

## 138. The Mystery of the Cross

By Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

1. Good Friday is the day which invites us more than any other to “enter into the thicket of the trials and pains ... of the Son of God” (St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, 35, 9), and not only with the abstract consideration of the mind, but also with the practical disposition of the will to accept suffering voluntarily, in order to unite and assimilate ourselves to the Crucified. By suffering with Him, we shall understand His sufferings better and have a better comprehension of His love for us, for “the purest suffering brings with it the most intimate and the purest understanding” (*ibid.*, 36, 12); and “no one feels more deeply in his heart the Passion of Christ than one who has suffered something similar” (*Imitation of Christ* II, 12, 4). With these dispositions let us accompany Our Lord during His last day on earth.

The atrocious martyrdom, which within a few hours will torture His body, has not yet begun, and yet the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives marks one of the most sorrowful moments of His Passion, one which best reveals the bitter sufferings of His soul. His most sacred soul finds itself immersed in inexpressible anguish; it is extreme abandonment and desolation, without the slightest consolation, either from God or from man. The Savior feels the weight of the enormous burden of all the sins of mankind; He, the Innocent One, sees Himself covered with the most execrable crimes, and made, as it were, the enemy of God and the target of the infinite justice which will punish all our wickedness in Him. Of course, as God, Jesus never ceased, even in the most painful moments of His Passion, to be united to His Father; but as man, He felt Himself rejected by Him, “struck by God and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4). This explains the utter anguish of His spirit, much more sorrowful than the dreadful physical sufferings which await Him; explains the cruel agony which made Him sweat blood; explains His complaint, “My soul is sorrowful even unto death” (Matt. 26:38). Whereas before He had so ardently desired His Passion, now that His humanity finds itself facing the hard reality of the fact, deprived of the sensible help of the divinity, which seems not only to withdraw, but even more, to be angry with Him, Jesus groans: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me!” But this anguished cry of human nature is immediately lost in that of the perfect conformity of Christ’s will to the Father’s: “Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39).

2. The Agony in the Garden is followed by the treacherous kiss of Judas, the arrest, the night passed in the interrogations by the high priests and insults from the soldiers who strike Jesus, spit in His face and blindfold Him, while in the outer court, Peter is denying Him. At dawn they commence anew the questionings and accusations; the going back and forth from

one tribunal to another begins — from Caiphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, and back again to Pilate — followed by the horrible scourging and the crowning with thorns. Finally, clothed as a mock king, the Son of God is presented to the mob which cries out: “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas”; for Jesus, the Savior, the crowd can only shout: “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” (Luke 23:18-21). Loaded down with the wood for His torture, Jesus is led away to Calvary where He is crucified between two thieves. These terrible physical and mental sufferings reach their climax when the Savior, in agony on the Cross, utters the cry: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46).

Here again we are in the presence of the inner struggle which tortures the soul of Christ, and now accompanies, with rapid crescendo, the intense increase of His physical sufferings. Jesus had said to His Apostles at the Last Supper, in speaking of His approaching Passion: “Behold, the hour cometh ... [when] you shall be scattered ... and shall leave Me alone; yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me” (John 16:32). Union with the Father is everything to Jesus; it is His life and His strength, His comfort and His joy. If men desert Him, the Father is always with Him, and that is sufficient for Him. This fact gives us a better understanding of the intensity of His sufferings when, in the course of His Passion, the Father withdraws from Him. Yet, even in His agony and death on the Cross, Jesus is always God, and therefore always indissolubly united to the Father. However, He has taken upon Himself the heavy burden of our sins, which stand like a moral barrier between Him and the Father. Although personally united to the Word, His humanity is, by a miracle, deprived of all divine comfort and support, and feels instead the weight of all the malediction due to sin: “Christ,” says St. Paul, “has redeemed us from the curse ... being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). Here we touch the most profound depths of the Passion of Jesus, the most atrocious bitterness which He embraced for our salvation. Yet, even in the midst of such cruel torments, the last words of Jesus are an expression of total abandonment: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit” (Luke 23:46). Thus Jesus, Who willed to taste to the dregs all that is bitter for man in suffering and dying, teaches us to overcome the anxieties and anguish caused in us by sorrow and death, by acts of complete submission to the will of God and trust abandonment into His hands.

*Text taken from [Divine Intimacy](#) (Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 395-397.*