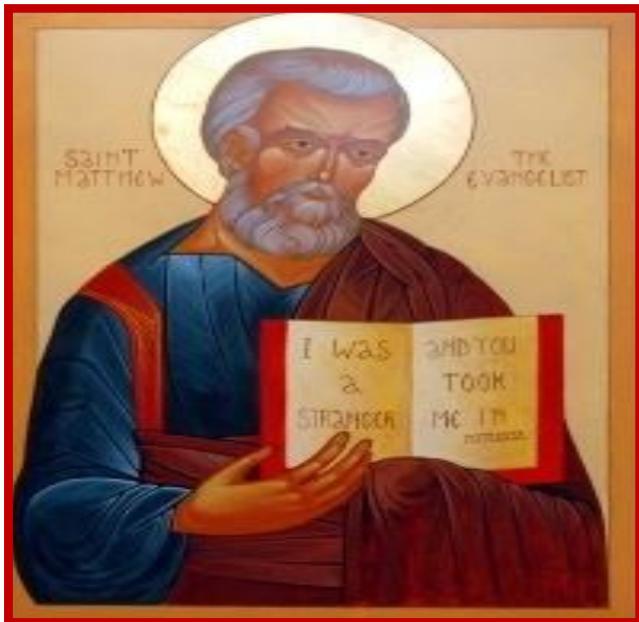


Why savest Thou the few and rejectest the many? For in so doing Thou forsakes Myself; for thou makest the fruit of My suffering to perish.

Tropologically: [Arnold apud] Cyprian (*de Passione*) thinks He spoke thus in order that we should inquire why He was forsaken. "He was forsaken," he says, "that we should not be forsaken; that we should be set free from our sins and eternal death; to manifest His love to us; to display His righteousness and compassion; to draw our love towards Him; lastly, to set before us an example of patience" The way to Heaven is open, but it is arduous and difficult. He wished to precede us with His wondrous example, that the way might not terrify us, but that the stupendous example of God in suffering might urge us on to say exultingly with S. Paul, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

This, then, His fourth word on the Cross, is a consolation to all who are desolate and afflicted. He consoled in this way S. Peter Martyr when falsely accused. The Saint complained to Christ (he was kneeling before the crucifix) that he had kept silence, and not defended him. Christ replied, "What wrong had I done to be crucified for thee on this Cross? Learn patience from Me, for all thy sufferings cannot equal Mine." The Saint on this was so strengthened that he wished to endure still further suffering. And therefore Christ at length established his innocence, and turned all his disgrace into glory (see *Surius*, April 29).



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For the Catholic Church, God's Revelation is found in Sacred Tradition, understood as God's Revealed Word handed down by the Living Teaching Authority established by Christ in the Church. That includes both Written Tradition (Scripture) and Unwritten Tradition received from Christ and handed down Orally by the Apostles and their Successors. The Church founded by Christ on Peter, and only that Church, has been Empowered by Christ to 'Interpret' His Teaching Authoritatively in His Name.

Scripture is *Inspired*; *Inspiration* really means that God Himself is the Chief Author of the Scriptures. He uses a Human Agent, in so marvelous a way that the Human writes what the Holy Spirit wants him to write, does so without Error, yet the Human Writer is Free, and keeps his own Style of Language. It is only because God is *Transcendent* that He can do this - insure Freedom from Error, while leaving the Human Free. To say He is Transcendent means that He is above and beyond all our Human Classifications and Categories.

Matthew writes his gospel account to give us the view of Jesus as the King. He records Jesus' authority in calling the disciples: "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19), and he also records more than any of the others about Jesus' teaching concerning God's kingdom and heavenly rule.

Considered one of the most important Catholic theologians and Bible commentators, Cornelius à Lapide's, S.J. writings on the Bible, created a Scripture Commentary so complete and scholarly that it was practically the universal commentary in use by Catholics for over 400 years. Fr. Lapide's most excellent commentaries have been widely known for successfully combining piety and practicality. Written during the time of the Counter Reformation, it includes plenty of apologetics. His vast knowledge is only equaled by his piety and holiness.

Continuation of Matthew 27: 35-46

Verse 35- *But after they had crucified Him* (see Vulg.). S. Matthew here studies brevity (as usual), and partly shrinks with horror from the crucifixion, not speaking of it as an actual occurrence, but only by the way. It is a doctrine of the faith that Christ was nailed, not merely tied, to the Cross. (See John xx. 25, and Ps. xxii. 16.) But it is possible that ropes were used as well, so says S. Hilary (*Lib. x. de Trin.*). The ropes are to be seen in the Church of Santa Croce at Rome. Nonnus, in his paraphrase of S. John, says that Christ's hands were fastened to the Cross with an iron band as well as by nails. The Cross, he says, was first raised up, and then a huge nail driven through both feet, laid one over the other. Some writers speak of a support for the feet to rest on, or a space hollowed out for the heels; and questions, too, are raised as to the number of the nails, whether three or four (or, as S. Bernard suggests, six), and the direction in which they were driven so as to cause the greatest torture.

He was indeed continually praying on the Cross, and offering Himself wholly to God for man's salvation. But as his death was drawing near He recited this Psalm, which throughout speaks of His Passion, to show that He was the very person there spoken of, and that the Jews might thus learn the reason why He refused to descend from the Cross, viz., because the Father had decreed that He should die for the salvation of men; as David had there foretold.

Calvin says impiously that these were the words of Christ in despair, for that He was obliged to experience the full wrath of God which our sins deserve, and even the sufferings of the lost, of which despair is one. But this blasphemy refutes itself. For if he despaired on the Cross, He sinned most grievously. He therefore did not satisfy but rather enflamed, the wrath of God. And how can it be said that Christ ever despaired, when He said shortly afterwards, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit"? Christ therefore does not cry out as being forsaken by the Godhead and hypostatic union of the Word, nor even by the grace and love of God, but only because the Father did not rescue Him from instant death, nor soothe in any way His cruel sufferings, but permitted Him to endure unmitigated tortures. And all this was to show how bitter was His death on the Cross, the rending asunder of His soul and body with such intense pain as to lead Him to pray in His agony and bloody sweat, "Father, if it be possible," &c. So S. Jerome, S. Chrysostom, Theophylact, and other Fathers; nor do S. Hilary and S. Ambrose mean anything else in saying, "The man cried aloud when dying at being separated from the Godhead." For they mean not a severing of essence and of the hypostatical union, but of support and consolation. For the faith teaches us that though the soul of Christ was separated from His body, yet the Godhead remained as before, hypostatically united both to His soul and His body. Besides this, Christ complained of His desertion, because the Godhead withheld Its succour, solely to keep Him still suffering, and to prolong His life for greater endurances; nay, rather to augment His pain when He saw Himself, though in union with Godhead, enduring such atrocious indignities (see S. L. Justiniani, *de Triumph. Agone Christi, cap. viii.*).

Symbolically: Christ here inquires why He was thus forsaken. What have I done that I should die on this Cross? I am most innocent, the Saint of Saints. He gives His own answer. "Far off from My salvation are the words of My sins" (Ps. xxii. 1), meaning thereby, "The sins of men, whose expiation the Father hath put on Me, these are they which take away My life, and bring Me to the death of the Cross." But some (see Theophylact) consider that He is here speaking not of His own desertion, but of that of the Jewish people.

Origen thinks He is complaining of the fewness of those who will be saved, and the multitude of the lost, in whom the fruit of His Passion comes to nought. Why forsakest Thou My kinsmen in the flesh, for whom I am dying?

one of them afterwards repented. But the Latin Fathers consider that the plural is here, by synecdoche, put for the singular. "Thieves," *i.e.*, "one of the thieves" (as Luke xxiii. 36, "the soldiers," meaning one of them); S. Matthew wishing by the word thieves to point out not so much the persons of the thieves, as the condition of those who insulted Christ; all vying in insulting Him, even the thief at His side. S. Luke (xxiii. 40) gives the story of the other thief (see Comment. *in loc.*).

Here comes in the third word on the Cross, "Woman, behold thy Son," &c. (see John xix. 26, and the notes thereon).

Verse 45- *But from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole earth unto the ninth hour.* From mid-day, *i.e.*, till 3 P.M., which is usually the brightest part of the day. This darkness was supernatural; as though the sun and the whole heavens were veiled in black, as bewailing the ignominious death of Christ their Lord. So S. Jerome and S. Cyprian (*de Bono Patient.*); and S. Chrysostom (*in Catena*), "The creature could not bear the wrong done to its Creator, and the sun withdrew his rays, that he might not see the evil doing of the wicked."

Again, it took place at full moon. It lasted much longer than an ordinary eclipse; it was total, the light of the moon as well as of the sun being withdrawn, the stars being seen, and so on.

Over the whole earth. Of Judæa, say Origen and Maldonatus. Others, more correctly (as S. Chrysostom, Theophylact, and others), over the whole world. Dionysius, the Areopagite, is said to have exclaimed at the time, "Either the God of Nature (or, as otherwise quoted, 'an Unknown God') is steering, or the fabric of the world is being dissolved." He was afterwards converted by S. Paul's preaching Christ at Athens as the Unknown God. "This, then, was a token of Christ's Godhead; for when the sun, the eye of the world, was obscured and dying out, it signified that Christ, its God and Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, was dying on the Cross, and that sun and moon and all the elements were bewailing Him in His agony.

Symbolically: This darkness signified the blinding of the Jews. So S. Chrysostom (*de Cruce*), Darkness is to this very day upon them; but with us night is turned into day. For it is the property of godliness to shine in the darkness; but ungodliness, though in the light, is in darkness still. Night is for believers turned into day, but for unbelievers their very light is darkness. It is said of believers, "Their darkness is no darkness, and their night shall be clear as the day" (Ps. cxxxix. 11); but for unbelievers even the day is turned into night, for "they shall grope for the wall as the blind" (Isa. lx. 10), "they will walk in mid-day as in the night" (Job v. 14).

Verse 46- *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* quoting Ps. xxii. 1. "Sabachthani" is Syriac, not Hebrew.

The anguish of the crucifixion was very great; because the tenderest parts of the body were pierced by the nails, and the whole weight hung from the hands. The pain was lasting Christ hanging on the Cross for three hours. Mystically, the words spoken of Jerusalem (Lam. i. 12) are applicable to Christ. Very great pain, too, was caused by the racking and stretching out of His limbs. S. Catharine of Sienna said she had practically experienced this when she had been made by Christ a partaker of all His sufferings. His bones were able to be counted when He was thus stretched out. It is in the Hebrew, "I will tell all My bones," that is, I am able to do so. But the Vulgate has it, "they counted," since Christ, while suffering such torture, was not able to count them Himself.

He was crucified with the crown of thorns, and between two robbers, as though He were the chief of them; and naked too, after the Roman custom. Some suppose that He was entirely naked, though others consider that this would have been too unseemly before a crowd of both sexes. This, then, was the greatest shame and pain to One who was so pre-eminently modest and chaste. S. Ambrose (in Luke xxiii.) says, "Naked He ascends the Cross. I behold Him naked. Let him who is preparing to conquer the world ascend in like manner, not seeking worldly supports. Adam, who sought to get clothing, was a conquered person. But He who laid aside His garments, and went up on the Cross just as nature had made Him, was a conqueror." "Adam," said Tauler (*Excerc. Vit. Christi, cap. xxxiii.*), "hasted to clothe himself because he had lost his innocence, but Christ was stripped naked because He had preserved His innocence, and needed no other covering." S. Francis, wishing to follow Christ's example, threw himself, when dying, naked on the ground. See notes on S. Matt. v. 3.

S. Flavia, a noble virgin and martyr, when she was exposed naked at the command of the tyrant Manucha, to make her deny Christ, said, "I am ready to endure not merely the stripping of my body, but also the fire and the sword, for Him who was willing to suffer all this for me" (see *Acta S. Placidij, art. 5*).

It is generally thought that Christ was nailed to the Cross when lying on the ground, as was the case with those who carried their own cross. S. Anselm, S. Laur. Justiniani, and others hold this view; S. Bonaventura, Lipsius, and others, the contrary, which is supported by the text (Cant. vii. 8), "I will go up to the palm-tree," on which passage see the notes. But it is quite an open question.

But why was Christ crucified rather than put to death in any other way? The obvious reason was, that the Jews wished to inflict on Him a most ignominious death, and thus bring discredit on His name and followers. They wished Him also to bear the punishment which was due to Barabbas, whom they preferred before Him. But on God's part the reason was to save by the foolishness of the Cross those that believed (see 1 Cor. ii. 23).

Besides which, victims of old time were lifted up as offerings, and afterwards burnt. And so, too, Christ, who offered Himself as a burnt-offering for our sins, was raised up on the Cross, and burnt and consumed there, not so much with pain as with love for men; just as the paschal lamb was stretched on the spit in the form of a cross, and then roasted.

There were various moral causes on the part of Christ and of men. 1st. That as Adam and Eve sinned by stretching forth their hands to the forbidden tree, so Christ might atone for their sin by stretching forth His hands to the wood of the Cross (so Augustine in *Append. Serm. de Diversis* iv.). Whence the Church sings, "By a tree we were made slaves, and by the holy cross have we been set free" (in the Office for Sept. 14); and "that life might spring from that from which death arose, and that he who conquered by the tree might be conquered by the tree." And S. Greg. Naz. (*in Orat. de Sepsio*), "We are by the tree of disgrace brought back to the tree of life which we had lost." And S. Ambrose (in Luke iv.), "Death by the tree, life by the cross." Nay, Christ Himself says, "I raised thee up under the apple-tree; there was thy mother defiled, there was she defiled that bare thee." The Cross, again, is the remedy and expiation of the concupiscence which came from Adam's sin, itself the fount and origin of all sins. Christ therefore teaches us by the pattern of His Cross continually to crucify and mortify our evil affections, if we wish to avoid sin and save our souls (S. Ath. *de Incarn. Verbi*).

2d. That by hanging between Heaven and earth He might reconcile those in Heaven and those on earth. So S. Ambrose (in *Luc. xxiii.*), "That He might conquer not for Himself only, but for all, He extended His arms on the Cross to draw all things to Himself, to free from the bands of death, raise aloft by the balances of faith, and associate with things in Heaven the things that before were earthly." So too [Arnoldus apud] Cyprian, "I see Thee victorious over sufferings, with uplifted hands triumphing over Amalek, bearing up into the heavens the standard of Thy victory, and raising up for those below a ladder of ascent to the Father."

Hence S. Jerome teaches that Christ on the Cross embraces the four quarters of the world with its four arms. In its very shape does it not resemble the four quarters? The east shines from the top, at the right is the north, the south on the left, the west firmly planted beneath His feet. Whence the Apostle says, "that we may know the height and breadth, and length and depth." Birds fly in the form of a cross; we swim or pray in the same form. The yards of a ship resemble a cross. And S. Greg. Naz. says (*Carm. de Virg.*),—

"For stretching forth to earth's remotest bounds
His sacred limbs, He brought the human race
From every clime, and gathering them in one,
He placed them in the very arms of God."

As Christ said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth," &c.

only. S. Jerome calls this promise of theirs a "fraudulent one; for which is greater, to descend when alive from the Cross, or to rise again from the grave? He rose again, and ye believed not, and were He even to descend from the Cross, ye would, in like manner, believe not." Just as heretics now say, We would believe the saints if they wrought miracles; but when their miracles are adduced, they cavil at them as pretended or imaginary.

Verse 43- *He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him, if He will have Him* (Arab., if He loved Him), *for He said, I am the Son of God*. They used the very words of David (Ps. xxii. 8), thus testifying that they were the very persons who were foretold, and that Jesus was the true Messiah, for the whole Psalm speaks of Him. When a man is in the agony of death, all human hope is gone. Confidence in God alone remains, and of this, His last stay, they try to deprive Him. Thou hast vainly put Thy trust in God. Thou hast said falsely that Thou art the Son of God. If He loved Thee, He would set Thee free. But as He will not, Thou art clearly not His Son, but an odious impostor. Thus do they revile and seek to drive Him to despair, as the devil who assails men in their last agony. But how fallacious was their argument! For God, as specially loving Christ, wished Him to die on the Cross, that He might afterwards glorify Him in His resurrection, and by Him save many souls. Now Christ knew all this. He heeded not their revilings, but fixed all His hope on God, and thereby gained from Him both of these great ends. He poured forth accordingly, after all these insults, fresh acts of confidence in God, teaching us to do the like. "Thou art He that took Me out of My mother's womb," &c. (Ps. xxii. 10). And so, too, the Martyrs used to say that God would not deliver them, in order that He might give them a better life, and the crown of martyrdom.

The Wise Man, speaking in their person, foretold all these insults (Wisd. ii. 13), and then added, "Such thoughts had they, and were in error," &c.

Tropologically: Sinners utter reproaches against Christ when they dishonour Him by their sins. S. Bernard (*Rhythm on Passion*) makes Him thus tenderly appeal to them:

"Tis I who die for thee, to thee who cry,
Thee I exhort on Cross uplifted high;
'Tis I who bare for thee, and open wide
The cruel spear-wound in My sacred side;
My inward and My outward pains are great,
But sadder far to find thee thus ingrate."

Zechariah (xiii. 6) speaks of His being wounded in the house of His friends.

Verse 44- *The thieves also which were crucified with Him uttered against Him the like reproach*. The Greek Fathers, and S. Hilary among the Latin's, think it probable that both the thieves blasphemed Christ at first, but that

He should descend from the Cross, if He be the King of Israel, and not rather go up on it? Hast thou, then, so entirely forgotten, O Jew, that 'the Lord hath reigned from the tree,' as to say, 'He is not King, because He remains on it.' Nay, rather, because He is the King of Israel let Him not abandon the royal title, let Him not lay down the rod of empire, for His government is upon His shoulder. If Pilate hath written what he hath written, shall not Christ complete that which He hath begun?" He goes on to say, "This is clearly the craft of the serpent, the invention of spiritual wickedness. The evil one knew His zeal for the salvation of that people, and therefore most maliciously did he teach these blasphemers to say, 'Let Him descend, and we will believe,' as though there were now no obstacle to His descending, since He so earnestly desired that they should believe. But He, as knowing all hearts, is not moved by their worthless profession. For their malicious suggestion tended not only to their unbelief, but to our own utter loss of faith in Him. For if we read, 'Perfect are all the works of God' (Deut. xxxii. 14), how could we even believe in Him as God if He had left the work of salvation unfinished?" He adds a further reason, "To give him no opportunity of stealing from us our perseverance, which alone is crowned; and that preachers should not be silenced when they exhort the feeble-minded not to abandon their post. For this would be the sure result if they were able to reply that Christ had abandoned His.

Verse 42- *Let Him come down from the cross.*

Christ, though able to do so, was unwilling to descend when thus taunted, because it was the Father's command that He should die on the Cross for our redemption. He despised, therefore, their reproaches, to teach us to do the same. So Theophylact (on Mark xv.) observes, "Had He been willing to descend, He would not have ascended at all. But knowing that men were to be saved by this means, He submitted to be crucified." "He wished not," said Origen, "to do any unworthy act, because He was jested at, or to do their bidding against reason and due order." And S. Augustine (*Tract. xxxvii. an S. John*), "Because He was teaching patience, He deferred a display of His power. For had He descended, it would seem as though He had given way to their cutting reproaches." And again, "He deferred the exercise of His power, because He wished not to descend from the Cross, though able to rise from the grave. But yet He manifested His compassion, for while hanging on the Cross He said, 'Father, forgive them,' &c."

Lastly, S. Gregory (*Hom. xxi. in Evang.*) says, "Had He then come down from the Cross, as yielding to their insults, He would not have exhibited the virtue of patience. But He waited awhile, He endured their reproaches and derision, He maintained His patience, He deferred their astonishment, and though He had refused to descend from the Cross, yet He rose from the tomb. And this, indeed, was a much greater matter; greater, indeed, to destroy death by rising again, than to save life by descending from the Cross."

And we will believe Him to be the Messiah. They spake falsely, for they who believed Him not when He raised others, would assuredly not have believed Him had He freed Himself from death. They should have said that He had descended in appearance

S. Athanasius (*de Incarn. Verbi*) says, "If He came to bear our sins and curse, how could He have done so but by taking on Himself an execrable death? But the Cross is that very death, as it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree'" (Deut. xxi. 25; Gal. iii. 13).

Besides this, all kinds of suffering concur in the Cross, and Christ embraced them all in His own, to set the martyrs an example of every kind of endurance. For the Cross wounds the hands and feet as a sword, it stretches out the body as a rack, lacerates it as a hoof, mangles it as a beast, burns and tortures it as a flame, and kills the whole man, as it were, with a slow fire. He experienced, then, the torments of all the Martyrs, and brought them before Himself, and was evil-entreated for their sakes, that He might obtain for all of them the power of over-coming them. As the blessed Laurence Justiniani says (*de Triumph. Christi Agone, cap. xix.*), "He was stoned in S. Stephen, burnt in S. Laurence, and bore the special sufferings of each several Martyr."

S. Augustine says further (*Serm. lxxix. de Diversis*), "He refused to be stoned, or smitten with the sword, because we cannot always carry about stones or swords to defend ourselves. But He chose the Cross, which is made with a slight motion of the hand, and we are protected thereby against the craft of the enemy." As S. Paul says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse," &c. (Gal. iii. 13).

S. Anselm (in Phil. ii.) says, "He chose the worst kind of death, that He might overcome all death." As S. Augustine says (in Ps. cxl.), "That His disciples should not only not fear death itself, but not even this kind of death." And (*de Ag. Christi, cap. xi.*), "Fear not insults, and crosses, and death, for if they really were hurtful to men, the man whom the Son of God took upon Him would not have suffered them" (see S. Thomas, Par. iii. *Quæst. 48, art. 4*).

S. Athanasius (*de Incarn. Verb.*) says, "The Lord came to cast down the devil, to purify the air, and to make for us a way to Heaven." It was therefore requisite for Him to be crucified in the air (see S. Chrysost. *de Cruce*). S. Thomas (*par. iii. Quæst. 46, art. 4*) gives many other reasons. Lastly, S. Basil (*Hom. de Humil.*) says, "The devil was crucified in Him whom he hoped to crucify, and was put to death in Him whom he had hoped to destroy." And S. Leo (*Serm. x. de Pass.*), "The nails of Christ pierced the devil with continuous wounds, and the suffering of His holy limbs was the destruction of the powers of the enemy."

Moreover, in the Cross that ancient reading of Ps. xcvi. was made good, "God hath reigned from the tree;" for, as S. Ambrose says (in Luke xxiii.), "though He was on the Cross, yet He shone above the cross with royal majesty." And as S. Augustine says, "He subdued the world not by the sword, but by the tree" (*Serm. 21, Ben.*). The Cross was the triumphal car of

Christ, in which He triumphed over the devil, sin, death, and hell. S. Ambrose accordingly calls it “the chariot of the Conqueror, and the triumphal Cross.”

The Cross is said to have been made of the cypress, cedar, palm, and olive:—

“Cedar the trunk, tall cypress holds His frame,
Palm clasps His hands, and olive boasts His name.”

(Dr. LITTLEDALE’S Version in *Cant.* vii. 8.)

For Christ was on the Cross exalted as a cedar, beautiful as the leafy cypress, poured forth the oil of grace as the olive, triumphed over death as the victorious palm. So says [Arnold. apud] S. Cyprian, “Thou hast gone up unto the palm tree, because the wood of thy Cross foretold Thy triumph over the devil, Thy victory over principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickednesses,” &c.

In short, God willed the Cross to be the price of our redemption, a book of heavenly wisdom, a mirror of every virtue and perfection. The book, I say, of the wisdom of God; for in the sufferings of the Cross Christ set forth His supreme love for man, for whom He was so cruelly and ignominiously crucified; the heinousness of mortal sin, which could not be atoned for in any other way; the awfulness of hell-torments (for if God punished so heavily the sins of others in Christ His Son, how will He not punish in hell-fire the personal guilt of sinners themselves?); the value of each single soul, for which so great a price has been paid; the care which should be had for the salvation of souls, lest the Blood of Christ should be shed for them in vain; the great happiness in store for the blessed, as having been purchased by Christ on the Cross. Rightly, therefore, S. Augustine says (*Tract.* cxix. in *S. John*), “The tree on which were fastened the limbs of the sufferer was the seat also of the Master and Teacher.”

It is also the mirror of all virtue and perfection, for Christ on the Cross exhibited humility, poverty, patience, fortitude, constancy, mortification, charity, and all other virtues in their highest perfection. Look on Him, therefore, O Christian, and live “according to the pattern showed thee in the Mount” (Exod. xxv. 40). This, too, is the teaching of the Apostle (Eph. iii. 17), “That ye being rooted and grounded in love,” &c. And accordingly the Martyrs strengthened themselves to bear all their sufferings by meditating on the Cross of Christ. As, *e.g.*, S. Felicitas, S. Ignatius (whose saying it was, “Jesus, My Love, is crucified”), the Brothers Marcus and Marcellinus (who said that “they were never so glad at a feast as in enduring this for Christ’s sake; we have now begun to be fixed in the love of the Cross, may He permit us to suffer as long as we are clothed in this corruptible body”); and, among others, the Martyrs of Japan. S. Francis, too, counted himself happy in receiving the Stigmata, and being thus conformed to Christ crucified. Those in “religion” should also rejoice, as having been crucified with Christ by their three vows, which are, as it were, three nails they have taken to bear for Christ’s sake (see *Pintutius apud Cassian, lib. iv. de Instit. Renunc. cap. 34, &c.*). In a word, how holy, tender, and true was that couplet of S. Francis de Sales—

their chief and leader, exactly as the Jews wished, in order to dishonour Him. But God overthrew and turned back on them all their artifices. For, as S. Chrysostom says, “The devil wished to hide the matter, but could not.” For though three were crucified, Jesus only was the distinguished one, to show that all proceeded from His power; for the miracles which took place were attributed to no one but Jesus. Thus were the devices of the devil frustrated, and recoiled on his own head; for even of these two one was saved. Thus, then, so far from marring the glory of the Cross, he greatly increased it. For it was as great a matter for the thief to be converted on the Cross, and to enter Paradise, as for the rocks to be rent.

Symbolically: Christ between the thieves represents the last judgment, with the elect on his right hand and the wicked on His left. So S. Ambrose (in Luke xxiii.); and S. Augustine (*Tract.* xxxi. in *S. John*) says, “The Cross, mark it well, was a judgment seat, for the judge, being between them, he who believed was set free, the other was condemned, signifying the judgment of the quick and dead.”

Verse 39- *And they that passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads.* All their revilings and insults were blasphemies, as being against the Son of God. “They blasphemed the Holy One of Israel,” Isa. i. 4, and Ps. xxii. 8. This was a greater torment even than the crucifixion. Whence it is said (Ecclus. vii. 11), “Laugh not at a man in the bitterness of his soul.” And Christ complains (Ps. lxxix. 26), “They persecute Him whom Thou hast smitten, and added to the pain of My wounds;” and (Ps. xxii. 13), “They gaped upon Me,” &c., so great was their cruelty.

Verse 40- *And saying, Ah! Thou that destroyest the temple of God.* The word “Ah!” is a term of reproach. Shame on Thee for boasting! Thou canst destroy the temple of God and build it up in three days! Show that Thou canst do it by setting Thyself free from the cross. If Thou canst not do this small matter, how canst Thou do that greater work on the temple, that vast building?

Verse 41- *Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said.* These were more fierce than the people against Christ, for they jest at His miracles, as though wrought not by the power of God, but by Beelzebub; or certainly as not real, but imaginary. For had they been wrought by God, He would certainly have delivered Him from the Cross. But His not doing it was a sign that He was an impostor. “For they wished Him to die as a boastful and arrogant deceiver,” says S. Chrysostom, “and to be reviled in the sight of all men,” that they might thus utterly stamp out His name and sect, so that no one might afterwards follow his teaching reverence and preach Him as the Messiah.

If Thou be the King of Israel. The King of the Jews, that is, the Messiah. “What is the connection here?” says S. Bernard (*Serm.* i. in *Pasch.*); “that

Symbolically: [Pseudo-]Athanasius says, "They divided His garments into four parts, because He wore them for the sins of the four quarters of the world. And when the Baptist saw Him clothed therein, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.'"

Verse 36- *And sitting down they watched Him there.* They watched Him lest His disciples should take Him away, or lest He should miraculously descend. But in the Divine counsels it was for another purpose, which they knew not. For, as S. Jerome says, "The watchfulness of the soldiers and of the priests was for our benefit, as manifesting more fully the power of His resurrection." For they saw Him dying on the Cross, and after He had been seen again alive, would be obliged to confess that He had risen by Divine power.

Verse 37- *And set up over His head His case (causam) written (Syr. the occasion of His death), This is the King of the Jews.* They put up a board inscribed with the reason of His crucifixion, that He had set up to be a King. And, consequently, the chief priests suggested that Pilate should not write, "The King of the Jews, but that He said, I am the King of the Jews" (John xix 21). Pilate refused, for he and the Jews meant the same thing. But God guided his hand, and he wrote, in another and truer sense, "This is the King of the Jews," *i.e.*, the Messiah or Christ. This inscription, then, conferred on Christ the highest honour, for it set forth not only His innocence, but also His dignity, that He was indeed the very Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It therefore convicts and condemns the Jews as His murderers, since it was they who compelled Pilate to crucify Him. Pilate, then, by this very title reproaches them with it, avenges himself on them for their obstinate importunity, and holds them up to general infamy. For he knew well that Jesus was the Messiah, the desire and expectation of all people. Hence Origen says, "This title adorns the head of Jesus as a crown." And Bede, dwelling on the words "over His head," says, "Though He was in the weakness of a man suffering for us on the Cross, yet did He shine forth with regal majesty above the Cross." For it was made known that He was even now beginning to "reign from the tree." Pilate accordingly refused to alter the title. And by this is signified, mystically, that while the Jews remained in their obstinate unbelief, Gentiles, such as Pilate, would acknowledge and worship Him as their King and Saviour.

Observe, 1. A title, declaring the cause of their death, used to be placed over the head of malefactors. It is hence inferred that the cross was not T-shaped, but with an upper limb to carry the title.

2. No one Evangelist fully sets out the title; but on comparing them all, it is concluded to have been, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

This title still exists in the Church of S. Croce at Rome, though much mutilated. Bosius (*de Cruce Triumph.* i. 11) gives an exact copy of it as it was when he wrote.

Verse 38- *Then were there crucified (with the like spikes and nails, says Nonnus, on John xix. 19) two thieves, one on the right hand and another on the left.* The cross was the punishment of such criminals, and Christ, as placed between them, seemed to be

"Or love or madness slew Thee, Saviour mine:
Ours was the madness, Lord; the love was Thine!"

But, next, on what day was Christ crucified? I answer, on March 25, the day of His conception, on which day S. Dismas, the penitent thief, is commemorated. So say, too, S. Augustine (*de Civ. lib. xviii. ad fin.*), S. Chrysostom, Tertullian, S. Thomas, and others, whom Suarez follows (*par. iii. disp. xl. sect. 5, ad fin.*). This was the completion of His thirty-fourth year, the day, too of the sacrifice of Isaac, and the passage of the Red Sea (both eminent types of Christ on the Cross), and of the victory of Michael the Archangel. Hence it is inferred that the world and the angels were created on the same day, and that they began from the very first to war with each other.

The hour was mid-day. "The sixth hour," says S. John (xix. 14), *i.e.*, from sunrise. S. Mark says "the third hour" (xv. 25), meaning the end of the third and the beginning of the sixth; for these hours with the Jews and Romans contained three of ours. S. Mark clearly means this when he says (ver. 33), "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land." Theophylact speaks of the fitness of this: "Man was created on the sixth day, and on the sixth hour he ate of the tree. At the same hour that the Lord created man, did He heal him after his fall. On the sixth day, and on the sixth hour, was Christ nailed to the Cross." Bede, among the Latin's, takes the same view. "At the very hour when Adam brought death into the world did the second Adam by His dying destroy death."

Many suppose that Adam was created on the same day of the year, and ate the forbidden fruit at the same hour, when Christ expiated his sin on the Cross. Tertullian (*lib. i. contra Marcion*) gives it in verse-

"Twas on the day and place where Adam fell,
As years rolled on the mighty athlete came
And battle gave, where stood th' accursed tree;
Stretched forth His hands, sought pain, despising praise,
And triumphed over death."

Procopius says (in Gen. iii.), "It was at the same hour in which Adam ate of the tree."

But, observe, He was crucified with His back to Jerusalem, as though He were its enemy, and unworthy to look on it; but in truth, as being about to reject the Jews, and choose the Gentiles. He thus looked on the west (Rome and Italy). Christians accordingly, by Apostolic usage, pray towards the east, as if looking at Christ crucified; and as the Crucifix in a Church looks west-ward, so must they who look towards and adore it necessarily look eastward. (See S. J. Damasc. *de Fide*, iv. 13; S. Jerome, &c.) Jeremiah

prophesied this (xviii. 17), "I will show them the back," &c.; and David (Ps. lxi. 7), "His eyes look upon the Gentiles."

S. Bridget speaks of the details of the Crucifixion as revealed to her by Christ (Rev. vii. 15) and by the Blessed Virgin (Rev. i. 10).

To conclude, Lactantius (iv. 26) says, "Since he who is hung upon a cross is raised high above all about him, the Cross was chosen to signify that He would be raised so high that all nations would flock together to acknowledge and adore Him," &c. He, therefore, stretched forth His hands, and compassed the world, to show that from the rising to the setting sun a mighty people from all languages and tribes would come under His wings, and receive on their brows that noblest of all signs. On other points relating to the Cross, its various forms, its oracular answers, &c., see Gretser, i. 29 *seq.*; S. Thomas, *par.* iii. Q. 46; and Suarez *in loc.* On the Moral Cross, *i.e.*, the patient, resolute, and firm endurance of all tribulations, see Gretser, *lib.* iv. *de Cruce*.

Tropologically: S. Chrysostom (*Hom. de Cruce*) thus recounts its praises: "It is the hope of Christians, the resurrection of the dead, the leader of the blind, the way to those in despair. It is the staff of the lame, the consolation of the poor, the restrainer of the rich, the destruction of the proud. It is the punishment of evil-livers, the triumph over evil spirits, the victory over the devil. It is the guide of the young, the support of the destitute, the pilot to those at sea, the harbour of those in peril, the bulwark of the besieged, the father of orphans, the defender of widows, the counsellor of the righteous, the rest of the troubled, the guardian of the young, the head of men, the closing act of the old." And so on at great length. See, too, S. Ephr. *de Cruce*; and S. J. Damasc. iv. 12.

Seven holy affections (especially) should be excited by meditating on Christ crucified, —compassion, compunction, gratitude, imitation, hope, admiration, love and charity.

Here comes in from S. Luke xxiii. 34 our Lord's first word on the Cross, "Father, forgive them," &c. He forgets entirely the pains and injuries He had received, and, kindled with the glow of charity, prayed for their forgiveness. And He was "heard for His reverence" (Heb. v. 7). For many repented at S. Peter's preaching, and were converted to Christ at Pentecost. He Himself taught us to pray for our persecutors, to do good to those who do us wrong, and to overcome evil with good. S. Stephen, too, imitated His example (Acts vii. 59). "They know not what they do." They know not I am the Christ the Son of God, for else they would not dare to commit this monstrous sacrilege, the murder of God. They know not that I am the Saviour of the world, and that I am dying for their salvation. "So does the gentleness and tenderness of Christ triumph over the cruelty and malice of the Jews" (*de Passione apud S. Cyprian*).

The flint is the emblem of the love of our enemies, and has this motto, "Fire comes from flint, but not without a blow." The flint is popularly called a "living stone" from the living fire within. The flint, then, here is Christ, the corner-stone. For He poured forth on the Cross the latent fire of His Godhead and His boundless charity. But yet not without a blow, for it was while smitten by His persecutors that He prayed for

them so ardently. He had Himself said before, "I came to send fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Luke xii. 49). Let the Christian, then, imitate Christ, and make himself a flint, which is full of fire itself, and ignites others; and when he is wrongfully smitten, let him shoot forth sparks of Divine love, as Christ did against His smiters.

Verse 35 (Continued)- *They parted His garments, casting lots.*

S. John relates this more fully (xix. 23). S. Cyril observes on this, "They claim the garments as being theirs by the law of inheritance, as the reward for their services." S. Chrysostom says also, "This was generally done in the case of mean and utterly destitute criminals." And again, "They part those garments wherewith miracles were wrought. But at that time they wrought none since Christ did not display His unspeakable power." It was a great affront and distress to Christ to see His garments insolently torn by the soldiers before His very eyes, and divided by casting lots. But He doubtless wished to die and suffer for us in the utmost poverty, in nakedness and disgrace, and to lay aside not merely His garments, but also His body and His life; that so His ignominy might clothe and hide the ignominy both of our and Adam's nakedness, and restore to us thereby the garments of immortality; "that He might clothe us with immortality and life" ([Pseudo-] Athanasius, *de Cruce*).

Tropologically: He would teach us to strip off the superfluities of this world.

Now, here observe Christ had a coat without seam. It was a kind of under-garment, worn next to the body, says Euthymius. And he adds, child by the Blessed Virgin. If so, it appears to have grown with His growth, like the garments of the Hebrews in the wilderness. It is religiously preserved, and is to be seen at Treves.

Symbolically: [Pseudo-]Athanasius says, This coat was without seam, "that the Jews might believe who and whence He was who wore it; that He was the Word, who came not from earth, but from Heaven; that He was the inseparable Word of the Father; and that when made man He had a body fashioned of the Virgin alone by the grace of the Spirit." And again, "This was not their doing, but that of the Saviour as He hung on the Cross. He spoiled principalities, and led the devil captive, and terrified the soldiers so that they rent not the coat, but that as long as it remained it might be a standing testimony against the Jews. For the veil was rent, but not the coat, no not even by the soldiers, but remained entire. For the Gospel ever remains entire when the shadows pass away." The soldiers rent Christ's other garments, and divided them into four parts for the four soldiers who crucified Him, and they again cast lots what each should take. It is supposed He had three garments, the stainless coat, another one over it like a *soutane*, and the upper coat, which covered the whole body.