

Jesus Lying On The Straw

From The Incarnation, Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ by Saint Alphonsus Marie de Liguori

Jesus is born in the stable at Bethlehem. His poor Mother has neither wool nor down to make a bed for the tender Infant. What does she do, then? She gathers together a small handful of straw into the manger, and puts it there for Him to lie on: And she laid Him in the manger?

But, O my God, how hard and painful is this bed for an infant just born; the limbs of a babe are so delicate, and especially the limbs of Jesus, which were formed by the Holy Spirit with a special delicacy, in order that they might be the more sensible to suffering: A body Thou hast fitted to Me?

Wherefore the hardness of such a bed must have caused Him excessive pain,--pain and shame; for what child, even of the lowest of the people, is ever laid on straw as soon as he is born? Straw is only a fit bed for beasts; and yet the Son of God had none other on earth than a bed of miserable straw!

Saint Francis of Assisi heard one day as he sat at table these words of the Gospel: And laid Him in the manger; and exclaimed, "What? my Lord was laid on the straw, and shall I continue to sit?" And thus he arose from his seat, threw himself on the ground, and there finished his scanty meal, mingling it with tears of tenderness as he contemplated the sufferings that the Infant Jesus endured whilst he lay on the straw.

But why did Mary, who had so earnestly desired the birth of this Son--why did she, who loved Him so much, allow Him to lie and suffer on this hard bed, instead of keeping Him in her arms? This is a mystery, says Saint Thomas of Villanova: "Nor would she have laid him in such a place, unless there had been some great mystery in it."

This great mystery has been explained by many in different ways, but the most pleasing explanation to me is that of Saint Peter Damian: Jesus wished as soon as He was born to be placed on the straw, in order to teach us the mortification of our senses: "He laid down the law of martyrdom."

The world had been lost by sensual pleasures; through them had Adam and multitudes of his descendants till then been lost. The Eternal Word came from heaven to teach us the love of suffering; and He began as a child to teach it to us by choosing for Himself the most acute sufferings that an infant can endure. It was, therefore, He Himself who inspired His Mother to cease from holding Him in her tender arms, and to replace Him on the hard bed, that He might feel the more cold of the cave and the pricking of this rough straw.

Affections and Prayers

O Lover of souls, O my loving Redeemer! is not, then, the sorrowful Passion that awaits Thee, and the bitter death that is prepared for Thee on the cross, sufficient, but Thou must, even from the commencement of Thy life, even from Thy infancy, begin to suffer?

Yes, because even as an infant Thou wouldst begin to be my Redeemer, and to satisfy the divine justice for my sins. Thou didst choose a bed of straw to deliver me from the fire of hell, into which I have so many times deserved to be cast. Thou didst cry and mourn on this bed of straw to obtain for me pardon from Thy Father. Oh, how these Thy tears afflict and yet console me! They afflict me from compassion at seeing Thee, an Innocent babe, suffering so much for sins not Thy own; but they console me, because Thy sufferings assure me of my salvation, and of Thy immense love for me.

But, my Jesus, I will not leave Thee alone to cry and to suffer. I myself will also weep; for I alone deserve to shed tears on account of the offences I have committed against Thee. I, who have deserved hell, will not refuse any suffering whatever, so that I may regain Thy favor, O my Saviour.

Forgive me, I beseech Thee; receive me once more into Thy friendship, make me love Thee, and then chastise me as Thou wilt. Deliver me from eternal punishment, and then treat me as it shall please Thee. I do not seek for pleasures in this life; he does not deserve pleasure who has had the temerity to offend Thee, O infinite Goodness. I am content to suffer all the crosses Thou shalt send me; but, my Jesus, I will love Thee still.

O Mary, who didst sympathize by thy sufferings with the sufferings of Jesus, obtain for me the grace to suffer all my trials with patience. Woe to me if, after so many sins, I do not suffer something in this life! And blessed shall I be if I have the happiness to accompany thee in thy sufferings, O my sorrowful Mother, and Thee, O my Jesus, always afflicted and crucified for love of me.



*"You shall find the Infant lying in a manger." -
Saint Luke 2:16*