

“They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.” (p. 133)

Christ's Darkest Hours

OR

The Characters of the Passion

By

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THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO THE PASSION
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST



"Hail, King of the Jews!" (p. 112)

INTRODUCTION

NEVER in the history of the human race were so many and world-shocking events packed into the space of a few days as the heart-rending events that transpired during the last few days of Holy Week. After a profound study of the malice and motives that prompted the gruesome scenes of Good Friday and weighing the happy events that followed, our Holy Mother, the Church, sings out in her liturgy on holy Saturday, "O felix culpa, quae talem, ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!" "O happy fault, one, which merited for us such a Redeemer!" We can speak in this manner only after we begin to realize the effects and world-wide repercussion that followed, revealing the mysterious designs of God and the unbounded love of our Redeemer.

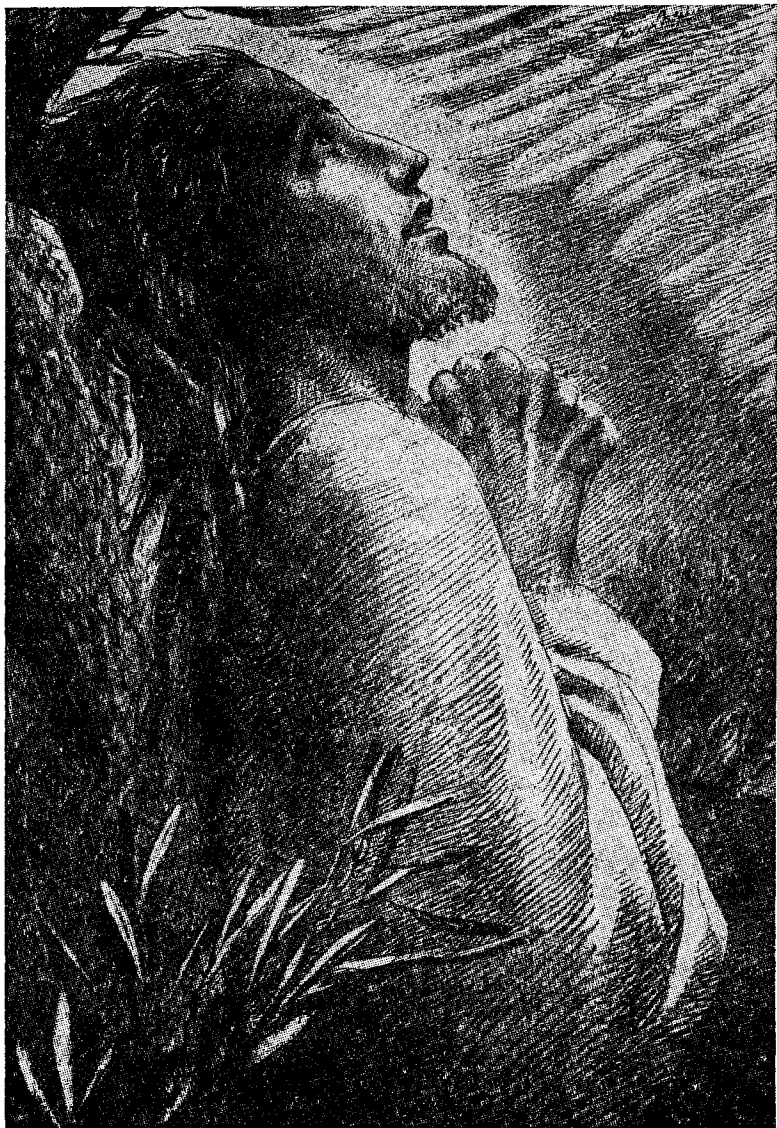
But the questions, after 1900 years, continuing to persist and plague us are these: Why did they do it? How could anyone be so mean and depraved as to plot and carry out such a nefarious deed as to crucify an innocent person like Jesus? No other series of sermons, in my experience, has drawn larger crowds or succeeded in sustaining the interest of an audience throughout than that on the characters of the sacred Passion. And once people understand the human, political, and religious malice which prompted the conspiracy of those who brought about the trial and condemnation and crucifixion of Christ, they will forever appreciate all the more the unbounded love of our Divine Saviour, and the awful

price paid for our Redemption. May our efforts, therefore, aid others in the fulfillment of Christ's prediction: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself." (John: 12-32).

All Scriptural readings and texts contained in this volume are principally taken from the Latin Vulgate as translated by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine under the patronage of the Episcopal Committee.

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THE AUTHOR



**“Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will,
but as thou willest.” (p. 22)**

CHRIST IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANI

READING: "And after reciting a hymn, they went out to Mount Olivet. Then Jesus came with them to a country place called Gethsemani, and he said to his disciples, 'Sit down here, while I go over yonder and pray.' And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he began to be saddened and exceedingly troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is sad, even unto death. Wait here and watch with me.' And going forward a little, he fell prostrate and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as thou willest.' Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, 'Could you not, then, watch one hour with me? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

"Again a second time he went away and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless I drink it, thy will be done.' And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

"And leaving them he went back again, and prayed a third time, saying the same words over. And there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him. And falling

into an agony he prayed the more earnestly. And his sweat became as drops of blood running down upon the ground. And rising from prayer he came to the disciples, and found them sleeping for sorrow. Then he said to them, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest! Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand.'" (Matt. 26:36-37; Luke 22:39ff; Mark 14:32-42).

OF ALL human events recorded in history, none is more appalling to the human mind, none more appealing to the human heart, than the tragic scenes and events surrounding the Passion and Death of Our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. We never seem to tire of meditating upon the scenes and events that transpired from the time Our Lord gathered His Apostles together for the last time in the Cenacle of the Last Supper, until we see Him hanging lifeless on Calvary's heights. With enthusiasm, therefore, should we frequently manifest our willingness to transport ourselves upon the wings of our imagination back to the city seated on the hill, the beautiful city of Jerusalem, and devoutly follow the Saviour as He enters upon His sacred Passion and Death. We kindly request your faithful attention as we consider the leading characters that took part in this sacred drama.

THE SETTING

The sun has set. The Last Supper is over. The hour is past seven o'clock in the evening when Jesus, accompanied

by the eleven, leaves and begins to wend His weary way through the crowded, narrow streets in the direction of the Garden of Gethsemani. Once beyond the noise and turmoil of the city, which always prevailed during the Paschal Week, the disciples, full of strange forebodings, gather closely around their Divine Master. Together, we see them press onwards towards the deep ravine, past the Garden of Ophel, past the Jewish burial ground, until they reach the valley below where the narrow wooden bridge spans the historic Brook Cedron.

Crossing the brook, swollen with the rains of early spring, they turn to the path hugging the eastern bank and going northward. See them, follow them—this timid little flock, clinging fearfully to the Good Shepherd, now alas! on His way to lay down His life for His sheep. Guided by the light of the Paschal moon, the Apostles press onward silently, close upon the heels of their Master. They know not whither, nor do they dare to inquire. Presently, the ruins of Solomon's temple to the false gods fling long shadows across their path. Then, too, that other Temple, built in honor of the one true God, stands out in bold relief on the opposite bank from whence they have just come. Strangely and sadly beautiful it looks with its glittering, graceful marble towers in the moonlight like a vision of heaven out of the richly wooded terrace of Mount Moriah. But, alas! it too, along with the city that knew not the time of its visitation, is before long to be beaten flat to the ground like the "abomination of the Ammonites," already lying in ruins on the opposite hill.

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANI

But this little company of disciples with Jesus is in no mood for reflections such as these. Their hearts are too heavily laden with sadness and apprehension for speech. So, in brooding silence, broken only by the sullen voice of the turbulent stream, they proceed until the western slopes of Mount Olivet, dotted with fading Jewish tombstones, remind them that they have reached the point where their pathway meets the road leading to Bethany—only a few miles distant, where Jesus has so often spent the night in seclusion and prayer in the company of Mary and Martha and their brother, Lazarus. But this night Jesus will go no further. He has reached journey's end. Immediately before them, almost directly facing the Gate Beautiful, there is a garden, some eighty yards square, called Gethsemani. It lies under a cluster of olive trees whose silver-lined foliage forms a network through which the slanting sheens of the early evening moon cast a chequered light upon the dewy, green grass of spring. Pausing here, with His hand upon the wicket-gate opening into the garden, our Blessed Lord, having cast one long sad look upon the Temple beyond, turns to His anxious disciples, and addressing eight of them, says to them tenderly: "Sit down here, while I go over yonder and pray."

Oh, how they wish He had not said it! They cannot bear the thought of the shock of parting from Him. Perhaps something will happen to Him during this interval of absence. Had not He Himself said this very evening that the Shepherd would be struck down? Is it to be this very night? They stand bewildered. They know not. Their eyes fill as they watch Him walking away from them into the darkness. In

obedience to His wishes, they sink to their knees, struggling hard to awaken the spirit of prayer. Meanwhile, Jesus taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, passes into the enclosure and is soon lost to sight among the dense foliage.

Reverently and devoutly, let us accompany our dear Lord with the three disciples, who, having already had the privilege of being witness to their Master's Transfiguration and glory on Mount Thabor, are now to see Him in humiliation and agony in the garden. Only to those most intimate friends would He now reveal the depth of His sorrow and humiliation. Casting aside all restraint, He begins to reveal to them the overwhelming tide of tribulation that is welling up in His soul. Great as the sea is His grief. They fix their gaze upon Him. They listen, holding their breath. How ashy pale He looks! What a weight of sadness is in His eyes and upon His lips! See, too, how tremulous they are with emotion as He struggles to tell them: "My soul is sad, even unto death!" Then He hastens to add: "Wait here and watch with me." They stay, they stand, they watch—but pray they cannot. The echo of those words, "One of you is about to betray me," which Jesus had spoken at the Last Supper a few hours before, keeps beating its dull thud into their ears like a trip-hammer, sending into their hearts an icy chill of agonizing fear as though the hand of death were already upon them.

THE BEGINNING OF THE AGONY

Meanwhile, Jesus tears Himself away from them, going, as it were, a stone's throw, whence He passes into "the val-

ley of the shadow." And, says St. Mark, "He began to feel dread and to be exceedingly troubled." Deliberately putting aside the defenses of the Divinity, the Son of Man in His Humanity bares, so to speak, His bosom, presenting His Heart as a target to the poisoned shafts of the children of men, and to the fiery darts of the wicked one. And thus He stands alone, under the trees, foreseeing the troubles, the trials, the torments, and the tortures that are so soon to be heaped upon Him, to pierce Him through and through, body and soul. He becomes unnerved; He reels; He totters; and He falls. The three see Him falling upon His face, falling "flat upon the ground," overcome by the vision of that terrible tragedy which was to close in shame on the morrow with its death-scene on Calvary.

Here let us pause to ask ourselves: What is the meaning of this strangest of all strange sights? Do our eyes deceive us? Is that white figure outstretched yonder, lying in agony on the green grass beneath the trees, the figure of Christ, the Son of the Living God? Is this the strong Son of Man whom in His boyhood days we saw among the doctors of the Temple at His ease, fearless? Whom in the springtime of His youth we watched heedless of the death with which the Pharisees and others were wont to threaten Him? Can strength then be afraid? Can courage be timid? "Art Thou," we might exclaim with St. Lawrence (Justinian), "the Lord of Hosts and yet fearful?"

Yes, He who never before has felt what fear is, not even when His townsmen at Nazareth attempted to murder Him; He who till this moment has always looked forward to His Passion so longingly, who has always spoken of it so joyfully, declaring Himself to be straitened until it be accomplished, is now, when alone in the garden this night, so completely

overcome, so utterly crushed, by the mere thought of it that it seems impossible that He can ever rise to face and endure its realities.

But why does our Saviour permit this sense of fear thus to attack, to seize, and to overwhelm Him, to fling Him on His face upon the ground? "*Oblatus est quia Ipse voluit.*" He permits it, because He is resolved, as the Apostle reminds us, to be in all things like unto us. Jesus cannot bear to think that there should be one cup of bitterness offered at any time to the lips of others which He Himself has not previously drained to the bitterest dregs. Accordingly, as He lies upon the grass in mental torment, there pass in vision before His soul all those tortures of body and of soul which are, in later days, to test the loyalty and love of His followers, as well as those torments He Himself is so soon to experience, beginning that very night. And so, "He began to feel dread" as those torments of the morrow are about to spend their fury upon that nature which He assumed for our sakes. Already that vile kiss of the betrayer He feels like a blister upon His sacred lips. The servant's blow is already stinging like a stab upon His cheek. From His back the scourge is even now tearing to shreds His sacred flesh. The sharp thorns of the mock crown are actually piercing His brow, while iron nails are burning like fires in His hands and in His feet.

Then He sees how He is to be jostled and jeered by an infuriated mob of His own countrymen; rushed through four mock trials, in which injustice and cruelty, perjury, and blasphemy, are to vie with one another for mastery; to be pronounced free of crime, and yet to be scourged with the lash; to be judged innocent of fault, and yet to be sentenced to death! This outrageous handiwork, this miscarriage of

justice, seems almost more than even He, who came to suffer for us, can undertake to endure.

Yet, greater still is the agony of His Most Sacred Heart as He lies there outstretched upon the ground, His face buried in His hands, when He contemplates the ingratitude, the insults, and ignominy He is about to experience from His own people for whom, during the past three years, He has devoted and spent Himself. Soon they will be clamoring for His very blood. Young men and old, to whom He has been an eye, a foot, a tongue, and an ear, are to rend the air with the savage cries: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Mothers, with infants at their breasts, and little ones clinging in fear to their mothers' skirts, are so soon to scream themselves hoarse with the curse: "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" Worse still, He can hear the tramp of priestly feet rushing to and fro, like fiends among the people, urging them to yield not, but to strike Him down, to tear Him to pieces, to do Him to death.

But what *most of all* breaks His paternal heart is the part which His own disciples will play in that awful tragedy. The vision of their desertion and flight, and then the treacherous betrayal of one and the cowardly denial of another—all this is borne in upon Him with such appalling definiteness and minuteness that courage fails Him, sending such an acute sense of agonizing fear through His whole frame that at last there breaks from His heart the reluctant cry: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as thou willest."

Thus shaken with fear, broken with agony, the Man of Sorrows with difficulty rises to His feet, and, turning to the spot where He has left His beloved three, He draws near to them, seeking comfort. Alas! James with his mantle drawn

closely around him, lies under the tree where Jesus has left him. There too is John with Peter, all sleeping heavily. Going to Peter, the Master awakens him, saying: "Simon, dost thou sleep? Couldst thou not watch one hour?" Then, without waiting for an answer, He addresses all three, saying appealingly, almost plaintively: "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation." Seeing them pained and ashamed of their conduct, He adds these encouraging words: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

CHRIST'S DESOLATION

Once more Jesus withdraws a stone's throw from them, uttering and pondering within His heart the words of the Prophet: "I looked for one to grieve together with Me, and there was none, and for one to comfort Me, and I found none." Before it was fear, but now Jesus grows weary. In other words, there now comes over Our Lord a sense of nausea or revulsion—almost of disgust. For is He not kneeling as a sinner in the presence of the Father all-holy? Has He not made Himself responsible to the justice of that Father for the whole mass of sin which lies like a mouldering blight upon the world? Yes, Our Saviour and Redeemer has chosen to become the victim of sin, and its weight of guilt is actually bearing down upon Him, beating Him to the ground.

What a piteous spectacle! From the north and the south, from east and west, the gathering storms of sin roll up, discharging their torrents of filth upon Jesus in the garden, smiting Him to the ground. Sins, "as hopes blighted, vows broken, lights quenched, warnings scorned, opportunities lost, the innocent betrayed, the young hardened, the peni-

tent relapsing, the aged falling, the tyranny of passion, the canker of remorse, the anguish of shame, the sickness of despair"—yes, these with all other forms and species of sin are being spilled upon the Saviour by the avenging hand of God. Oh, what an awful moment this is, when sin, when every kind and species of sin, clings so closely to our Lord and presses so heavily upon His Sacred Heart that there is drawn from His sacred lips the cry: "My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless I drink it, thy will be done."

Then, having offered this sublime act of resignation, the Divine Sufferer once again rises from prayer, seeking a little human sympathy from the three friends so dear to His Sacred Heart. But alas! for a second time they have been overcome by sleep; for their eyes, like their hearts, are heavy. Sadly and lonely He stands before them until a sense of His sacred presence awakens them. But because, as St. Mark observes, "they did not know what answer to make to him," Jesus spares their feelings and embarrassment, and withdraws to pray for a third time.

THE INGRATITUDE OF MANKIND

During the first hour of His agony in the garden, Jesus, says Sacred Scripture, was overcome by fear. During His second hour He grew heavy and weary. In His third hour of agony, "He began to be sad." At this moment there stole over and into the sacred *soul* of Jesus a sense of prostration and desolation, a sense of disappointment and despondency, of anguish and of agony. It was a state of soul altogether distinct from the sense of fear and depression of spirit which

He had previously experienced. This time it was *unrequited love* that smote Him to the ground.

Some of you, at least, have known what it is for a mother to have lost the love of an only child over whom she doted. You have heard of two young people, the one loyal and true in devotedness and love, the other unfaithful and untrue. But what are those and all other unfaithful stories gathered from the cruel experiences of human life compared with the torturing agonies searing the Heart of the Son of God, as He looks out from the Garden of Gethsemani and sees that untold multitude who throughout all ages will scorn the atonement the Redeemer is about to make for the sins of the world! In His ears He seems to catch a mocking echo of the words of the betrayer: "Ad quid perditio haec?" "To what purpose is this waste?" Yes, why should I, He seems to ask Himself, for the sake of those who despise and malign Me, waste My energies, waste My mercies, waste My blood, and waste My life? "Quae utilitas in sanguine meo?" What is the use of spilling My blood for those who do not appreciate it? Why should I supply a copious redemption for those who will not accept it? Why die for those who do not care to live?

Such grave misgivings overwhelmed the soul of Jesus at this moment and brought His heart well nigh to the breaking point; and death, like a dark cloud, seemed to hover over Him. He is broken, crushed; His very utterance is choked. See, His precious blood is actually forcing itself through the pores of His sacred body, seeking release from His over-weighted heart! He is in a bloody sweat. It trickles down His drawn face; it dyes His snow-white garment to redness, falling in ruddy beads, like jewels, upon the ground. He is in agony, and being in an agony He prays the longer, offering up His spilt blood for all creatures, made to the image and

likeness of God. Yes, listen! Hear Him! There is breaking from these sacred lips a prayer: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou willest." "The Sacred Heart," exclaims Faber, "can bear no more. It gives out its life blood, drop by drop; through the burning pores of the skin, the beads of blood ooze out, they stand upon His brow, they trickle down His face, they clog His hair, they blind His eyes, they fill His mouth, they mat His beard, they wet His hands, they suffuse every limb as in a universal sweat of blood."

The agonizing cry, "Abba-Father!" startles the drowsy three Apostles. They awake and gaze, now stunned by the awful sight they see and the words they hear. They behold their Master in the attitude of prayer. His garments are dyed red and clinging closely to His body, while His hands are outstretched as though grasping at something. A heavenly light seems to envelop Him. As they bend forward, straining their eyes to see, the vision of an Angel appears ministering to His failing strength. And the Angel offers Him a chalice which the Divine Victim drains, holding it between His hands—yes, drains it to its very dregs! "Calicem quem dedit mihi Pater, non bibam illum?" "The chalice which thou gavest me, Father, shall I not drink it?"

CONCLUSION

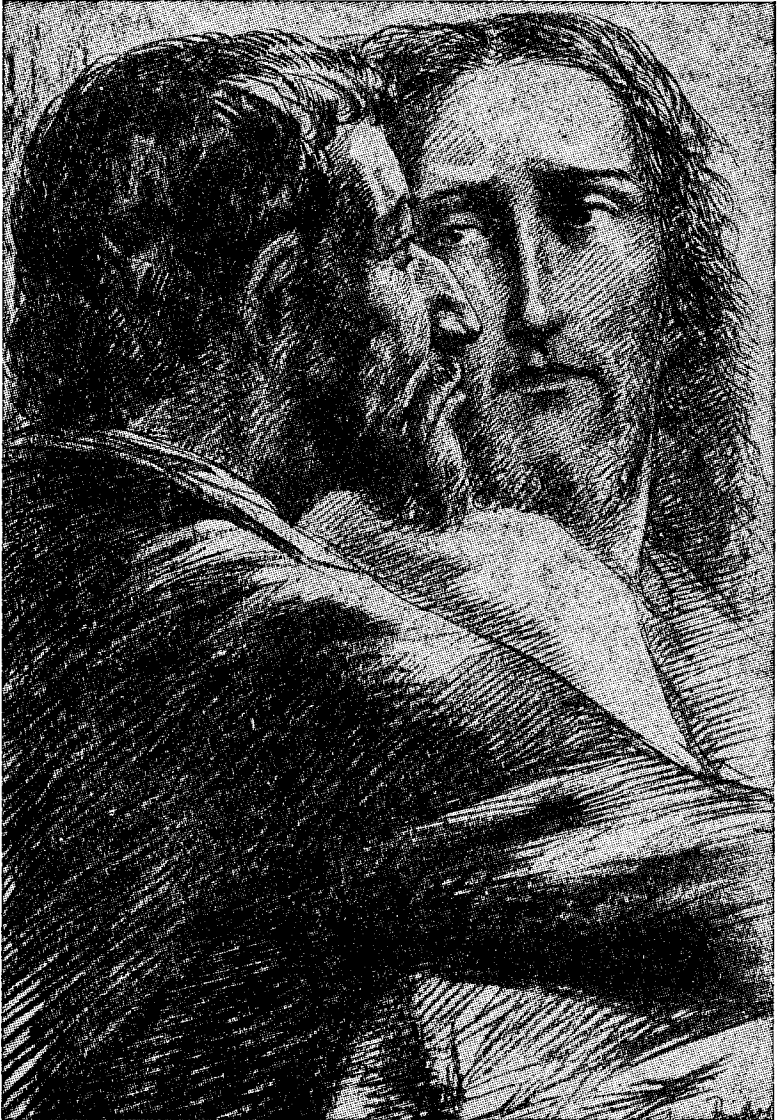
This, my friends, is but a faint and feeble description of what transpired in the Garden of Gethsemani on Holy Thursday night between the hours of nine and twelve, the night before our Saviour's death on Good Friday. From this sorrowful scene we may, first of all, learn the true love of our

Saviour for fallen humanity. "Nowhere," says St. Ambrose, "does the love and majesty of Jesus cause more admiration in me than in this sadness, in this agony. It was not enough for Him to assume my nature; He also assumed my feelings and my sensations. He who had no reason to be sad for Himself, wished to feel my sadness."

From the Saviour's agony in the Garden of Olives we also learn the price of our Redemption, the value of a human soul, your soul and my soul included. We further learn from this the gravity of mortal sin. Christ entered upon His Sacred Passion during the early evening hours when millions of people, millions of Christians, yes, millions of Catholics, go forth to seek the embrace of sinful pleasures. From nine until twelve o'clock at night, Jesus was sad unto death; He trembled and quaked, He fell in agony, He shed a bloody sweat. What an awful contrast this picture to the noisy carousals, frivolous and shameless entertainments, secret meetings, lustful orgies which in exactly these hours of the night *defy* the Blood of Christ! In the light of Our Lord's agony in the Garden of Gethsemani let us at least take the true measure and gravity of sin.

Let us, therefore, live in the shadow of the Garden of Gethsemani. Then, when our last agony overtakes us we shall be prepared to meet the Saviour with hope and confidence. How consoling, then, will be the words of Holy Mother Church when she prays at the bedside of the faithful dying Christian, saying: "O Lord Jesus Christ, through Thy holy agony and Thy prayer which Thou hast offered for us upon the Mount of Olives, when Thy sweat, as drops of blood, trickled down upon the ground, vouchsafe we beseech Thee, to present and to offer to God, the Father Almighty, against the multitude of all our sins, the abundance

of Thy bloody sweat, which Thou didst copiously shed for us in fear and trembling, and to deliver us in the hour of our death from all the pains and anguish which, we fear, we have merited for our sins." Yes, "these things I write to you," says St. John, "in order that you may not sin. But if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just; and he is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world." (I John 2:1-2).



"Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (p. 34)

- II -

THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

READING: "And while he was yet speaking, behold Judas, one of the Twelve, came and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now his betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, that is he; lay hold of him and lead Him carefully away.' Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, since Jesus often met there together with his disciples. Judas, then, taking the cohort, and attendants from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches, and weapons. And he went straight up to Jesus and said, 'Hail, Rabbi!' and kissed him. But Jesus answered and said to him, 'Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?' Jesus therefore knowing all that was to come upon him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am he.' Now Judas, who betrayed him, was also standing with them.

"When, therefore he said to them, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus

answered, 'I have told you that I am he. If, therefore, you seek me, let these go their way.' Simon Peter, therefore, having a sword, drew it and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus. Jesus, therefore, said to Peter, 'Put up thy sword into the scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? Bear with them thus far.' And he touched his ear and healed him. Then all his disciples left him and fled. And as Jesus was being taken captive, he exclaimed: 'As against a robber have you come out, with swords and clubs. When I was daily with you in the temple, you did not stretch forth your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'" (Matt. 26:ff; Mark 14:43ff; Luke 22:47ff; John 18:2ff).

IN our previous chapter we accompanied our Divine Saviour from the Supper Room, down across the Brook Cedron, into the Garden of Gethsemani. We saw Him there in His three sad hours of loneliness, absorbed in prayer, overcome with grief, which culminated in His bloody sweat. An Angel appeared to comfort and to minister unto Him. Consoled and strengthened by the words of the Angel, Jesus returns for the third time to His three favored Apostles, Peter, James, and John, whom again He finds overcome with sleep. "Sleep on now," He tells them, "and take your rest! Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand."

And, in truth, already through the shadow of the trees, near the bridge above the Brook Cedron, may be seen a large

group of men advancing slowly and cautiously, looking hither and thither as they advance. "For Judas, who betrayed Him," says St. John, "knew the place; because He had often resorted thither together with His disciples." The hour is now approaching midnight. During the three hours that have elapsed since Judas left the Lord and the other Apostles in the Cenacle, he has not been idle. Even though especially invited to do so, the three favorite Apostles could not "watch and pray" with their Master. All the while Judas, however, has been busy betraying his Master while the others slept. He has sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, the customary price of an ordinary slave.

THE TREACHERY OF JUDAS

He is now ready to execute his evil designs and deliver Jesus over to His enemies. And how is he to accomplish this? Just glance for a moment at the mob that is to accompany the traitor. It is led by the arch-traitor himself. Close upon his heels follows a detachment of the Roman garrison from the citadel, under the command of the tribune. This means at least one hundred and twenty-five soldiers, or more. Then come the chief priests, the magistrates, the scribes, and the ancients of the Temple. Servants of the Temple, servants of the chief priests and of the Pharisees, together with loiterers, idlers, and so forth, bring up the rear. Observe, they are armed with weapons—with staves, with clubs, and with swords—as though they are going forth to hunt down and to capture some wild beast. Stealthily, they approach the Garden of Olives where they expect to capture their prey. Judas agrees upon a signal, the kiss of friendship, saying:

"Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he." Then he adds: "Hold him fast, and lead him carefully away."

In the meantime, the Master, with His three Apostles, approach the eight, and all together they walk sadly and slowly towards the gate of the Garden. There, unexpectedly, they encounter the traitor, who approaches with furtive steps. Judas has hoped to surprise the Master in His prayers or in sleep. And in giving Him the kiss, which is the sign understood by the guards, he has hoped to deliver Jesus to them without being discovered by the Master and His disciples. How little he has understood the clearness of the vision of Christ! Judas has hoped to cover himself by his deceit. But Jesus openly reveals the infamy of the traitor by going out to meet him, surrounded by His eleven disciples, the traitor's erstwhile intimate companions. To their chagrin, the mob is met by the calm, gentle, majestic figure of Jesus. The bewildered Judas is standing before his Master. Jesus looks at him, and speaks: "Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?" What a greeting! "Friend!" The loving and tender title with which Jesus is accustomed to salute His disciples! But alas, although Judas is taken by surprise, the affectionate words of Jesus touch him not. Nevertheless, overcome by confusion, Judas stammers into a mocking salutation: "Rabbi, Rabbi, Ave!" "Master, Master, hail!" Thereupon he kisses Jesus, and Jesus does not resent it. We should expect to see the Saviour draw back with a shudder from the touch of the traitor's lips upon His sacred cheek. But no; instead, our Lord folds the bewildered man in His arms, saying to him in plaintive tones as He does so: "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

In these words Jesus makes it clear to Judas and to all present that He understands well the sign of the traitor. And

oh, what a touch of pity, more than human, is here! What a revelation of that divine mercy which is above all God's work! How those pleading words seem to linger with us: "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" More touching are they than that look of love which later He will give to Peter; more than the sweet words of pardon that He addressed to the Magdalen; more than the promise of Paradise to the good thief upon the Cross. Oh, the goodness and the mercy of Christ! What a lesson of charity and patience for us! How it opens our hearts with hope eternal! Ah, yes, if only, when Christ speaks, we do not resist His voice; if only, when Christ looks upon us, we do not close our eyes to the light of His truth; if only, when He reminds us of our sins, we do humble penance for them; if, in a word, we follow the example of Peter, and not that of Judas!

"Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Alas, from Judas there is no response. Whereupon, the Apostles, filled with indignation at the sight of this treachery on the part of Judas, their former colleague, gather close about Jesus with threatening countenances. But Jesus, in the midst of this commotion, moves calmly forward to meet the crowd of armed men, who, seeing Him suddenly before them, stand still in bewilderment. "Whom do you seek," He inquires from them with an even voice. They answer: "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replies: "I am he." At this solemn declaration the crowd before Him staggers, reels back, and falls to the ground. The lights of their lanterns and torches are extinguished. Jesus stands before them, illumined by the splendor of the silvery moon. For the moment He sees a glorious victory, triumphing over His enemies. Stunned and amazed, they stumble to their feet, while Jesus repeats the question: "Whom do you seek?" A voice from the crowd replies:

“Jesus of Nazareth.” To this Jesus again answers: “I have told you that I am he. If, therefore, you seek me, let these go their way,” pointing to the eleven who stand about Him in bewilderment.

J E S U S I S A R R E S T E D

The guards permit the Apostles to withdraw. But before going, realizing the gravity of the situation, some of the Apostles cry out: “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And forgetting the overwhelming odds against them, Peter, the impulsive disciple, immediately draws forth the sword which he has carried with him from the Cenacle, and strikes the first one who comes near him. He is the servant of the high-priest, named Malchus. With one blow Peter cuts off his right ear. This impetuous act on the part of the Prince of the Apostles serves only to increase the tension, confusion, and disorder of the scene.

But Jesus, still calm and composed, turning to His disciples, says: “Bear with them thus far.” Then turning to Peter, He says to him: “Put back thy sword into its place; for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or dost thou suppose that I cannot entreat my Father, and he will even now furnish me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then are the Scriptures to be fulfilled, that thus it must take place? Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Then, going up close to Malchus, Jesus touches his ear and heals it.

Here it might be well to remind you how Jesus, just before He was taken captive, demonstrated publicly that He is both God and Man. Jesus speaks: “It is I,” and the mob

staggers and falls to the ground. He heals the ear of Malchus; He assures His enemies that, if He so desires, His heavenly Father will send twelve legions of Angels to defend Him. But at the moment, as it has been through all ages down to our own day, the enemies of Christ, blinded with passion, or weak with fear, or insane with malice and wickedness, are ever determined to carry out their evil designs in open defiance of an all-powerful God. Therefore, Jesus reproves the rabble for the boisterous and malicious manner with which they have come out to take Him. "As against a robber," He tells them, "have you come out, with swords and clubs. When I was daily with you in the temple, you did not stretch forth your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness that the Scriptures may be fulfilled." With these words He surrenders Himself into the hands of His enemies.

Immediately they rudely apprehend Him. Without any legal formality, they bind Jesus forcibly as though He were a dangerous criminal. "Oblatus est quia Ipse voluit," "He was offered because He wished it," is the prophetic utterance of Isaias. The ministers of the Sanhedrin and the mob possess no power over Him until Jesus surrenders and permits them to take Him captive.

But where now are the Apostles? Where now is Peter, who has sworn that he will accompany Jesus, even unto death? All have abandoned Him; all, seized with terror, have fled from Him. Not one of them has been arrested; not even Peter, who alone has done enough to be indicted when he struck off the ear of Malchus. But no, one and all, they are allowed to go their way, for Christ has said to the mob: "If you seek me, let these go." And thus the prayer of Christ to His heavenly Father has been fulfilled: "Of those whom Thou has given me I have lost no one." But

the Saviour Himself, forgetful of self, is now taken captive. They leap upon Him like a pack of wolves. They bind Him securely, carrying out the order of the traitor, Judas, who has said: "Lay hold of him and lead him carefully away." Evidently, even Judas has feared some surprise attack from the Saviour's friends who may attempt to liberate Him, and they wish to make sure of their prey. Doubtless also, the ministers of the Sanhedrin, who have accompanied Judas and the rabble, direct all these precautionary maneuvers.

Having secured the Saviour, their coveted prize, the mob drag Him down the Mount of Olives. They jostle Him along the narrow path that leads to the bridge across the Brook Cedron. They force Him along the pathway on the opposite side, leading towards the Gate Beautiful. Avoiding the road before them, going upward towards the Temple, they turn to the left and follow a path which climbs obliquely the steep incline bending in the direction of Ophel to the south. This is the shortest way to the house of the high-priest on Mount Zion. Ophel is the part of the city inhabited by the poorer classes. These have always been fervent followers and friends of the Nazarene, and among them He has wrought many miracles. His enemies fear that, while they are passing through this part of the city, the friends of Jesus may rise up and attempt to free Him. Hence, the Sanhedrin has taken every precaution against such an attempt. They have the public square and the streets carefully guarded. In fact, the presence of many soldiers and the cries of the crowd which has captured their Master arouse these poor friends of Christ from their beds. They hasten to the windows and begin to pour out into the streets to see what is transpiring.

When these sympathetic spectators behold their beloved

Master bound, surrounded by guards, His countenance pale as death, His clothing in disorder, with guards dragging Him along the way, they raise a cry of indignation and protest. Others bow their heads and weep bitterly. Still others, alas, weak souls as there always are even among friends, are scandalized at the sight of Jesus in this, His hour of abandonment. Before they have believed in Him on account of the many miracles He has wrought in their behalf; now they assume an attitude of doubt and indifference.

They behold the Divine Victim dragged up the flight of steps opening in Sion, the upper town. Our Lord, bound, wholly unable to help Himself, with His hands closely tied behind Him, falls, bruising His sacred face upon the stone steps. This is but an excuse for further cruelty. They drag Him to and fro up the stairs, while in the still midnight air are heard the echoes of the oaths and curses of this savage, blood-thirsty mob, pressing rudely about His sacred person, surrounding Him on every side.

Having passed through the fashionable quarters of Sion, they now bear off due west. This path leads them through gardens and groves lying along the side of the hill. Now they are approaching the palace of the high-priest, standing south of the Cenacle, where but a few hours before Jesus has given His timid Apostles their First Holy Communion. Here this strange procession has reached its destination. Crossing the courtyard to the palace, they lead their Prisoner through the great door-way of the west wing, into a long, low chamber. At the farthest end, on a raised dais, seated on a throne of state, and surrounded by such retainers as may be gathered together at this late hour, we behold the ex-high-priest, Annas, before whom Jesus is to stand the first mock-trial.

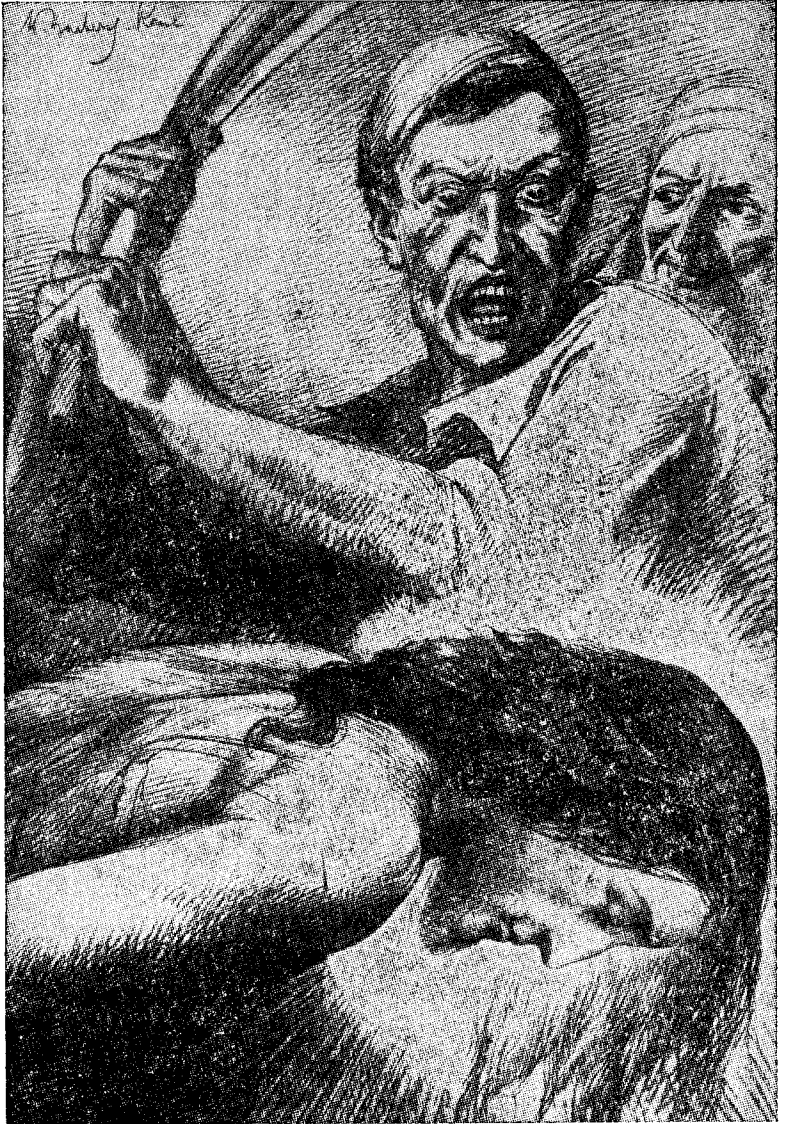
CONCLUSION

Here, my friends, we shall pause for the moment, meditating upon the scenes of our Saviour's Passion caused by the betrayal of one of His intimate friends. "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" Now what was the motive that prompted Judas to such a foul betrayal? His predominant fault or passion was that of covetousness, which, as Holy Scripture says, is the root of all evil. Covetousness is that inordinate desire, that greed for wealth. There seems to be a hidden, enticing power in money. Those shining gold and silver coins, those decorated bank notes passing from hand to hand, seem to possess peculiar, almost magical, charms. True, every man has a natural right to acquire and to hold earthly goods. He stands in need of them in order to live becomingly. Hence, he may secure these means through honest toil. And money is recognized all over the world as the common medium of exchange for earthly goods. Even our Lord used the coin of the realm to pay taxes and purchase provisions for Himself and His disciples. Judas was entrusted with the community purse.

But like Judas, many people covet money, not for useful and necessary purposes, but for the satisfying of unlawful and sinful passions and inclinations. Many people want money to indulge their every whim; money to satisfy the cravings of an unmortified heart that brooks no denials; and money thus acquired and used leads to luxury, to moral decline, and depravity. This inordinate desire for money leads countless numbers to sins of fraud, theft, embezzlement, deceit, lying, and perjury. Yes, the avaricious man

readily forgets his eternal destiny and very often ends in despair.

Judas acted in like manner. When Mary Magdalen anointed the feet of Jesus, Judas murmured because this seemed to him wasteful extravagance. But Jesus approved of Mary's action. Judas embezzled the money entrusted to him, and St. John calls him a thief. As treasurer for his Master and the Apostles, he constantly sought to enrich himself. When he heard that the Pharisees and Sadducees had promised a reward to him who would deliver the Nazarene to them, he eagerly entered into secret conspiracy with the Saviour's enemies. For a time he wavered between loyalty to Jesus and love of money. But after that unworthy Communion at the Last Supper, his heart was hardened and his soul was darkened. Oh, my friends, let us never become too much attached to things of earth, and lose sight of the things of heaven. When we are tempted, for the sake of a passing pleasure, to an inordinate passion for wealth or money, let us remember the words of the Master, addressed to the traitor Judas: "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"



“Behold, the lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world!” (p. 110)

- III -

THE TRIAL OF CHRIST BEFORE ANNAS

READING: "The cohort therefore and the tribune and the attendants of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him. And they brought him to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiphas, who was the high-priest that year. Now it was Caiphas who had given the counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

"The high-priest therefore questioned Jesus concerning his disciples, and concerning his teaching. Jesus answered him, 'I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why dost thou question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; behold, these know what I have said.'

"Now when he had said these things, one of the attendants who was standing by struck Jesus a blow, saying, 'Is that the way thou dost answer the high-priest?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken ill, bear witness to the evil; but if well, why dost thou strike me?' And Annas sent him bound to Caiphas, the high-priest." (John 18:12, 14, 19-24).

IT WAS about midnight of Holy Thursday when Jesus was betrayed by Judas, and taken captive in the Garden of Olives. It took less than an hour to lead the shackled Prisoner back into the city where He was to appear for trial. Upon His arrival, four principal characters enter into the trial scenes of our Lord's Passion and Death. They are Annas, Caiphaz, Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas. As you may recall, in those days the entire civilized world was subject to the Roman Empire. Tiberius Caesar, then ruler of the Roman Empire, had designated Pontius Pilate as the civil governor of the Jewish people. Caiphaz was high-priest, or religious ruler of the Jews at that time. Herod Antipas was the Jewish puppet-king, subject to Pilate. He ruled as king over Galilee, the country where Jesus was born.

ANNAS

But who was this Annas, who played so prominent a role in the prosecution of our Divine Saviour? Although Caiphaz was then the official high-priest, yet his father-in-law, Annas, was looked upon by many of the Jews as the rightful heir to that title and position of honor. Annas had been deposed by Valerius Gratus, the Roman Governor, and predecessor to Pontius Pilate. But through cunning, trickery and bribery, Annas, the white-draped, white-haired and white-faced villain who summoned Jesus before him, remained for years in actual control of the official powers of the high-priesthood. According to the historian, Flavius Josephus, this man Annas had, by bribing the Roman governor, obtained the dignity of high-priest in the sixth year

after the birth of Christ. Although he personally held the pontificate for only six or seven years, yet, through his cunning, chicanery and bribery, he succeeded in having the position of high-priest filled by no less than five of his sons, by his son-in-law, Caiphas, and then by his grandson. In this way he enjoyed the dignity of the office and all its influence. It enabled him to direct affairs without either the responsibility or the restraint which the office of high-priest imposed. On account of his enormous wealth and liberal religious views, he had also gained great favor with the Roman rulers, whom every other orthodox Jew despised.

Yes, like Judas, the besetting sin of Annas was covetousness or avarice. In order to satisfy his greed for money, there was no device to which he was not ready to stoop. The shops under the cedars of Olivet, as well as the booths under the porticos of the Temple, were all set up for the money-seeking Annas and his family. It was with this shrewd, cruel, avaricious Sadducee that Judas struck his bargain. And it was with Judas, no doubt, that Annas bargained for the privilege of being the first to examine Jesus in person after His betrayal and captivity.

REASONS FOR HATRED OF JESUS

But why should Annas bear such an intense hatred for Jesus in particular? His hatred for our Lord dated from nearly three years back. And it had reached its climax on the opening day of the paschal week, only a few days before. The occasion was this. When our Lord had come for the first time in His official capacity as Teacher and Redeemer to the city of Jerusalem, He had driven forth from the Court of

Gentiles all those who were engaged in selling beasts of sacrifice, or those engaged in changing foreign money for the shekel. This act had been resented by Annas as a personal injury and insult. For a second time, on Palm Sunday, soon after our Lord's triumphal entry into the Holy City, He again turned away from the porticos of the Temple the money-changers with their weights and scales, saying: "My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves."

All this was more than the priests of the Temple could endure, for it meant the collapse of their chief source of revenue. From that moment on, the avaricious Annas swore vengeance against the Nazarene. He was determined to revenge the cleansing act of Jesus Christ. He would bring about His death, in spite of His popularity with the people.

ILLEGAL TRIAL

With this picture in mind, you may better understand the true character of the crafty, clever Annas, as he sits up all night, awaiting the arrest of Jesus, impatiently pacing his court to and fro, like an hyena in his cage, waiting eagerly to satisfy his thirst for blood. The midnight hour has struck. Has his conspiracy with Judas gone awry? No, the well-conceived, well-planned strategy has succeeded. The commotion in the street increases; the mob enters the court chamber; and there stands Jesus, a prisoner, in the dock before His self-constituted Judge, Annas.

Take one more look at this man, this hungry vulture, preparing to judge his God! His eager features with beak-like nose, his small, wild, black eyes, deeply set beneath the

high brow, his long bony neck protruding from out of a dark mantle of winter fur, his thin, sinewy hands clutching the bench at which he sits—all indicate a state of acute nervousness and expectancy. Below him stands Jesus as his prisoner, truly the Lamb of God before His shearers. Or, as the prophet Isaias has expressed it: "He was led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Is. 51:7).

St. Cyril calls Annas the very soul of the whole conspiracy against Christ. In fact the Acts of the Apostles (44:6), show him to have been the spiritual head of the entire anti-Christian party. And now this arch-fiend can safely look down upon the shackled Saviour and feast his hungry eyes upon Him, a thing he has long desired. But as Annas stares, he can conjure up no past incriminatory act on the part of Jesus which will merit His condemnation. He knows quite well the Lord's public teachings. He knows that Jesus has selected a small group of disciples with whom He has spent considerable time, instructing them to carry on His mission on earth. He knows that the followers of Jesus are increasing daily in numbers. But some cause must be found now, either against the Roman law or against the Jewish regulations, upon which he might base his condemnation of the Prisoner. Annas is determined to get Jesus to condemn Himself; if in no other way, at least through the betrayal of the character and conduct of His followers. Hence, says St. John: "The high-priest, therefore, asked Jesus concerning his disciples, and concerning his teaching" (John 18:19).

But where are His disciples now? At the moment there is, unfortunately, little good that Jesus may be able to say to Annas in behalf of His disciples. For nearly three years He has been training them as never before a master has schooled his pupils. He has been everything to them. He has con-

cealed nothing from them. They are bound to Him by such ties as never before has been a friend to a friend. And yet, in the hour of humiliation, they have all left Him, having fled for their own lives. One of them, even now standing near Him, has actually sold Him for less than is usually given for a beast of burden. In the courtyard below stands the frightened Peter at this very moment, about to deny with an oath that he has ever known Jesus. And yet, for all this treachery and defection, our Lord's love for all of them remains unchanged. Not even now will the Redeemer speak of—nay, much less even think of—their shortcomings. On the contrary, they are present to Him even now, as they will be when, with the past blotted out, they will rise in the full strength of their love and loyalty; ready, with one sad exception, each and all to shed their life's blood and die a martyr's death for love of their Master.

As a Prisoner, Jesus stands before Annas. He alone is there to be judged. Hence, the Saviour passes over the question concerning His disciples, and speaks to Annas of Himself only, saying: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where all Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why dost thou question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; behold, these know what I have said." (John 18:21-22).

CHRIST BEFORE ANNAS

As Christ speaks these words, Annas, the crafty politician, turns pale and rigid. Never did a judge, in answer to an irrelevant question, receive a more bewildering blow.

Who is the man implied by Jesus in antithesis with the pronoun "I," used so repeatedly and emphatically? Who is the man who in private has said one thing and in public another? Who is the man whose measure of principle is expediency, and whose standard of success is gold? That man, without any mistake, is the sly old villain and ex-high-priest, Annas, before Him. And so Jesus reveals, without directly declaring to Annas, that He knows of all his deceitful ways of drawing money from the poor people; of all his illicit practices; of all his illegal dealings with the Romans; of all his secret plots with the other priests to encompass His death.

Annas is too shrewd a judge not to realize that Jesus is exposing all the secret, mercenary, cunning, and foxlike deeds of his whole private life. For does not one so well read in the law as Annas knows that this hole-corner meeting this night is illegal? Does he not know that the cross-examination of the Prisoner is illegal? Does he not know that to proceed with a trial in the absence of counsel for the defense is also illegal? Does he not know that to open the case without the sworn evidence of witnesses is also illegal? Does he not know that to bind Jesus is illegal? That even the arrest is illegal? Has this old, wily, spiteful arch-conspirator in his unseemly impatience to find Jesus of Nazareth guilty of crime, to be expiated only by crucifixion, lost sight of all these irregularities, and forgotten all legal standards of judicial procedure?

Indeed, not. Therefore, to the question, "Why askest thou me?" Annas, the judge, can find no answer. He shows embarrassment, turns ghastly pale, and still no answer comes. Silence, like a pall, hangs over all the spectators in the court chamber. Suddenly, a sharp sickening thud is heard through-

out the room. The astonished mob looks up. They see before them such a sight as might make Angels weep. Jesus is reeling and staggering under the pain and shock of a blow. He has been struck across the face by the servant of the high-priest, and the Most Precious Blood is actually flowing down His cheek. There is a profound pause during which no man, not even the presiding judge, dares to speak. Jesus, with difficulty, draws Himself up, and looking into the face of His assailant, asks him calmly and firmly: "If I have spoken ill, bear witness to the evil; but if well, why dost thou strike me?" The cruel, cowardly servant who thought to win the favor of his master by this dastardly deed, turns insultingly towards Jesus, asking, "Is that the way thou dost answer the high-priest?" But Jesus demands justice. He insists that, if He has spoken ill, He should be tried for it, not struck; and if He has spoken well, He should be praised and not blamed.

In the meanwhile, Annas the judge, how does he deal with this dastardly attack upon Jesus in his presence in open court? He says nothing. He does not even rebuke the culprit; for those few, yet crushing, words of Jesus have shattered his courage. He is powerless to act or to speak. Hence, with a wave of his long, quivering arm, he turns to his guard, and in a voice choked with anger, orders them to bind the Prisoner as though He has already been proved guilty. Jesus is marched off for trial to the court of his son-in-law, Joseph Caiphas, the official high-priest.

CONCLUSION

Here, my friends, let us pause and turn the mirror upon

our own selves and the world around us. Mankind has not changed much since the days of Annas. Like him, as well as the other judges who passed sentence upon our Divine Saviour, the man of the world today is pursuing identically the same paths, scheming for money and position. Expediency and not justice is his norm of morality. In the Garden of Olives Jesus prayed and suffered for the sins of pride. In contrast, "Father, not my will, but Thine be done," was His humble prayer. Judas was led to do his wicked deed on account of the sin of avarice. With Annas we find the two, pride and avarice, combined. And these two combined will lead one to every other conceivable sin. In fact, throughout the Sacred Passion of Christ we are repeatedly brought into contact with man after man, who has mis-directed his talents and misused his opportunities due to the sins of pride and covetousness.

These sad examples are lessons which none of us can afford to ignore. They are character-building lessons. And it is character, not expediency, that matters in our lives. Take for example Annas. In him you see a man of great talents, with exceptional opportunities for doing good. Had he taken advantage of these natural gifts, using them for ends noble and holy in the position and world in which God had placed him, Annas might have built for himself a character and a name which, for all time, would have stood out in the pages of history as a worthy example to all his countrymen.

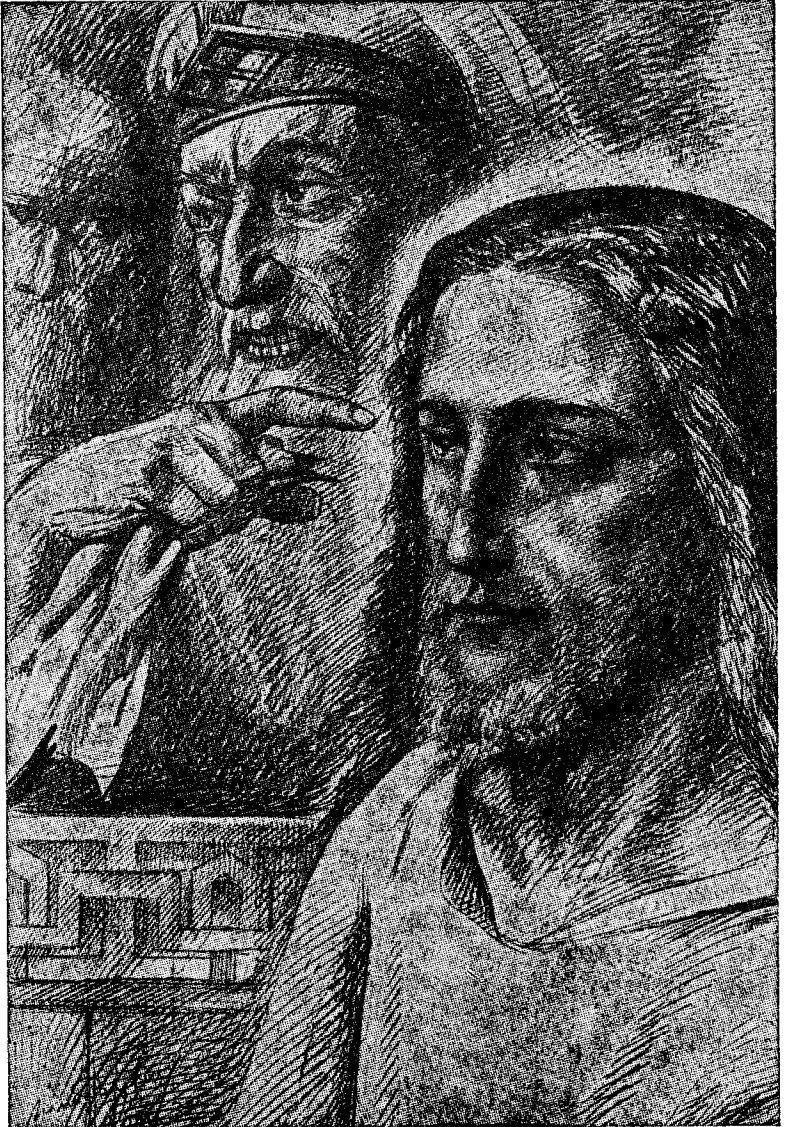
What was it that induced men like Annas, Caiphas, Pilate, and Herod, all men in high station, so far to forget all sense of justice and equity, nay, of decency itself? The answer is the same for all. The ignoble characters were, all of them, men who made expediency their measure of principle and success, their interpretation of truth. They

tried, like so many before and since their day, the impossible. They dared to compromise between conscience and popularity, to serve both God and mammon. They contravened the dictum of Christ whom they crucified, when He said: "You cannot serve God and mammon."

No, neither can you, any more than could these murderers of Jesus Christ, afford to compromise with principle. Become a money-grabber like Annas, or a self-worshipper like Caiphas, or a place-hunter like Pilate, or a pleasure-seeker like Herod, and you will end by treating Christ, your Lord and Saviour, much the same as they did. And he who attacks the Lord, will also attack His disciples, just like Annas, who tried to entrap our Lord by asking Him to commit Himself about His disciples. Evidently, Annas was also one of those scandalmongers who glory in the assassination of character in their neighbors by broadcasting the faults of others. This, too, is one of the besetting sins of our day. There is scarcely a place upon God's earth where the best man's character is safe. Even in Christian circles, our character is liable to be torn to pieces. A single word expressed or even implied is sometimes quite enough to set off a wicked person in evil pursuit, hunting down his quarry until morally he has done his victim to death.

These, like Annas, have forgotten the two most important of all Commandments, namely, the love of God and love of neighbor. But as for you and for me, let us learn from Jesus as he stands before Annas. The silence of Christ was more musical than any song, more eloquent than any speech, more impressive than any sermon. He declined to answer when questioned by Annas about His disciples. What a lesson for all! Jesus is the one whose practice runs level with His theories; whose deeds reflect perfectly His words; whose

life in public is what it is in private. Hence, we must form and fashion our character as we find it reflected in the life of Christ. And as we follow Him through His Sacred Passion and Death, let us learn to love our Crucified Saviour. For to be a Christian means to be like unto Christ, or Christ-like. And once we love Jesus, we will also anxiously serve Him. For "love is service, and service is sacrifice, and sacrifice is the test of character."



“He has blasphemed; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” (p. 68)

- IV -

JESUS ON TRIAL BEFORE THE HIGH-PRIEST CAIPHAS

READING: "Now those who had taken Jesus led him away to Caiphas the high-priest, where the Scribes and the elders had gathered together. But Peter was following him at a distance, even to the courtyard of the high-priest, and he went in and sat with the attendants to see the end.

"Now the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin were seeking false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward, and said, 'This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it after three days.' Another stated it this way, 'I will destroy this temple built by hands, and after three days I will build another, not built by hands.' And even then their evidence did not agree.

"Then the high-priest, standing up, said to him, 'Dost thou make no answer to the things that these men prefer against thee?' But Jesus kept silence. And the high-priest said to him, 'I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'Thou hast said it. Nevertheless, I say to you, here-

after you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming upon the clouds of heaven.' Then the high-priest tore his garments, saying, 'He has blasphemed; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' And they answered, and said, 'He is liable to death.'

"And the men who had him in custody began to mock him and beat him. And they blindfolded him, and kept striking his face and asking him, saying, 'Prophecy, who is it that struck thee?' And many other things they kept saying against him, reviling him." (Matt. 26:57-64; Mark 14:63; Luke 22:54-65).

THE events and that portion of the Sacred Passion of our Saviour which we are about to consider opened between one and two o'clock in the night, and closed between three and four in the morning. Jesus had made His appearance before the ex-high-priest Annas. The examination there had taken such an unexpected turn that Annas, without pronouncing any sentence, sent Jesus to his son-in-law, Caiphas, the actual high-priest. He alone had the authority to pass sentence in the Sanhedrin, the official court.

RULES GOVERNING JEWISH COURT

Before we can fully comprehend the malice and injustice of the trial of Jesus before Caiphas, we must first get the proper setting of this trial in our minds. We must know something about this supreme Jewish Council, the powers of the

Sanhedrin, and the rules and regulations governing the procedure of this body in juridical matters. The Sanhedrin, including the high-priest, consisted of seventy-one or seventy-two members. It was composed of the chief priests, scribes and elders of the people. The presiding officer was either the high-priest himself, or, if he were unable to attend, then his deputy, who was called the "father of the court." In accordance with the theocratic constitution of Israel, the Sanhedrin was the "Supreme Ecclesiastical and Secular Court of the Jews." It possessed authority to deal with the "Whole Administration of Justice," in so far as this did not fall within the scope of lower tribunals, and had not been restricted by the Roman Governors.

THE MODE OF PROCEDURE in criminal cases was determined strictly by the Law of Moses and by traditional usage. The latter forbade meetings of the Sanhedrin at night. The proper time was defined as being between the morning and evening hours. Therefore, according to custom, judicial proceedings might begin after the morning sacrifice had been offered, and that is about seven o'clock in the morning; and had to end with the evening sacrifice at sundown. Moreover, a death sentence could not be pronounced until the day after the trial and examination of the witnesses.

THE ACCUSED PERSON took his place on a platform in the court of justice, opposite the Sanhedrists. The counsel sat to his right, and to the right and left of these two sat a clerk. The duty of the one was to record the defense or the acquittal; the other was to note down the charge and the sentence. Close by stood armed attendants, ready to guard the prisoner, to call in the witnesses, and, if the accused was found guilty, to bind him and lead him away.

THE PRESIDING JUDGE sat upon a raised platform, surrounded by his judges seated in a semicircle. The presiding official, pledged by the Mosaic Law to the strictest impartiality, would open the proceeding by formulating the accusation. Then the evidence was given—first by witnesses for the defense, who were always given precedence by the rules of the court. The witnesses for the prosecution were heard afterwards. On both sides the witnesses were brought forward and examined singly. Their examination took place only after they had been most solemnly charged to tell nothing but the truth, under pain of severe punishment. And the Law of Moses (Deut. 19:15), expressly required that the evidence of at least two witnesses must agree, if said evidence were to have any weight. Then, after all witnesses had been heard, the defendant, his counsel, and the prosecutor spoke in turn. The judges, after weighing the evidence, gave the verdict. But the rules of the court required a certain number of the Sanhedrist judges to be present at every trial, at least twenty-three which formed a quorum; and the majority of their votes determined the verdict.

TRIAL BEFORE CAIPHAS

Now that we have the proper setting, let us turn to the actual trial of Jesus. A comparison of these rules of procedure with the actual record of what transpired at our Lord's trial, will at once reveal the gross injustice perpetrated by the Sanhedrin. There was no difficulty in calling the Sanhedrin together at that hour of the night, because some of them were in the very crowd that effected our Lord's

seizure. The priests themselves had been kept well informed in all the progressive stages of the case since the arrest in the Garden of Gethsemani. And word was sent them to hurry to the court of Joseph Caiphas, as Annas, having found Jesus guilty on two distinct counts, was sending Him at once for trial. But they completely ignored the fact that it was *illegal* for Caiphas and his judges to try a prisoner between one and three o'clock in the morning. It was illegal to drag the accused before them without witness or counsel for the defense.

Now let us turn to the trial proper, and see what actually transpires. On the farthest end of the long court chamber we see Caiphas, wearing a tiara, the ephod, and the official richly embroidered alb, with the famous silver bells tinkling along its fringes. He is seated on a semicircular platform supporting a wide inlaid throne. On either side of him are seated some twenty-two judges. Before this grim gathering of hostile white-robed prelates, Jesus our Lord, bound and clothed in the garments of an ordinary Jewish peasant, is brought forth for trial. What a look of indescribable sadness steals across the worn and weary face of our Saviour as He raises those soul-reading eyes to survey the scene which the red glimmering light of the oil lamps reveals to Him!

Silence prevails. The mock trial, a travesty of justice, begins. Caiphas, the "father of the court," arises. Immediately he violates the first rule of procedure. He does not open the case, as prescribed, by informing Jesus of the nature of the crime with which He is charged. He calls no witnesses in His defense. On the contrary, Joseph Caiphas begins the trial by summoning false witnesses who are in collusion with the bench. They have been bribed so that the evidence brought against Jesus might surely bring about His condem-

nation. The law stated clearly: "By the mouth of two or three witnesses shall he die who is to be slain." Hence, ironically exclaim the priests present: "We must proceed legally in this trial. So let us summon to our presence not two or three, but a very host of witnesses, against the accused." Accordingly, there troops into the court a veritable hord of witnesses. And thus begins the false trial, pushed forward by false witnesses, giving false testimony, in the presence of false judges.

THE ACCUSATION

Just listen to some of the fictitious charges brought against the Prisoner by the well-coached and perjured witnesses. One swears that our Lord has been in the habit of breaking the Sabbath day; that He is known, on more occasions than one, to have worked a miracle on the sacred day of rest. Another attests that he has it on the authority of the Pharisees themselves that Jesus of Nazareth has indeed wrought such miracles as He is credited with, but that He has worked them through the power of Beelzebub. Another states on his oath that when a wretched woman was actually taken in the act of sinning, the Prisoner, before whom she had been brought, not only refused to condemn her, but had even gone out of His way to cast a slur upon the very men who, out of respect for the law, had charged her with adultery—a crime for which she should have been stoned to death. Another witness steps forward to declare that he was present when Jesus said to Mary of Magdala, a public sinner in the city of Naim: "Thy sins are forgiven thee." He is followed

by one who states that it was known to be the boast of this Man, that He had power to cure not only the ills of the body, but even the ailments of the soul. Then comes one who says that the Prisoner was often heard to call the Pharisees "hypocrites," a "brood of vipers," and "an adulterous generation." Yes, He has even rebuked, before the common people, the chief priests of the Holy Temple.

Now there is some excitement in the court room. A rumor is spread that two other witnesses have just arrived. These would prove to the satisfaction of the court and all present that the Prisoner is actually guilty of blasphemy. The first of these, pointing to the Divine Saviour, takes an oath, saying: "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it after three days.'" And the second witness states it this way, 'I will destroy this temple built by hands, and after three days I will build another, not built by hands.' So again there is no agreement here on the part of the witnesses, and their testimony only further increases the uneasiness of the judges. For have not some of the judges, presiding at the trial of Jesus now in progress, been present when their Prisoner spoke about a temple? Had it not been on the day of His public visit to their Temple, nearly three years ago, when He drove from its porches the buyers and sellers? On that occasion they themselves had put the question: "What sign dost Thou show to us, seeing Thou dost these things?" In answer, Jesus had declared, NOT "I can destroy," NOR "I shall destroy." What He did say was: "Destroy this temple and in three days I shall rebuild it." In other words, it had been a challenge. In reality, He had spoken, not of the material Temple of the Jews, but of His own body, foretelling thus His future resurrection. And later events proved that the Pharisees and the whole Sanhedrin

had understood well what Christ meant by those words. For, after His death they placed a guard at His sepulchre, recalling precisely these very words as predicting the resurrection after His death.

CAIPHAS SPEAKS

Now the testimony of perjured witnesses has come to a close. A painful stillness prevails throughout the court room. Caiphas, with his father-in-law Annas at his side and other judges of this mock trial, realizes that the testimony of the witnesses is insufficient to justify conviction. So, Caiphas, quivering with anger and emotion, rises from his throne, turns to our Lord as he points to the array of false witnesses, and says: "Dost thou make no answer to the things that these men prefer against thee?" Jesus, with His hands tied behind Him, stands facing the angry judge, but answers him never a word.

And why does Jesus refuse to answer? Because He is resolved to throw the whole responsibility of this awful night upon the instigators of this conspiracy. Caiphas, as high-priest, must realize that upon his own perjured soul lies the accumulated guilt arising out of this miscarriage of justice. Hence, this painful silence on the part of Jesus causes Caiphas to stand there as though struck by some unseen hand. He knows not where to turn to avoid the sight of the wan and worn, yet calm and majestic, face that seems to pierce him through and through. But try as he will, Caiphas cannot escape the Saviour's pleading eyes which are reading the story written in letters of fire on the guilty soul of His judge.

With his embarrassment clearly manifest to all present, Caiphas, panting with rage, becomes more determined than ever to force an answer from Jesus. Once more he arises to ask another question—one, no doubt, suggested by the observant and crafty father-in-law, Annas. Caiphas realizes that upon the answer to that question must depend the sentence of condemnation or acquittal.

Accordingly, solemnly and emphatically the high-priest addresses Jesus, saying: "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God." And now listen with bated breath to the calm emphatic answer which comes forth with majestic precision from the sacred lips of the Divine Saviour and Prisoner. That answer pronounces, seals, and delivers His own death-warrant to the criminal judge. "And Jesus," the Gospel tells us, "said to Caiphas: 'Thou hast said it, I am. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming upon the clouds of heaven.'" As a final declaration Christ publicly and officially declares to the world that He is both God and Man. For Caiphas, the high-priest, Christ's words imply a future threat and prophecy, saying as it were: "Although now and here you see Me before you as a Prisoner, then and there you shall see Me before you as your Judge. It will then be your turn to answer the question you have even now put to me: 'Dost thou make no answer to the things that these men prefer against thee?' Then you and I, Caiphas, shall have changed places." So, with these solemn words, in this most critical moment, from this high court of Justice, Jesus proclaims to the whole Jewish people and to the whole world that the Messiah has arrived and is actually in their very midst.

THE SENTENCE

There is a solemn pause. Silence prevails throughout the court. And then, without waiting for a verdict from the judges and ignoring all rules of legal procedure, Caiphas springs to his feet, rends his garments, symbolizing sorrow, dramatically sends forth a cry as it were of pain, and exclaims: "He has blasphemed; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" With one accord, all cry out: "He is liable to death." The verdict of guilt has been voted, death must be the penalty. One day's delay is necessary to make the sentence legal, but what do they care for legal technicalities now!

Furthermore, once sentence has been passed and pronounced, even judges are sometimes found to assure the poor victim of their sympathy and regret that inexorable law has forced them to put aside all forbearance. But there is no such sympathy towards Jesus. The sentence of death is pronounced upon Him, amidst a storm of applause. Like unleashed lions, several of the judges, Scribes, Pharisees, and priests leap upon the Prisoner and vent their fury and hatred in blows. They buffet and drag Him hither and thither, pulling His hair and reviling Him in most bitter sarcasm and ridicule.

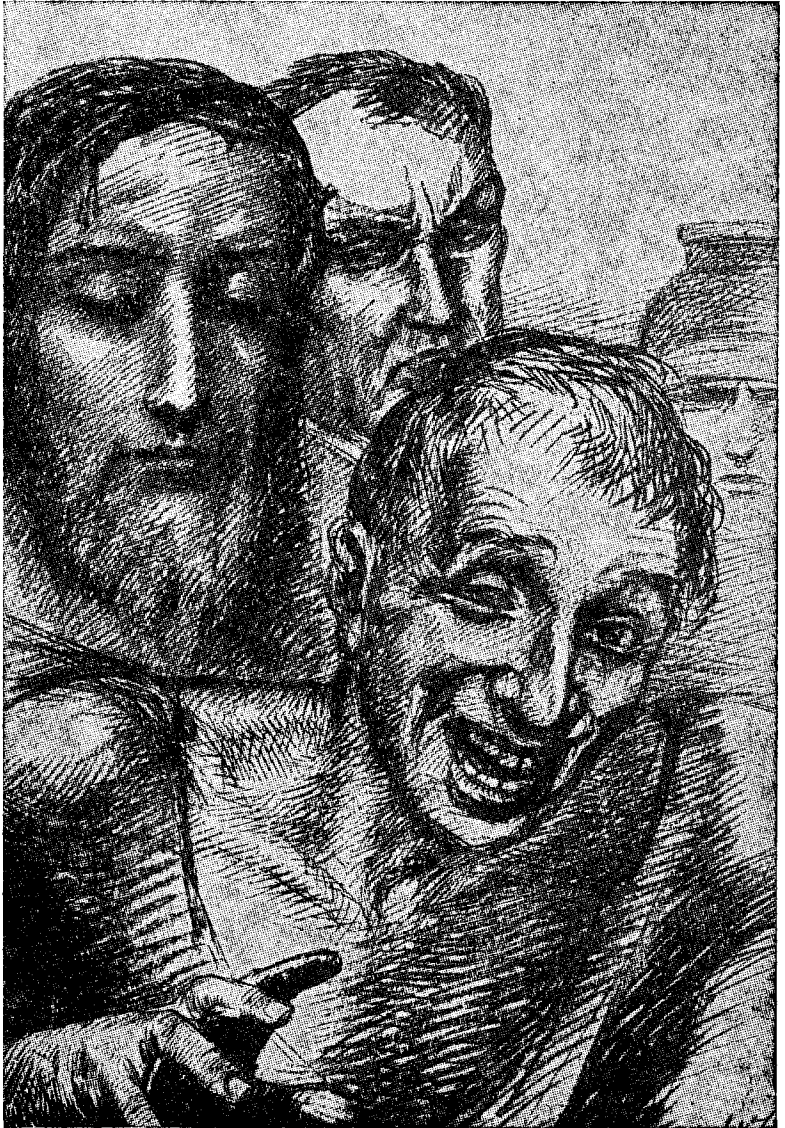
It is now about four in the morning. All the officials with Caiphas and Annas retire to take a well-earned rest before completing their criminal task on the morrow. But Jesus receives no respite. He is surrendered into the hands of the servants and court menials. These drag the Redeemer

out of the palace, through the courtyard, past Peter, into a small prison next to the guard-room, where insults and injury continue throughout the night. Now that He is branded as a blasphemer, these ruffians strike Him in the face with their fists; others tear His face with their fingernails; others pull Jesus by the hair, fulfilling the words of the Prophet Isaias: "I have given My body to the strikers and My cheeks to them that plucked them" (Is. 1:6). Then they throw their dirty and loathsome spittle into His holy face. And the climax is reached when, blindfolding Him, they strike Him, saying: "Prophecy, Christ, who is it that struck Thee? Who is it that spat upon Thee?" "On that night," says St. Chrysostom, "all the pits of the nether world were opened, and, after breaking their chains and the bars of hell, Lucifer and all his satellites rushed to Jerusalem, entered into and took possession of the bodies . . . to pour out through them upon Christ their long pent-up hatred, envy and anger, their rage and all their fury."

CONCLUSION

But, my friends, why continue further to speak about those cruel inhuman and diabolical scenes in and around the court of Caiphas during those early morning hours on Good Friday? Rather, let us remember that down through the centuries there have lived many others who, like Caiphas, his perjured judges and servants, continue to reecho that same cry: "We have a law, and according to that law He ought to die; because He made Himself the Son of God." There have been, and there still are, untold multitudes who refuse to this day to acknowledge that same Jesus Christ as

their God and Saviour. There are even many so-called Christian ministers of the Gospel and people who deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. They will admit that Jesus was the ideal type of man of His age; but yet, they say, He was only a man. They recognize Him as a great hero, like Moses, Plato, Socrates, or Washington. But what did the Saviour Himself say when asked by Caiphas, the high-priest: "Art thou Christ, the Son of the living God?" His solemn reply and declaration was: "Thou has said it, I am." His subsequent acts, beginning with His own resurrection, proved His statement to be true. Therefore, as we leave the trial scene of Jesus before Caiphas, we will promise no longer to walk with those who continue to spit in His sacred face, who strike Him, or mock Him through sin. Instead, we will pledge our Saviour anew on this day that we shall strive with greater efforts to avoid sin, to be more grateful in the future by loving Him more and serving Him better in all our thoughts, words, and actions.



“Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas!” (p. 108)

MORNING SESSION OF THE SANHEDRIN:
CHRIST BEFORE PILATE

READING: "Now when morning came the chief priests held a consultation with the elders, the Scribes and the whole Sanhedrin against Jesus in order to put him to death. And the whole assemblage rose, and took him before Pontius Pilate the procurator. It was early morning, and they themselves did not enter the praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.

"Pilate, therefore, went outside to them, and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' They said to him in answer, 'If he were not a criminal we should not have handed him over to thee.' And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ, a king.'

"Now Jesus stood before the procurator, and the procurator asked him, saying, 'Art thou the king of the Jews?' Jesus said to him, 'Thou sayest it.' Then Pilate said to him, 'Dost thou not hear how many things they prefer against thee?' But he did not answer him a single word, so that the procurator wondered exceedingly.

“And Pilate said to the chief priests and to the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man. Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law.’ The Jews, then, said to him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.’ Pilate therefore again entered into the praetorium, and he summoned Jesus, and said to him, ‘Art thou the king of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Dost thou say this of thyself, or have others told thee of me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Thy own people and the chief priests have delivered thee to me. What hast thou done?’ Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my followers would have fought that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’ Pilate therefore said to him, ‘Thou art then a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest it; I am a king. This is why I was born, and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.’ Pilate said to him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went outside to the Jews again, and said to them, ‘I find no guilt in him.’

“But they persisted, saying, ‘He is stirring up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, and beginning from Galilee even to this place.’ But Pilate, hearing Galilee, asked whether the man was a Galilean. And learning that he belonged to Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him back to Herod, who likewise was in Jerusalem in those days.” (Matt. 26:11ff; Mark 15:1ff; Luke 22,23:1ff; John 18:28f).

CONTRARY to all prevailing customs, the trial of Jesus Christ before Caiphas, the high-priest, was secretly conducted in the darkness of the night. At this trial illegal

as to time, place and procedure, false and perjured witnesses were in collusion with the conspiracy of the Sanhedrin and court judges. This mock trial—a travesty of justice, as we have seen—ended with the unjust conviction of Jesus. For the remainder of the night the Saviour was subjected to every imaginable abuse, while He was in the custody of the servants of the court officials. By early morning word had gone out all over the city about what had transpired during the night. Crowds gathered rapidly around the house of Caiphas where Jesus was being held prisoner. Then, in order to give their actions a semblance of legality, the high-priest and Sanhedrin assembled once more early on Good Friday morning. All the judges were now present. Once more Jesus was dragged before that tribunal where, for a second time, He was condemned to death. But the execution of that sentence rested in the hands of the Roman Governor, now Pontius Pilate. The Roman Emperor had always reserved for the Governor the exclusive power of inflicting capital punishment. Therefore, about six o'clock in the morning Caiphas and his co-conspirators order their Prisoner, now shackled with chains, to be dragged over the rough streets to the court of Pontius Pilate.

CHRIST'S FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE PILATE

The Praetorium, or official residence of the Governor, was of magnificent proportions. It was built entirely of polished marble. Two flights of marble steps led to the entrance of the building. But since it was illegal for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile, upon their arrival before the

house of Pilate the soldiers and servants led Jesus into the hall. The high-priest and Sanhedrin did not enter lest they become defiled, and thus be prohibited from eating the pasch. Be it further remembered that between the Governor and the people of Jerusalem there was nothing in common. On the contrary, they disliked one another intensely. Like most Romans, Pontius Pilate had a sovereign contempt for all Orientals, and for Jews in particular. Mindful of this strained relationship, Pilate emerges to meet the milling crowd outside. From his elevated balcony he cries down to them scornfully and defiantly: "What accusation do you bring against this man?"

Caiphas and the chief priests are taken aback. They are not prepared to find Pilate in this defiant mood. At least during their festival season, they hoped Pilate would be in a more congenial mood, so that he would pass over questions regarding the nature of the specific charges against the Prisoner. Looking up at Pilate fiercely and defiantly, they shout back: "If he were not a criminal, we would not deliver him up to you!" In other words: "We do not want your law; we are asking your verdict. We do not need the Prisoner's trial; we demand his death." But Pilate, with folded arms, stands defiantly on the balcony, surveying the mob stirred to madness in the court below. He sees clearly enough what they want. But he is determined not to accede so readily to their insolence. Therefore, since they refuse to produce evidence as satisfactory proof for conviction, Pilate turns abruptly upon them, exclaiming, as he motions with a wave of his hand: "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law!" Reminding them of their inability to execute their own laws without his permission, he challenges them, as it were, saying: "If you do not wish to bring a convincing legal

charge against him, take him and judge him if you dare, and if it be in your power."

Here the chief priests, the Scribes, and people too, become exasperated beyond endurance over the sneering, cynical mood of the Governor. But they are not to be cowed so readily. Nor will they stand for any further postponement or delay. For another trial before Pilate might lessen their chances for conviction of the Prisoner. Therefore, in an attempt to impress Pilate with the legality of their own trial and the guilt of the Prisoner, they shout back at Pilate, saying, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." In these words they indicate to Pilate what their ultimate demands will be.

THE CHARGES AGAINST CHRIST

There is an abrupt pause. Pilate continues to stand there defiant, refusing to acquiesce. They grow more desperate. They dare not repeat the flimsy charges upon which they convicted Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Hence they trump up three new charges which might more readily appeal to that pagan and hated Governor. Here are the charges:

FIRST, "we have found this man perverting our nation." But how can this be true? Never before was such a charge adduced against Him. It is a deliberate lie, and they know it.

SECONDLY, they say: "We have found this man forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar." Another deliberate falsehood. For it was they themselves who objected when Christ, their Prisoner, had said: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that belong to God."

THIRDLY, they exclaim: "We have found this man say-

ing he is Christ, the king." Neither is there a shred of evidence to support this charge.

In fact, until now Jesus has never asserted that He is a king, but He has publicly proclaimed Himself the promised Messiah. Nay more, Jesus has even refused to act as a king. When they threatened to make Him their king by force, Jesus fled and hid Himself. If only he had proclaimed Himself their king, and had unfurled the banner of revolt against pagan Rome; if only He had forbidden tribute to be paid to Caesar; if only He had perverted the nation; if only He had actually done what they said He did, but which as a matter of fact He had not done, the Jewish people would have rallied around Him. They would have fought by His side, and would have strained every resource, every nerve, to support His claims. Nay, they would have died to a man in order to break the despised Roman yoke, and to crush the hated foreigner who lorded it over them. But just because Jesus has made it clear to them that He has come as a religious and not a political reformer, these leaders of the Jews now come out openly against Him, in whom they found their national hopes have been misplaced, and through whom their highest personal political aspirations have come to naught.

Therefore, Pilate, who knows his audience only too well, listens to their clumsy charges, recognizing them as being framed on the spot for the purpose of intimidating him. He scowls down upon them with a look of supreme contempt. His cold, grey eyes glare like steel at them, while his pale, puckered lips curl up in scorn without replying to their charges. Rising from his judgment seat, Pilate turns abruptly upon his heels, passes into the Praetorium, ordering the captain of the guard to follow with the Prisoner. In this manner Pilate serves notice upon the priests and the mob

below that he utterly mistrusts them, that he will not be intimidated by them, and that he intends to go to the bottom of this ugly business by examining the Prisoner in person. The Jewish priests and their followers scent the situation. They fill the air with groans and hisses, curses and oaths, imprecations and blasphemies, milling about in confusion as Jesus passes from their view.

And what a change of scene Jesus finds within the walls of Pilate's beautiful palace! Picture our Divine Saviour standing upon that polished mosaic floor! The silence is broken only by the fountains playing on the broad lily leaves mantling the face of the waters in the snow-white basins that adorn the center of the spacious hall. He stands there among the marble columns that support the famous gilded roof set up by King Herod, who some three and thirty years before when Jesus was a babe in Mary's arms, had sought His life. And now Pilate, representing a foreign potentate in a strange land, has taken the place of King Herod the Great.

PILATE QUESTIONS OUR LORD

Jesus already knows the ultimate outcome of all these interviews. But for the moment at least Pilate appears to be His best friend and sole protector. Pilate, dismissing the guards, mounts the steps of his throne, and bids the divine Prisoner to draw near to him. Jesus and Pilate are alone, face to face! Pilate, for the first time in his checkered career, feels that he is in the presence of some mysterious person whose bearing and appearance seem rather to belong to another world. He speaks kindly and softly to the Prisoner.

He ignores the first two charges brought against Jesus by the Jews outside, and takes up the third. Somewhat anxiously, as well as inquisitively, Pilate puts the question: "Art thou the king of the Jews?"

Our Lord raises His head and looks calmly into the eyes of His judge. He answers the question put by Pilate by asking another: "Dost thou say this of thyself, or have others told thee of me?" As though Jesus would say to Pilate: "Do you ask me this question out of a wish to know the real truth about my case, or is it mere idle curiosity which leads you to ask this question?" This embarrasses Pilate somewhat. For he has considered his question of little importance, because the Jewish religion does not interest him. Hence Pilate replies: "Am I a Jew? Thy own people and the chief priests have delivered thee to me." But his curiosity has been aroused. He draws nearer to Jesus. He asks Jesus about His life and the motives that actuated it. Especially is he anxious to know what Jesus has done that incurred the bitter hatred of the whole Jewish nation against Him. Hence, stretching forth his hands, the judge asks a direct question: "What hast thou done?"

"What hast thou done?" Rather should he ask: "What has He not done." Has Jesus not done all manner of good and no evil? What a wonderful personality! What a mystery of love is the Incarnation! The divine has become human, the infinite become finite, the immortal become mortal, the impassible become passible! He who is high has become low, He who is rich has become poor! Do you still ask what Jesus has done? Why, He has done everything that a God-Man could do to win human love, being made like unto us in all things save sin! He was made flesh, being made of a woman, born of a woman. Yes, the Son of a woman, of a

pure woman; a woman rich in virtue but poor as far as worldly possessions go; of a woman who ministered to Him as our mothers ministered to us, feeding Him at her breast, rocking Him to sleep in her tender arms, nursing Him, loving Him, caressing Him, while He in turn loved, obeyed, and caressed her.

What has Jesus done? Ask the five thousand men, besides women and children, whom He fed on the mountain side. Ask the lepers whom He restored to health. Ask the blind man who stood at the gates of Jericho. Ask Zaccheus, or Jairus, or the widow of Naim. Or, if you will, go to Magdalen, once the sinner, or to the woman of Samaria, who was actually living in sin. They will, one and all, tell you what Jesus has done, how He forgave them, put new life into them, and set them on their way with such courage, strength, and hopefulness as they had never felt or known before.

What has He done? Ask Peter, James and John, and the rest of the Apostles. They will all agree that in their case He has left nothing undone. Has He not weaned them from the world, schooled them into His ways, and loaded them with untold favors and blessings? And to all these, you and I can add our own indebtedness to the same Jesus Christ. Without exception, He has loved each one of us as though there were no one else to love. Here, then, you have a brief chapter out of the story of all Jesus has done.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM

Now, returning to Pilate, let us see what our Lord Himself answered to the question: "What hast thou done?" St.

John tells us that Jesus answered Pilate, saying: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my followers would have fought that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." In other words: "Pilate, you need have no fear of your position. I have no army. I belong to no political party. I have no political aspirations for the future." Pilate was struck by the simplicity, the sublimity, the majesty of our Lord's answer. Yes, Pilate was convinced that before him stood One who really seemed to be what He claimed to be, as divine as He was human. Jesus had made it clear to Pilate: (1) that He was a king; (2) that He ruled over a kingdom; (3) that this kingdom was not of this world, defined neither by national boundaries nor even the utmost bounds of the earth.

Once again Pilate leans forward, and for a second time asks: "Thou art then a king?" And Jesus answered: "Thou sayest it; I am a king. This is why I was born, and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." This was Christ's mission, to teach us the truth. He lived for this truth, and now He is prepared to die for that truth. He founded a kingdom; He set up a Church; He established a code of morals and dogmas upon earth, based upon that truth. These Gospel truths, at His command, were to be preached to all nations. In turn, he who accepts these truths shall enjoy a freedom from fear, a freedom from doubt, a freedom from the shackles of sin. "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"—free with the freedom with which Christ has set us free. "This is why I was born, and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

PILATE'S OPPORTUNITY

What an opportunity was here offered to Pilate! But Pilate, the skeptic, was thoroughly imbued with the pagan philosophy of his time. The greatest of these pagan scholars had arrived at the unanimous conclusion that there is no supreme truth, that everything ends in fallacy and uncertainty. Socrates, the wisest of them all, had ventured the statement that he had found the truth. In punishment, the poisoned cup was handed him. Plato, his disciple, died with the declaration that, should man ever arrive at the knowledge of the truth, a God must needs descend to convey it to him. Now that God had arrived. At this moment He stands before Pilate, the representative of paganism, to teach that truth. But Pilate, with a shrug of his shoulders, only counters with the exclamation: "What is truth?" As much as to say: "I am a practical man, and deal constantly with concrete facts, not with abstract theories. As for truth, what does it matter? I am a politician, and as such, my principle is not so much truth as political expediency." If great scholars like Socrates or Plato can go astray over some abstract theories, why could not also this poor harmless dreamer before him be led into strange hallucinations about kingship and eternal truths?

With these thoughts in mind, Pilate arises, descends the flight of steps, steps out on the balcony, followed by the divine Prisoner and accompanied by the guards. Here he faces the impatient mob, awaiting the death sentence which they expect to hear from Pilate's lips. Before that sea of uplifted faces, which glare with cruelty and savagery depicted in every feature, Pilate calmly and deliberately

delivers himself of this sentence: "I find no fault in this man."

This only serves to increase their fury. Swearing that they will not be robbed of their prey, they bring further charges against the Prisoner. Pilate turns towards Jesus. Jesus manifests no anger or resentment, but remains calm, unmoved, untouched by the storm of angry passion that sweeps with unabated fury over Him. With such a persistent threat of defiance of that milling mob before him, Pilate scents a feeling of insecurity of his own position as Governor. Impatient with the patience of our dear Lord, Pilate asks Jesus in an angry tone: "Dost thou not hear how many things they prefer against thee. Answerest thou nothing? Behold, in how many things they accuse thee." As though he would say: "Is there to be no limit to this endurance? Defend thyself and set the brutal mob at defiance." At least, thinks Pilate, Jesus might set forth some line of defense which he himself might turn to account on behalf of the Prisoner. "But," says St. Matthew, "Jesus answered him not a single word, so that the procurator wondered exceedingly." Pilate calls for silence. And rising before the people, in clear and articulate speech he tosses to them defiantly the declaration once more: "I find no guilt in him."

PILATE SENDS CHRIST TO HEROD

But the stubbornness and determination of the mob continues to persist. Amidst the clamor and turmoil, groanings and hisses, the clear voice of one Jew reaches Pilate's ears, saying: "He is stirring up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, and beginning from Galilee even to this place." "Beginning from Galilee!" Ah, this was the cue Pilate was

looking for. These words may help Pilate out of his present predicament. He inquires and is assured that Jesus is from Galilee. This is now Pilate's alibi, namely, the Roman Governor has jurisdiction only over Judea, but not over Galilee and Herod is the ruler of Galilee.

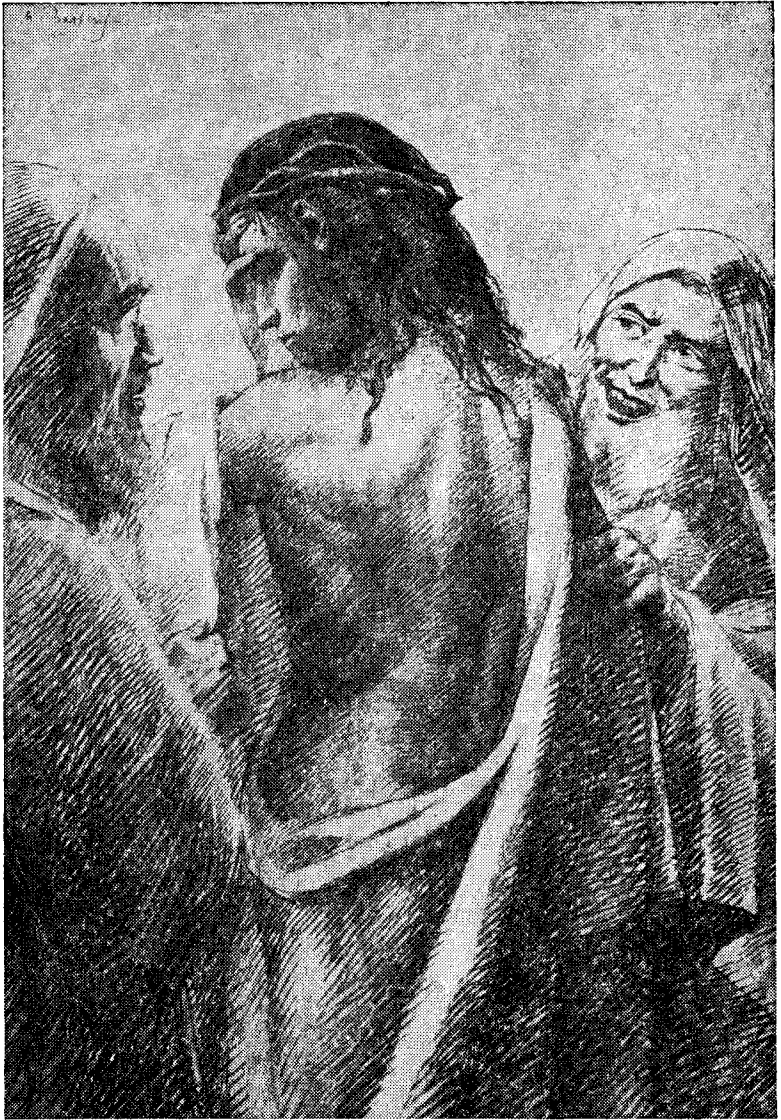
Herod is up in Jerusalem for the paschal season. Pilate has no love for Herod, nor has Herod any jurisdiction in the city. But what does that matter as long as Herod can serve as a tool for Pilate? Therefore, Pilate resolves to send Jesus, under the custody of a guard, to the court of Herod, with the request that he will try the Prisoner, who comes from the province over which Herod rules as Tetrarch, and is therefore his legal subject. It is a diplomatic stroke, and well calculated. In this way, Pilate feels, he will flatter Herod's vanity, and at the same time be relieved of a difficult and awkward position.

Now Pilate once more addresses the people, telling them of his resolve. He orders the guard to conduct the Prisoner for trial to the court of Herod. He leaves the balcony, returns to the Praetorium, well pleased with himself for his clever stroke of diplomacy. But instead, Pilate lost thereby the greatest opportunity for fame of his entire life. Had he been a true statesman and not a mere politician, a judge and not a diplomatist, a governor and not a compromiser, a defender of justice and not a seeker of political expediency, he would have ordered the soldiers to clear the ground, to dismiss the rabble, and set the Prisoner free in whom he had found no cause of guilt. Had he arisen and responded to the dictates of his conscience, Pilate's name would have been carried down through the ages, greeted with acclamation and honor. But alas, Pilate's actions brought his name into the "Credo" as a warning example to all despisers of truth. It put his

name in that confession by which every Christian expresses his belief in the truth: "Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate." It forever associates Pilate's name with the names of so many others in exalted positions, as men of lost opportunities. In a word, like all unprincipled men, Pilate was a coward and not a man of honor.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my friends, I would say that Pilate's case is full of soul-searching lessons for us all. Pilate's conduct was and is not exceptional. Legion is the name of those who repeat his conduct today in the world. They begin by compromising with principle, compromising with truth, and end with bartering away their very honor. Religious indifference and contempt for religious truths and principles are the prevailing sins of modern times. And those who are not trying, like Pilate, to get rid of Jesus Christ and His teachings, are at any rate attempting, like the high-priest, Caiphas, to deny His divine claims; or else, like Annas, they question His conduct; or perhaps, even like Judas, they do not even hesitate to sell Him to His enemies for a few pieces of filthy lucre. My friends, we come in contact with such people almost daily. This is our danger and challenge. Shall we, like Pilate, begin with indifference to truth, go on to compromise with truth, and end, like Pilate, as we shall subsequently see, by the condemnation of Truth? God forbid! Rather, let us cry out with St. John: "Lord, Thou hast words of everlasting life, and we have come to believe and to know that thou art the Christ, the Son of God."



"They divided my garments among them; and for my vesture they cast lots."

(p. 131)

JESUS BEFORE KING HEROD ANTIPAS

READING: "Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had been a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard so much about him, and he was hoping to see some miracle done by him. Now he put many questions to him, but he made him no answer.

"Now the chief priests and Scribes were standing by, vehemently accusing him. But Herod, with his soldiery, treated him with contempt and mocked him, arraying him in a bright robe, and sent him back to Pilate. And Herod and Pilate became friends that very day; whereas previously they had been at enmity with each other." (Luke 23:8-12).

IN THE shameful Passion and Death of our Lord there is one phase that is often overlooked. It is the conspiracy between both the religious and civil authorities of the time, that ended with the death of the Saviour. The Sanhedrin, headed by Annas and Caiphas, exercised both civil and religious powers in the conduct of the trial of Jesus. Only the SANCTION or approval of the execution of one found guilty by the Sanhedrin of capital punishment rested with the

purely civil authorities, represented by the Governor or King. Pilate and Herod represented the latter group.

Before both groups, the civil and religious, Christ made His position clear. To the high-priest Caiphas, the Saviour presented Himself as the divinely anointed High Priest of the New Law, as the promised Messiah, as the true Son of God. Before Pilate, who represented the civil power of the state, Jesus declared Himself to be a King absolutely independent in His kingdom from all worldly powers. The object of His kingdom is, and always will be, a supernatural one. "My kingdom," He informed Pilate, "is not of this world."

The state, on the other hand, has for its principal object the material welfare of the subjects. Thus, the declaration of Christ before Pilate defined for all times to come the mutual relations of Church and State. Although both are in the world, yet both are not of the world. However, for the perfect and full attainment of their respective objectives, both should work hand in hand without conflict, much like two railroad tracks running parallel in order to support the train that carries passengers and freight to their destination. And yet, at the very first meeting in the court of the Governor, we behold the Church, sponsored by Christ, and the state in conflict. It was an evil foreboding of what the Church might expect down through the centuries.

But to the everlasting credit of Pilate, he neither started nor fostered the conflict between himself and Christ. Rather did he strive to avoid the conflict entirely. Therefore, learning that Jesus was a Galilean, Pilate at once arranged to send the Prisoner to Herod who was in Jerusalem from Galilee for the Paschal festivities. Herod Antipas, being Tetrarch or ruler of Galilee from whence Jesus had come, could preside at the trial of his own subject. So, while Jesus is being

dragged from the court of Pontius Pilate to the court of Herod, Pilate dispatches a messenger ahead, explaining to Herod the circumstances of the case as he saw it.

HEROD ANTIPAS, TETRARCH OF GALILEE

Now, who was this Herod? He was one of the four sons of King Herod the Great, who reigned over all of Palestine at the time of the birth of Christ. This cruel father was great only in his tyranny. He defiled his hands with the blood of one of the high-priests, merely to get him out of the way because he saw in him a possible rival. He killed his own wife, Mariamme; then his wife's mother, Alexandra; and ordered both her sons, Alexander and Aristobulus, to be strangled. And finally, Herod the Great ended his miserable record of crime by the murder of the Holy Innocents at the time of the birth of Christ, hoping thereby to end the life of the new-born Saviour. Then, before his death, with the consent of the Roman Emperor, Herod divided his kingdom into four parts called tetrarchies, over each of which one of his four sons was assigned to govern. Archelaus received the tetrarchy of Judea, including the Holy City of Jerusalem. But, like a true son of his wretched father, his crimes were so numerous and his life so base that the Roman authorities removed him and appointed a Roman Governor. Pontius Pilate was this Governor at the time of Christ.

Herod Antipas, the other son, who enters into the Sacred Passion of our Lord, ruled over the province of Galilee. He married the daughter of the King of Arabia. But, soon tiring of her, he fell in love with Herodias, the wife of his brother,

Philip. This he dared to do in spite of the opposition of the King of Arabia, and in defiance of the Mosaic Law which condemned adultery with the grave penalty of being stoned to death. The Jewish priesthood had also become degenerate, and retained only the semblance of power. Hence, the only penalty which Herod Antipas suffered for living with his brother's wife was exclusion from the Jewish sacrifices in the temple.

Herod Antipas, then, had inherited most of his father's vices, being cruel, crafty, and sensual. Having spent much of his youth in pagan Rome, he further developed his Herodian taste for luxury and splendor. As Tetrarch of Galilee, he built a city on Lake Tiberias, modeled after pagan Rome and Athens. Here, amidst those blazing splendors, within a palace called the Golden House, lived this semi-pagan Jew, this adulterous Herod Antipas, with his brother's wife, Herodias. The Jewish priests had not the courage to condemn such brazen violations of their law. St. John the Baptist, however, strong in the courage which God gives to His saints, spoke strongly against the scandalous life of this infamous ruler. These open reproaches indicated that an open conflict between the two was inevitable.

HEROD AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

One day while the Baptist was preaching in the neighborhood, attracting immense crowds, Herod invited him to speak at the Golden House. Herod, always thirsting for some new excitement, thought it might interest and amuse his family and his court not a little to hear the popular preacher whose fame was spreading far and wide. John the Baptist

accepted the royal invitation, hoping thereby to bring Herod and Herodias face to face with their guilty consciences. St. John, rough and shabby, clad in hair-cloth, entered the spacious marble palace and met the man and woman living in sin, surrounded by their gay and giddy courtiers, clad in luxurious attire. This strange audience, gathered in that gilded den of iniquity, waited with bated breath as John the Baptist opened his discourse with these words: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." You may picture the consternation in that audience as he drove home his uncompromising message. And before he had finished, John was seen being led away in custody to be cast in chains in a damp, dreary dungeon or prison.

You know the rest of the story. Herod, and especially Herodias, swore the vengeance of death against him. The opportunity presented itself on the eve of Herod's birthday. The saturnalian banquet had already extended far into the night. The king and guests were surfeited with meat and wine. Upon the suggestion of Herodias, Salome, her daughter, appeared before the king and performed her lascivious dances. As the concealed orchestra sent forth its voluptuous music, Salome, seductively clad, began with her cavorting and diabolical arts amid a blaze of lights. Before she had finished, her charm and pirouetting aroused Herod's passions to such an extent that he offered her whatever she might ask, even though it be half of his kingdom. Salome, well schooled by her wicked mother, demanded to have brought to her at once the head of John the Baptist. The order was given; the head was brought to her; and she, in turn, presented it to Herodias, exultant in her triumphant revenge over the man who had dared to preach from the text: "Non licet," "It is not lawful."

CHRIST BEFORE HEROD

Here now, my friends, you have a comprehensive picture of Herod Antipas, whose hands were red with the blood of him who had preached the coming of Christ—Herod, to whom our sorrowful Saviour was sent by Pilate for trial. The messenger had already reached Herod with the news that Pilate was sending him Christ the Nazarene. This put Herod in exceeding good humor. He summons all his household. His soldiers gather around the Grecian Hall where the Galilean Prisoner is to appear for trial. Herod himself is clad in all his regal splendor. He reclines in studied ease upon the silken cushions, deftly arranged upon the couches on the stage of the court chamber. All is in readiness for the arrival of the divine Prisoner. The procession is approaching, headed by Annas and Caiphas. The priests and ancients of the people come next. Behind them follow Pilate's guards, leading the unusual Prisoner, jostled by an unruly mob and mad orientals thirsting for His blood. Jesus is led to a raised platform where all of Herod's court may see Him. Jesus, garbed in the seamless robe, dyed with blood, discolored with dust and spittle, appears, as so often we have pictured Him, majestically, meekly. His sacred hands are tied behind His back. His divine head, with hair all matted and dishevelled and unkempt, is bent as though absorbed in prayer. On first mounting the platform, Jesus for once lifts His weary eyes. But, having surveyed the scene, He quickly closes His eyes again as though oppressed by the revolting sight before Him.

St. Luke tells us that "Herod was exceedingly glad; for he had been a long time desirous to see him, because he had

heard so much about him, and he was hoping to see some miracle done by him." Had Herod been a serious or contrite man, he would scarcely have relished the thought of meeting Jesus, the murdered Baptist's best Friend. But Herod, being frivolous, represents to us the voluptuous, giddy world of dissipation, the world of fashion, the so-called smart set, if you will. For such there is no sin but that of being dull; for such there is no preoccupation but self, yes, self-gratification. The Gospel story describes such as being steeped in the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.

But why should Herod Antipas be so very glad to see the Holy One of Israel? Because it would offer him a new diversion, and satisfy selfish curiosity. Well could he remember hearing, as a mere boy in his father's palace, of the massacre of the Holy Innocents, from which, it was commonly reported, the Infant Jesus had escaped by flight into Egypt. Later, as Tetrarch of Galilee, Herod had been kept well posted as regards the actions and doings of the young Rabbi whose fame was on the lips of all in Galilee, where He was said to have wrought many miracles. Herod's palace, not far distant from Capharnaum where Jesus spent much of His public life, had been the constant rendezvous of jugglers, actors, dancers and the like, but Herod had never been able to entice the Galilean Wonder Worker to the Golden House where a performance, set off with some miracles, would have afforded goodly sport and entertainment for his household. And now the long-awaited opportunity of seeing Jesus had come without any formal invitation.

There were many other reasons why Herod should be pleased over the occasion. He felt immensely flattered over the great consideration manifested by the Roman Governor.

Until then the two had been bitter enemies. Herod had been hatching one conspiracy after another, trying to regain the entire domain once governed by his father. This naturally included the territory which Pontius Pilate governed. Furthermore, this occasion gave him an excellent opportunity to show his utter contempt for the Sanhedrin and the high-priests who so impertinently excluded him from the sacrifices in the temple. Thus pleased with himself, with everybody and everything, Herod arrayed himself in all his glory, prepared to receive Jesus with every possible solemnity.

THE TRIAL

The scene for the trial is now in order. What an intense hatred must have welled up in the hearts of Annas and Caiphas as they approached the throne whereon Herod sat! Herod, whom they abhorred! But now they had their point to gain, and, therefore, they presented their case with deepest obeisance and blandishments. Herod sat in silence, peering at the face of the Accused before him. As he gazed, his mind began to torture him with remorse. Like a specter, there appeared before him the head of John the Baptist as it was handed to Salome in a dish. And now he was asked to put to death this same Baptist's best Friend, this Man, this Prophet, the Nazarene of whose goodness he had heard so much about. Then again, why should he bother himself with the wishes of the Sanhedrin, with Annas and Caiphas? They were most certainly no friends of his. Rather, then, would he use the occasion to satisfy his own curiosity.

Therefore, says St. Luke, Herod began to speak to Jesus

at considerable length, asking Him many questions. The Gospel story does not give the exact words, but we may easily surmise what the conversation must have been. "The Roman Governor has sent you to me that I may judge you. But after hearing the accusations I am much of the same opinion as he. However, you have heard all the accusations made here against you. What have you to say? I have many reasons to believe that you are extremely intelligent. In rebuttal of all their testimony, you may now employ all the powers of your clever mind. Speak to them. What, you decline to utter a word in self-defense? I also heard that you have done many wonderful things, many prodigies. Is it true that you restored sight to the blind? That you raised Lazarus to life? That you fed a great multitude with a few little loaves? You see, I have the power to set you free. Why, then, do you not answer? Why not now perform one of your wonderful mysterious deeds?"

Jesus, however, continues to remain silent. Irritated by the perfect calm of the Prisoner, Herod continues: "They tell me that the spirit of the Baptist, whom I beheaded, has come upon you. Is this true? Who are you? What is your mission? Who has sent you? What is the meaning of your novel doctrine? One day, many years ago, three strange kings of the East came to my father's house. They were seeking the new-born King of the Jews, who, they said, had just been born in Judea. Were you that babe? How did you escape the death planned by my father? Where have you remained in hiding all these years? Oh, do come and tell me: are you really the Messiah? Come, come, and defend yourself!"

HEROD'S RESENTMENT

But all this pleading is in vain. Jesus knows the cunning of the judge that is speaking to Him. On a previous occasion (Luke 13:32), Jesus has publicly called Herod a "fox," summing up in one word the true character of the man. Hence, Jesus is silent with a purpose. He refuses to cast pearls before swine. He knows Herod's mind is darkened too deeply by sin, his heart is fouled too much by vice, his will weakened too much by gluttony and debauchery, to be capable of deriving any good or drawing any salutary lessons from such words as He, under other circumstances, might have addressed to him. Before Him Jesus beholds a typical example of that smart society group whose one and only idea of life is to think what they please, to say what they please, and to do what they please. Their conscience is atrophied, and the thought of judgment day is banished from their minds. Therefore, our Lord has nothing to say to Herod. "Tacebat!" "He was silent!"

But Herod will not learn the lesson intended by this solemn silence. Instead, he becomes exasperated, growing livid with rage. Then, says the Evangelist, "Herod, with his soldiery, treated him with contempt and mocked him, arraying him in a bright robe." For Herod recalls that His enemies have accused the Prisoner of entertaining aspirations to become King of Judea. Among the Romans white garments were worn by those who aspired to some office. Among the Jews, madmen were clad in white, so that passers-by could see that they were mentally weak. Therefore, Herod orders his soldiers to clothe the Prisoner with a white cloak. Then, turning to the high-priests, Annas and Caiphas, the Scribes

and princes of the people, Herod refuses to condemn the Prisoner to death. But rather in contempt of the whole Sanhedrin, Prisoner and all, Herod continues: "Evidently, these pretensions of the young prophet prove clearly that he is a visionary, more mad than guilty. I shall treat him as a fool and send him back to the Roman Governor without sentence of any kind."

Here Herod, the fox, plays the game well. By sending the Prisoner back to Pilate, Herod will escape the dread remorse of shedding more innocent blood, knowing the guilt and remorse that already haunted him ever since the beheading of John the Baptist. In this manner, too, he will also forever seal his friendship with Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. So, over the Sacred Body of the Man-God is thrown the white garment of the fool, indicating that He has lost His mind or is a victim of hallucinations. Then Herod arises, orders the guards immediately to conduct the Prisoner, garbed in the cloak of a fool, amidst the cheers of all, out of his house and to return Him to Pontius Pilate. What a sad Corpus Christi procession!

CONCLUSION

And now let us see what we ourselves may learn from this unusual interview between our Saviour and Herod. Do not many in our day and age act much the same as Herod did when he met Jesus face to face in his day? If Jesus were to come back today in human form, many, only too many, would be quite as anxious to see Him as Herod was; and for no better reason, namely, because they "had heard many things about Him." They, too, would hope that in

their presence He would work what the vulgar and ignorant of the present call miracles. In fact, this smart set classifies as vulgar and ignorant whoever speaks of duty, of sin, of death, or of judgment to come. And this same smart set, like Herod, would end by treating the Master in much the same manner, despising Him, mocking Him, and calling Him a mere fool, a visionary of this enlightened modern age.

So, let us, at least, take warning from Herod. And especially, let us take warning from the silence of our Lord. The worst thing that can happen to any man, is to be treated by Jesus Christ with silent contempt. The wicked may go on in their life of sin, defying their Lord, saying He does not care. But God does care, or He would not have borne all these abuses, sufferings, and insults for us. "Woe to you," cries out the Prophet Isaias, "that are wise in your own eyes, and prudent in your own conceits" (Is: 5:21). On the day of judgment they who mocked Him as a fool, will be put to shame in all their wisdom. "He it is," they will then cry, "whom we had some time in derision and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed His life madness and His end without honor" (Wis. 5:3-5). The imitators of Herod will be treated like Herod, in silent contempt. But "blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). They shall see the miracles of the Saviour, the miracles of His graces, the wonders of His power, the wonders of His mercy, the wonders of His love, both here and in the world to come.



"I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see to it yourselves." (p. 115)

- VII -

SECOND TRIAL BEFORE PILATE: CHRIST'S CONDEMNATION

READING: "Herod treated him with contempt and mocked him, arraying him in a bright robe, and sent him back to Pilate. Now at the festival the procurator used to release to the crowd a prisoner, whomever they had petitioned for. Now he had at that time a notorious prisoner called Barabbas, imprisoned with some rioters, one who in the riot had committed murder.

"And the crowd came up, and began to ask that he do for them as he was wont. But Pilate addressed them, saying, 'Do you wish that I release to you the king of the Jews?' For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him up out of envy. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. But Pilate again spoke and said to them, 'What then do you want me to do to the king of the Jews?' But they cried out again, 'Crucify him!' But Pilate said to them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they kept crying out the more, 'Crucify him!'

"And Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, 'You have brought

before me this man, as one who perverts the people; and behold, I upon examining him in your presence have found no guilt in this man as touching those things of which you accuse him. Neither has Herod; for I sent you back to him, and behold, nothing deserving of death has been committed by him. I will therefore chastise him and release him.'

"Then the soldiers of the procurator took Jesus into the praetorium, and gathered together about him the whole cohort. And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet cloak; and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed into his right hand; and bending the knee before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spat on him, and took the reed and kept striking him on the head.

"Pilate therefore again went outside and said to them, 'Behold, I bring him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in him.' Jesus therefore came forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, 'Behold, the man!'

"When, therefore, the chief priests and the attendants saw him, they cried out, saying, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' Now Pilate, seeing that he was doing no good, but rather that a riot was breaking out, took water and washed his hands in sight of the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered and said, 'His blood be on us and on our children. If thou release this man, thou art no friend of Caesar; for everyone who makes himself king sets himself against Caesar.' Pilate therefore, when he heard these words, brought Jesus outside and said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.'" (Matt. 27:15ff; Mark 15:6ff; Luke 23:13ff; John 18:29ff).

WHILE Jesus was absent from Pilate's Court and being led to Herod Antipas for trial, it would seem that Pontius Pilate and his wife, Claudia, were exchanging their views about the divine Prisoner. They are still conversing when, about ten o'clock on Good Friday morning, Herod's messenger enters to inform the Roman Governor how much Herod appreciated the compliment paid him by Pilate. He further informs Pilate that Herod agrees entirely with the decision of the Roman Governor, and that he is now returning the Prisoner, leaving it entirely to him to dispose of the case. And thus Pilate, by virtue of his office, is obliged to resume the unpleasant trial once more.

Meanwhile, in the square beneath the Praetorium a tremendous concourse of people has gathered. For by now the whole city has been aroused and the very air is charged with excitement. In order that more people might see Jesus, now clothed in the white garment of a fool, He is led back by a circuitous and longer route on His return. This also gives the high-priests and the Pharisees, the ministers of the Temple and judges, more time to gather the rabble, arousing them through messengers along the way. All send up a tremendous commotion and fearful clamor as they approach Pilate's palace, desiring to make the Governor realize that they have now come to the end of their patience. This unruly mob alarms Pilate. For at the time of the Pass-over only a year ago, he found himself face to face with a conspiracy among the Galileans, encouraged by the arch-conspirator, Herod. To put down that disturbance, he was obliged to use force, and several of Herod's subjects were killed in the skirmish. Therefore, Pilate gives orders to redouble the guard at once. A special cordon of troops is thrown

around the principal entrance to the palace as the returned Prisoner arrives.

At the foot of the royal staircase, flanked by soldiers, Jesus is left standing alone. On either side are seen members of the Sanhedrin and the high-priests. Behind them other soldiers are seen, scattered amongst the overflowing crowd that has gathered in the courtyard and beyond. Presently, Pilate comes forth from the palace and, as before, takes his position at the head of the stairs. With a motion of the hand, he commands silence. Turning to the priests and Jewish magistrates, he addresses them in rather a stern tone: "You have brought this man before me as an usurper and a conspirator. I have already interrogated him in your presence, and I found no cause of guilt in him. I sent him then to Herod, and, behold! Herod sends him back to me with a confirmation of my decision. Both Herod and I, therefore, agree that he has done nothing worthy of death. I shall punish him and then liberate him."

PILATE'S IRRATIONAL CONDUCT

But where is the logic of Pilate's reasoning? "I find no cause in this man," and yet he adds, "I will chastise him, therefore, and release him." He pronounces the Prisoner to be innocent in one breath, and in the next treats him as though he is guilty. Before, Pilate's sympathy seemed entirely with the Lord. Has Herod's act of returning the Saviour, garbed in the white cloak of a fool, impressed Pilate adversely? Does he, too, look upon Jesus now as a man subject to hallucinations? "Well," perhaps Pilate reasoned, "although I have no intention of allowing these people to

put him to death, perhaps by chastising him, although not too severely, I can administer a lesson to this Visionary and arouse him from his dreams." But is that the reasoning of an impartial judge? No, but rather that of a compromiser, a mere follower of expediency. Pilate hopes thereby to liberate Jesus and to conciliate the Jews with one stroke. But subsequent events proved that he failed in both.

No sooner had Pilate declared his intentions than the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin begin to shake their heads and shrug their shoulders. Pilate realizes at once that half-measures are at an end. He must now outwit them with some other strategy. The Governor recalls that it was the custom to liberate one of the prisoners at the request of the people during the Passover, commemorating the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery under the Egyptians. Hence, calling for one of the worst criminals, Pilate addresses the people as follows: "It is the custom with you to set a prisoner free at the time of the Passover. Which now will you have me liberate, Barabbas, the notorious robber and murderer, or Jesus, who is called Christ, King of the Jews?" For the first time Pilate places Jesus at a disadvantage, putting Him on an equal basis with the worst criminal.

Here another disturbing incident occurs to increase Pilate's anxiety still further. While he pauses, allowing the Sanhedrin time to make up their minds on the subject of their choice, a messenger from his wife rushes towards him, bearing this solemn message: "Have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things in a dream today because of him." (Matt. 27:19). Claudia, Pilate's wife, had during the past few years become greatly interested in the sayings and doings of this new Prophet. During the night she has the grace to see, in a vision, the figure of the divine

Redeemer. Now, as she hears the tumult of the crowd in the plaza below the palace, she looks out and sees the weary and blood-stained face of Christ. She realizes instantly that some terrible thing is taking place. Doubtless, this man whom she has seen in her vision is the victim of some horrible tragedy. Hence, she hastens to inform her husband of her vision, entreating him not to allow himself to become embroiled in this tragic plot.

The Roman Governor is deeply stirred by this message from his wife. He grows nervous as he sees the high-priest and leaders inciting the people. Arising, Pilate demands an answer: "Which, therefore, of these two do you wish that I should set free?" From all sides arises the shrill cry of the mob: "Not this man, but Barabbas! Give us Barabbas! Away with this man and give us Barabbas!" "Oh, the fury of these fanatics!" comments St. Augustine. "They wished to kill Him who raised the dead to life, and to set him free who had killed others!" Indignant at such baseness, and still hoping almost against hope to compel them to set Jesus free, Pilate cries out: "What then do you want me to do to the king of the Jews?" This time their frenzy knows no bounds. They shout back at Pilate in a rage: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Still Pilate stands his ground. He is wavering, but has not yet yielded. For a third time Pilate shouts back: "Why, what evil has this man done? I find no crime deserving of death in him. I will therefore chastise him and release him" (Luke 23:22). Here the crowd rocks and sways with wrath, like so many madmen. It seems as though hell has let loose all its venom and its fury. They throw up their arms in defiance, clenching their fists as the chorus rises to a higher pitch of frenzy. Pilate weakens, and the enemies of Christ know it. He orders Barabbas to be liberated and Jesus to be scourged.

THE SCOURGING

No Roman citizen was ever punished by scourging, only foreigners and slaves. For certain grave faults, especially for crimes against the flesh, the Jewish law prescribed the flagellation, or scourging. But this punishment should never exceed forty blows. With the Roman law, however, the number of blows was not limited. The number and the severity was left to the whims of the judge or the soldiers who dealt the blows. St. Paul underwent this punishment. "Five times," he tells us, "I received forty lashes less one. Thrice I was scourged, once I was stoned" (II Cor. 11:24). Frequently victims were known to die under such flagellation. Many martyrs and young virgins who died for the Faith were compelled to undergo such scourging. St. Agnes and St. Barbara were two such martyrs. This they suffered rather than offer incense to idols. The ministers of the law who carried out this form of punishment were called lictors. They were especially chosen as men of little feeling or sensibility.

The scourge consisted of a short handle, perhaps sixteen inches long, to which was attached a number of strings or wires. At the end of these cords were fastened either knots of bones or pieces of iron or lead. And Jesus, the innocent Prisoner, was sentenced to submit His tender body to this outrageous scourging by these ruffians at the command of Pilate. This torture of being ignominiously disrobed was, without doubt, one of the greatest in all His Sacred Passion. We see now why Jesus, when thinking of this scourging, cried out in the Garden of Olives: "Father, if it be possible, let it pass!" Even we, as after the lapse of so many centuries we reverently contemplate this scene, find it difficult to un-

derstand how our suffering Saviour should be subjected to this agony and ignominy.

But come now with me down to the courtyard of the palace, where each of us may witness the scene about to be enacted. My friends, if the Passion of Jesus can teach us nothing more, it at least tells us this, namely, that none of us really comprehends what divine love actually is. "Behold, Jesus, the Lamb of God. Who taketh away the sins of the world," in the midst of a gang of ruffians like a pack of hounds clamoring for its prey! See that broken column in the center of the courtyard. The crowd is jostling its way there. Jesus is stripped to nakedness in view of the crowd, crying for His Sacred Blood. Now look! The sacred hands that have so often been raised to bless and to heal, are being actually bound with cords, drawing them upward to an iron ring which holds them rigidly in such a position that our Saviour's feet scarcely touch, with their toe-tips, the white marble pavement so soon to be dyed red with His Most Precious Blood.

"Go, lictor, bind the hands of the prisoner! Veil his head and strike him with blows!" Such was the curt command from the Roman judge whenever a prisoner was sentenced to this punishment. Usually six lictors would appear to take their turn in pairs. A shout goes forth from the people, greeting the appearance of the first two strongly built soldiers, stripped to the waist. They run their fingers through the knotted cords, swing them through the air, until down with a thud comes the stroke upon the quivering flesh of the Son of God. On they go, lash after lash, every stroke lapping the flesh and drawing blood, until it is seen streaming down the sacred limbs, pouring itself about the ankles, while the surrounding mob is beside itself drunk with delight. How

long this terrible scene continued, we know not. But we do know that as it was inflicted, not with a view to punishment, but with the object of awakening pity for Jesus, the savage cruelty of it no language can describe. The lictors at last exhausted, Jesus is loosed from the pillar, and sinks to the pavement in a pool of warm blood.

Ah, you votaries of sinful pleasures and amusement, who proclaim so loudly that there is no such thing as sin, you will probably call upon me to have done with this realistic picture, saying: "You are offending every canon of good taste. You are forgetting every rule of fine art and refinement. Pass from this scene of blood which blinds our sight, wounds our hearts, and stings our conscience." But, my friends, I will not have done with this picture of Jesus prostrate there, all broken and bruised from the soles of His feet to the top of His head, lying half-dead in a stream of His Precious Blood, until you come to acknowledge that in the sight before you, you recognize the handiwork of our own sins. And if you insist that this flagellation is meant to awaken the pity of the Jews and spectators, I declare to you it is endured by Jesus Christ rather to create a clean heart in us Christians and every other human creature in the world by our common Redeemer. These cruel bodily pains Jesus suffered to atone for the sins of the flesh. Yes, and that crown of thorns which is so rudely pressed upon His sacred brow, is being worn in reparation for the sins of pride and vanity. Yea, those sacred eyes are blindfolded and that mock sceptre is being placed in His trembling hands, to make atonement for the sins of sight and of touch so frequently indulged in. Here the divine Penitent is offering to heaven His act of reparation for the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.

"Then," continues Holy Scripture, "the soldiers of the procurator took Jesus into the praetorium, and gathered together about him the whole cohort. And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet cloak; and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed into his right hand; and bending the knee before him they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spat on him, and took the reed and kept striking him on the head."

ECCE HOMO!

"Ecce Homo!" "Behold the Man!" As Jesus is led forth, He can exclaim in truth what has been foretold by the prophets: "The whips have beaten Me and there is no sound spot in My body. I sought someone who would console Me, and I found him not. I have become even as a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people. There is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness . . . despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity. . . . Surely He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows, and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted" (Ps. 21; Is. 53, ff). With this sad picture before him, Pilate once more faces the Sanhedrin and people. Surely, he thinks, this sad sight of the Prisoner will now evoke cries of awe and pity from the mob. "Behold," exclaims Pilate pleadingly, "I bring him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in him. Ecce Homo! Behold the Man!"

But no sooner does the mob catch sight of the Saviour with the purple rag and the mock sceptre and crown than there rings clamorously forth through the air the people's

well-schooled cry: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Trembling, Pilate looks on while the gentle eyes of Jesus rest upon the mob below. His sacred lips move not, but His pleading eyes bespeak the sentiments of His crushed Heart. Surely, thinks Pilate, this sad sight will move them to cry out: "Enough, enough!" But, alas, their vengeance knows no bounds. Pilate is at his wits' end. In disgust and disdain, he yells at the mob: "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him," no reason to condemn Him to death. But encouraged by his weakness, they come back at Pilate with an altogether new charge. They drop the charges of sedition and disloyalty to Caesar. The Prisoner has declared Himself God. For this now must He die. Hence there thunders forth this new challenge at Pilate himself: "We have a law and according to the law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

Here, says St. John, Pilate is seized with a great fear. And why this fear? Pilate, as a man well read in literature, knows that Plato had spoken obscurely about one who was to come as the Just One. Aeschylus, the poet, had written of one whom he named the "beloved son of the Father." Virgil, the great Roman poet, had written about some wonderful event foreshadowing the coming of God on earth. The message from Claudia, his wife, about her vision still haunts him. Perhaps this might, after all, be the promised Messiah. Hence, eagerly, Pilate turns to Jesus and says: "Whence art thou?" But now, as with Herod, Jesus is silent and answers not a word. Already at His first interview, Jesus told Pilate that He had descended from heaven. Yet, Pilate had ordered Him to be scourged like a criminal.

CHRIST'S SILENCE BEFORE PILATE

The Saviour's silence angers Pilate. His pride begins to exert itself. So, in angry tone he addresses Jesus further, saying, "Dost thou not speak to me? Dost thou not know that I have power to crucify thee, and that I have power to release thee?" (John 19:10). This pretense of supreme power Jesus cannot allow to be passed over without a challenge. Hence, in defense of His heavenly Father, Jesus answers: "Thou wouldst have no power at all over me were it not given thee from above. Therefore, he who betrayed me to thee has the greater sin."

"He who betrayed me to thee has the greater sin!" How strange these words! But Pilate understands their meaning. The sin of Judas or the high-priest may be greater; yet, Pilate himself, with all his compromises, is likewise guilty of a great sin. Then, the Gospel states, Jesus spoke to the Governor at some length. Whereupon, Pilate makes one more effort to set Him free. Turning towards the angry crowd, Pilate repeats his resolve. "I repeat to you now what I have already told you, I find no cause in this man worthy of death, and I intend to set him free."

The people, headed by the high-priest and magistrates, now threaten to storm the palace. Even the women and children on the roofs of houses across the way have caught the contagion. Defiantly, they shout at Pilate: "If thou release this man, thou art no friend of Caesar; for everyone who makes himself king sets himself against Caesar."

Here is another new charge, one that implies a threat against Pilate's own position as Governor. If they report him to Emperor Tiberius in Rome, Pilate fears that he may

be deposed and exiled in disgrace. This creates a new struggle in Pilate's mind. It is now, as has happened so often since, a battle between God and Caesar, between eternal justice and mere expediency, between absolute truth and vacillating weakness, between the rights of heaven and his own personal, temporal fortune. The struggle is fierce, but it lasts only a moment with Pilate. Trembling with a cowardly emotion, he gives his decision to the people. The Evangelists give in a few words the closing climax of this battle for right and the final triumph of evil, saying: "When Pilate heard these words, wishing to satisfy the people requiring that he might be crucified, their voices prevailed, and Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required, and he released unto them him who for murder and sedition had been cast into prison, but Jesus he delivered up to their will."

However, even as Pilate delivers Jesus over to the Jews, he makes it clear that they should not hold him responsible for the crucifixion of this Prisoner. Upon Pilate's orders, a servant appears with a ewer of water and a basin, bearing on his arm a linen cloth. Pilate washes his hands so that all could see, declaring with a loud voice: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see to it yourselves." This cowardly attempt to shift responsibility only infuriates them all the more. They rail back at the Governor, crying out: "His blood be on us and on our children!" In these words and by this public proclamation, they accept not only for themselves personally, but for the whole Jewish nation, the awful guilt of Deicide. Even Renan, the free-thinker, wrote many centuries later: "If ever a crime was the crime of a whole nation, surely the death of Christ was such a crime."

CONCLUSION

The trial is over. Pilate has retired. Jesus is left in the hands of His enemies. From all sides is heard the triumphant cry of a nation proclaiming, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children!" How tragic the scene! How terribly real and actual it all seems, even to us who reverently, after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, study the trial of Christ! And what is so terrible about it all is this, that it is being reenacted over and over again by cruel people in every age down to our own, with much the same results. Again and again, we hear the same cry go forth: "We have no king but Caesar. We will not have this man to reign over us!" And what has happened to our Lord has been the constant experience of His Bride, the Church, all through the centuries. She has been accused of being disloyal to Caesar, because she accepts and proclaims Christ her King.

My friends, are we not surrounded on all sides by people who, by the lives they lead, the pleasures they seek, the literature in which they delight, the sensuality in which they indulge, the luxuries in which they wallow, and the blasphemies which they utter, proclaim anew to the outer world, with the same cry which swept like a blight from the children of Israel on that first Good Friday, their defiance against the God and Saviour, saying, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children. We have no king but Caesar?" Let us not be misled by these. Rather, let us remain with the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Jesus, with St. John and the other pious followers of Jesus, who were surely somewhere

near the portico of the Praetorium, looking on with sad eyes and tortured souls at all that was transpiring. As true followers of the sorrowful Saviour, we shall promise this day that we will never forget what Jesus endured for us before Annas, before Caiphas, before Herod, and before Pilate. Let us ever live in the shadow of His Sacred Passion and sufferings. Then we, too, will one day enjoy the privilege of seeing Him, not as He looked as a Prisoner in disgrace, but as He really is, our divine Saviour and Redeemer, a glorious God, since the Resurrection.



“And he who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple.”
(p. 126)

- VIII -

VIA DOLOROSA – THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

READING: “Pilate therefore, handed him over to them to be crucified. And so they took Jesus and led him away. And when they had mocked him, they took the purple off him and put his own garments on him, and led him out to crucify him. And as they led him away, they laid hold of a certain Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and upon him they laid the cross to bear it after Jesus. Now there was following him a great crowd of the people, and of women, who were bewailing and lamenting him. But Jesus turning to them said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.’

“Now there were also two other malefactors led to execution with him. And they came to the place called the Place of the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side and Jesus in the center.

“And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ Now in dividing his garments, they cast lots. And the people stood looking on; and the

rulers with them kept sneering at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ, the chosen one of God.' In like manner, the chief priests with the Scribes said in mockery to one another, 'He saved others, himself he cannot save! Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' And they that passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads.

"And Pilate also wrote an inscription and had it put on the cross. And there was written, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS, in Greek and Latin and Hebrew letters.

"Now one of those robbers who were hanged was abusing him, saying, 'If thou art the Christ, save thyself and us!' But the other in answer rebuked him and said, 'Dost not even thou fear God, seeing that thou art under the same sentence? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what our deeds deserved; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said to Jesus, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' And Jesus said to him, 'Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.'

"Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalen. When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, thy son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, thy mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

"Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani?' which translated, is, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Then Jesus said, 'I thirst.' Now there was standing there a vessel full of common wine; and having put a sponge soaked with the wine on a stalk of hyssop, they

put it to his mouth. But Jesus said, 'It is consummated.' And bowing his head, said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,' and saying it, he gave up his spirit." (Matt. 27:31 ff; Mark 15:20ff; Luke 23:26ff; John 19:16ff).

WE HAVE arrived at the final chapter—the closing scenes of our Lord's sorrowful Passion. It is the VIA DOLOROSA to Golgotha, the Sorrowful Way to Calvary, the Hill of Skulls. The trial scene of Jesus before Pontius Pilate has just closed. Pilate is still seated on his throne before the rabble. The cries from the mob still reverberate in his ears; "Crucify him, crucify him! If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend." Pilate yields to the Sanhedrin's unjust demands when hesitatingly he speaks and says: "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." Thereupon Pilate becomes conscience-stricken. He tries to conceal his embarrassment, lest his Roman dignity and position as Governor be further compromised. However, one thing still remains before he can rid himself of this awful incubus which weighs so heavily upon his soul. It still rests with him to pass the FORMAL JUDGMENT. Adjusting his toga, therefore, he leans back, and with feigned dignity pronounces the solemn sentence which is to settle everything: "Ibis ad crucem," "Thou shalt go to the cross!" Such is the brief, though momentous verdict. Then, glancing towards the centurion who stands beside him, and who is to carry out the sentence, he speaks with a voice of command, saying, "I, miles, expedi crucem!" "Go, soldier, bring forth the cross!" And thus is passed the horrible sentence which indicates that all hope of escape has vanished.

This formal judgment was passed between eleven and twelve o'clock in the forenoon. Contrary to the Hebrew and Roman law, the high-priest and Sanhedrin demand that the execution of the Victim shall follow immediately, for fear lest Pilate should remorsefully recall his decision. The crowd grows wild with excitement. In haste and in fury, the Cross, about fifteen feet in length and six feet across the beams, is dragged out into the square. The soldiers take their places. The Jewish priests begin to form the procession. Once more they mock the condemned Prisoner. They take from Him the purple cloak of mockery, and clothe Him with His own cloak, the seamless garment. This was done, says St. Ambrose, in order that, clothed in His own garment, He might, when led forth, be more easily recognized by the populace as the unmasked deceiver who had been acclaimed by their hosannas a few days before.

From the portico into the piazza another band of soldiers comes marching. They are guarding between their ranks two notorious criminals who also have been condemned to die on the cross. They are a pair of brigands, a band of which infested the desert between Palestine and Egypt, and lived by murder and highway robbery (Luke 23:32). All has been arranged with the court, so that these two should likewise die with the greatest of all malefactors, Jesus of Nazareth.

TITLE ON THE CROSS

One of Pilate's soldiers, as was the legal form according to Roman and Hebrew custom, heads the procession, marching towards the place of execution. He carries what is known

as the TITLE. It consisted of a large wooden tablet, covered with plaster, upon which was written the cause of the condemnation. We know this from Suetonius, the Roman historian. This herald at the head of the procession called out the name of the prisoner, the crime and penalty, and challenged all those who heard him to disprove, if they could, the justice of the sentence. The judge in the case alone had the right to inscribe upon the title whatever words he thought might indicate the cause of his sentence. In the case of Jesus, it was the duty of Pilate to carry out this custom. Gloomily, Pilate commanded his soldier, saying, "Write upon that title: 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.'" I.N.R.I. are the initials of these words in Latin. The inscription, however, was written in Hebrew and Greek, as well as Latin. Latin was the legal tongue of the Empire. Hebrew and Greek were the two popular languages spoken by the Jews assembled for the Passover from home and abroad. The Jewish priests later objected to the wording of the inscription. But Pilate replied: "Quod scripsi manet," "What I have written, stands!" All that remained now, was to agree on the place of execution.

According to law, it was not allowed to crucify anyone within the city limits. This had been the law since the time of Moses. The place usually selected was near the city at a point where several roads converged, so that the passers-by might be terrified at the sight of this awful penalty. Golgotha, or Calvary, was the place selected for the execution of Jesus and the two robbers. Here three roads converged, and many other criminals had been crucified on the same hill. For that reason it was also known as the "Hill of Skulls."

BEGINNING OF THE SORROWFUL JOURNEY

Now let us turn to the sad cortege as it leaves the Holy City. The Cross is held up before Jesus, the Condemned. He leans towards it, puts His sacred arms tenderly about it, kisses it lovingly, thus saluting the altar upon which He is soon to offer up the holocaust of love to His Eternal Father for our redemption. He is surrounded by Roman soldiers, and one precedes, carrying the title on a lance, shouting its wording to the crowd. Immediately behind Jesus the two robbers follow, each bearing his cross and guarded by other soldiers. Then follow the judges, high priests and ancients of the people on horseback, with an enormous crowd on foot bringing up the rear. Upon the roofs a great multitude has assembled, watching the procession pass, and adding their curses and blasphemies to the thousands of other voices that are rending the air.

MEETING OF SON AND MOTHER

The trumpet gives the signal, and the march begins. Slowly, slowly, the procession wends its way down the hill from the Praetorium, through cobble-stone streets crowded with spectators. Imagine Jesus, weary and exhausted, disfigured and disgraced, being pushed and jostled, goaded and dragged along! At a crossroads where the crowd is usually dense, the divine Victim stumbles in His weakness, no longer able even to plod over the rough pavement, and falls to the

ground. As He is forced back to His feet, there near the walls of the houses stands a little group, patiently waiting. It is His Blessed Mother, Mary, with a few pious women and companions at her side. Oh, what unspeakable pains and pangs does not that most tender motherly heart then experience! How earnestly does she desire to die instead of Jesus, or at least with Him! And that grief-stricken Jesus, her Son! The sight of His Blessed Mother, meeting Him face to face in so disfigured a state, that look of unspeakable grief upon her face, the tender, compassionate look of love beaming from those affectionate eyes bedimmed with tears, all add to the fatigue and anguish which Jesus has already undergone. It so moves Him from head to foot that the strength of His body again leaves Him, and He totters feebly under the weight of the Cross.

The soldiers and Pharisees see that the suffering Prisoner is rapidly losing strength. But there is no time to be lost, the procession must move on. No free man or citizen dare help carry the Cross without disgracing himself and his family. The soldiers look around. They see a stranger, a man of robust build, who happens along the way. It is Simon of Cyrene, a man with some property near Jerusalem. He tries to pass on, but is unceremoniously forced, either by the soldiers or by the Jews, to carry the Cross.

Once again the trumpet is sounded and the procession advances. The Blessed Mother Mary, her eyes red with weeping, with pallid face and her veil drawn about her, proceeds with the marchers, accompanied by St. John and a few other devout friends. They hear the fierce shouts of the angry populace, which grows ever larger and louder. Mary's breast is filled with terror as she sees the sorrowful figure of Jesus staggering along under His load. Truly could

she, like Jesus, cry out with the Prophet, as she sinks fainting into the arms of her companions: "O, all ye that pass by the way attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow! To whom shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee? For thy grief is great as the sea, and who is there who can comfort thee?" (Lam. 1:12).

VERONICA

We have now reached the lower valley, leaving the Holy City. The procession begins its ascent of the opposite hill towards Calvary, over the road known as "Via Dolorosa," "The Street of Sorrows." Meanwhile, almost unnoticed by the crowd, the heavens begin to take on a menacing appearance. The noon-day sun gives forth a sickly glow. The heat is oppressive and the air stifling. The dust of the streets, raised by the shuffling of the multitude and the galloping to and fro of the horses, makes breathing almost impossible. In addition to His disfigured body, covered with bloody clots and spittle, Jesus is wet with perspiration.

Suddenly a door opens on the left-hand side of the street. Out upon the highway appears the noble figure of a matron. Her face is veiled, but, fearlessly and with resolute step, she makes her way through the crowd. She passes the soldiers, and suddenly kneels at the feet of Jesus. Struck with surprise at this bold act on the part of a woman, the crowd pauses in expectancy. From the folds of her robe she draws forth a linen napkin or towel, and offering it to Jesus she murmurs a prayer: "O my Lord, my Master, make me worthy to wipe Thy sacred face!" Silently, and reverently, Jesus takes, with His left hand, the cloth held up to Him and lays it for an

instant over His bleeding countenance. It is all done so quickly that even the guards have no time to interfere. Veronica (which means "true image"), is the name of this pious woman. She hastens back and faints as she enters the house, kissing and weeping over her kerchief all the while. When she recovers from her swoon, she opens the folds of the linen cloth, and lo, wonder of wonders!—there traced upon the towel are the lineaments, or outlines, of the face of Jesus.

Meanwhile the soldiers on horseback disperse the crowd, and order the procession to move on. By this time, we are told, even the little children take up the fierce cry of their elders against the Master who has loved them so tenderly. We may well imagine what a blow this last proof of desertion brings to the divine and bruised heart of Jesus. But the corruption of the elders makes itself felt always and everywhere, down through the ranks, even to the little ones. For children, after all, are close imitators of what they see. Hence, when the children saw their elders among the crowd filling the air with angry shouts, they imitated them in like manner. Over this sight Jesus is once more overcome, and again He falls under the crushing weight of the Cross. It seems as if the end has suddenly come. Realizing this, the soldiers stoop down and, lifting up the body of the Prisoner, half carry and half drag Him towards Calvary.

And thus Jesus passes out through the gates of the Holy City, never again to enter its unwelcome portals. He has loved it and has wept over it, but now, since all His tenderness has been repaid with abuse, He will go out of it, and the city will see Him no more. Turning back for a last sad look, we find the Praetorium deserted. Pilate sits there, passive and alone, with the vision of the "Ecco Homo" ever

rising before his eyes. The streets of the city are emptied, all crowding after the sad cortege.

THE DAUGHTERS OF JERUSALEM

The procession has now reached the point where three roads converge. The road to the right, leading to the north, connects with Samaria and Galilee, Christ's native province. The road to Calvary, over which Jesus is now led, is quite steep. At the foot of the hill, just as Jesus turns from the main road to begin the ascent, a crowd of kind-hearted women and children have gathered. At the sight of the sad figure of Jesus, bowed with grief and overcome with suffering, these good women begin to weep. Disregarding the rebukes of the guards, they speak to the Saviour words of consolation and of comfort. Jesus pauses for an instant, and turns His tender eyes towards the little group. In His look they read the signs of understanding and gratitude. Then they hear those touching words come from His trembling lips: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." In speaking thus to them, says Bossuet, Jesus meant to speak to the whole world, saying: "It is not sufficient to have compassion upon My sufferings, but you must also show pity to your own souls by repenting of the sins you have committed. For these have caused My suffering."

Then, as He ascends the steep slope of Golgotha, each step becomes a new torture. It is with extreme difficulty that Jesus is able to gather enough strength, even with the assistance of Simon the Cyrenian, to reach the summit of the hill. From the effort comes the terrible reaction. He realizes

that the journey is soon at an end. But before Him He sees the other and greater sufferings that are about to be inflicted. He stands for a moment, His Sacred Heart almost bursting. His head reels, He closes His eyes, and then suddenly every muscle relaxes, and down He falls for the third time to the ground, a limp and crushed figure. Simon of Cyrene is dismissed, for they need his service no longer. Jesus is aroused from His swoon, and roughly set on His feet. Four of the strongest Roman soldiers step forward. They have done the vile work before. Hence they are hardened to the task, and experienced in all its grim reality.

My friends, were it not that our suffering Saviour and Redeemer had endured these horrible pains accompanying such a gruesome death, I would not have the courage to attempt to describe these heart-rending scenes. Rudely taking hold of Jesus, these hardened and experienced soldiers strip Jesus from head to foot, leaving only the loin cloth to cover Him. When they remove the seamless woollen garment adhering closely to His sacred body, all the wounds are again renewed. But this matters little with them. The fresh blood oozing forth from every pore, and coursing down His trembling frame, does not even cause them to flinch for a moment. They roughly throw Jesus upon the Cross, stretching out His twitching hands and feet. They reach for the hammer and large iron nails. They pierce His sacred hands and feet, driving the nails through His tender flesh, and fasten the Victim securely to the Cross. His cries and groans are entirely ignored. He is raised on the Cross. And as it slips into the socket prepared for fastening it in the ground, the lacerations in His hands and feet are further enlarged. Not infrequently on such occasions the limbs were jarred from their sockets.

CRUELTY OF CRUCIFIXION

So cruel was the crucifixion that, as previously stated, its penalty was reserved for and inflicted only on slaves or the worst criminals, the outcasts of society. It was so cruel and shameful that no Roman citizen was ever thus condemned. And among the Hebrews, one who was crucified was called the accursed of God (Deut. 21:23), and brought everlasting disgrace upon his family and all his relations. The crucified was insulted by everyone who passed by. The urchins of the street stoned him. And thus, hour would follow hour in bitterest torture. Before nightfall, soldiers would approach, and with a club break the legs of the victim by striking him over the shins. The posca, a dregged potion, purposely intended to deaden all sensibility, was administered if the victim were not already dead. Thus stupefied, he would hopelessly await the moment that would bring death. Frequently when morning came, death did not always come with it. The traveller who heard the moaning would pass quickly, paying no attention. And when he died, he was often left hanging, food for buzzards and other scavenger birds.

My friends, such were the horrors of the crucifixion! To such a penalty the Son of God was condemned. For three weary hours He hung there, enduring all these insults, all these tortures. Then Longinus, a soldier, stepped forth, and with a lance opened the sacred side of Jesus, piercing His Sacred Heart from which blood and water oozed forth. And He accepted all these horrible sufferings and tortures in order to blot out the sins of men. Truly, could St. John cry out: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

CONCLUSION

Here, as I look at the Saviour upon the Cross, words fail me. I can proceed no further. I must let the Saviour Himself speak from here on. Seven times does He speak to us from the Cross. First, He asks forgiveness from His heavenly Father for all who have offended Him. Then He turns to the repentant thief. He casts one more sad look at His sorrowful Mother at His feet. He grows desperate in His agony, and forsaken, He cries out, "I thirst!" He places His trust in His heavenly Father, bows His head and dies. "Consummatum est!" "It is accomplished!" The work of Redemption is accomplished.

Oh, let us linger for a while at the foot of the Cross. Let us linger with the sorrowful Mother of Jesus, with her sister, Mary of Cleophas, with Salome, Susanna, the Magdalen, Martha, St. John the Apostle, and the few others. Let us also whisper into His ears a few words of consolation and of love. Let us also ask for His forgiveness. Let us pledge Him our loyalty and fidelity henceforth till the day of our death. If we live under the shadow of the Cross, we will, when our own death approaches, find our greatest strength and comfort in Him who died for us. Taking the crucifix into our feeble hands, we can kiss it for the last time, peacefully closing our eyes, and say with Jesus: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." If we live with Christ, we shall also die with Christ.

A. M. D. G.



"O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow
like to my sorrow!" (p. 128)

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IN HONOR OF THE PASSION

PRAYER

O God, who for the redemption of the world didst will to be born amongst men, to be circumcised, to be rejected by the Jews, to be betrayed by the traitor Judas with a kiss, to be bound with cords, to be led to slaughter as an innocent lamb, to be shamelessly exposed to the gaze of Annas, Caiphas, Pilate and Herod, to be accused by false witnesses, to be tormented by scourges and insults, defiled with spitting, crowned with thorns, smitten with blows, struck with a reed blindfolded, stripped of Thy garments, fastened to the Cross with nails, lifted on the Cross, reckoned among thieves, given gall and vinegar to drink and wounded with a spear; do Thou, O Lord, by these Thy most holy sufferings, upon which I unworthily meditate, and by Thy holy Cross and death, deliver me from the pains of hell, and vouchsafe to bring me where Thou didst bring the penitent thief who was crucified with Thee, Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost livest and reignest, one God, world without end. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be (*five times*).

An indulgence of 3 years.

An indulgence of 5 years, if this prayer is recited on Fridays in Lent.

A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, if this prayer is said with devotion daily for an entire month. (S. C. Ind., Aug. 25, 1820; S. P. Ap., Oct. 6, 1933; March 7, 1941).

