

139. The Victory of the Cross

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

1. As soon as Jesus expired, “the veil of the Temple was torn in two ... the earth quaked, the rocks were rent. And the graves were opened; and many bodies ... arose,” so that those who were present were seized with a great fear and said: “Indeed this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:51-54). Jesus willed to die in complete ignominy, accepting to the very end the mocking and ironic challenges of the soldiers, “If Thou be Christ, save Thyself” (Luke 23:39); but scarcely had He drawn His last breath, when His divinity revealed itself in such a powerful manner that it impressed even those who, up to that moment, had been jeering at Him. Christ’s death began to show itself for what it really was, that is, not a defeat but a victory: the greatest victory that the world would ever witness, the victory over sin, the victory over death, which was the consequence of sin, the victory which restored man to the life of grace.

In offering us the Cross for adoration yesterday, the Church sang: “Behold the wood of the Cross, on which hung the salvation of the world,” and after the mournful alternations of the *Improperia*, or tender reproaches, she intones a hymn of praise in honor of the Cross: “Sing, my tongue, the noble triumph whose trophy is the Cross, and the victory won by the immolation of the Redeemer of the world!” Thus, consideration of the Lord’s sufferings and compassion for them alternate with the hymn of victory. The supreme paradox of death and life, of death and victory, reach a unity in Jesus, in such a way that the first is the cause of the second. St. John of the Cross, describing the agony of Jesus on the Cross, affirms: “He wrought herein the greatest work that He had ever wrought, whether in miracles or in mighty works, during the whole of His life, either upon earth or in Heaven, which was the reconciliation and union of mankind, through grace, with God. And this, as I say, was at the moment and the time when this Lord was most completely annihilated in everything. Annihilated, that is to say, with respect to human reputation; since, when men saw Him die, they mocked Him rather than esteemed Him; and also with respect to nature, since His nature was annihilated when He died; and further with respect to the spiritual consolation and protection of the Father, since at that time He forsook Him” And he concludes: “Let the truly spiritual man understand the mystery of the gate and of the way of Christ, and so become united with God, and let him know that, the more completely he is annihilated for God’s sake, according to these two parts, the sensual and the spiritual, the more completely he is united to God and the greater is the work which he accomplishes” (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, 7, 11).

2. “In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest.” These opening words of Matins of Holy Saturday refer to the peace of the tomb, where, after so many tortures, the sacred Body of Jesus rests. Indeed, this day is meant to be one of recollection in silence and prayer beside the sepulcher of the Lord.

After the death of Jesus, frightened by the earthquake and the darkness, all had left Calvary except the little group of faithful ones: Our Lady and St. John, who were never away from the Cross, and Mary Magdalen and the other pious women who “had followed Jesus from Galilee ministering unto Him” (Matt. 27:55). Although Our Lord had died, they could not tear themselves away from Him, their adored Master, the object of all their love and hope. It was their love that kept them near the lifeless Body. This is a sign of real fidelity, to persevere even in the darkest and most painful moments, when all seems lost, and when a friend, instead of triumphing, is reduced to defeat and profound humiliation. It is easy to be faithful to God when everything goes smoothly, when His cause triumphs; but to be equally faithful in the hour of darkness, when, for a time, He permits evil to get the upper hand, when everything that is good and holy seems to be swept away and irrevocably lost — this is hard, but it is the most authentic proof of real love.

Two disciples, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, took charge of the burial. The sacred Body was taken down from the Cross, wrapped in a sheet with spices, and laid “in a new monument” which Joseph “had hewed out in a rock [for himself]” (Matt. 27:60). Together with Mary, who must certainly have been present at the scene and received the lacerated Body of her divine Son into her arms, let us also draw near to the sacred remains; let us gaze on these wounds, on these bruises, on this Blood, all of which speak so eloquently of Jesus’ love for us. It is true that these wounds are no longer painful, but glorious; and tomorrow, at the Easter dawn, we shall celebrate the great victory which they have won. However, though glorified, they remain and will remain forever the indelible marks of the exceedingly great charity with which Christ loved us.

May this Saturday, a day of transition between the agony of Friday and the glory of the Resurrection, be a day of prayer and recollection near the lifeless Body of Jesus; let us open wide our heart and purify it in His Blood, so that renewed in love and purity, it can vie with the “new sepulcher” in offering the beloved Master a place of peace and rest.

Text taken from [Divine Intimacy](#) (Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 398-400.