated by the Babylonians in place of God: Ordered to accomplish that same foolishness, Daniel refused magnanimously, and told the King: “I adore the Lord, my God: For he is the living God. But give

King Sigismund I the Old. A specialist on Royal Prussia and Warmia, in 1551, Kromer became head of the Warmian canonry. However, his Church career did not proceed as planned, since he was seen as one of the best Polish diplomats of the age and was frequently required by the court to leave his post to serve as envoy on various diplomatic missions. In 1552, for his services to the King, he was ennobled and granted a coat of arms. From 1558 to 1564, Kromer served as Polish envoy to Emperor Ferdinand I, who in recognition of Kromer’s services added his own family coat-of-arms to Kromer’s. In 1564, Kromer was recalled to Poland, where he was promoted within the Church hierarchy and took the post of coadjutor (de facto bishop) of the Bishopric of Warmia, to succeed on the demise of Prince-Bishop Stanislaus Hosius. After nine years at that post, Kromer was officially promoted to Prince-Bishop. He spent the rest of his days in Warmia, keeping diaries and writing several books on the history of Poland. He died on 23 March 1589 in Heilsberg (Lidzbark Warminski). In his works, Kromer advocated the reform of Poland’s scientific and cultural life.

² Gaius Julius Solinus, Latin grammarian and compiler, probably flourished in the early third century. Historical scholar Theodor Mommsen dates him to the middle of the third century. He was the author of *De mirabilibus mundi* (*The wonders of the world*) which circulated both under the title *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (*Collection of Curiosities*), and *Polyhistor*, but the latter title was favoured by the author. The work is indeed a description of curiosities in a chorographical framework. Adventus, to whom it is dedicated, is identified with Oclatinus Adventus, consul 218. It contains a short description of the ancient world, with remarks on historical, social, religious, and natural history questions. The greater part is taken from Pliny’s *Natural History* and the geography of Pomponius Mela (see Wikipedia).

me leave, O king, and I will kill this dragon without sword or club. And the king said, I give thee leave. Then Daniel took pitch, and fat, and hair, and boiled them together: and he made lumps, and put them into the dragon's mouth, and the dragon burst asunder" (Dan 14:24-26, Douay-Rheims).

O how insatiable is that beast, most gluttonous death! No position or gender seems to be spared. It takes over human minds (compelling them) to adore and venerate it like a goddess. From there, the temples erected (in honor) of Libitina³ originated, and death was honored by the pagan world because it was held in fear. But behold, the heavenly Kracus, behold Daniel, our most holy Christ, our God, about to free us from fear. He casts Himself before this monster, to be eaten up but not to be consumed. "Indeed, no woman in labor" (the golden mouth Bishop says) "suffers as much as death did, when it devoured the body of the Lord; it was burst asunder and torn apart. This is the same thing that happened to the Babylonian dragon, when it burst asunder in the middle, after having eaten the food. For not through the mouth of death did the most illustrious Christ escape again, but from the middle of the stomach of the dragon, He burst forth," to render us equally illustrious.

Surely, He promised this through the prophet Hosea: "I will deliver them out of the hand of death. I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy death; O hell, I will be thy bite." (Hos 13:14, Douay-Rheims) Wherefore rightly and deservedly, the Church joyfully sings: "O great work of merciful love!" Death has died, when Life died on the tree. For when Jesus "inclined his head" giving the signal of death, He expired and gave back to us the breath of life; when He was dying, He was supporting us; when He conquered death, He prepared for us the joy of the immortal triumph: Hurrah, the triumph! "Death is swallowed up in victory" (Paul, rejoicing, insults death) "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The

³ Libitina, also Libentina or Lubentina, is an ancient Roman goddess of funerals and burial. Her name was used as a metonymy (a figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated) for death.

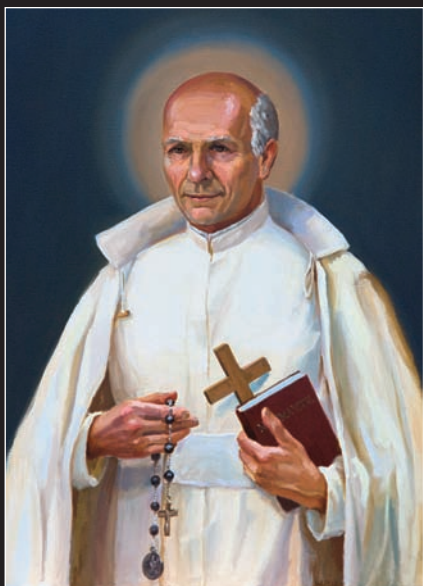
sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:54-57).

Jesus, by dying You defeated death: What further stands to be done?

Yes, that You teach me to conquer this (death).

May You teach me to conquer,
grant me to live together (with You)

On the wood of life, since I believe it (victory) to lay there.



Blessed Stanislaus of Jesus and Mary Papczyński was born on May 18, 1631, in Podegrodzie. After finishing his courses in Jesuit and Piarist Colleges, he joined the Piarist Order in 1654. Ordained to the priesthood in 1661, he became famous as a gifted educator of youth, illustrious preacher, wise spiritual director, and also as an author of works on spirituality and rhetoric. In 1673 Fr. Stanislaus founded the first Marian monastery in Puszcza Korabiewska, known today as Puszcza Mariańska. He was the first to found in the Church a male Order dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, nearly two centuries before the proclamation of this dogma. To his new Congregation he assigned three goals: promulgation of devotion to the Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M., prayerful assistance to Poor

Souls in Purgatory, and pastoral ministry, especially among people lacking pastoral guidance. He died in the opinion of holiness on September 17, 1701, in Góra Kalwaria near Warsaw. His remains were laid to rest at the Church of the Cenacle of Our Lord. On September 16, 2007, the Church proclaimed him Blessed.

FROM "THE SUFFERING CHRIST" BY BLESSED STANISLAUS PAPCZYŃSKI

The cross is an accepted affliction of the body; the cross is uninterrupted, serious penance; the cross is infamy, contempt, injury, and any kind of tribulation; the cross is infirmity, lack of goods, hardships, forfeiting temporal goods, loss of wealth; the cross is the lack of necessities, the pruning off of the superfluous, the subtraction of success, the entrance of adversity, and whatever either in the spirit or in the body causes difficulty. To carry such a cross out of love for Christ with an eager and joyful heart, we are all called by Christ Himself through His word and example – particularly, through the most bitter carrying of the salvific wood of the cross – so that, ultimately, we may attain together with Him the eternal inheritance of everlasting joy and glory by following after our Predecessor on the way of the cross.

Christ, I go there, wherever you call me: through hostility and fire, and through waters, and deserts, rocks, and thorns, under Your leadership, all difficult roads will be made easier especially if the companion Love will impart wings.



*More information
about Blessed Stanislaus Papczyński
is available at:*

www.stanislawpapczynski.org

