

CHAPTER XX

By Order of Pilate Our Savior Jesus is Scourged, Crowned with Thorns, and Mocked; what Most Holy Mary Did during This Time.

624. Aware of the obstinate hostility of the Jews against Jesus of Nazareth, and unwilling to condemn Him to death because he knew Him to be innocent, Pilate thought a severe scourging of Jesus might placate the fury of the ungrateful people and soothe the envy of the high priests and scribes. If He had failed in anything pertaining to their ceremonies and rites they would probably consider Him sufficiently chastised and cease in their persecutions and clamors for his death. Pilate was led to this belief by what they had told him in the course of his trial, for they had vainly and foolishly calumniated Christ of not observing the Sabbath and other ceremonies, as is evident from his sermons reported by the Evangelists (Jn. 9:16). But in his thinking in this matter Pilate was entirely ignorant, for neither could the Master of sanctity be guilty of any defect in the observance of the law which He had come not to abolish but to completely fulfill (Mt. 5:17), nor even if the accusation had been true would He have deserved such an outrageous punishment as such an impious and painful scourging, since the Jews in their laws had other means of atonement for transgressions against their law. In still greater error was this judge in thinking the Jews had any kind of benevolence and natural compassion, since their outrage and fury against the most meek Master was not human,* not like men who are naturally moved and placated when they see the enemy overthrown and humiliated; for men have hearts of flesh,† and the love of their own kind is natural and the source of at least some compassion, whereas those perfidious Jews were clothed in the guise of demons, or as it were transformed into demons, who exert the more furious rage against those who are rendered more exhausted and afflicted, who when they see anyone most helpless say: Let us pursue him now, since he has none to defend him and free him from our hands (Eccles. 4:10).

625. Such was the implacable fury of the priests and their allies the Pharisees against the Author of life, for Lucifer, despairing of being able to hinder his murder by the Jews, inspired them with his own dreadful malice and outrageous cruelty. Pilate, placed between the known truth and his human and earthly motives which governed him, chose to follow the erroneous leading of the latter and commanded Christ to be scourged with rigor (Jn. 19:1), though he himself had declared Him free from guilt. In order to execute this suggestion and persuasion of the demon and act thus unjustly, there were assigned six rugged executioners of the greatest strength, who as vile men, reprobate and merciless, accepted the office of executioner with great pleasure, since the violent and envious man always delights in executing his rage, even with actions which are dishonest, cruel and horrific. Thereupon those ministers of Satan with many others brought Jesus our Savior to the place of punishment, which was a courtyard or enclosure attached to the house and set apart for the torture of criminals in order to force them to confess their crimes. It was enclosed by a low, open building surrounded by columns, some of which supported the roof, while others were lower and stood free. To one of these columns, which was of marble, they bound Him very securely, for they still thought Him a magician and feared his escape.

* cf. I Cor. 10:13 [Ed.]

† cf. Ez. 36:26 [Ed.]

626. They first took off the white garment with not less ignominy than when they clothed Him with it in the house of the adulterous murderer Herod. In loosening the ropes and chains, which He had borne since his capture in the garden, they cruelly widened the wounds which his bonds had made in his arms and wrists. Freeing his divine hands they imperiously commanded the Lord himself with ignominious blasphemies to strip Himself of the seamless tunic which He wore. This was the identical garment with which his most holy Mother had clothed Him in Egypt when He first began to walk, as I have related in its place (*Inc.* 691). Our Lord at present had no other garment, since they had taken from Him his mantle or cloak when they seized Him in the garden. The Son of the eternal Father obeyed the executioners and began to unclothe Himself, ready to bear the shame of the exposure of his most sacred and modest body before such a multitude of people. But his tormentors, impatient at the delay which modesty required, grabbed the tunic with violence in order to hasten his undressing and, as is said, flay the sheep with the wool. His Majesty now stood completely naked with the exception of the loincloth which He wore beneath the tunic, with which his Mother likewise had clothed Him in Egypt.* These garments had grown with his sacred body, nor had He ever taken them off. The same is to be said of the sandals which his Mother had placed on his feet; however, as I have said on a former occasion, He had many times walked barefooted during his preaching (457).

627. I understand that some of the doctors have said or have pondered that our Savior Jesus at his scourging and at his crucifixion, for his greater humiliation, permitted the executioners to strip Him of all his clothing. But having again been commanded under holy obedience to ascertain the truth in this matter, I was told the divine Master was prepared to suffer all the insults compatible with decency, and that the executioners attempted to subject his body to this shame of total nakedness, seeking to despoil Him of the loincloth, but they failed because upon touching it their arms became paralyzed and stiff as had happened also in the house of Caiphass when they attempted to take off his clothes, as I said in chapter XVII (579). All six of his tormentors separately made the attempt with the same result. Yet afterwards these ministers of evil, in order to scourge Him with greater effect, raised some of the coverings, for so much the Lord permitted, but not that they uncover and strip Him of his garments entirely. The miracle of their being hindered and paralyzed in their brutal attempts did not however move or soften the hearts of these human beasts, but with diabolical insanity they attributed it all to the supposed sorcery and witchcraft of the Author of truth and life.

628. Thus the Lord stood uncovered in the presence of a great multitude, and the six torturers bound Him brutally to one of the columns in order to chastise Him so much the more at their ease. Then two and two at a time in their order they scourged Him with such unheard-of cruelty as was not possible in the human condition if Lucifer himself had not possessed the impious hearts of those merciless executioners, his ministers. The first two scourged the most innocent Lord with some branching and knotted cords, hard and thick, and in their sacrilegious fury they strained all the powers of their body to inflict the blows. This first scourging raised in the deified body of our Savior great bruises and welts which joined together, causing his whole body to swell and become disfigured, and the most precious blood to burst through the wounds throughout his entire body. When these executioners became tired, two new executioners entered in competition with the first two; with branching straps like the hardest reins they leveled their strokes upon the places already wounded, breaking open all the welts and bruises the first scourging had caused and shedding the sacred blood, which not only entirely bathed the sacred

* cf. *Incarnation* 686 [Ed.]

body of Jesus our Savior, but also spattered onto and covered the garments of the sacrilegious executioners who tormented Him, running down even to the ground. With that the second pair of executioners withdrew and the third pair began, using as new instruments of torture branching rawhides, nearly as hard as dried wicker. They scourged Him still more cruelly because they were wounding not so much his virginal body as cutting into the wounds already produced by the previous scourging; moreover, they had been secretly incited to greater fury by the demons, who were filled with new rage at the patience of Christ.

629. Since the veins of the sacred body had now been opened and his whole Person seemed but one continuous wound, the third pair found no more room for new wounds; so repeating the inhuman blows they tore the immaculate and virginal flesh of Christ our Redeemer, tearing many pieces of it off which scattered to the ground, clearly exposing the bones of many parts of his back, which then showed red through the flowing blood; and in other places the bones were laid bare larger than the palm of the hand. In order to wipe out entirely that beauty which exceeded that of all other men (Ps. 44:3), they scourged Him in his divine face and in the feet and hands, thus leaving unwounded not a single spot upon which they could exert their fury and wrath against the most innocent Lamb. The divine blood flowed to the ground, gathering here and there in great abundance. The scourging in the face and in the hands and feet was unspeakably painful because these parts are so full of sensitive and delicate nerves. His venerable countenance became so swollen and wounded that the blood and the swellings blinded Him. And above all this the executioners covered Him with the most filthy spittle and loaded Him with insulting epithets (Lam. 3:30). The exact number of lashes dealt out to the Savior from the soles of the feet to the top of the head* was 5,115. The great Lord and Author of all creation, who by his divine nature was incapable of suffering, was in his human flesh and for our sake reduced to a man of sorrows (as Isaias had prophesied in chapter LIII [v. 3]), well acquainted with the experience of our infirmities, the last of men and reputed as the outcast of all.†

630. The multitudes who had followed the Lord filled the courtyard of the house of Pilate and the surrounding streets, for all of them waited for the issue of this event, discussing and arguing about it according to each one's views. Amid all this confusion the Virgin Mother endured unheard-of insults, and She was deeply afflicted by the injuries and blasphemies heaped upon her divine Son by the Jews and gentiles. When they brought Him to the place of the scourging She retired to a corner of the courtyard in the company of the Marys and St. John, who attended upon Her and accompanied Her in her affliction. Assisted by her divine visions She there witnessed the entire scourging and all the torments of our Savior. Although She did not see it with the eyes of her body nothing was hidden to Her, no more than if She had been standing quite near. Human thoughts cannot comprehend how great and how diverse were the afflictions and sorrows of the great Queen and Lady of the Angels; together with many other mysteries of the Divinity they shall become manifest in the next life for the glory of the Son and the Mother. I have already mentioned in other places of this History, and especially during the Passion (508, 553), that most holy Mary felt in her own body all the torments of her Son. This was true also of the scourging, which She felt in all the parts of her virginal body in the same intensity as they were felt by Christ in his body. Although She shed no blood except what flowed from her eyes with her tears, nor was lacerated in her flesh, yet the bodily pains so changed and disfigured Her that St. John and the holy women failed to find in Her any resemblance of Herself. Besides the tortures of the

* cf. Is. 1:6, 53:2 [Ed.]

† cf. Ps. 21:7 [Ed.]

body She suffered ineffable sorrows of her most pure soul, for there any addition to her knowledge only added to her sorrow (Eccles. 1:18). And beyond the natural love of a mother, and her supreme love of Christ, She alone knew and could ponder more accurately than all creatures the innocence of Christ, the dignity of his divine Person, and the atrocity of the injuries He was receiving from the perfidious Jews and the very children of Adam whom He was redeeming from eternal death.

631. Having at length executed the sentence of scourging, the executioners unbound the Lord from the column, and with imperious and blasphemous presumption commanded Him immediately to put on his garment. But one of those executioners, instigated by the demon, had hidden his clothes out of sight while they scourged the most meek Master in order to prolong his nakedness for the greater derision and affront of his divine Person. This evil intention of the demon was well known to the Mother of the Lord; therefore, making use of her power as Queen, She commanded Lucifer and all his demons to leave the neighborhood, and they immediately fled, compelled by her sovereign power and virtue. She gave orders for the tunic to be brought by the holy Angels within reach of her most holy Son so He could again cover his sacred and lacerated body. All this was executed immediately, though the sacrilegious executioners understood not the miracle, nor how it had been wrought; they attributed it all to the sorcery and cunning of the demon. During this protracted exposure our Savior had in addition to his wounds suffered greatly from the cold of that morning, as mentioned by the Evangelists (Mk. 14:54; Lk. 22:55; Jn. 18:18). His sacred blood had frozen and compressed the wounds, which had become inflamed and extremely painful, and the cold had diminished his powers of resistance, though the fire of his infinite charity strained them to the utmost in order to suffer more and more. Though compassion is so natural in rational creatures, there was none for Him* in his affliction and necessity, except that of his Sorrowful Mother, who tearfully bewailed and pitied Him in the name of the whole human race.

632. Among other sacraments of the Lord, hidden to human wisdom, this also causes great astonishment, that the wrath of the Jews, who were men of flesh and blood like ourselves, was not appeased at seeing Christ our Good so torn and wounded by the scourging, and that the sight of a person so lacerated failed to move their natural compassion, but rather aroused their envy to invent new types of injuries and torments against one already so torn; for so implacable was their fury they at once planned another new and unheard-of species of torment. They went to Pilate and in the presence of his counselors said: "This seducer and deceiver of the people, Jesus of Nazareth, in his boasting and vanity, has sought to be recognized by all as the King of the Jews. So his pride might be humbled and his presumption further dispelled, we desire thee to permit us to place upon Him the royal insignias merited by his fantasy." Pilate yielded to the unjust demand of the Jews, permitting them to proceed according to their intentions.

633. Thereupon they took Jesus our Savior to the praetorium, where with the same cruelty and contempt they again stripped him of his garments, and in order to deride Him before all the people as a counterfeit king clothed Him in a much torn and soiled mantle of purple color. They placed also upon his sacred head a cap made of woven thorns to serve Him as a crown (Jn. 19:2). This cap was woven of thorn branches, and in such a manner that many of the hard and sharp thorns would penetrate into the skull, some of them into the ears, and others into the eyes. Hence one of the greatest tortures suffered by the Lord was that of the crown of thorns. Instead of a sceptre they placed into his hands a contemptible reed. They also threw over His shoulders a

* cf. Ps. 68:21; Eccles. 51:10; *Offertory*, Palm Sunday and the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus [Ed.]

violet colored mantle, something of the style of capes worn in churches, for such a garment belonged to the vestiture of a king. With all this ignominy of a mock king the Jews arrayed Christ the King, who by nature and all titles was the true King of kings and Lord of lords (Apoc. 19:16). Then all the soldiers, in the presence of the priests and Pharisees, gathered around Him and heaped upon Him their blasphemous mockery and derision. Some of them bent their knees and mocked Him, saying: God save Thee, King of the Jews; others struck Him; others snatched the cane from his hands and struck Him on his crowned head; others ejected their disgusting spittle upon Him (Mt. 27:29-30); and all of them, instigated by furious demons, insulted and affronted Him in different manners.

634. O charity incomprehensible and exceeding all measure! O patience never seen or imagined among mortals! Who, my good Lord, since Thou art the true and mighty God both in essence and in thy works, who could oblige Thee to suffer the humiliation of such unheard-of torments, insults and blasphemies? Rather who among all men, O infinite Good, has not disobliged Thee, causing Thee to refuse to suffer for them? Who could ever believe all this if we did not know of thy infinite goodness? But now, since we see it and in firm faith look upon such admirable blessings and miracles of love, where is our judgment? What effect upon us does the light of truth have? What delusion is this that we suffer, since at the very sight of thy sorrows, scourges, thorns, insults and affronts we seek for ourselves without the least shame or fear the delights, riches, ease, preferments and vanities of this world? Truly great is the number of fools (Eccles. 1:15), since the greatest foolishness and dishonesty is to recognize a debt and be unwilling to pay it; to receive blessings and never give thanks for them; to have before one's eyes the greater good and despise it; to claim it for ourselves and make no use of it; to turn away and flee from life and seek eternal death. The most innocent lamb Jesus opened not his mouth in such and so many ignominies, yet neither was the furious wrath of the Jews appeased, neither by the derision and scorn heaped upon the divine Master nor by the torments which added to the contempt of his most exalted Person.*

635. It seemed to Pilate that the spectacle of a man as pitiable as Jesus of Nazareth would move and fill with shame the hearts of that ungrateful people. He therefore commanded Him to be brought from the praetorium to an open window where all could see Him as He then was, having been scourged, disfigured, crowned with thorns, and wearing the ignominious vestments of a mock king. Pilate himself spoke to the people, calling out to them: *Ecce homo, behold the Man* (Jn. 19:5). This was as if to say: Look upon this Man, whom you hold as your enemy. What more can I do with Him than to have punished Him in this severe manner? You certainly have nothing more to fear from Him. I do not find any cause of death in Him. What this judge said was certainly the entire truth, but in his own words he condemned his outrageous injustice, since knowing and confessing this Man was just and not guilty of death he had nevertheless ordered Him to be tormented and punished in such a way that according to the natural course He should have been killed many times over. O blindness of self-love! O hellish malice of estimating only the influence of those who can confer or take away mere earthly dignities! How deeply do such motives obscure the reason, how much they twist the course of justice, and how completely they pervert the greatest truths in judging the just by the standards of the unjust! Tremble, ye judges of the earth (Ps. 2:10); beware that the sentences you render are not full of deceit, for you yourselves shall be judged and condemned by your unjust judgments! Since the priests and Pharisees in their eager and insatiable hostility were irrevocably determined to take away the life

* cf. Ps. 68:27 [Ed.]

of Christ our Savior, nothing but his death would content or satisfy them. Therefore they answered Pilate: *Crucify Him, crucify Him* (Jn. 19:6).

636. The blessed among women, most holy Mary, when She saw her divine Son as Pilate showed Him to the people and heard him say *ecce Homo*, fell upon her knees and openly adored Him as the true Godman. The same was also done by St. John and the holy women, together with all the holy Angels of the Queen and Lady, for She as Mother of our Savior ordained it so, besides it being the will of God himself as known by the Angels. The most prudent Lady spoke to the eternal Father, to the Angels, and especially to her most beloved Son precious words of sorrow, compassion, and profound reverence, possible to be conceived only in her chaste and love-inflamed bosom. In her exalted wisdom She pondered also the ways and means by which the evidence of his innocence could be made most opportunely manifest at a time when He was so insulted, mocked and despised by the Jews. With this most proper intention She renewed the aforementioned petitions (595), namely that Pilate in his position as judge would continue to maintain the innocence of Jesus our Redeemer, and that all the world would understand that He was not guilty of death nor of any of the crimes imputed to Him by the Jews.

637. Pilate, due to these prayers of the Blessed Mother, was made to feel great compassion at seeing the Lord so wounded by the scourging and opprobrium heaped upon Him, and regret at having punished Him with such cruelty. Although he was naturally disposed to such emotions by his soft and compassionate disposition, yet they were principally caused by the light he received through the intercession of the great Queen and Mother of Grace. This same light moved the unjust judge after the crowning of thorns to prolong his parley with the Jews for the release of Christ, as is recorded by St. John in chapter XIX (v. 4). When they again asked him to crucify the Lord, he answered: "Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no just cause for doing it." They replied: "According to our law He is worthy of death, because He made Himself the Son of God" (Jn. 19:6-7). This reply threw Pilate into greater consternation, for he began to think it might be true that Jesus was the Son of God according to his heathen notions of the Divinity. Therefore he withdrew with Him into the praetorium, where speaking alone with the Lord he asked whence He was (Ib. 9). The Lord did not answer this question, for Pilate was not in a state of mind either to understand or to merit a reply. Nevertheless he insisted and said to the King of heaven (Ib. 10): *Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee?* Pilate sought to move Jesus to defend Himself and tell him what he wanted to know. It seemed to Pilate that a man so afflicted and tormented would gladly accept any offer of favor from a judge.

638. But the Master of truth answered Pilate without defending Himself, but rather with greater grandeur, and thus He said: *Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that hath delivered Me to thee, hath the greater sin* (Ib. 11). This answer by itself made the condemnation of Christ inexcusable in Pilate, since he could have understood therefrom that neither he nor Caesar had any power of jurisdiction over this Man Jesus; that by a much higher decree He had been so unreasonably and unjustly delivered over to his judgment; that therefore Judas and the priests had committed a greater sin than he did in not releasing Him; yet nevertheless he too was guilty of the same crime, though not in such a high degree. Though Pilate failed to arrive at these mysterious truths, he was struck with still greater consternation at the words of Christ our Lord, and therefore made still more strenuous efforts to liberate Him. The priests, who knew the intention of Pilate, threatened him with the displeasure of the Emperor which he would incur, and by which he would be brought down, if he released and did not execute one who raised himself up to be king. They said to him: *"If thou release this*

man, thou art not Caesar's friend. For whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against his orders and commands" (Ib. 12). They said this because the Roman emperors never permitted anyone in the whole empire to assume the title or insignia of a king without their consent and order, and hence if Pilate permitted it he would contravene the decrees of Caesar. Pilate was much disturbed by this malicious threat and warning of the Jews, and seating himself in his tribunal about the sixth hour in order to pass sentence upon the Lord (Ib. 13) he once more turned to plead with the Jews, saying (Ib. 14-15): *Behold your King*. And all of them responded: *Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him*. He replied: *Shall I crucify your King?* Whereupon they shouted unanimously: *We have no king but Caesar*.

639. Pilate permitted himself to be overcome by the obstinacy and malice of the Jews. On the day of Parasceve then, seated in his tribunal, which in Greek was called Lithostrotos, and in Hebrew Gabbatha, he pronounced the sentence of death against the Author of life, as I shall relate in the following chapter. The Jews departed from the hall in great haughtiness and rejoicing, proclaiming the sentence of the most innocent Lamb; in their disregard for Him consisted our remedy. All this was well known to the sorrowful Mother, who though outside the hall of judgment saw all the proceedings by exalted vision; and when the priests and Pharisees went forth proclaiming the condemnation of her most holy Son to the death of the cross, the sorrow of her most chaste Heart was renewed, dividing it by the sword of bitterness which penetrated and pitilessly transfixed it. Since the sorrow of most holy Mary on this occasion surpassed all that can enter the thoughts of man it is useless to speak more of it, and it must be referred to Christian piety. Just as impossible is it to enumerate her interior acts of adoration, worship, reverence, love, compassion, sorrow and resignation.

*INSTRUCTION WHICH THE GREAT LADY
AND QUEEN OF HEAVEN GAVE ME.*

640. My daughter, thou dost reflect with wonder upon the obstinacy and malice of the Jews and the weakness of Pilate, who knew their evil dispositions yet permitted himself to be overcome, though fully convinced of the innocence of my Son and Lord. I desire to relieve thee of this astonishment by furnishing thee with instructions and warnings suitable for making thee careful on the path to eternal life. Know then that the ancient prophecies concerning the mysteries of the Redemption and all the Holy Scriptures were to be infallibly fulfilled (Acts 3:18), for sooner shall heaven and earth fall to pieces than their words fail in their effect as determined in the divine mind (Mt. 24:35). So the most ignominious death foretold for my Lord could occur (Wis. 2:20; Jer. 11:19), it was necessary for Him to be persecuted by men; however, that these men happened to be the Jews, the priests, and the unjust Pilate was their own fault, not the choice of the Almighty, who *desires all men to be saved* (I Tim. 2:4). Their own wickedness and malice brought them to their ruin, for they resisted the great grace of having in their midst their Redeemer and Master, of knowing Him, conversing with Him, hearing his doctrine and preaching, witnessing his miracles, and receiving such great favors as none of the ancient Patriarchs had attained by all their longings (Mt. 13:17). Hence the cause of the Savior was justified. It is clear He had cultivated his vineyard by his own hands and showered his favors upon it, but it brought Him only thorns and briars, and its keepers took away his life (Mt. 21:33-39), refusing to recognize Him as was their opportunity and duty before all other men.

641. This same which happened in the Head, Christ my Lord and Son, must likewise happen to all the members of his Mystical Body, that is, to the just and predestined to the end of the world,

for it would be a monstrosity for the members to not correspond with the Head, the children with the Father, or the disciples with the Master. Although *it must needs be that scandals come* (Mt. 18:7), since in this world the just shall always be mingled with the unjust, the predestined with the reprobate, the persecutors with the persecuted, the murderers with the murdered, the tormentors with the tormented, yet these lots are divided by the malice or the goodness of men. Unhappy shall he be who causes scandal to come into the world through his fault and malevolent will, thus making himself an instrument of the demon. This kind of activity was begun in the new Church by the priests, Pharisees and Pilate, who all persecuted the Head of this Mystical Body, and in the future course of the world by all those who persecute its members, the saints and the predestined, imitating and following the Jews and the demon in their evil work.

642. Think well then, my dearest, which of these lots thou dost desire to choose in the presence of my Son and of myself. If thou dost see thy Redeemer, thy Spouse, and thy Head tormented, afflicted, crowned with thorns, and saturated with reproaches, and at the same time desire to have a part in Him and be a member of his Mystical Body, it is not becoming or even possible for thee to live steeped in the pleasures of the flesh. Thou must be the persecuted and not a persecutor; the oppressed and not the oppressor; the one who bears the cross and suffers the scandal, not the one who causes it; the one who suffers, and at the same time makes none of the neighbors suffer. On the contrary, thou must exert thyself for their conversion and salvation to the extent compatible with the perfection of thy state and vocation. This is the portion of the friends of God and the inheritance of his children in mortal life; in this consists the participation in grace and glory which by his torments, reproaches, and death of the cross my Son and Lord has acquired for them. I too have cooperated in this work, and have paid the price of the sorrows and afflictions which thou hast understood, and which I desire thee to never allow to be blotted out from thy inmost memory. The Almighty would indeed have been powerful enough to exalt his predestined in this world, giving them riches and favors beyond those of others and making them as strong as lions for reducing the rest of mankind to their invincible power. But it was inopportune to exalt them in this manner so men would not be led into the error of thinking that greatness consists in what is visible, and happiness in earthly goods; lest being induced to forsake virtue and obscure the glory of the Lord they fail to experience the efficacy of divine grace and cease aspiring for spiritual and eternal things. This is the science which I desire thee to study continually and in which thou must advance day by day, putting into practice all thou dost come to know and understand.