

CHAPTER XXIV

The Wound which the Lance Thrust Caused in the Side of Christ when He was Already Dead; He is Taken Down from the Cross and Buried; the Doings of Mary Most Holy during These Events until She Returned to the Cenacle.

725. The Evangelist St. John tells us that near the Cross stood Mary, the most holy Mother of Jesus, with Mary of Cleophas and Mary Magdalen (Jn. 19:25). Although this is said of the time before our Savior expired, it must be understood that the unconquerable Queen remained also afterwards, always standing beneath the Cross and adoring her dead Jesus and the Divinity which was always united to his sacred body. Amid the impetuous floods of sorrow which penetrated to the inmost recesses of her most chaste Heart, the great Lady remained immovably constant in the exercise of ineffable virtues while contemplating within Her the mysteries of the Redemption of man and the order in which divine Wisdom executed all these sacraments. The greatest affliction of the Mother of Mercy was the traitorous ingratitude which men, to their own great loss, would show toward this extraordinary blessing, so worthy of eternal gratitude. But at present She was specially solicitous for the burial of the sacred body of her divine Son and how to procure someone to take Him down from the Cross, upon which her heavenly eyes were riveted. With this sorrowful care She turned to her holy Angels around Her and spoke to them: "Ministers of the Most High and my friends in tribulation, thou knowest there is no sorrow like unto my sorrow; tell me then, how shall I take Him down from the Cross whom my soul loveth, and how and where shall I give Him honorable burial, since this duty pertains to me as his Mother. Tell me what to do and assist me on this occasion by thy diligence."

726. The holy Angels answered: "Our Queen and our Lady, let thy afflicted Heart be dilated for what remains to be suffered. The almighty Lord has concealed his glory and power from mortals in order to subject Himself to the impious disposition of wicked and cruel men, and desires to consent to the observance of the laws established by men, and one of them is that those sentenced to death shall not leave the cross without permission of the judge himself. We are ready and able to obey Thee and defend our true God and Creator, but his right hand restrains us because his will is to justify his cause entirely and shed the rest of the blood still in Him for the benefit of mankind, in order to still further oblige them to make a return for his love by which He so copiously redeemed them (Ps. 129:7). If they do not avail themselves of this benefit as is their due their chastisement shall be deplorable, and its severity shall recompense God for having taken slow steps in exacting his vengeance." This answer of the Angels increased the sorrow of the afflicted Mother, for it had not as yet been manifested to Her that her most holy Son would be wounded by the lance, and the fear of what would happen to the sacred body caused Her new tribulation and anguish.

727. She soon saw an armed band approaching Calvary, and in her dread of some new outrage against the deceased Savior She spoke to St. John and the pious women: "Alas, now shall sorrow reach its peak and divide my heart in my bosom! Could it be the executioners and the Jews are not yet satisfied with having put to death my Son and Lord? Do they now seek to inflict another injury upon his sacred body, already dead?" It was the evening of the great Sabbath of the Jews, and in order to celebrate it with unburdened minds they had asked Pilate for permission to shatter the limbs of the three men sentenced (Jn. 19:31) so their death being hastened they could be taken from their crosses and not left on them for the following day. With this intention the company of soldiers which most holy Mary now saw had come to mount Calvary. Since they

perceived the two thieves still alive, they broke their limbs and thus hastened their end (Ib. 32). But when they examined Christ our Savior they found Him already dead and hence did not break his bones (Ib. 33), thus fulfilling the mysterious prophecy in Exodus (Ex. 12:46) commanding that no bones be broken in the figurative lamb to be eaten for the Pasch. But a soldier by the name of Longinus, approaching the Cross of Christ, thrust his lance through the side of the Savior, and immediately blood and water flowed from the wound as affirmed by St. John, who saw it and gave testimony of the truth (Jn. 19:34-5).

728. This wounding of the lance, which could not be felt by the sacred and dead body of the Lord, was felt by his most holy Mother in his stead and in the same manner as if her chaste bosom had been pierced. But even this pain was exceeded by the affliction of her most holy soul in witnessing the cruel laceration of the breast of her dead Son. At the same time, moved by compassion and love, and in forgetfulness of her own sorrow, She said to Longinus: "The Almighty look upon thee with eyes of mercy for the pain thou hast caused to my soul." So far and no farther went her indignation, or more properly her most kind meekness, for the instruction of all of us who are ever injured, for in the estimation of this most sincere Dove this injury to the dead Christ weighed most heavily, and the retribution sought by Her for the perpetrator was one of the greatest blessings, namely that God would look upon him with eyes of mercy and return blessings and gifts of grace for the offense. Thus it also happened, for the Savior, moved by the prayer of his most holy Mother, ordained that some of the blood and water from his sacred side drop upon the face of Longinus and restore to him his eyesight which he had almost lost. At the same time sight was given to his soul, and thus he recognized in the Crucified his Savior whom he had so inhumanly mutilated. Through this enlightenment Longinus was converted; weeping over his sins and having washed them in the blood and water from the side of Christ, he openly acknowledged and confessed Him as the true God and Savior of the world. He proclaimed Him as such in the presence of the Jews, confounding by his testimony their perfidy and hardness of heart.

729. The most prudent Queen knew the mystery of this lance thrust, and how in this last pouring forth of the blood and water from the side of her most holy Son issued forth the new Church, cleansed and renovated in virtue of his Passion and Death, and that from his sacred side would spread as from the roots the branches over the whole world, extending over it the fruits of eternal life. She likewise conferred interiorly within her bosom upon the mystery of that rock struck by the rod of the justice of the eternal Father (Ex. 17:6) so living water* could issue forth to quench the thirst of the entire human race, refreshing and recreating all who would go to drink therefrom. She considered the correspondence of the five fountains from the wounds of his hands, feet and side, which opened up the new paradise of the most holy humanity of our Savior, and which were more copious and powerful to fertilize the earth than those of the terrestrial paradise divided into four streams over the surface of the earth (Gen. 2:10). These and other mysteries the great Lady rehearsed in a canticle of praise which She composed in honor of her divine Son after his being wounded by the lance. Together with this canticle She poured forth a most fervent prayer that all these mysteries of the Redemption be verified in the blessings spread over the whole human race.

730. The evening of that day of the Parasceve was already approaching, and the loving Mother had as yet no solution, which She desired so much, to the difficulty of the burial of her deceased Son Jesus. But the Lord ordained that the tribulations of his most tender Mother would be

* cf. Jn. 4:10 [Ed.]

relieved by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, whom He had inspired with the thought of caring for the burial of their Master. They were both just men and disciples of the Lord, although not of the seventy-two, for they had not as yet openly confessed themselves as disciples for fear of the Jews, who suspected and hated as enemies all those who followed Christ and acknowledged Him as Master. The mandate of the divine will regarding the burial of her Son had not been manifested to the most prudent Virgin, and due to the difficulty which presented itself her sorrowful predicament increased such that She saw no way out by her own diligence. In her affliction She raised her eyes to heaven and said: "Eternal Father and my Lord, by the condescension of thy goodness and infinite wisdom I was raised from the dust to the exalted dignity of Mother of thy eternal Son, and by that same immense liberality of God Thou hast granted me to nurse Him at my breast, nourish Him, and accompany Him to his death. Now it is incumbent upon me as his Mother to give honorable burial to his sacred body, though my strength can only manage to desire it and my heart is torn because I cannot attain it. My God, I beseech Thy Majesty to dispose by thy power the means for me to execute it."

731. This prayer the most pious Mother offered up after the sacred body of the Lord was pierced by the lance. Soon after She saw another group of men coming toward Calvary with ladders and other apparatus seemingly for the purpose of taking from the Cross her priceless Treasure; but since She did not know their intentions She was afflicted anew with apprehension due to the cruelty of the Jews, and turning to St. John She said: "My son, what may be the intention of these people who come with such instruments?" The Apostle answered: "My Lady, do not fear those who are coming, for they are Joseph and Nicodemus with some of their servants, all of them friends and servants of thy most holy Son and my Lord." Joseph was just in the eyes of the Most High (Jn. 19:38) and noble in the estimation of the people, a decurion in the employment of the government and a member of the Council, who as is given us to understand in the Gospel had not consented to the resolves and the proceedings of the murderers of Christ (Lk. 23:50-1), and who had recognized Him as the true Messiah; and though Joseph had been a secret disciple of the Lord, yet at his death he publicly manifested his adherence, the efficacy of the Redemption working these new effects. Setting aside all fear of the envy of the Jews, and caring nothing for the power of the Romans, he went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus (Mk. 15:43) in order to take Him down from the Cross and give Him honorable burial. He openly maintained that He was innocent and the true Son of God, as testified by the miracles of his life and death.

732. Pilate dared not refuse the request of Joseph, but gave him full permission to dispose of the dead body of Jesus as he thought fit. With this permission Joseph left the house of the judge and called upon Nicodemus. He too was a just man, learned in divine and human letters and in the Holy Scriptures as is evident in what St. John related of him when he visited Christ our Lord at night in order to hear his doctrine (Jn. 3:2). Joseph provided the winding sheets and burial cloths for the body of Jesus, while Nicodemus bought about one hundred pounds of the spices (Jn. 19:39) which the Jews were accustomed to use in the burial of distinguished men (Mt. 27:59). Provided with these and other necessities they went to Calvary. They were accompanied by their servants and some other pious and devout persons in whom likewise the blood shed for all by the crucified God had produced its salutary effects.

733. They approached most holy Mary, who in the company of St. John and the Marys stood in inconceivable sorrow at the foot of the Cross. Instead of a salute, their sorrow at the sight of so painful a spectacle as that of the divine Crucified was roused to such vehemence and bitterness that Joseph and Nicodemus remained for a time prostrate at the feet of the Queen, with all of

them at the Cross amid tears and sighs without speaking a word. All of them wept, crying out and lamenting bitterly until the invincible Queen raised them from the ground and animated and consoled them, whereupon they saluted Her in humble compassion. The most observant Mother thanked them for their kindness and the service they would render to their God, Lord and Master in giving burial to his deceased body, and offered them the reward for that work in his name. Joseph of Arimathea answered: "Already, our Lady, do we feel in the secret of our hearts the sweet and gentle force of the divine Spirit, who has moved us with such loving affections that we could never merit it or succeed in explaining it." Then they took off their mantles and with their own hands Joseph and Nicodemus placed the ladders to the Holy Cross. On these they ascended in order to detach the sacred body, the glorious Mother being very near, and St. John and Magdalen in attendance. It seemed to Joseph that the sorrow of the heavenly Lady would be renewed when the sacred body would be lowered and She would touch Him, and therefore he advised the Apostle to take Her aside in order to divert Her. But St. John, who knew better the invincible Heart of the Queen, answered that from the beginning of the Passion She had been present at all the torments of the Lord, and that She would not leave Him until the end because She venerated Him as God and loved Him as the Son of her womb.

734. Nevertheless they begged Her for her own good to retire for a short time while they lowered her Master from the Cross. But the great Lady responded: "My dearest masters, since I was present to see my sweetest Son nailed to the Cross, allow me to be present at his taking down, for this act of such piety, though it shall hurt my heart anew, yet the more I see Him and hold Him the greater alleviation it shall be for my sorrow." Thereupon they began to arrange to take down the body. First they detached the crown from the head, laying bare the lacerations and very deep wounds it had caused. They descended with it with great reverence and tears, and placed it in the hands of the most sweet Mother. She received it kneeling and with admirable worship venerated it, bringing it to her virginal face and bathing it with abundant tears, allowing some of the sharp points of the thorns to touch her face. She asked the eternal Father to inspire due veneration toward the sacred thorns in those Christians who would obtain possession of them in future times.

735. Then, in imitation of the Mother, St. John and Magdalen, with the Marys and the other pious women and faithful there present, venerated the crown of thorns; they did the same with the nails, which were first handed to most holy Mary for veneration, and afterward to the bystanders. Then the great Lady placed Herself on her knees and held the unfolded cloth in her outstretched arms ready to receive the dead body of her Son. In order to assist Joseph and Nicodemus, St. John supported the head of Christ and Magdalen the feet, and thus they tearfully and reverently placed Him into the arms of the most sweet Mother. This was for Her an event of equal compassion and joy, for in seeing Him covered with wounds, and his beauty disfigured, which had been greater than all the sons of men (Ps. 44:3), the sorrows of her most chaste Heart were again renewed, while by holding Him in her arms and at her bosom her incomparable sorrow was rejoiced and her love satiated by the possession of her Treasure. She looked upon Him with supreme worship and reverence, shedding tears of blood. In union with Her, as He rested in her arms, all the multitude of her attendant Angels worshipped Him, though this act was hidden from the bystanders. Then St. John, and after him all those present in their turn, adored the sacred Body. In the meanwhile the most prudent Mother, seated on the ground, held Him in her arms so they could satisfy their devotion.

736. In all these proceedings our great Queen acted with such heavenly wisdom and prudence that She excited the admiration of angels and men, for her words were of great deliberation, She

was most sweet in her caresses and compassion for her deceased Son, most tender in her pity, and mysterious in what these actions signified and comprehended. Her sorrow exceeded all that could ever be felt by mortals. She moved the hearts to compassion and tears; She enlightened all so they could realize such a divine sacrament now transpiring. Above all this, without excess or failure in what She had to do, She maintained a humble majesty of countenance in the serenity of her face despite the painful sorrow She was suffering. With uniform adaptation to the circumstances She spoke to her beloved Son, to the eternal Father, to the Angels, to the bystanders, and to the whole human race, for whose Redemption the Lord had undergone his Passion and Death. I shall not detain myself in specifying the most prudent and sorrowful words of the great Lady on this occasion, for Christian piety will be able to conceive many of them, and it is not possible for me to pause for each one of these mysteries.

737. Some time passed during which the Sorrowful Mother held at her bosom the deceased Jesus, and since evening was advancing St. John and Joseph besought Her to allow the burial of her Son and true God to take place. The most prudent Mother allowed it, and then they embalmed the sacred body using all one hundred pounds of the spices and aromatic ointments brought by Nicodemus (Jn. 19:40). Thus anointed the deified body was placed on a bier in order to be carried to the sepulchre. The heavenly Queen, most attentive in her zealous love, called from heaven many choirs of Angels, who together with her Guardian Angels accompanied the burial of their Creator. Immediately they descended from on high in shapes visible to their Queen and Lady, though not to the rest. A procession of heavenly spirits was formed and another of men, and the sacred body was carried by St. John, Joseph, Nicodemus and the centurion, who had confessed the Lord and now assisted at his burial. The heavenly Mother followed, accompanied by Mary Magdalen, the Marys, and the other pious women, his disciples. In addition to these a great number of the faithful joined them, for many had been moved by divine light and had come to Calvary after the lance thrust. All of them thus ordered processed in silence and in tears to a nearby garden where Joseph had hewn into the rock a new grave in which nobody had as yet been deposited or buried (Jn. 19:41). In this most blessed sepulchre they placed the sacred body of Jesus. Before they closed it up with the heavy stone the devout and prudent Mother adored Christ anew, causing the admiration of men and angels. All of them imitated Her, adoring the crucified and buried Lord; then they closed the sepulchre with the stone, which according to the Evangelist was very heavy (Mt. 27:60).

738. At the same time the sepulchre of Christ was closed the graves which had opened at his death also closed, for among other mysteries of their opening was they were as if waiting to see if they would have the happy lot of receiving within themselves their deceased Creator made man, since that is what they were able to offer Him, whereas the Jews would not receive Him* when He was alive and their Benefactor. At the command of the Queen many Angels remained to guard the sepulchre in which She had left her Heart. In the same order and silence in which they had come they now returned to Calvary. The heavenly Mistress of virtues approached the Holy Cross and adored it with profound reverence and worship. In this Joseph and all the rest of the mourners followed Her. It was already late and the sun had set when the great Lady went from Calvary to the house of the Cenacle, accompanied by those who had been at the burial. Leaving Her in the Cenacle with St. John, the Marys, and other companions, the others took leave of Her with great tears and sobs, asking Her to give them her blessing. The most humble and prudent Lady thanked them for the service they had performed for her most holy Son and the

* cf. Jn. 1:11 [Ed.]

benefit She had received. She permitted them to depart with many hidden and interior favors, and the blessings of sweetness from her natural kindness and pious humility.

739. The Jews, confused and disturbed by the events, went to Pilate on the morning of the sabbath and asked him for soldiers to guard the sepulchre (Mt. 27:62-4), for Christ (whom they called a seducer) had openly announced that after three days He would rise from the dead; hence his disciples might steal the body and then say He had risen. Pilate yielded to this malicious measure and gave them the guard they desired (Ib. 65), whom they stationed at the sepulchre. But the perfidious priests merely wished to palliate the event which they feared would really happen, as was manifest afterwards when they bribed the soldiers of the guard to testify that Christ our Lord had not risen but had been stolen by the disciples (Mt. 28:12-15). Since no counsel will prevail against God (Prov. 21:30), the Resurrection of Christ became only so much the more public and was the more fully confirmed.

*INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN
OF HEAVEN GAVE ME.*

740. My daughter, the wound which my most holy Son received in his side was very cruel and painful only to me, but its effects and mysteries are most sweet to those souls who know how to taste its sweetness. It greatly afflicted me, but to whom this mysterious favor is imparted it shall serve him as a great gift and alleviation in his sorrows. In order for thee to understand and participate in this, thou must know that my Son and Lord, because of his most ardent love for men, in addition to the wounds of the feet and hands, desired to open the wound of his Heart, the seat of love, so through this portal souls could enter and there receive refuge and relief. This is the only retreat which I desire thee to seek during the time of thy banishment and which thou must consider as thy habitation upon earth. There thou shalt find the conditions and laws of love for imitating me, and learn how for injuries thou must return blessings to all who commit them against thee and thine, just as thou hast seen me do when I was injured by the wound which my most holy Son received in his side when He was already dead. I assure thee, my dearest, thou canst not do anything more adapted for obtaining efficacious graces from the Almighty. The prayer which thou dost offer in a forgiving spirit is powerful not only for thy own good but for the good of the one who offends thee, for it moves the most kind Heart of my Son when He sees creatures imitate Him by pardoning offenders and praying for them, for they thereby participate in his most ardent charity manifested on the Cross. Write this doctrine in thy heart, and in imitation of me practice this virtue of which I thought so highly. Through this wound look upon the Heart of Christ thy Spouse and upon me in it, loving in it so sweetly and efficaciously all who offend thee and all creatures.

741. Consider also the providence of the Most High, so punctual and attentive in coming to the aid of the creatures who call upon Him in true confidence. This thou hast seen in my behalf when I found myself afflicted and at a loss concerning the proper burial of my divine Son. In order to come to my assistance in this plight the Lord showed his sweet love by moving the hearts of Joseph, Nicodemus, and the other faithful to assist me in burying Him. By their opportune help I was so much consoled in this tribulation that due to their behavior and my prayer the Most High filled them with wonderful influences of the Divinity by which they were regaled during the time they took Jesus my Son down from the Cross and during his burial, and from that time on these faithful were enlightened and filled with the mysteries of the Redemption. This is the admirable disposition of the sweet and powerful providence of God, that in order to bind Himself to do

good to some of his creatures He sends hardships upon others, thus giving an occasion for the practice of benevolence while at the same time those in necessity can be benefited. Thus the benefactor, because of the good work he does and the prayer of the poor, is rewarded by receiving graces of which he otherwise would not be worthy.* The Father of mercies, who inspires and assists the good work done, afterwards pays for it as if it were due in justice, for we can correspond to his inspirations merely according to our insignificant abilities, while all that is really good comes entirely from his hands (James 1:17).

742. Consider also the equity maintained by divine Providence in compensating the injuries received in patient suffering, for after my divine Son had suffered death amid the contempt, dishonor and blasphemies of men, the Most High at once provided for an honorable burial and moved many to confess Him as the true God and Redeemer, to proclaim Him as holy, innocent and just, and at the very time when they had finished their frightful crucifixion to adore Him as the Son of God. Even his enemies were made to feel within themselves the horror and confusion of their sin in persecuting Him. Although not all took advantage of these benefits, yet all of them were effects of the innocent death of the Lord. I also concurred by my prayers so the Lord could be acknowledged and honored by those known to me.

* cf. Lk. 16:9 [Ed.]