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CHAPTER 26: 68-75

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 26: 68-75

Verse 68- *Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?* They jest at Him for saying He was a Prophet. If Thou art a Prophet, prophesy to us. They seem to have said this insultingly, after they had covered His face. If Thou art the Christ, Thou canst not be ignorant of what is hid from Thee. Tell us who smote Thee? They jested at Him as a pretended soothsayer. "The King of Prophets," says Theophylact gravely, "is jested at as a false Prophet." "They insultingly covered His face, so as to make mock of Him, and next that they might not be deterred from beating Him by His Divine countenance," says Jansen. "For His majesty beamed forth in His countenance," says S. Jerome.

Mystically: Christ when veiled signified that He hid His face from the Jews, who were deprived of faith and the knowledge of God. Just as Moses, a type of Christ, when he veiled his eyes on coming down from the Mount, signified the same thing (2 Cor. iii. 13). In his own words, "I will hide my face from them" (Deut. xxxii. 20).

“satisfaction” excuses for sin, as appears from what follows. “I read that Peter lamented his sin, and did not excuse it, as guilty men are wont to do.” But Peter confessed his sin with loving tears. And there is no question among the orthodox that such works are satisfactory.

S. Clement, the disciple and successor of S. Peter, records that Peter was so penitent, as his whole life afterwards to fall on his knees when he heard the cock crow, shed bitter tears, and ask pardon again of God and Christ for his sin, long since forgiven. His eyes also are evidence of this, being bloodshot from constant weeping (*Niceph.* ii. 37). And lastly, Peter compensated for his fall by living to his death an austere life, feeding on lupins (S. Gregory Naz. *de Amore pauperum*), and also by his unwearied labours as an apostle, his persecutions, his sorrows, and, finally, his death on the cross, which he most resolutely and joyfully underwent for Christ’s sake.

S. Bridget records (*Rev.* iii. 5) that S. Peter appeared to her, and stated that the cause of his fall was his forgetfulness of his own resolution and the promise he made to Christ. And he thence suggests this remedy for temptation, “Rise up by humility to the Lord of Memory, and seek for memory from Him.”

Tropologically: it signifies that He atoned for Adam and Eve’s sin, for they sinned both with their eyes and their mouths, in looking at and then eating the forbidden fruit. Christ therefore, to expiate this sin, suffered His mouth and eyes to be covered. For, as S. Augustine says, “Christ suffered in all the members in which man has sinned, that He might expiate all.”

Christ, moreover, endured all these sufferings with steadfast patience. “As He,” says S. Chrysostom, “omitted no act of gentleness, so did they omit no act of insult or impiety, but sought to glut their rage both in word and deed.”

The Delphic Sibyl thus foretold—

“Then impious Israel
Will buffet Him, and from their sinful lips
Will pour their poisonous spittle,
And will give, for food the gall, and vinegar to drink,” &c.

And the Erythræan Sibyl (*Lact.* iv. 18)—

“The innocent will give His back to blows,” &c.

The reason for these insults was—First, That Christ should thus expiate the infinite sins with which men (so far as they can) inflict the greatest injuries on God. For the sinner, so far as he can, spits upon God, buffets and beats Him, because he despises Him, and esteems Him less than the creature which he loves. So Origen, “He suffered all these indignities to save us who deserved them all.” “His reproaches took away our reproach,” Pseudo-Jerome on S. Mark. “It was not Christ that suffered, but we suffered in Him,” says S. Athanasius. Christ wished to endure all these dire sufferings in order to honour God the more, and to make the greater satisfaction for the wrong done Him. His Passion therefore honoured God more than Adam’s sin dishonoured Him. Add to this, that wicked men insult God, and invent fresh ways of insulting Him. Christ therefore willed to be insulted, and to expiate their newly-devised sins by His newly-devised insults.

Secondly, to set forth the highest pattern of patience and virtue. If any one, therefore, desires a specimen of the greatest humility, gentleness, obedience, patience, constancy, charity, let him look on Christ suffering and crucified, and imitate Him as far as he can. “According to the pattern I showed to thee in the Mount” of Calvary (Exod. xxv. 40). “Wondrous is Thy Passion, O Lord Jesus,” says S. Bernard (Wednesday in Holy Week), “which hath driven away all our sufferings, makes propitiation for all our iniquities, and is never found ineffectual in all our diseases. For what is so deadly as not to be healed by Thy death? In this Passion, then, three things we must specially look at: the act, the mode, the cause; for in the act, patience; in the mode, humility; in the cause, charity,—is specially commended to us.”

Thirdly, to animate the martyr to endure every kind of torment, and the faithful to bear any injuries, by whomsoever imposed. "He endured them all with great courage, teaching us to bear injuries," says Euthymius, deriving from Christ adamant hardness; as Isaiah (l. 7) says, "I have set my face as a flint, and I know that I shall not be confounded. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me?" For as iron is hardened the more it is struck with the hammers, and is so far from being broken by them that it breaks them itself; so let us, the more we are afflicted, exhibit the greater courage, and thus by our patience overcome the hatred of our adversaries (see Ezek. iii. 9). Again, as iron breaks iron, so do the patient overcome the obstinate wickedness of the ungodly, of whom Zecharias says (vii. 12), "They made their hearts as adamant, lest they should hear the law." "For nothing is so hard as not to be surpassed by something harder," says S. Bernard. Moreover, S. Athanasius says (*de Cruce*), "Just as when a man strikes a stone with his hand, he does not break the stone, but hurts his hand; so they who strove against the Lord, as contending against incorruption, were corrupted, and as plotting against the Immortal, themselves perished."

And so the Jews, for these insults offered to Christ, were rejected by God, and exposed to universal reprobation. "They received," says Origen, "a lasting blow, and lost all their Prophets; whereas God exalted Jesus, who humbled Himself even unto death, and gave Him a name which is above every name."

After Caiaphas had with the whole Council proclaimed Christ to be guilty of death, the servants of the High Priest and some of the Council insulted Him for three whole hours, while the others lay down to rest, to be ready to proceed with the case in the morning.

Indeed, He was subjected all the night through to cruel injuries, and bore them all with sweetness and fortitude.

S. Bernard (*Serm. xliiii. in Cant. i. 12*), on the words, 'My beloved is as a bundle of myrrh,' wisely and piously observes, "He made up this bundle from the reproaches and insults of these attendants," and adds, "This healthful posy is preserved for me; no one shall take it from me. It shall lie between my breasts. These I said meditated wisdom; in these I established the perfections of my righteousness, in these the fullness of wisdom, in these the riches of salvation, in these abundance of merits. From these there came to me one while the healthful draught of bitterness, at another the sweet ointment of consolation. They sustain me in adversity, those check me in prosperity; and amidst the joys and sorrows of this present life they afford me safe guidance on either side as I walk along the royal road, and ward off imminent dangers on both sides."

Verse 69- Now Peter sat without in the hall: and a damsel came unto Him, saying, And thou also was with Jesus of Galilee. S. Matthew here goes back to the history of S. Peter, whom he speaks of (ver. 58) as having followed Jesus into the hall; and he here brings together in one S. Peter's three denials, though they took place at different times. He sat at the fire warming himself. S. John says he stood; but this with the Jews

Symbolically: a cock. Our own conscience is given to us by God, which cries out against us as oft as we sin, and says, Why committest thou this great sin? Why dost thou offend God? Why dost thou hurt thyself, and expose thyself to the peril of hell? This cry wounds the conscience, and stimulates it to repentance; and whoso hears and regards it feels true compunction with S. Peter, and does away his sin by penitence. So *Laur. Justin de Christi agone, cap. ix.* So, too, S. Gregory (*Mor. xxx. 4*), explaining Job xxxviii. 36 (Vulg.), "Who hath given the cock understanding?"

And he went out. Because he could not weep before the Jews, lest he should betray himself; and because the very sight of them was the cause of his denying Christ. As he was penitent, this ground for falling away had to be removed. He goes forth, therefore, and gives full vent to his tears. "For he could not," says S. Jerome, "manifest his repentance when sitting in the hall of Caiaphas; he therefore goes away from the council of the wicked to wash away the filth of his cowardly denial with the tears of love."

Calvin objects, that this was but a halting repentance, because he did not confess his sin before the Jews, in whose presence he had denied Christ, and thus do away with the scandal he had caused them. I reply, that he had not given them any scandal so as to strengthen them in their hatred of Christ, for they were already most determined in their hatred of Him. And if he had retracted his denial in their presence, it would have been without any benefit, nay, with hurt both to himself and them. For he would have exposed himself to the risk of relapse, and them to the peril of feeling greater indignation against Christ; and they would then have punished more severely both himself and Christ.

Wept bitterly. He wept with bitter tears (in the Arabic), as though his great sorrow had embittered his heart, so as to shed bitter tears in satisfaction for his sin. "For" (as S. Bernard says) "the tears of penitents are the wine of angels"—nay, of God and Christ. Hear S. Ambrose (in Luc. xxii.), "Why wept he? Because his sin came into his mind. Peter grieved and wept because he had erred as a man. To fall is a common thing, to repent is of faith. But why did he not pray rather than weep?" He answers, "Tears wash away the sin which the voice is ashamed to confess. Tears do not ask for pardon, they merit it. I know why Peter kept silence. It was because an earlier request for pardon would have added to his offence. We must weep first, and then pray." And shortly after he says, "Teach us, O Peter, what did thy tears profit thee! Thou hast taught us already. For thou didst fall before thou wept. But after thy tears thou wast raised up to rule others, though before thou couldst not rule thyself."

Thou wilt say that S. Ambrose remarks in the same passage, "I read of the tears of Peter, but not of his satisfaction." These words the Calvinists pervert, as doing away with works of satisfaction, and destroying their efficacy. But ignorantly and foolishly. For S. Ambrose means by

And immediately the cock crew. To remind Peter of Christ's prediction, and to move him to repentance. S. Luke adds, "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter," &c. This look, then, as S. Ambrose teaches, caused Peter, who had not noticed the first cock-crowing, to notice this, to call to mind his warning, and to begin to repent and weep. "Christ looked on Peter," says S. Leo, "and then raised him up." He looked on him also with the eyes of His mind, putting before him the baseness of his denial, and urging him on to repentance (S. Augustine, Bede, Ambrose, and others). And with His bodily eyes also, because Christ, after being pronounced guilty of death, seems to have been brought down to the outer hall, which was below, and where Peter was; and there turning to him, and smiting him with His gracious look, He reminded him of his fall, and recalled him to himself. Christ seems to have been brought down to this hall that, while the Priests were taking a little rest, He might be handed over to the custody and insolence of their attendants. Or Christ certainly from the inner hall saw Peter standing in the outer one, Christ's overruling providence so ordering everything, that a fit opportunity was afforded for looking on Peter.

Here admire alike the loftiness and the charity of Christ. For though already condemned to death, and in the midst of His insults and blows, He seemed as it were to forget Himself, and to care for Peter, to bring him back as a lost sheep into the path of safety, and teach us to do the like. It was so with S. Chrysostom, who, when driven into exile, and even to death, seemed to forget himself, and wrote most affectionate letters to his friends; and exhorts Constantius, his presbyter, not to be downcast at his persecution, but to rouse himself, and send apostolic men to convert Phœnicia, and write him an account of their proceedings. For the energy and courage of the helmsman is exhibited in the storm, as that of a soldier in fight, a general in the field, a physician in the paroxysm of a disease. S. Leo (*Serm. iii de Pass.*) observes, "The Lord looked on Peter, and though exposed to the revilings of the Priests, the falsehoods of the witnesses, and the insults of those who smote and spat upon Him, He met His troubled disciple with those eyes wherewith He foresaw he would be troubled. And the glance of truth was turned on him in whom amendment of heart was to be wrought, as though the voice of the Lord sounded within him, and said, What doest thou, Peter? Why dost thou withdraw into thine own conscience? Turn to Me, trust in Me, follow Me; this is the time of My passion, the hour of thy punishment has not yet arrived. Why fearest thou that which thou also wilt overcome? Let not the weakness I have taken upon Me perplex thee; I was trembling for thy fate, be not thou anxious for Mine." And therefore "it was impossible," says S. Jerome, "that he should remain in the darkness of denial, since the Light of the World had looked upon him."

Verse 75- *And Peter remembered the word of Jesus which He said, Before the cock crow twice (S. Mark adds), thou shalt deny Me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly.* "After the herald of day cried to him," says Origen, "he remembered." And Victor of Antioch on Mark xiv. says, "He was admonished by the cock crowing, and, as if aroused from deep sleep and brought back again to himself, he remembered that he had fallen into that very sin and disgrace which the Lord had foretold."

merely meant that he was present, not any particular attitude. He stood, it may be, at one time, and sat at another.

But if he stood without, how was it that he was within the house? He was within, as being in the outer court, but without with respect to the inner court. Whence S. Ambrose says (Luke xxii.), "Where was it that Peter denied Christ? In the prætorium of the Jews, in the company of the wicked." And Bede, too, on Mark xiv., "How hurtful is converse with the wicked! Peter amongst the servants of the High Priest said he knew not the man, though among the disciples he had confessed Him to be God."

A damsel. One of inferior degree, "a doorkeeper," says S. John. Hence we see more clearly the weakness and fear of Peter, who was staggered by the question of a humble damsel, and denied Christ; though afterwards, when he had received the Spirit, feared not Caiaphas, or the whole Council, when he said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts iv.). Learn from this how weak is man when over-confident in himself and forsaken of God, and, on the other hand, how bold, if he distrusts himself and trusts in God. "Peter without the Spirit was overcome by the words of the damsel, but with the Spirit he yielded neither to rulers nor kings" (*Com. on S. Mark, apud S. Jerome*).

But how did this damsel recognise Peter before all the men who had seen him in the garden with Christ? Because, as the doorkeeper, she carefully noticed those who went in and out. And she observed that Peter was not one of the servants, but a stranger, and with an agitated look, and hence conjectured he was a follower of Jesus. For sagacious doorkeepers are quick in detecting, for it is difficult to conceal the feelings, and not to betray them by the look. Perhaps, also, she had seen Peter with the other Apostles, and had carefully noted his appearance.

Of Galilee: For Jesus was of Nazareth in Galilee, and he calls him a Galilean, both as despised by the Jews, who thought that no Prophets came from thence (John vii. 62), and also as a seditious person, a follower of Judas of Galilee (Acts v. 37).

Verse 70- *But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.* Fearing he would be seized, and to obtain belief for his denial, he said that her question was so strange that he knew not what it meant. "I am so far from knowing who Jesus is, that I know not what it is you ask. For I know not whether He has disciples, or who and what they are." It was a lie; just as when a person, if asked by Pagans whether he is a Christian, says he is not. This is a sin against the profession of the faith, of which Peter had heard Christ's warnings and threatenings (Matt. x. 33). "But Peter," says Victor of Antioch, "was in such consternation and agitation of mind as entirely to forget the Lord's threatening." And hence S. Augustine (on John xviii. 65), commiserating his fall, exclaims, "Behold this most firm pillar

tumbled at one single breath of air! Where is now that boldness of promising, that over-confidence in himself? Where are his words, 'If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee'? But what marvel if God's prediction proved true, and man's presumption false?"

Denied. How many times? Dionys. Carthus. says six times, thrice in the house of Annas. S. John implies, thrice in the house of Caiaphas, as the other Evangelists expressly state (see *S. Aug. de Cons. Evang.* iii. 6). Cajetan (on John xviii.) says seven times, thrice when addressed by women, and four times by men.

But the common opinion is that he denied only thrice. See S. Cyril on John xviii.; S. Ambrose (Luke xxii.), and others. And this is clear from S. Matthew's narrative, who sets forth the history succinctly, and in the best order.

The Evangelists relate his threefold denials in different ways. But in order to reconcile them, observe that Peter first simply denied in the hall, when asked by the first damsel, next with an oath, when asked by the second, and thirdly, with cursing and swearing.

Here observe that S. Hilary on this passage, and S. Ambrose on Luke xxii., seem to say that Peter in denying Christ did not lie, but spoke ambiguously. For he said he knew not the man, because he knew Him to be God. "I was not with Him whom ye call a man, but I withdrew not from the Son of God," says S. Ambrose. I know not what thou sayest,—that is, I understand not your profanity. But S. Jerome tacitly refutes them, as Christ does also by saying, "Thou shalt thrice deny Me." But SS. Hilary and Ambrose can both be excused, because they merely meant to say that Peter's words were so measured that a sound meaning could be elicited from them, that he spoke so ambiguously that his words of denial could be turned into a good meaning.

1. It is certain, therefore, that Peter sinned mortally. So S. Chrysostom here, and S. Augustine (*Tract.* cxiii. on John). He therefore lost by his denial the grace and love of God. But whether he lost his faith is doubtful. But if any one of the Apostles retained his faith it was Peter (see above, ver. 31), especially as he soon afterwards repented, and wept bitterly for his sin of denial. He therefore mentally retained his faith, which moved him to repentance and tears. 2. He was to fall thus gravely for three reasons. First (which is the source of all), from over-confidence; next, because, though conscious of his weakness, he threw himself into the company of the wicked men who had seized Jesus; and lastly, that he, the future head of the Church, might learn to have compassion for the fallen, and set a pattern of true penitence to all sinners. So S. Chrysostom, S. Leo (*Serm.* ix. *de Pass.*), S. Gregory (*Hom.* xxi.), and others.

The first denial took place just after midnight. He went away for fear the damsel should question him again.

And the cock crew. This first cock-crowing did not rouse Peter from his fall, nor keep him from falling again.

Verse 71- *But as he was going out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said to them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.* "It is clear," says S. Augustine (*de Cons. Evang.* iii. 6), "by comparing the testimony of all the Evangelists, that Peter did not deny in front of the gate, but within it, in the hall by the fire. S. Matthew and S. Mark mention his going, but for brevity's sake do not mention his return."

Verse 72- *And immediately he denied with an oath, I know not the man.* It appears from S. Luke and S. John that several others put the same question, and pressed him hard. On which Peter, finding that a stronger answer was required, added an oath, *i.e.*, committed perjury; for, as S. Gregory says, "a sin which is not blotted out by repentance, by its very weight quickly draws on to another," both because it weighs down, depresses, and weakens the conscience, and also because the sinner thinks that as he has sinned, it is of little moment if he falls again into the like sin. Some Christians when they have once fallen into fornication or gluttony repeat the sin, as thinking, "We have already fallen, let us fall again, and then by the same confession we shall blot out all our sins together." But they are wrong; for a second is a new offence against God, and inflicts on the soul a new wound more deadly than the first; for repentance is more difficult after repeated sin than after the first fall. "Perseverance in sin causes increase of guilt," says Rabanus. His intercourse with the ungodly, which he ought to have given up after his first fall, drove Peter to this, though, assuredly, he never should have done it, as having experienced its noxiousness and his weakness in their company.

Verse 73- *And after a while came unto him they that stood by and said unto him, Surely thou art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee.*

Verse 74- *Then began he to curse and swear, saying, I know not the man.* The servants who were watching the trial at the door after a while returned to the fire, and turning to Peter, tempted him again, and forced him to his third denial. They gave their reason, "Thy speech betrayeth thee;" from his Galilean dialect. S. John adds (xviii. 26) a further charge, for a kinsman of Malchus said, "Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?" Peter, therefore, finding himself driven to extremities, "began to curse and swear" that he knew not the man, saying, after the Hebrew manner, May God do these things to me if I know Him. May the earth open, may the lightning blast me, if I know Him. The Greek word is *καταναθεματίζειν*, to anathematise vehemently, to call curses down on oneself. "The more they urge and insist upon it, the more vehemently does he swear, the more obstinately does he act," says Victor of Antioch on Mark xiv. "Consider here," says S. Cyril (*Lib.* xii. on John), "what the Apostles were before the coming of the Holy Spirit, and what they were made afterwards, when endued with power from on high."