

THE AGONY OF OUR LORD IN THE GARDEN

By Padre Pio

“Divine Spirit, lighten my intelligence and inflame my heart while I meditate on the Passion of Jesus. Help me to penetrate this mystery of love and suffering of my God who made man, suffered and died for me.

“The Eternal, the Immortal, humbled himself to undergo an indescribable martyrdom, the infamous death on the Cross, amidst insults, jeers and ignominy, in order to save His creatures who had outraged him and who wallowed in the filth of sin.

“Man savours sin and God, on account of sin, is deathly sad; the pangs of a cruel agony make him sweat blood.....

“No, I cannot penetrate this ocean of love and suffering unless thy grace, O Lord, assist me. Give me access to the most intimate depths of the Heart of Jesus, so that I may commune there on the bitterness which led Him to the Mount of Olives, to the gates of death and to console Him in the final abandonment. May I be joined to Him, abandoned by his Father and by Himself, so that I may expiate with Him.

“Mary, Mother of Sorrows, let me follow Jesus and commune intimately in His Passion and in thy affliction.

“Guardian Angel, keep my faculties steadfast in Jesus who suffered, so that they never become detached from Him.

“At the end of his earthly life, after delivering himself to us entirely in the Sacrament of his Love, the Lord went to the Mount of Olives which the disciples knew, as did Judas. On the way he taught them and prepared them for his imminent Passion; he invited them to suffer for love of Him, calumny, persecution, even death, that they might be transfigured in his likeness, their divine model.

“At the moment of entering upon his bitter Passion, it was not of Himself that he thought, but of thee.

“What depths of love does his Heart not contain! His Holy Face is filled with sadness and utter tenderness. His words spring from the profoundest depths of his Heart and overflow with love.

“O Jesus, my heart is overwhelmed when I think of the love which made Thee speed towards Thy Passion. Thou hast taught us that there is no greater love than to give one’s life for those one loves. Now Thou art on the point of sealing those words with Thy example.

“In the Garden, the Master went apart from His disciples, taking only three witnesses to His Agony—Peter, James and John. Having seen Him transfigured on Mount Tabor, would they have the strength to recognise the Man-God in this being, broken by the agony of death?

“On entering the Garden He said to them: ‘Do you abide here. Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. Be on your guard, for the enemy sleepeth not. Arm yourselves in advance with prayer, lest you be surprised and led into sin. This is my hour of darkness.’

“Having exhorted them, he walked towards a stone fountain and prostrated himself. His soul was plunged in a sea of bitterness and extreme affliction.

“It was late. The pale night was filled with sinister shadows. The moon seemed infused with blood. The wind stirred the branches of the trees and pierced to the marrow. The whole of nature seemed to quiver in secret terror:

“O Night, such as had never before been seen!

“This was the spot where Jesus prayed. He divested His sacred Humanity of the strength which was its right, by its union with the Godhead. He plunged it into an abyss of sadness, agony, abjection. His spirit seemed to be submerged. ..

“He could foresee his Passion.....

“He could see Judas his beloved apostle who would sell him for a few pieces of silver. . . . He was now on the way to Gethsemane to betray and deliver him to his enemies. And yet, a few hours before had he not nourished him with his Flesh and quenched his thirst with his own Blood? Prostrate before him he had washed his feet, pressed them to his heart and kissed them with his lips. What had he not done to halt him on the brink of sacrilege or at least to bring him to repentance? But no, now he was hastening to his perdition..... Jesus wept.

He saw himself dragged through the streets of Jerusalem where a few days ago he had been acclaimed as the Messiah. He saw himself humiliated before the High Priest. He heard the cries: 'Put to death.' He, the Life-giver, dragged like a clout from one tribunal to another.

"The people, His well-loved chosen people, jeering, hissing and abusing Him, loudly demanding His death—and what a death. Death by crucifixion. He heard their false accusations; saw himself being flogged, crowned with thorns, derided and hailed as the false king.

"He saw Himself constrained to bear the Cross to Calvary, succumbing beneath its weight, staggering, falling.....

"And now He has reached Calvary, bereft of his garments, stretched on the Cross, nailed pitilessly to it, suspended between Heaven and earth. He hangs there panting from the nails in indescribable torture. My God! Those three long hours of agony which will make him succumb to the jeers of the rage-intoxicated mob.

"He saw his throat and bowels devoured by burning thirst and the sponge soaked in vinegar and gall to quench His thirst.

"He saw His Father who abandoned Him and his Mother bowed down with grief.

"An ignominious death between two thieves. If one confessed and was saved, the other blasphemed and died unrepentant.

"He saw Longinus approach and thrust the spear into his side.

"And at last, the extreme humiliation of body and soul reft apart.....

"All this, scene by scene, passed before his eyes, and terror seized his heart.

"Would he draw back?

"From the very first moment he had embraced all, accepted all. Why then this dire terror? Because he had exposed his sacred humanity as a shield to parry the blows of Justice, outraged by sin.

"He felt vividly in spirit all he had to suffer. For each sin, its individual pain. . . . He was crushed because he himself was a prey to his terror, weakness and anxiety.

"He seemed to have plumbed the depths of pain. He prostrated himself before the majesty of his Father. The sacred Face of the Man-God, who enjoyed beatific vision, lay there in the dust, unrecognisable. My Jesus! Art thou not God? Master of Heaven and earth? Equal to the Father? Why dost thou abase thyself until thou lovest all human aspect?

"Oh, yes... . I understand. Thou wouldst teach me in my pride that to scale the heavens I must plumb the very depths. It is to expiate my arrogance that thou has bent thy head. It is to reconcile Heaven and earth that thou liest prostrate on the ground as if thou wished to give it the kiss of peace.

"Jesus raised his eyes to Heaven in supplication, raised his arms and prayed. His face was deathly pale as he entreated his Father who would not hear his plea. He prayed with filial trust, but he knew the place he occupied—the victim of the whole of mankind, exposed to the wrath of an outraged God. He knew that he alone could satisfy infinite Justice and reconcile the Creator with his creatures. He desired it, demanded it. But his nature was literally broken. It rebelled against such a sacrifice. And yet his spirit was prepared for the immolation, and the bitter combat continued.

"Jesus, how can we ask thee for strength when we see thee so weak and so beset?

"Yes, I understand. Thou hast taken all our weaknesses upon thyself. To give us strength thou hast been the scapegoat. Thou wishest to teach us that in thee alone we must trust, even if Heaven appears to us to be obdurate.

"In his Agony Jesus cried to his Father: 'If it is possible, let this chalice pass me by.' It was the cry of nature which in its distress turned trustingly to heaven. Although he knew that his prayer would not be answered, since he willed it thus, he prayed nevertheless. 'My Jesus, who dost thou ask what thou knowest thou canst not obtain?'

"Mystery that makes one reel! The pain that afflicted thee made thee beg for aid and comfort, but thy love for us and thy desire to lead us back to God made thee say: 'Only as Thy will is, not as mine is.'

"His anguished Heart yearned for comfort. Gently he rose to his feet, took a few staggering steps. He approached his disciples; they at least were his friends, his confidants, they would understand and share his pain....

"He found them deep in sleep. How lonely and abandoned he suddenly felt. 'Simon, art thou sleeping?' he says softly

to Peter. 'Thou who didst say that thou wouldst follow me unto death.'

"He turned to the others: 'Had you no strength to watch with me even for an hour?' Once more he forgot his own sufferings and thought of them. 'Watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation.'

"He seems to be saying: 'If ye have forgotten me so soon, I who wrestle and suffer, at least in your own interest watch and pray!'

"But they, intoxicated with sleep, hardly heard him.

"O, my Jesus, how many generous souls, touched by thy complaints, keep thee company in the Garden of Olives, sharing thy bitterness and thy mortal fear! How many hearts down the ages have generously replied to thy appeal! May they console thee and, sharing thy distress, operate in thy work of salvation! May I myself be counted among their number and comfort thee, be it but a little, O my Jesus!"

"Jesus returned to his place of prayer and another picture even more terrible rose before his eyes. All our sins in their least detail filed past him. He saw the extreme vulgarity of those who commit them. He knew to what extent they outraged the divine Majesty. He saw all the infamies, all the obscenities, all the blasphemies which sully hearts and ups created to sing the praises of God. He saw the sacrileges which dishonour priests and the faithful. He saw the monstrous abuse of the sacraments, which He had introduced for our salvation and which can become the cause of our damnation.

"He had to don all this foetid muck of human corruption. He had to present himself thus before the sanctity of his Father in Heaven. He had to expiate each sin separately and render to his Father all its stolen glory. To save the sinner He has to descend into the mire.

"But this did not daunt him. Like a monstrous wave the mud enveloped and submerged him. Now he stood before his Father, God of Justice. He, the Holy of Holies, bowed beneath the weight of the sins, in the image of sinners. Who could plumb his horror and utter repugnance? This gulp of disgust, that hideous nausea!

"Having taken everything upon himself without exception, he was crushed by the appalling burden and groaned under the weight of Divine Justice, face to face with his Father, who had allowed his Son to offer himself as a victim for the sins of the world, and to become like 'an accursed one.'

"His purity shuddered before this infamous burden, but at the same time he saw outraged Justice, the sinner condemned.... . Two forces, two loves conflicting in his heart. Outraged Justice was the victor. But what an infinitely pitiful sight! This man charged with all our blemishes. He the essential Sanctity, outwardly resembling the criminals. He trembled like a leaf....

"To bear this terrible agony, he plunged himself in prayer. Prostrated before the Majesty of his Father, he said: 'Father, let this chalice pass me by.' It is as though he said: 'Father, I desire thy glory. I want to see thy Justice done. I want a reconciliation with mankind. But not at this price! That I, the essence of Sanctity, must thus be spattered with filth, oh no! not that! O Father, to whom all is possible, let this chalice pass me by and find another means of salvation in the unbounded treasure of thy Wisdom. But if thou art not willing, only as thy will is, not as mine is!

"Once more the Saviour's prayer remained unanswered. He felt the throes of death. Painfully he rose to his feet in search of comfort. He felt his strength ebbing. He staggered towards his disciples. Once more he found them asleep. His sadness was even greater. He was content to wake them. Were they ashamed? Jesus said nothing. I can only see him incredibly sad. He kept to himself all the bitterness of this abandonment.

"My Jesus, how great is the pain I read in thy Heart which overflows with distress. I see Thee turn away from thy disciples after this blow to thy heart. May I bring thee some comfort, console thee a little. . . . But knowing naught else I can but weep with thee. The tears of my love and my compunction join with thy tears. Thus they rise to the throne of the Father begging him to have pity on thee and on so many souls that are plunged in the sleep of sin and death.

"Jesus returned to his place of prayer, exhausted and sore distressed. He fell to the ground rather than prostrated himself. He felt crushed by mortal fear and his prayers grew more fervid.

"His Father averted his eyes, as though His Son were the most abject of men.

"I seem to hear the complaints of the Saviour: 'If only man, for whom I suffer thus, would profit by the grace I procure

for him by my great suffering! If only he recognises at its true value the 'price I pay to redeem him and to give him the life of the Son of God! Ah, this love that tears my heart more cruelly than my executioners will soon tear my flesh...'

"He saw the man who does not *know* because he *does not wish to know*, who blasphemes against the Divine Blood, and what is more irreparable, leads him to damnation. How few will profit, how many more will hasten to their destruction!

"In the great distress of his Heart he continued to repeat: '*Quae utilitas in sanguine meo?* How few avail themselves of my Blood!'

"But the thought of this small number sufficed to make him face the Passion and death.

"Nothing and no-one to whom he could turn for an iota of comfort. Heaven was closed to him. Man, although weighted down by his sins, was ungrateful and unaware of his love. He felt drowned in pain and cried in the pangs of his agony: 'My soul is sick unto death.'

"O Divine Blood, thou wellest eternally from the Heart of Jesus, thou flowest from all his pores to wash this poor ungrateful earth. Grant that I may gather this most precious Blood, above all these first drops. I wish to keep thee in the chalice of my heart. Thou art the irrefutable proof of the love which alone made thee flow. May I be purified in thee, O most precious Blood! I would purify all souls sullied by sin. I would offer thee to the Heavenly Father.

"This is the Blood of his beloved Son who came down to earth to purify it. This is the Blood of his Son who ascends to his throne to reconcile outraged Justice. The satisfaction is in truth superabundant!

But is Jesus at the end of his sufferings?

"Oh, no, he does not wish to dam up the flood of his love. Man must learn how much he, the Man-God, loves him. Man must know to what depths of abjection such an extreme love can be reduced. Even if the Father's Justice is satisfied by the sweat of the Most Precious Blood, man needs palpable proofs of this love.

"Jesus would therefore go to the limit; to an ignominious death on the Cross.

"The contemplative would perhaps grasp a shadow of this love which brought Him to the pangs of the sacred Agony in the Garden of Olives. But the man who lived enmeshed in the material affairs of the world and who looked more to the earth than to the sky, had to see him outwardly nailed to the Cross, so that at least the sight of his Blood and his cruel martyrdom might move his heart.

"No, his loving Heart was not yet satisfied. Collecting himself, he prayed anew: 'My Father, if this chalice may not pass me by, but I must drink it, then thy will be done!'

"From this moment Jesus, from the bottom of his heart, consumed with love, responded to the cry of mankind which demanded his death as the price of Redemption. To the death sentence which his Father had pronounced in Heaven, the earth replied by demanding his death. Jesus bowed his adorable head. 'My Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass me by; only as thy will is, not as mine is.'

"And now the Father sent him a consoling angel. What comfort could an angel offer to the God of Strength, the Invincible God, the All-Powerful God? But this God had wanted to assume the liability, this man of suffering at grips with the Agony. It was his love that made him sweat drops of blood.

"He prayed to his Father for himself and for us. His Father refused to hear his prayer for he had to die for us. I think that the angel bowed low before the Eternal Beauty, sullied with dust and blood, and that with unutterable respect he entreated Jesus to drink the cup to the glory of God the Father and for the redemption of sinners.

He prayed thus in order to teach us to have recourse to Heaven *only* when our souls were distressed like his.

"He our Strength, would come to our aid, since he had agreed to assume all our distresses.

"Yes, my Jesus, now thou must drink the cup to the dregs! Now thou art pledged to thy cruel death.

"Jesus, may naught separate me from thee; neither life nor death! If I adhere to thy suffering throughout my life with infinite love, I shall be allowed to die with thee on Calvary and to ascend with thee to glory. If I follow thee in thy torments and persecution, thou will make me worthy to love thee one day before Heaven and to sing thy praises as an action of grace for thy cruel Passion.

"But see! Jesus rises to his feet out of the dust, strong, invincible! Has he not desired, with an inordinate desire, this

feast of blood? He shakes off his dismay, wipes the bloody sweat from his Face and makes for the exit of the garden with resolute steps.

“Whither goest thou, Jesus? Wert thou not a prey to anxiety and grief? Did I not see thee trembling and as though crushed by the cruel weight of thy forthcoming ordeals? Whither goes thou, with that firm, intrepid step? To whom wilt thou deliver thyself?”

“Hark, my child, the weapons of prayer came to my aid and allowed me to conquer, my spirit overcame the weakness of nature. Strength came to me in prayer and now I can face my ordeal. Follow my example and treat with Heaven as I have done.

“Jesus approached the apostles. They were still sleeping. The emotion, the late hour, the presentiment of some horrible and irreparable disaster and weariness had made them fall into a leaden sleep. Jesus had pity on their weakness. He cried: ‘Sleep and take your rest hereafter.’ He paused for a moment. Hearing him approach they opened their eyes with a great effort.....Jesus went on:

‘As I speak the time draws near when the Son of Man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. . . . Rise up, let us go on our way; already he that is to betray me is close at hand.....’”

“Jesus saw all this with his divine eyes. He seemed to say: ‘You, my friends and disciples, sleep while my enemies watch and draw near to arrest me. Thou, Peter, whom I thought steadfast enough to follow me even unto death, thou sleepest now. From the beginning thou gavest me proof of thy weaknesses. But be of good cheer. I have assumed thy weakness and I have prayed for thee. When thou hast confessed thy fault, I will be thy strength and thou shalt feed my flock.... . And thou, John, thou too art asleep. Thou who felt the beatings of my heart, couldst thou not watch with me for one hour? Rise and let us go, there is no time left for sleep. The enemy is at the gate!

This is the hour of the power of darkness. Let us go! Of my own free will I go towards my death. Judas is hastening to betray me and I would go and meet him. I shall see that the prophecies are carried out to the letter. My hour has come; the hour of Infinite Compassion.’

“The echo of footsteps. Lighted torches filled the garden with purple shadows. Jesus stepped forward, followed by his disciples, intrepid and calm.

“O, my Jesus. Give me strength when my weak nature rebels against all the ills that threaten it, so that I may with love accept the pain and distress of this life in exile. I adhere with all my strength to thy merits, thy sufferings, thy expiation and thy tears so that I may work with thee in the work of redemption and that I may have the strength to flee from sin, the sole cause of thy agony, of thy bloody sweat and thy death.

“Destroy in me all that displeases thee and imprint on my heart with the fire of thy sacred love all thy sufferings. Kiss me so intimately, with such a strong and tender embrace, that I shall never abandon thee to thy cruel torments.

“I ask but one repose: on thy Heart. I desire but one thing: to share in thy divine Agony. May my soul be intoxicated by thy Blood and be nourished by the bread of thy suffering! Amen.”

PRAYER TO ST. MARGARET MARY.

O Saint Margaret Mary! thou whom the Sacred Heart of Jesus hast made a participator of His divine treasures we implore thee to obtain all the graces we stand in need of from that adorable Heart.

We ask them of Him with a confidence that has no limit. May the divine Heart vouchsafe to grant them to us through thy intercession so that He may once more be glorified and loved through thee. Amen.
