

PASSIONTIDE AND HOLY WEEK

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History

AFTER having proposed the forty-days' fast of Jesus in the desert to the meditation of the faithful during the first four weeks of Lent, the holy Church gives the two weeks which still remain before Easter to the commemoration of the Passion. She would not have her children come to that great day of the immolation of the Lamb, without having prepared for it by compassionating with Him in the sufferings He endured in their stead.

The most ancient sacramentaries and antiphonaries of the several Churches attest, by the prayers, the lessons, and the whole liturgy of these two weeks, that the Passion of our Lord is now the one sole thought of the Christian world. During Passionweek, a saint's feast, if it occur, will be kept; but Passion Sunday admits no feast, however solemn it may be; and even on those which are kept during the days intervening between Passion and Palm Sunday, there is always made a commemoration of the Passion, and the holy images are not allowed to be uncovered.

We cannot give any historical details upon the first of these two weeks; its ceremonies and rites have always been the same as those of the four preceding ones.¹ We, therefore, refer the reader to the following chapter, in which we treat of the mysteries peculiar to Passiontide. The second week, on the contrary, furnishes us with abundant historical details; for there is no portion of the liturgical year which has interested the Christian world so much as this, or which has given rise to such fervent manifestations of piety.

This week was held in great veneration even as early as the third century, as we learn from St. Denis bishop of Alexandria, who lived at that time.² In the following century, we find St. John Chrysostom, calling it the *great week*:³ 'Not,' says the holy doctor, 'that it has more days in it than other weeks, or that its days are made up of more hours than other days; but we call it *great*, because of the great mysteries which are then celebrated.' We find it called also by other names: the *painful week* (*hebdomada poenosa*), on account of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the fatigue required from us in celebrating them; the *week of indulgence*, because sinners are then received to penance; and, lastly, *Holy Week*, in allusion to the holiness of the mysteries which are commemorated during these seven days. This last name is the one under which it most generally goes with us; and the very days themselves are, in many countries, called by the same name, *Holy Monday*, *Holy Tuesday*, *Good Friday*, *Holy Saturday*.

The severity of the lenten fast is increased during these its last days; the whole energy of the spirit of penance is now brought out. Even with us, the dispensation which allows the use of eggs ceases towards the middle of this week. The eastern Churches, faithful to their ancient traditions, have kept up a most rigorous abstinence ever since the Monday of Quinquagesima week. During the whole of this long period, which they call *Xerophagia* they have been allowed nothing but dry food. In the early ages, fasting during Holy Week was carried to the utmost limits that human nature could endure. We learn from St. Epiphanius,⁴ that there were some of the Christians who observed a strict fast from Monday morning to cock-crow of Easter Sunday. Of course it must have been very few of the faithful who could go so far as this. Many passed two, three, and even four consecutive days, without tasting any food; but the general practice was to fast from Maundy Thursday evening to Easter morning. Many Christians in the east, and in Russia, observe this fast even in these times. Would that such severe penances were always accompanied by a firm faith and union with the Church out of which the merit of such penitential works is of no avail for salvation!

Another of the ancient practices of Holy Week were the long hours spent, during the night, in the churches. On Maundy Thursday, after having celebrated the divine mysteries in remembrance of the Last Supper, the faithful continued a long time in prayer.⁵ The night between Friday and Saturday was spent in almost uninterrupted vigil, in honour of our Lord's burial.⁶ But the longest of all these vigils was that of Saturday, which was kept up till Easter Sunday morning. The whole congregation joined in it: they assisted at the final preparation of the catechumens, as also at the administration of Baptism; nor did they leave the church until after the celebration of the holy Sacrifice, which was not over till sunrise.⁷

Cessation from servile work was, for a long time, an obligation during Holy Week. The civil law united with that of the Church in order to bring about this solemn rest from toil and business, which so eloquently expresses the state

of mourning of the Christian world. The thought of the sufferings and death of Jesus was the one pervading thought: the Divine Offices and prayer were the sole occupation of the people: and, indeed, all the strength of the body was needed for the support of the austerities of fasting and abstinence. We can readily understand what an impression was made upon men's minds, during the whole of the rest of the year, by this universal suspension of the ordinary routine of life. Moreover, when we call to mind how, for five full weeks, the severity of Lent had waged war on the sensual appetites, we can imagine the simple and honest joy wherewith was welcomed the feast of Easter, which brought both the regeneration of the soul, and respite to the body.

In the preceding volume, we mentioned the laws of the Theodosian Code, which forbade all law business during the forty days preceding Easter. This law of Gratian and Theodosius, which was published in 380, was extended by Theodosius in 389; this new degree forbade all pleadings during the seven days before, and the seven days after, Easter. We meet with several allusions to this then regent law, in the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, and in the sermons of St. Augustine. In virtue of this degree, each of these fifteen days was considered, as far as the courts of law were concerned, as a Sunday.

But Christian princes were not satisfied with the mere suspension of human justice during these days, which are so emphatically days of mercy: they would, moreover, pay homage, by an external act, to the fatherly goodness of God, who has deigned to pardon a guilty world, through the merits of the death of His Son. The Church was on the point of giving reconciliation to repentant sinners, who had broken the chains of sin whereby they were held captives;

Christian princes were ambitious to imitate this their mother, and they ordered that prisoners should be loosened from their chains, that the prisons should be thrown open, and that freedom should be restored to those who had fallen under the sentence of human tribunals. The only exception made was that of criminals whose freedom would have exposed their families or society to great danger. The name of Theodosius stands prominent in these acts of mercy. We are told by St. John Chrysostom⁸ that this emperor sent letters of pardon to the several cities, ordering the release of prisoners, and granting life to those that had been condemned to death, and all this in order to sanctify the days preceding the Easter feast. The last emperors made a law of this custom, as we find in one of St. Leo's sermons, where he thus speaks of their clemency: 'The Roman emperors have long observed this holy practice. In honour of our Lord's Passion and Resurrection, they humbly withhold the exercise of their sovereign justice, and, laying aside the severity of their laws, they grant pardon to a great number of criminals. Their intension in this is to imitate the divine goodness by their own exercise of clemency during these days, when the world owes its salvation to the divine mercy. Let, then, the Christian people imitate their princes, and let the example of kings induce subjects to forgive each other their private wrongs; for, surely it is absurd that private laws should be less unrelenting than those which are public. Let trespasses be forgiven, let bonds be taken off, let offenses be forgotten, let revenge be stifled; that thus the sacred feast may, by both divine and human favours, find us all happy and innocent.'⁹ This Christian amnesty was not confined to the Theodosian Code; we find traces of it in the laws of several of our western countries. We may mention France as an example. Under the first race of its kings, St. Eligius bishop of Noyon, in a sermon for Maundy Thursday, thus expresses himself: 'On this day, when the Church grants indulgence to penitents and absolution to sinners, magistrates, also, relent in their severity and grant pardon to the guilty. Throughout the whole world prisons are thrown open; princes show clemency to criminals; masters forgive their slaves.'¹⁰ Under the second race, we learn from the <Capitularia> of Charlemagne, that bishops had a right to exact from the judges, for the love of Jesus Christ (as it is expressed), that prisoners should be set free on the days preceding Easter;¹¹ and should the magistrates refuse to obey, the bishops could refuse them admission into the church.¹² And lastly, under the third race, we find Charles VI, after quelling the rebellion at Rouen, giving orders, later on, that the prisoners should be set at liberty, because it was Painful Week, and very near to the Easter feast.¹³

A last vestige of this merciful legislation was a custom observed by the parliament of Paris. The ancient Christian practice of suspending its sessions during the whole of Lent, had long been abolished: it was not till the Wednesday of Holy Week that the house was closed, which it continued to be from that day until after Low Sunday. On the Tuesday of Holy Week, which was the last day granted for audiences, the Parliament repaired to the palace prisons, and there one of the grand presidents, generally the last installed, held a session of the house. The prisoners were questioned; but, without any formal judgment, all those whose case seemed favourable, or who were not guilty of some capital

offence, were set at liberty.

The revolutions of the last eighty years has produced in every country in Europe the secularization of society, that is to say, the effacing from our national customs and legislation of everything which had been introduced by the supernatural element of Christianity. The favorite theory of the last half century or more, has been that all men are equal. The people of the ages of faith had something far more convincing than theory, of the sacredness of their rights. At the approach of those solemn anniversaries which so forcibly remind us of the justice and mercy of God, they beheld princes abdicating, as it were, their sceptre, leaving in God's hands the punishment of the guilty, and assisting at the holy Table of Paschal Communion side by side with those very men, whom, a few days before, they had been keeping chained in prison for the good of society. There was one thought, which, during these days, was strongly brought before all nations: it was the thought of God, in whose eyes all men are sinners; of God, from whom alone proceed justice and pardon. It was in consequence of this deep Christian feeling, that we find so many diplomas and charters of the ages of faith speaking of the days of Holy Week as being *the reign of Christ*: such an event, they say, happened on such a day, 'under the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ:' *regnante Domino nostro Jesu Christo*.

When these days of holy and Christian equality were over, did subjects refuse submission to their sovereigns? Did they abuse the humility of their princes, and take occasion for drawing up what modern times call the *rights of man*? No: that same thought which had inspired human justice to humble itself before the cross of Jesus, taught the people their duty of obeying the powers established by God. The exercise of power, and submission to that power, both had God for their motive. They who wielded the sceptre might be of various dynasties: the respect for authority was ever the same. Now-a-days, the liturgy has none of her ancient influence on society; religion has been driven from the world at large, and her only life and power is now with the consciences of individuals; and as to political institutions, they are but the expression of human pride, seeking to command, or refusing to obey.

And yet the fourth century, which, in virtue of the Christian spirit, produced the laws we have been alluding to, was still rife with the pagan element. How comes it that we, who live in the full light of Christianity, can give the name of progress to a system which tends to separate society from everything that is supernatural? Men may talk as they please, there is but one way to secure order, peace, morality, and security to the world; and that is God's way, the way of faith, of living in accordance with the teachings and the spirit of faith. All other systems can, at best, but flatter those human passions, which are so strongly at variance with the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we are now celebrating.

We must mention another law made by the Christian emperors in reference to Holy Week. If the spirit of charity, and a desire to imitate divine mercy, led them to decree the liberation of prisoners; it was but acting consistently with these principles, that, during these days when our Savior shed His Blood for the emancipation of the human race, they should interest themselves in what regards slaves. Slavery, a consequence of sin, and the fundamental institution of the pagan world, had received its death-blow by the preaching of the Gospel; but its gradual abolition was left to individuals, and to their practical exercise of the principle of Christian fraternity. As our Lord and His apostles had not exacted the immediate abolition of slavery, so, in like manner, the Christian emperors limited themselves to passing such laws as would give encouragement to its gradual abolition. We have an example of this in the Justinian Code, where this prince, after having forbidden all law-proceedings during Holy Week and the week following, lays down the following exception: 'It shall, nevertheless, be permitted to give slaves their liberty; in such manner, that the legal acts necessary for their emancipation shall not be counted as contravening this present enactment.¹⁴ This charitable law of Justinian was but applying to the fifteen days of Easter the decree passed by Constantine, which forbade all legal proceedings on the Sundays throughout the year, excepting only such acts as had for their object the emancipation of slaves.

But long before the peace given her by Constantine, the Church had made provision for slaves, during these days when the mysteries of the world's redemption were accomplished. Christian masters were obliged to grant them total rest from labour during this holy fortnight. Such is the law laid down in the apostolic constitutions, which were compiled previously to the fourth century. 'During the great week preceding the day of Easter, and during the week that follows, slaves rest from labour, inasmuch as the first is the week of our Lord's Passion, and the second is that of His Resurrection; and the slaves require to be instructed upon these mysteries.'¹⁵

Another characteristic of the two weeks, upon which we are now entering, is that of giving more abundant alms, and of greater fervour in the exercise of works of mercy. St. John Chrysostom assures us that such was the practice of his times; he passes an encomium on the faithful, many of whom redoubled, at this period, their charities to the poor, which they did out of this motive: that they might, in some slight measure, imitate the divine generosity, which is now so unreservedly pouring out its graces on sinners.

ENDNOTES

1 It would be out of place to enter here on a discussion with regard to the name <Mediana>, under which tide we find Passion Sunday mentioned both in ancient liturgies and in Canon Law.

2 <Epist ad Basilidem> Canon i. 3 Hom. xxx <in Genes.> 4 <Expositio fidei>, ix <Haeres.> xxii. 5 St. John Chrysostom, Hom. xxx <in Genes.> 6 St. Cyril of Jerusalem, <Catech.> xviii.

7 <Const. Apost.> lib. i. cap. xviii. 8 Homil. <in magn. Hebdom.> Homil. xxx. <in Genes.> Homil. vi <ad popul. Antioch.> 9 Sermon xi. <de Quadragesima>, ii. 10 Sermon x. 11 We learn from the same <capitularia>, that this privilege was also extended to Christmas and Pentecost. 12 <Capitular.> lib. vi. 13 Jean Juvenal des Urains, year 1382, 14 <Cod.> lib. iii. tit. xii. <de feriis.> Leg. 8. 15 <Constit. Apost.> lib. viii cap. xxxiii.

MYSTERY

THE holy liturgy is rich in mystery during these days of the Church's celebrating the anniversaries of so many wonderful events; but as the principal part of these mysteries is embodied in the rites and ceremonies of the respective days, we shall give our explanations according as the occasion presents itself. Our object in the present chapter, is to say a few words respecting the general character of the mysteries of these two weeks.

We have nothing to add to the explanation, already given in our Lent, on the mystery of forty. The holy season of expiation continues its course until the fast of sinful man has imitated, in its duration, that observed by the Man-God in the desert. The army of Christ's faithful children is still fighting against the invisible enemies of man's salvation; they are still vested in their spiritual armour, and, aided by the angels of light, they are struggling hand to hand with the spirits of darkness, by compunction of heart and by mortification of the flesh.

As we have already observed, there are three objects which principally engage the thoughts of the Church during Lent. The Passion of our Redeemer, which we have felt to be coming nearer to us each week; the preparation of the catechumens for Baptism, which is to be administered to them on Easter eve; the reconciliation of the public penitents, who are to be readmitted into the Church on the Thursday, the day of the Last Supper. Each of these three objects engages more and more the attention of the Church, the nearer she approaches the time of their celebration.

The miracle performed by our Saviour almost at the very gates of Jerusalem, by which He restored Lazarus to life, has roused the fury of His enemies to the highest pitch of frenzy. The people's enthusiasm has been excited by seeing him, who had been four days in the grave, walking in the streets of their city. They ask each other if the Messiah, when He comes, can work greater wonders than these done by Jesus, and whether they ought not at once to receive this Jesus as the Messiah, and sing their Hosanna to Him, for He is the Son of David. They cannot contain their feelings: Jesus enters Jerusalem, and they welcome Him as their King. The high priests and princes of the people are alarmed at this demonstration of feeling; they have no time to lose; they are resolved to destroy Jesus. We are going to assist at their impious conspiracy: the Blood of the just Man is to be sold, and the price put on it is thirty silver pieces. The divine Victim, betrayed by one of His disciples, is to be judged, condemned, and crucified. Every circumstance of this awful tragedy is to be put before us by the liturgy, not merely in words, but with all the expressiveness of a sublime ceremonial.

The catechumens have but a few more days to wait for the fount that is to give them life. Each day their instruction becomes fuller; the figures of the old Law are being explained to them; and very little now remains for them to learn with regard to the mysteries of salvation. The Symbol of faith is soon to be delivered to them. Initiated into the glories and the humiliations of the Redeemer, they will await with the faithful the moment of His glorious Resurrection; and we shall accompany them with our prayers and hymns at that solemn hour, when, leaving the defilements of sin in the life-giving waters of the font, they shall come forth pure and radiant with innocence, be enriched with the gifts of the

holy Spirit, and be fed with the divine flesh of the Lamb that liveth for ever.

The reconciliation of the penitents, too, is close at hand. Clothed in sackcloth and ashes, they are continuing their work of expiation. The Church has still several passages from the saved Scriptures to read to them, which, like those we have already heard during the last few weeks, will breathe consolation and refreshment to their souls. The near approach of the day when the Lamb is to be slain increases their hope, for they know that the Blood of this Lamb is of infinite worth, and can take away the sins of the whole world. Before the day of Jesus' Resurrection, they will have recovered their lost innocence; their pardon will come in time to enable them, like the penitent prodigal, to join in the great Banquet of that Thursday, when Jesus will say to His guests: 'With desire have I desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.'¹

Such are the sublime subjects which are about to be brought before us: but, at the same time, we shall see our holy mother the Church mourning, like a disconsolate widow, and sad beyond all human grief. Hitherto she has been weeping over the sins of her children; now she bewails the death of her divine Spouse. The joyous *Alleluia* has long since been hushed in her canticles; she is now going to suppress another expression, which seems too glad for a time like the present. Partially, at first,² but entirely during the last three days, she is about to deny herself the use of that formula, which is so dear to her: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. There is an accent of jubilation in these words, which would ill suit her grief and the mournfulness of the rest of her chants.

Her lessons, for the night Office, are taken from Jeremias, the prophet of lamentation above all others. The colour of her vestments is the one she had on when she assembled us at the commencement of Lent to sprinkle us with ashes; but when the dreaded day of Good Friday comes, purple would not sufficiently express the depth of her grief; she will clothe herself in black, as men do when mourning the death of a fellow-mortal; for Jesus, her Spouse, is to be put to death on that day: the sins of mankind and the rigours of the divine justice are then to weigh him down, and in all the realities of a last agony, He is to yield up His Soul to His Father.

The presentiment of that awful hour leads the afflicted mother to veil the image of her Jesus: the cross is hidden from the eyes of the faithful. The statues of the saints, too, are covered; for it is but just that, if the glory of the Master be eclipsed, the servant should not appear. The interpreters of the liturgy tell us that this ceremony of veiling the crucifix during Passiontide, expresses the humiliation to which our Savior subjected Himself, of hiding Himself when the Jews threatened to stone Him, as is related in the Gospel of Passion Sunday. The Church begins this solemn rite with the Vespers of the Saturday before Passion Sunday. Thus it is that, in those years when the feast of our Lady's Annunciation falls in Passion-week, the statue of Mary, the Mother of God, remains veiled, even on that very day when the Archangel greets her as being full of grace, and blessed among women.

ENDNOTES

1 St. Luke xxii. 16. 2 Unless it be the feast of a saint, as frequently happens during the first of these two weeks. The same exception is to be made in what follows.

PRACTICE

The past four weeks seems to have been but a preparation for the intense grief of the Church during these two. She knows that men are in search of her Jesus, and that they are bent on His death. Before twelve days are over, she will see them lay their sacrilegious hands upon Him. She will have to follow Him up the hill of Calvary; she will have to receive His last breath; she must witness the stone placed against the sepulchre where His lifeless Body is laid. We cannot, therefore, be surprised at her inviting all her children to contemplate, during these weeks, Him who is the object of all her love and all her sadness.

But our mother asks something more of us than compassion and tears; she would have us profit by the lessons we are to be taught by the Passion and Death of our Redeemer. He Himself, when going up to Calvary, said to the holy women who had the courage to show their compassion even before His very executioners: 'Weep not over Me; but weep for yourselves and for your children'.¹ It was not that He refused the tribute of their tears, for He was pleased with this proof of their affection; but it was His love for them that made Him speak thus. He desired, above all, to see them appreciate the importance of what they were witnessing, and learn from it how in exorable is God's justice

against sin.

During the four weeks that have preceded, the Church has been leading the sinner to his conversion; so far, however, this conversion has been but begun: now she would perfect it. It is no longer our Jesus fasting and praying in the desert, that she offers to our consideration; it is this same Jesus, as the great Victim immolated for the world's salvation. The fatal hour is at hand; the power of darkness is preparing to make use of the time that is still left; the greatest of crimes is about to be perpetrated. A few days hence the Son of God is to be in the hands of sinners, and they will put Him to death. The church no longer needs to urge her children to repentance; they know too well, now, what sin must be, when it could require such expiation as this. She is all absorbed in the thought of the terrible event, which is to close the life of the God-Man on earth; and by expressing her thoughts through the holy liturgy, she teaches us what our own sentiments should be.

The pervading character of the prayers and rites of these two weeks, is a profound grief at seeing the just One persecuted by His enemies even to death, and an energetic indignation against the deicides. The formulas, expressive of these two feelings are, for the most part, taken from David and the Prophets. Here, it is our Saviour Himself, disclosing to us the anguish of His soul; there, it is the Church pronouncing the most terrible anathemas upon the executioners of Jesus. The chastisement that is to befall the Jewish nation is prophesied in all its frightful details; and on the last three days, we shall hear the prophet Jeremias uttering his lamentations over the faithless city. The Church does not aim at exciting idle sentiment; what she principally seeks, is to impress the hearts of her children with a salutary fear. If Jerusalem's crime strike them with horror, and if they feel that they have partaken in her sin, their tears will flow in abundance.

Let us, therefore, do our utmost to receive these strong impressions, too little known, alas! by the superficial piety of these times. Let us reflect upon the love and affection of the Son of God, who has created His creatures with such unlimited confidence, lived their own life, spent His three and thirty years amidst them, not only humbly and peaceably, but in going about doing good. 2 And now this life of kindness, condescension, and humility, is to be cut short by the disgraceful death, which none but slaves endured the death of the cross. Let us consider, on the one side, this sinful people, who, having no crimes to lay to Jesus' charge, accuse Him of His benefits, and carry their detestable ingratitude to such a pitch as to shed the Blood of this innocent and divine Lamb, and then let us turn to this Jesus, the Just by excellence, and see Him become a prey to every bitterest suffering His Soul sorrowful even unto death; 3 weighed down by the malediction of our sins; drinking even to the very dregs the chalice He so humbly asks His Father to take from Him; and lastly, let us listen to His dying words: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' 4 This it is that fills the Church with her immense grief; this it is that she proposes to our consideration; for she knows that, if we once rightly understood the sufferings of her Jesus, our attachments to sin must needs be broken, for, by sin, we make ourselves guilty of the crime we detest in these Jews.

But the Church knows, too, how hard is the heart of man, and how, to make him resolve on a thorough conversion, he must be made to fear. For this reason, she puts before us those awful imprecations, which the prophets, speaking in Jesus' person, pronounced against them that put our Lord to death. These prophetic anathemas were literally fulfilled against the obdurate Jews. They teach us what the Christian, also, must expect, if, as the apostle so forcibly expresses it, we again crucify the Son of God. 5 In listening to what the Church now speaks to us, we cannot but tremble as we recall to mind those other words of the same apostle: How much more, think ye, doth he deserve worse punishment, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath esteemed the Blood of the testament unclean, (as though it were some vile thing), by which he was sanctified, and hath offered an affront to the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said 'Vengeance belongeth to Me, and I will repay.' And again: 'The Lord shall judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. 6

Fearful indeed it is! Oh! what a lesson God gives us of His inexorable justice, during these days of the Passion! He that spared not even his own Son, 7 His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased, 8 will He spare us, if, after all the graces He has bestowed upon us, He should find us in sin, which He so unpitifully chastised even in Jesus, when He took it upon Himself, that He might atone for it? Considerations such as these-the justice of God towards the most innocent and august of victims, and the punishments that befell the impenitent Jews-must surely destroy within us every affection to sin, for they will create within us that salutary fear which is the solid foundation of firm hope and

tender love.

For if, by our sins, we have made ourselves guilty of the death of the Son of God, it is equally true that the Blood which flowed from His sacred wounds has the power to cleanse us from the guilt of our crime. The justice of our heavenly Father cannot be appeased, save by the shedding of this precious Blood; and the mercy of this same Father wills that it be spent for our ransom. The cruelty of Jesus' executioners has made five wounds in His saved Body; and from these, there flow five sources of salvation, which purify the world, and restore within each one of us the image of God which sin had destroyed. Let us, then, approach with confidence to this redeeming Blood, which throws open to the sinner the gates of heaven, and whose worth is such that it could redeem a million worlds, were they even more guilty than ours. We are close upon the anniversary of the day when it was shed; long ages have passed away since it flowed down the wounded Body of our Jesus, and fell in streams from the cross upon this ungrateful earth; and yet its power is as great as ever.

Let us go, then, and draw from the Saviour's fountains; 9 our souls will come forth full of life, all pure, and dazzling with heavenly beauty; not one spot of their old defilements will be left; and the Father will love us with the love wherewith He loves His own Son. Why did He deliver up unto death this His tenderly beloved Son? Was it not that He might regain us, the children whom He had lost? We had become, by our sins, the possession of satan; hell had undoubted claims upon us; and, lo! we have been suddenly snatched from both, and all our primitive rights have been restored to us. Yet God used no violence in order to deliver us from our enemy; how comes it, then, that we are now free? Listen to the apostle: 'Ye are bought at a great price.' 10 And what is this price? The prince of the apostles explains it: 'Know ye,' says he, 'that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold or silver, but with the precious Blood of Christ as of a Lamb unspotted and undefiled.' 11 This divine Blood was placed in the scales of God's justice, and so far did it outweigh our iniquities, as to make the bias in our favour. The power of this Blood has broken the very gates of hell, severed our chains, and made peace both as to the things on earth, and the things that are in heaven. 12 Let us receive upon us, therefore, this precious Blood, wash our wounds in it, and sign our foreheads with it as with an indelible mark, which may protect us, on the day of wrath, from the sword of vengeance.

There is another object most dear to the Church, which she, during these two weeks, recommends to our deepest veneration; it is the cross, the altar upon which our incomparable Victim is immolated. Twice during the course of the year, that is, on the feasts of its Invention and Exaltation, this sacred Wood will be offered to us that we may honour it as the trophy of our Jesus' victory; but now, it speaks to us but of His sufferings, it brings with it no other idea but that of His humiliation. God had said in the ancient Covenant: 'Accursed is he that hangeth on a tree'. 13 The Lamb, that saved us, disdained not to suffer this curse; but, for that very cause, this tree, this wood of infamy, has become dear to us beyond measure. It is the instrument of our salvation, it is the sublime pledge of Jesus' love for us. On this account, the Church is about to lavish her veneration and love upon it; and we intend to imitate her, and join her in this, as in all else she does. An adoring gratitude towards the Blood that has redeemed us, and a loving veneration of the holy cross—these are the two sentiments which are to be uppermost in our hearts during these two weeks.

But for the Lamb Himself—for Him that gave us this Blood, and so generously embraced the cross that saved us what shall we do? is it not just that we should keep close to Him, and that, more faithful than the apostles who abandoned Him during His Passion, we should follow Him day by day, nay, hour by hour, in the way of the cross that He treads for us? Yes, we will be His faithful companions during these last days of His mortal life, when He submits to the humiliation of having to hide Himself from His enemies. We will envy the lot of those devoted few, who shelter Him in their houses, and expose themselves, by this courageous hospitality, to the rage of His enemies. We will compassionate His Mother, who suffered an anguish that no other heart could feel, because no other creature could love Him as she did. We will go, in spirit, into that most hated Sanhedrim, where they are laying the impious plot against the life of the just One. Suddenly, we shall see a bright speck gleaming on the dark horizon; the streets and squares of Jerusalem will re-echo with the cry of Hosanna to the Son of David. That unexpected homage paid to our Jesus, those palm branches, those shrill voices of admiring Hebrew children, will give a momentary truce to our sad forebodings. Our love shall make us take part in the loyal tribute thus paid to the King of Israel, who comes so meekly to visit the daughter of Sion, as the prophet had foretold He would: but alas! this joy will be short-lived, and we must speedily relapse into our deep sorrow of soul!

The traitorous disciple will soon strike his bargain with the high priests; the last Pasch will be kept, and we shall see the figurative lamb give place to the true one, whose Flesh will become our food, and His Blood our drink. It will be *Our Lord's Supper*. Clad in the nuptial robe, we will take our place there, together with the disciples; for that day is the day of reconciliation, which brings together, to the same holy Table, both the penitent sinner, and the just that has been ever faithful. Then, we shall have to turn our steps towards the fatal garden, where we shall learn what sin is, for we shall behold our Jesus agonizing beneath its weight, and asking some respite from His eternal Father. Then, in the dark hour of midnight, the servants of the high priests and the soldiers, led on by the vile Iscariot, will lay their impious hands on the Son of God; and yet the legions of angels, who adore Him, will be withheld from punishing the awful sacrilege! After this, we shall have to repair to the various tribunals, whither Jesus is led, and witness the triumph of injustice. The time that elapses between His being seized in the garden and His having to carry His cross up the hill of Calvary, will be filled up with the incidents of His mock trial—lies, calumnies, the wretched cowardice of the Roman governor, the insults of the by-standers, and the cries of the ungrateful populace thirsting for innocent Blood! We shall be present at all these things; our love will not permit us to separate ourselves from that dear Redeemer, who is to suffer them for our sake, for our salvation.

Finally, after seeing Him struck and spit upon, and after the cruel scourging and the frightful insult of the crown of thorns, we will follow our Jesus up Mount Calvary; we shall know where His sacred feet have trod by the Blood that marks the road. We shall have to make our way through the crowd, and, as we pass, we shall hear terrible imprecations uttered against our divine Master. Having reached the place of execution, we shall behold this august Victim stripped of His garment, nailed to the cross, hoisted into the air, as if the better to expose Him to insult! We will draw near to the tree of life, that we may lose neither one drop of that Blood which flows for the cleansing of the world, nor one single word spoken, for its instruction, by our dying Jesus. We will compassionate His Mother, whose heart is pierced through with a sword of sorrow; we will stand close to her, when her Son, a few moments before His death, shall consign us to her fond care. After His three hours' agony, we will reverently watch His sacred Head bow down, and receive, with adoring love, His last breath.

A bruised and mangled corpse, stiffened by the cold of death—this is all that remains to us of that Son of Man, whose first coming into the world caused us such joy! The Son of the eternal Father was not satisfied with emptying Himself and taking the form of a servant; 14 this His being born in the flesh was but the beginning of His sacrifice; His love was to lead Him even unto death, even to the death of the cross. He foresaw that He would not win our love save at the price of such a generous immolation, and His heart hesitated not to make it. 'Let us, therefore, love God,' says St. John, 'because God first loved us.' 15 This is the end the Church proposes to herself by the celebration of these solemn anniversaries. After humbling our pride and our resistance to grace by showing us how divine justice treats sin, she leads our hearts to love Jesus, who delivered Himself up, in our stead, to the rigours of that justice. Woe to us, if this great week fail to produce in our souls a just return towards Him who loved us more than Himself, though we were, and had made ourselves, His enemies. Let us say with the apostle: 'The charity of Christ presseth us; that they who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them.' 16 We owe this return to Him who made Himself a Victim for our sake, and who, up to the very last moment, instead of pronouncing against us the curse we so justly deserved, prayed and obtained for us mercy and grace. He is, one day, to reappear on the clouds of heaven, and as the prophet says, men shall look upon Him whom they have pierced. 17 God grant that we may be of the number of those who, having made amends by their love for the crimes they have committed against the divine Lamb, will then find confidence at the sight of those wounds!

Let us hope that, by God's mercy; the holy time we are now entering upon will work such a happy change in us, that, on the day of judgment, we may confidently fix our eyes on Him we are now about to contemplate crucified by the hands of sinners. The death of Jesus puts the whole of nature in commotion; the midday sun is darkened, the earth is shaken to its very foundations, the rocks are split: may it be that our hearts, too, be moved, and pass from indifference to fear, from fear to hope, and, at length, from hope to love; so that, having gone down, with our Crucified, to the very depths of sorrow, we may deserve to rise again with Him unto light and joy, beaming with the brightness of His Resurrection, and having within ourselves the pledge of a new life, which shall then die no more!

ENDNOTES

1 St. Luke xxiii. 28. 2 Acts x 38. 3 St. Matt. xxvi 38. 4 <Ibid.> xxvii 46. 5 Heb. vi. 6. 6 <Ibid.> x. 29-31. 7 Rom. viii 32. 8 St. Matt. iii 17. 9 Is. xii. 3. 10 I Cor. vi 20. 11 I St. Peter i. 18, 19. 12 Coloss . i 20. 13 Deut. xxi . 23. 14 Phil ii. 7. 15 I St. John iv. 19.
16 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. 17 Zach. xii 10.
