

Holy Week – Holy Saturday

Signs following the death of Our Lord. After three hours of agony Jesus died.

The evangelists narrate that the sky was darkened while Our Lord was still hanging on the Cross. And extraordinary events occurred, for it was the Son of God who was to die. *The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom*, (Matt 27:51) signifying that the death of Christ had caused the cult of the old covenant to lapse. Now the pleasing cult offered to God would be through the Humanity of Christ, who is both Priest and Victim.

Good Friday evening was approaching; it was necessary to take the bodies away – they could not remain there on the Sabbath. Before the first star shone in the heavens, the bodies had to be buried. As it was the eve of the Pasch (the day of Preparation for the Passover), *in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the Cross on the Sabbath (for the Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that the legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.* (John 19:31)

Pilate sent some soldiers to break the legs of the two thieves, so that they would die quickly. Jesus was already dead. *But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.* (John 19:33) This event, besides being an historical fact witnessed by St John, has deep significance. St Augustine and Christian tradition see the sacraments and the Church itself flowing from the open breast of Jesus. *There it was that the gate of life was opened, from there the sacraments of the Church flow; without these one does not enter true life.* (St. Augustine) *The Church grows visibly through the power of God in the world. The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus.* (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*) The death of Christ pointed to the supernatural life we were to receive through the Church.

This wound, which strikes one's breast and passes through it, is a result of the superabundance of love, and it is added to all the others. It is a way of expressing what no words can say, Mary understands and suffers. Her Son can no longer feel; she can. Thus to the end, is the prophecy of Simeon fulfilled: *a sword shall pierce your own soul.* (Luke 2:35)

They lower Christ from the Cross with love and veneration. With great care they lay him in the arms of his Mother. Although his Body is all wounded, his countenance is serene and majestic. Slowly and with piety we gaze at Jesus, as the most blessed Virgin would. Not only has he ransomed us from sin and death, but he has taught us to put the will of God above all personal plans, to live detached from everything, to know how to pardon, even when the offender has not repented, to know how to forgive others, to be apostles until the very moment of death, to suffer without sterile lament, to love men although one is suffering because of them ... *Don't hinder the work of the Paraclete: seek union with Christ, so as to be purified, and feel with him the insults, the spitting, the blows, and the thorns, and the weight of the Cross ..., the nails tearing through the flesh, the agony of a forsaken death. And enter through our Lord's open side until you find a refuge there in his wounded heart.* (J. Escriva, *The Way*) There we will find peace. St Bonaventure speaks of this mystical life within the wounds of Christ. *O how good it is to be with Christ crucified! I wish to make three resting places in him. One, in the feet; another, in the hands; the third, perpetually in his precious side. Here I would like to rest and relax, to pray and to sleep. Here I will speak to his heart and he will grant me everything I ask. O, how lovable are the wounds of our Holy Redeemer! ... In them do I live, and from their special dishes do I receive sustenance.* (Prayer of St. Bonaventure)

Let us look at Jesus slowly, and in the intimacy of our hearts say to him: *Kind Jesus, hear my prayer! Hide me within your wounds, and keep me close to you. Defend me from the evil enemy. Call me at my death to the fellowship of your saints, that I may sing your praise with them through all eternity. Amen.* (Roman Missal, *Act of Thanksgiving after the Mass*)