

CHAPTER XIX

Pilate Refers to Herod the Cause and Person of Our Savior Jesus; He is Accused before Herod, who Despises Him and Sends Him Back to Pilate; Mary Most Holy Follows the Lord, and what Happened along the Way.

603. One of the accusations which the Jews and their priests presented to Pilate against Jesus our Savior was that He had begun in the province of Galilee to stir up the people by his preaching (Lk. 23:5). This caused Pilate to inquire whether Christ our Lord was a Galilean (Ib. 6), and since they told him He was a natural citizen of that province and raised there he thought this circumstance useful for the solution of his difficulties in regard to Christ our Good and for escaping the molestations of the Jews, who so urgently demanded his death. Herod was at that time in Jerusalem celebrating the Pasch of the Jews. He was the son of the first Herod, who had murdered the Innocents to procure the death of Jesus soon after his birth (Mt. 2:16). This murderer had become a proselyte of the Jews at the time of his marriage with a Jewish woman. Because of this his son Herod likewise observed the law of Moses, and he had come to Jerusalem from Galilee of which he was governor. Pilate was at enmity with Herod, for the two governed the two principal provinces of Palestine, namely Judea and Galilee, and a short time before it had happened that Pilate in his zeal for the supremacy of the Roman empire had murdered some Galileans during a public function in the temple, mixing the blood of the insurgents with that of the holy sacrifices (as related in chapter XIII [v. 1] of St. Luke). Herod was highly incensed at this sacrilege, and Pilate, in order to give him some satisfaction, resolved to refer to him Christ our Lord as a vassal or natural citizen of Galilee so Herod could examine his cause and judge Him (Lk. 23:7). Pilate also expected Herod to set Him free as being innocent and accused by the malicious envy of the high priests and scribes.

604. Christ our Lord therefore was taken from the house of Pilate to the palace of Herod, being still bound and chained as before and accompanied by the scribes and priests as his accusers. There were also a large number of soldiers and servants who dragged Him along by the ropes and cleared the streets which were filled with multitudes of people to see the spectacle. The military broke their way through the crowds, and since the servants and priests were thirsting so eagerly for the blood of the Savior and wished to shed it on this very day they hastened with the Lord through the streets nearly on a run and with great tumult. Most holy Mary also went forth from the house of Pilate with her company in order to follow her sweetest Son Jesus and accompany Him in the steps remaining until He would reach the cross. It would not have been possible for the great Lady to follow her Beloved closely enough to be in his sight if the holy Angels had not arranged all according to the desire of Her Highness, in this manner making it possible for Her to be always so near her Son that She could relish his presence and be able to participate with greater plenitude in his torments and sorrows. She obtained the fulfillment of all her desires, for walking along through the streets near the Savior She saw and heard the insults of the servants, the blows they dealt Him, and the reproaches of the people, expressed either as their own or repeated from hearsay.

605. When Herod was informed that Pilate would send Jesus of Nazareth to him he was highly pleased. He knew He was a great friend of John the Baptist whom he had ordered to be put to death (Mk. 6:27), and had heard many reports of his preaching. In vain and foolish curiosity he harbored the desire of seeing Christ do something new and extraordinary for his entertainment and wonder (Lk. 23:8). The Author of life came into the presence of the murderer Herod, against

whom the blood of the Baptist was calling more loudly to this same Lord for vengeance than the blood of Abel in its time (Gen. 4:10). But the unhappy adulterer, ignorant of the terrible judgments of the Almighty, received Him with laughter, judging Him an enchanter and magician. In this dreadful misconception he began to examine and question Him, persuaded he could thereby induce Him to work some miracle to satisfy his curiosity. But the Master of wisdom and prudence, standing with a humble reserve before his most unworthy judge, answered him not a word (Lk. 23:9), for because of his wicked deeds he well merited the punishment of not hearing the words of life, which he would certainly have heard if he had been disposed to listen to them with reverence.

606. The princes and priests of the Jews stood around, continually rehearsing the same accusations and charges which they had made in the presence of Pilate (Ib. 10); yet the Lord maintained silence also in regard to these calumnies, much to the disappointment of Herod. In his presence the Lord would not open his lips, neither in order to answer his questions nor refute the accusations. Herod was altogether unworthy of hearing the truth, this being his greatest punishment and the punishment most to be dreaded by all the princes and the powerful of this earth. Herod was highly indignant at the silence and meekness of our Savior, and was much disappointed in his vain curiosity. But the iniquitous judge tried to hide his confusion by mocking and ridiculing the most innocent Master, being joined by all of his soldiers, and he ordered Him to be sent back to Pilate. Having made fun of the reserve of the Lord, the servants of Herod joined in treating Him as a fool and as one deficient in mind, and they clothed Him in a white garment in order to mark Him as insane and to be avoided as dangerous (Ib. 11). But by the hidden providence of the Most High this garment signified the purity and innocence of the Savior, and these ministers of wickedness were thus unwittingly giving testimony of the truth which they were trying to obscure in deriding the miraculous power of the Lord.

607. Herod showed himself thankful to Pilate for the courtesy of sending Jesus of Nazareth to be judged before his tribunal. He informed Pilate that he found no cause in Him, but held Him to be an ignorant man of no consequence whatsoever. By the secret judgments of divine Wisdom Herod and Pilate were reconciled on that day and thenceforward remained friends (Ib. 12). From Herod our Savior was brought before Pilate a second time, conducted by many soldiers of both governors, and amid a still greater crowd, uproar and commotion of the people. The very ones who had some time before hailed and venerated Him as the Savior and Messiah, blessed of the Lord (Mt. 21:9), had now changed their minds, perverted by the priests and magistrates, and they despised and condemned the same Lord whom they had so shortly before revered and glorified; so powerful as this is the error of leaders and their bad example in drawing the people after them. In the midst of all this confusion and ignominy the Lord passed along, repeating within Himself in unspeakable love, humility and patience those words which He had long before spoken by the mouth of David: *I am a worm and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people. All they that saw Me have laughed Me to scorn; they have spoken with the lips, and wagged the head* (Ps. 21:7-8). The Lord was a worm and no man not only because He was not engendered like the rest of men and was not merely and solely a man, being true God and man, but also because He was not treated like a man but a vile and despicable worm. Amid all the insults He was knocked down and trampled upon, yet made no more outcry or resistance than a humble wormlet which is despised, tread upon, and regarded as ignominious and most vile. All the innumerable people who saw our Christ our Redeemer spoke of Him with wagging heads, as if retracting their notion and opinion of Him.

608. At the insults and accusations made by the priests against the Author of life in the presence of Herod, and the questions he himself asked, the afflicted Mother was not bodily present, remaining outside the hall of judgment where they had taken the Lord, though She saw all by her interior vision. But when He came forth from the hall She met Him, and they looked upon each other in reciprocal sorrow of their souls such as corresponded to the love between such a Son and Mother. The sight of the white vestment by which they proclaimed Him fit to be treated only as an insane fool pierced her Heart with new sorrow, though She alone of all mankind recognized the mystery of his purity and innocence indicated by this vestment. She adored Him in it with deepest reverence and followed Him through the streets back to the house of Pilate, for in this house was to be executed the divine decree for our remedy. On the way from Herod to Pilate it happened that due to the crush of the people and the haste with which those most impious executioners drove the Lord on they tripped Him up and threw Him to the ground several times, and pulling on the ropes with the greatest cruelty they caused the blood to flow from his sacred veins, and He could not easily help Himself to rise from his falls since his hands were bound. Thus the multitude of people who followed, and who were neither able nor cared to stop in their onward rush, stepped upon His Divine Majesty, treading Him under foot and kicking Him. The blows and wounds He thus received, instead of stirring the compassion of the soldiers, only excited them to loud laughter, for instigated by the demons they had become devoid of all human compassion no less than so many wild beasts.

609. At the sight of such unmeasured cruelty the most sorrowful and loving Mother was moved to deepest compassion, and turning to her holy Angels She commanded them to gather up the divine blood so it would not be trodden upon and dishonored by the feet of sinners; this the heavenly servants willingly fulfilled. The great Lady also commanded that if her divine Son again fell to the earth they hasten to his assistance and prevent those workers of iniquity from injuring and stepping on his divine Person; however, since She was the most prudent of all mortals She did not desire them to execute her command unless it met the approval of the Lord. Hence She urged them to make this proposal themselves and ask his permission, representing to Him at the same time her anguish as his Mother in seeing Him thus irreverently subjected to the feet of sinners. In order to so much the sooner move the Lord to grant this petition She begged Him through the holy Angels to commute this humiliation of being trodden upon and crushed by the rabble into an act of obedience in complying with the petition of his afflicted Mother, who at the same time acknowledged Herself as his slave and formed of the dust. All these petitions of his Blessed Mother the Angels presented to Christ the Lord in her name; not that He was ignorant of them, since He knew all things and was Himself the instigator of them through his divine grace, but because in such prayers and petitions the Lord desires the order of reason to be preserved. The great Lady was aware of this desire, and in her most exalted wisdom practiced virtues by diverse ways and activities, since in such matters She was unimpeded by the knowledge of the Lord, who knew all things beforehand.

610. Our Savior Jesus yielded to the desire and petitions of his Blessed Mother, and gave the Angels permission to execute her requests as her ministers. During the rest of the passage to the house of Pilate they would not permit His Majesty to be tripped or cast to the ground, or to be stepped upon by the crowd as had happened before, though in regard to rest of the injuries He gave permission and consent to the soldiers, executioners, and the blinded and malicious people to execute all their wrath in their insane anger. His most holy Mother heard and saw all with an unconquered yet lacerated Heart. The same was also witnessed respectively by the Marys and St. John, who with ceaseless tears followed the Lord in company with his most pure Mother. I shall

not stop to describe the sorrows of these and other pious women who attended upon the Queen because I would go too wide of my subject, especially if I were to describe the doings of Magdalen, most distinguished in her ardent love of Christ and most pleasing to the Savior, for to her we must apply what Christ himself said when He justified her, that those love most to whom the greater sins are forgiven (Lk. 7:43, 47).

611. Pilate was again confronted with our Savior Jesus in his palace and was bestormed anew by the Jews to condemn Him to the death of the cross. Convinced of the innocence of Christ and the mortal envy of the Jews, he regretted it very much when Herod again referred to his own tribunal the decision from which he had tried to free himself. Feeling himself obliged in his duty as judge to make this decision, he sought to placate the Jews in different ways. One of these was a private interview with some of the servants and friends of the priests and high priests. He urged them to prevail upon their masters and friends not any more to ask for the release of the criminal Barabbas, but instead demand the release of our Redeemer and be satisfied with some punishment he was willing to administer before setting Him free. This measure Pilate had taken before they arrived a second time to press their demand for a sentence upon Christ our Lord. The proposal to choose between freeing either Jesus or Barabbas (Mt. 27:17) was made to the Jews not only once but two or three times, the first time before sending Him to Herod and again after his return. This is related by the Evangelists with some variation, though without contradicting the truth. Pilate spoke to the Jews and said: "You have presented this Man to me, accusing Him of dogmatizing and perverting the people; and having examined Him in your presence I have not been convinced of that which you accuse Him. And neither did Herod, to whom I sent Him and before whom you repeated your accusations, condemn Him to death. It will be sufficient for now to correct and chastise Him so He afterward may amend. Since I am to release some criminal for the feast of the Pasch, I will release Christ, if you will have Him freed, and chastise Barabbas" (Lk. 23:14-16). But the multitude of the Jews, realizing how much Pilate desired to free Christ our Lord, all responded: *Away with Christ, and release unto us Barabbas* (Ib. 18).

612. The custom of giving freedom to an imprisoned criminal at this great solemnity of the Pasch was introduced by the Jews in grateful remembrance of the release of their forefathers from servitude by their passage through the Red Sea, when the Almighty freed them from the power of Pharaoh by killing the firstborn children of the Egyptians (Ex. 12:29), and afterwards annihilating him and his armies in the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:28). In gratitude for this favor the Jews always sought out the greatest criminal and pardoned him his crimes, while they refused such clemency to those who were less guilty. In their treaties with the Romans they expressly reserved this privilege, and the governors complied with it. But in the present instance they failed to follow in their demands what they were so loudly proclaiming in regard to Christ our Lord, for they were to demand the release of the greatest criminal, and this they proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to be, yet they persisted in demanding the punishment of Christ and the release of Barabbas, whom they judged less guilty. By imbuing the wrath and envy of the demon himself they had become so blind and perverted that they were all bedazzled even against their own selves.

613. While Pilate was thus disputing with the Jews in the praetorium his wife Procula happened to hear of his doings, and she sent him a message telling him: "What hast thou to do with this just Man? Leave Him alone, for I tell thee I have had some visions today regarding his cause" (Mt. 27:19). It was Lucifer and his demons who moved Procula to give this warning, for observing all that was happening in regard to the Person of our Savior, and the unchangeable patience with which He bore all injuries, they were more and more confused and staggered in

their rabid fury. Although the swollen pride of Lucifer could not explain how, if Christ was divine, it could be compatible with such great ignominies and feeling their effects in the flesh, and though he could not come to any certain conviction whether this Jesus was the Godman or not, yet the dragon was persuaded that some great mystery was here transpiring among men which would be the cause of great damage and defeat to him and his malice if he did not succeed in stopping its progress in the world. Having come to this conclusion with his demons, he many times suggested to the Pharisees the propriety of ceasing their persecutions of Christ. These suggestions, however, since they originated from malice and were devoid of any power for good, failed to move the obstinate and perverted hearts of the Jews. Despairing of success the demons went to the wife of Pilate and spoke to her in dreams, representing to her that this Man was just and without guilt, and if her husband condemned Him he would be deprived of his rank and she herself would meet with great adversity. They urged her to advise Pilate to release Jesus and punish Barabbas if she did not wish to draw misfortune upon their house and their persons.

614. Procula was filled with great fear and terror at these visions, and as soon as she heard what was passing between the Jews and her husband she sent him the message mentioned by St. Matthew (Ib.) not to get involved in condemning this Man to death, whom she looked upon and recognized as just. The demon also injected similar misgivings into the mind of Pilate, and these warnings of his wife only increased them. Yet since all his considerations rested upon worldly policy, and as he had not cooperated with the true helps given him by the Lord, all these fears delayed his unjust proceedings only as long as no other more powerful consideration arose, as will presently be seen. But now he insisted with the Jews on the innocence of Christ our Lord for the third time (as St. Luke tells us [23:22]), defending Him and declaring that he found no crime in Him nor any guilt worthy of death, and therefore he would punish and then dismiss Him. As we shall see in the next chapter, he truly did punish Christ in order to see whether the Jews would be satisfied. But the Jews, on the contrary, demanded that Christ be crucified (Ib. 23). Thereupon Pilate asked for water and released Barabbas. Then he washed his hands in the presence of all the people, saying: "I have no part in the death of this just Man, whom you condemn. Look to yourselves in what you are doing; and in testimony of this I wash my hands so it is understood they are not stained in the blood of the Innocent" (Mt. 27:24). Pilate thought by this ceremony he could excuse himself entirely and thereby put its blame upon the princes of the Jews and the people who demanded it. The wrath of the Jews was so blind and insane that for the satisfaction of seeing Jesus crucified they entered upon this agreement with Pilate and took upon themselves and upon their children the responsibility for this crime. Loudly proclaiming this terrible sentence and curse, they exclaimed: *His blood be upon us and upon our children* (Ib. 25).

615. O most cruel and blind stupidity! O temerity never even imagined! The unjust condemnation of the Just and the blood of the Innocent, whom the judge himself is forced to proclaim guiltless, you wish to take upon yourselves and upon your children so his blood may call out against you to the end of the world! O perfidious and sacrilegious Jews! So lightly then weighs the blood of the Lamb who bears the sins of the world, and the life of a Man who is at the same time true God! How is it possible you wish to load yourselves and your children with it? If He had been only your brother, your benefactor and master, your audacity would have been tremendous and your malice execrable. Justly indeed do you merit the punishment which you meet, and that the burden which you have put upon yourselves and your children allows you neither rest nor relief in all the world. It is just for this burden to rest upon you heavier than heaven and earth. But alas! Though this deified blood was intended to wash and cleanse all the children of Adam, and though it was in effect poured out upon all the children of the holy

Church, yet there are many belonging to it who make themselves guilty of this blood by their works, both by word and deed, in the same manner as the Jews charged themselves with it. The Jews ignored and refused to believe it was the blood of Christ, while Catholics both know and confess it is.

616. The words of the sins* of Christians and their depraved works call out against the blood and death of Christ our Lord, loading themselves with it. Let Christ be affronted, spit upon, beaten, and stretched upon a cross; let Him be despised; let Him die while Barabbas is preferred before Him; let Him be tormented, scourged, and crowned with thorns for our sins; we desire to have no more part in this blood than that it be shed ignominiously and be eternally imputed to us. Let God himself made man suffer and die, while we enjoy the apparent goods of this world. Let us seize the occasion, use the creatures, crown ourselves with roses, and live in joy (Wis. 2:6-9); let us use our power; let no one get ahead of us; let us despise humility, abhor poverty, amass riches, deceive everyone, forgive no offenses, and surrender ourselves to the delights of depraved pleasures; let our eyes see nothing they shall not covet; and all this our strength can attain. This is our law without regard for anything else. And if by all this we crucify Christ, let his blood come upon us and upon our children.

617. Let us ask the reprobate who are in hell right now if these were the sentiments expressed in their works as attributed to them by Solomon in the book of Wisdom (Ib.), and whether it was because they spoke thus foolishly in their hearts that they were called impious and were so in reality. What else except damnation can they expect who abuse the blood of Christ and load it upon themselves, not as those who desire it for their remedy, but as those who despise it for their condemnation? Who can be found among the children of the Church who would suffer a thief and criminal to be preferred to him? So little practiced is this doctrine of humility that it is considered admirable if someone allows another just as good and worthy as himself, or even more worthy, to take precedence, and none will be as good as Christ or as bad as Barabbas. Yet there are innumerable men who in spite of this example are offended and judge themselves disgraced if they are not preferred and exalted by honors, riches, dignities, and in whatever pertains to the ostentation and applause of the world. These are sought after, contended for, and solicited; in such things are consumed the thoughts and all the exertions and powers of men almost from the time in which they can use their faculties until they lose them. The most lamentable misfortune is that even those who by their profession and their state have renounced and turned their backs upon such things do not free themselves. While the Savior has commanded them to forget their people and the house of their parents (Ps. 44:11), they return to them and devote to them the best part of their human existence, which is their attention and solicitude in governing their affairs, using their will and desires for the increase of their worldly goods. It seems but a small matter to them to engage themselves in these vanities. Instead of forgetting the house of their father they forget the house of their God in which they live and where they are divinely assisted to gain a salvation, honor and esteem never possible in the world, and where they receive their sustenance without any anxiety or worry. They show themselves ungrateful for all these benefits by drifting away from the humility due to their state. Thus the humility of Christ our Savior, his patience, his injuries, the dishonor of the cross, the imitation of his works, the following of his doctrines, all is left to the poor, to the lonely ones, to the destitute and humble of this world, while the ways of Sion are deserted and full of wailing

* cf. Ps. 21:2 [Ed.]

because there are so few who will come to the solemn feast of the imitation of Christ our Lord (Lam. 1:4).

618. Not less was the absurdity of Pilate in thinking that washing his hands and having imputed to the Jews the blood of Christ would justify him in his conscience and with men, whom he pretended to satisfy with that ceremony so full of hypocrisy and deceit. It is true the Jews were the principal actors and more guilty in the condemnation of the Innocent, and they expressly charged themselves with its guilt. However, Pilate was not because of this free from guilt, since knowing the innocence of Christ our Lord he should not have allowed a thief and robber to be preferred before Him, nor chastised and pretended to correct Him, who showed nothing that could be corrected or amended (Lk. 23:25). Much less should he have condemned and delivered Him over to his mortal enemies, whose envy and cruelty were so evident. He is not a just judge who knowing the truth and justice place them in the balance with his own human respect and personal interest, for such a course drags down the right reason of men, who are so cowardly of heart. Since they do not possess the strength and perfection of mind necessary to a judge, they cannot resist their greed or their human respect. In their blind passions they forsake justice in order not to endanger their temporal advantages, as happened to Pilate.*

619. In the house of Pilate, through the ministry of the holy Angels, our Queen was placed in such a position that She could hear the disputes of the iniquitous judge with the scribes and priests concerning the innocence of Christ our Savior and the release of Barabbas in preference to Him. All the clamors of these human tigers She heard in silence and admirable meekness as the living counterpart of her most holy Son. Although the most modest decency of her exterior was imperturbable, all the voices of the Jews pierced her lacerated Heart like two-edged swords. But the clamors of her silent sorrow resonated in the bosom of the eternal Father more pleasantly and sweetly than the lamentations of the beautiful Rachel, who as Jeremias says was bewailing her children because they could not be restored (Jer. 31:15). Our most beautiful Rachel, Mary most pure, sought not revenge but pardon for her enemies who were depriving Her of the Onlybegotten of the Father and her only Son. She imitated all the actions of the most holy soul of Christ, and accompanied Him in works of most exalted sanctity and perfection, for neither could her torments hinder her charity, nor her affliction diminish her fervor, nor could the tumult distract her attention, nor the outrageous injuries of the multitudes prevent her interior recollection. Under all circumstances She practiced the most exalted virtues in the most eminent degree.

*INSTRUCTION GIVEN ME BY THE GREAT
LADY OF HEAVEN, MARY MOST HOLY.*

620. My daughter, in what thou hast written and understood I see thee astonished to find that Pilate and Herod exhibited less unkindness and cruelty in the death of my divine Son than the priests, high priests, and Pharisees; and thou dost dwell much upon the fact that the former were secular and gentile judges, while the latter were teachers of the law and priests of the people of Israel, professing the true faith. In answer to thy thoughts I remind thee of a doctrine not new, but which thou hast understood on former occasions, and I desire thee to refresh it in thy mind and remember it for the rest of thy life. Know then, my dearest, that a fall from the highest position is extremely dangerous, and the damage done is either irreparable or very difficult to

* cf. Mt. 16:26 [Ed.]

repair. Lucifer held an eminent position in heaven regarding both gifts of nature and of grace, for in beauty he excelled all creatures, yet by his sin he fell to the deepest abyss of loathsomeness and misery, and into a more hardened obstinacy than all of his followers. The first parents of the human race, Adam and Eve, were exalted to the highest dignity and raised to exquisite favor as coming forth from the hand of the Almighty, yet their fall caused ruin to themselves and to all their posterity, and their remedy was so costly as faith teaches, since to remedy them and their descendants was the work of immense mercy.

621. Many other souls have risen to the summit of perfection yet from there have fallen most unhappily, afterwards finding it doubtful or nearly impossible to rise again. This sad state in the creature originates from many causes. The first is the dismay and boundless confusion of one who feels he has fallen from an exalted state of virtue, for he knows he has not only lost great blessings but does not expect to obtain greater ones than those of the past and those he has lost, nor does he promise himself more firmness in keeping those he can obtain through renewed efforts than he has shown in those acquired and now lost through his ingratitude. From this dangerous distrust originates lukewarmness, lack of fervor and diligence, and absence of zeal and devotion, since diffidence extinguishes all these in the soul, just as encouraging and cheerful hope overcomes many difficulties and strengthens and vivifies weak human creatures to undertake great works. There is another cause, not less formidable, namely this: The souls accustomed to the blessings of God either through their office, as the priests and religious, or by the exercise of virtues and the abundance of divine favors, as spiritual-minded persons, usually aggravate their sins by a certain contempt of these very blessings and abuse of the divine things, for by the abundance of the divine favors they fall into a dangerous dullness of mind. They begin to think little of the gifts of the Lord and become irreverent. Thus failing to cooperate with the grace of God they hinder its effect and lose the holy fear of God, a fear which awakens and stimulates the soul toward good works and obedience to the will of God, and then to make use of the means ordained by God to depart from sin and attain his friendship and eternal life. This is an evident danger for lukewarm priests who frequent the Holy Eucharist and other Sacraments without fear and reverence, and also for the learned, wise, and powerful of this world, who so reluctantly correct and amend their lives. They have lost the appreciation and veneration of the remedial helps of the Church, namely the Sacraments, preaching and instruction. Thus these medicines, which for other sinners are so salutary and counteract ignorance, weaken those who are the physicians of the spiritual life.

622. There are other reasons for this kind of danger which must be referred to the Lord himself. The sins of those souls who by their state or their advanced virtues are more closely bound to their God are weighed in the balance of the justice of God in quite a different way than the sins of those who have been less favored by his mercy. Although the sins of all are more or less essentially the same, yet the circumstances of sin are very different; for the priests and teachers, the powerful and the dignitaries, and those who due to their station or by reputation are supposed to be advanced in a holy life, cause great scandal by their fall or by any sins they commit. Their audacity and temerity is greater in their daring against God, whom they know better and to whom they owe much more, but whom they offend with more deliberation and knowledge than the ignorant. Hence, as is evident from the basic meaning of all the Holy Scriptures, the sins of Catholics, and especially of those who are instructed and enlightened, are so displeasing to God. Just as the term of life is set for each one as the time in which he is to merit eternal reward, so the

number of sins the patience of the Lord must await and suffer* is also determined; however, this determination is not only by the quantity of sins, but also by their quality and weight in the eyes of divine justice. Thus it may happen that in souls favored by greater enlightenment and graces of heaven the grievousness supplies what is lacking in the number of sins, and with fewer sins they are forsaken sooner and chastised more severely than others with many more sins. Nor can it happen for all as it happened for David (II Kg. 12:13) and St. Peter (Lk. 22:61), because not all of them have performed as many good works before their fall for the consideration of the Lord. Moreover, the special privileges of some cannot be set up as a rule for all others, because according to the secret judgments of the Lord not all are destined for a special office.

623. By this explanation, my dearest, thou shalt be able to satisfy thy doubts and understand what a bitter evil so many souls incur whom the Almighty has redeemed by his blood, placed in the way of light, and drawn toward Himself, and how a person can fall from a more exalted state into more perverse obstinacy than others below him in station. This truth is testified by the mystery of the Passion and Death of my most holy Son, in which the high priests, scribes, priests, and all the people of the Jews were more obligated to God in comparison to the gentiles; their sins made their obstinacy, blindness and cruelty more abominable and bold than the gentiles themselves, who were ignorant of the true religion. I desire this truth, as exhibited by their example, to convince thee of this terrible danger so thou mayest prudently fear; and with this holy fear join humble gratitude and an exalted esteem for the favors of the Lord. *Remember poverty in the time of abundance* (Ecclus. 18:25). Ponder as well the one as the other within thyself, and remember thou dost carry thy treasure in a fragile vessel which thou canst easily lose (II Cor. 4:7), and that to receive such benefits argues not merit, and neither is the possession of them a right in justice, but due to grace and liberality. That the Most High has been so familiar with thee is no assurance thou canst not fall, and no license to live carelessly and without reverence and fear. All things happen to thee according to the number and greatness of thy blessings, for the wrath of the serpent has proportionately increased toward thee, and is more alert against thee than against other souls. He has become aware that the Most High has not been so generously loving to men of many generations as toward thee, and if thou dost meet so many blessings and mercies with ingratitude thou shalt be most wretched and worthy of a rigorous punishment, against which thou canst make no objection.

* cf. Mt. 17:16 [Ed.]