

From the House of Herod to That of Pilate
or
Scourging, Crown of Thorns, *Ecce Homo*
[295]
Mt 27; Lk 23; Mk 15; Jn 19

Usual Preparation Prayer.

First Prelude: The history: This is the history of the mystery. Here it will be to consider how after Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate, the Roman governor once again finds no guilt in Him, but nonetheless orders Him to be scourged.

Second Prelude: The composition of place: This is to see the place. Here we can consider the walk back from Herod's palace to the praetorium where Pilate is. We can also see the place where Christ was scourged, which some say was the praetorium's forum, in full view of everyone.

Third Prelude: The petition: I will ask for the grace I desire. In the Passion it is proper to ask for sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me.

In [295], Ignatius gives us three very simple points to follow:

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First Point

Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, and because of this they became friends, though before they were enemies.

Second Point

Pilate took Jesus and had Him scourged, and the soldiers made a crown of thorns and placed it upon His head. They put a purple cloak about Him, and came to Him and said, "Hail king of the Jews!" "And they gave Him blows."

Third Point

Pilate led Him forth before all: "Jesus, therefore, came forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple garment. And he said to them, 'Behold the man!'" When the chief priests saw Him they cried out, "Crucify him, Crucify him!"

As with some of the other contemplations we have considered, Ignatius doesn't give a very detailed contemplation. He gives only the basic steps and then reminds us to follow the same model as we did before: to *see* the people, then to *hear* the people,

then to *examine what they are doing*, each time gathering some fruit for my life.

In the previous contemplation, we considered how Pilate and Herod became friends. Let us, then, consider the scourging and the mockeries that Christ received, considering the punishments historically, and then considering some specific points for our contemplation. In all of this, we should bear in mind the words of Saint John Chrysostom. He writes: “Observe how carefully the Evangelist recounts all those particulars, even [those] which seem most disgraceful, hiding or extenuating nothing, but thinking it the highest glory that the Lord of the earth should endure such things for us. Let us read this continually, let us imprint in our minds, and in these things let us boast.”

“In order to save Christ, Pilate decided to have Him scourged. . . . It calls our attention that the evangelists are extremely sober in their descriptions of the event. John says simply, ‘Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged,’ in Jn 19:1; Mark states ‘So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified’ in 15:15; and Matthew, at 27:26, recounts: ‘Then he released Barabbas to them, but after he had Jesus scourged, he handed him over to be crucified.’

These descriptions are so short that we have to reconstruct what took place from historical records.

We should bear in mind the following considerations. First, “this scourging was not only painful, but humiliating, a punishment imposed only on slaves and on inhabitants of countries or regions brought under the control of the Roman government; the law prohibited imposing it on Roman citizens. To Pilate it therefore seemed that this punishment should be sufficient. If in some way Jesus was guilty in the eyes of the Jews with regard to this matter of his kingship, thought Pilate, this scourging would leave him so disgraced and dishonored among the people that he would never again dare to speak of his kingdom. . . .

[Physically], this scourging was the next worst penalty to that of death.” “Indeed, sometimes it was imposed instead of capital punishment.”¹ “The lashes hit the whole body, from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head.”² “Few remained conscious throughout the ordeal; some died; and many went raving mad.”³ Indeed, historians tells us that, if offered a choice between scourging and death, many criminals simply opted for death. “Cicero called this punishment *media mors*, half

¹ Ricciotti, *Life of Christ*, 621. Other sections are adapted from *The Mystery of the Crown of Thorns* by a Passionist Father, 1847.

² Luis de la Palma, *The Sacred Passion*, 103-104.

³ Barclay’s commentary on John’s Gospel.

death, because it wasn't uncommon for the victim to die during it or shortly thereafter." "In describing the scourging of the martyrs of Smyrna, Eusebius writes, 'All of the assistants were frightened upon seeing the flesh of the martyrs torn apart down to the veins, in such a way that the bones were uncovered, and even their organs could be seen.'"⁴

In the *Revelations of Saint Bridget* (1, 10), it is written that our Lady said, 'During the Passion of my Son, his enemies seized him and hit him in the face and on the neck. Then they led him to a pillar, and he himself took off his clothes and put his hands on the pillar, and his enemies bound him to it. . . . I saw his body scourged down to the ribs; the bones were showing. The lashes had ripped away the flesh. And as my Son stood there all bleeding and torn to shreds, there being on his body no sound part left to scourge, one of those present angrily shouted, 'Do you intend to put this man to death before he has been sentenced to it?' And while saying this, he cut the ropes.'⁵

As great as the pain and suffering of scourging is in itself, we can think of three reasons why Christ's suffering during the scourging were great, "greater than others.

- First, because His body was more delicate and noble, since it had been formed in the Blessed Virgin Mary's womb, and hence was more sensible;
- Second, Pilate had ordered the scourging precisely to arouse compassion in the crowd, and so it needed to be severe, and
- Third, God saw Christ as covered with all of our sins, and hence the divine justice exacted vengeance for our sins in His body.

Why did Christ want to suffer this terrible torment?

- First, to make satisfaction for our sins, first and foremost for those of impurity, making up with His pain our pleasures; with His nudity, the sins committed and caused by immodest clothing and nudity;
- Second, to have us understand the hatred God bears for sins of impurity.
- Third, to have us understand as well the terrible punishments that the bodies of the condemned will have to suffer after the resurrection of the body on account of these sins.
- Fourth, for the consolation of the holy martyrs, and strength for confessors and penitents.

⁴ Cited in Oraa, *Ejecicios Espirituales*, 535.

⁵ Luis de la Palma, *The Sacred Passion*.

If Christ did and suffered all this for me, what must I do and suffer for Him? Could anything He asks of me be hard or difficult? Those who really belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its vices and passions.”⁶

After the scourging at the pillar, **Christ was crowned with thorns**: thorns and thistles were the consequence of original sin, as we read in Genesis 3:18, so it was fitting that our Savior bear this sign of our sinfulness during His work of redemption.

The Evangelists notes that this abuse was public, and it wasn't done simply by a handful of soldiers. Matthew tells us “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus inside the praetorium and gathered the whole cohort around him” (27:27). The whole cohort was there, and they all mocked Him. The events are recounted in Mt 27:27-30, Mk 15:16-19, and Jn 19:2-3. Some commentators note that this suffering truly has a diabolic character, and John Chrysostom says it seems that all hell had broken loose against the Son of God in order to increase the number and severity of His torments.

We are told that they stripped His clothes from Him *yet again*, after they had stuck to His wounds after the scourging. “These soldiers must have put all the more gusto into their jeers and jibes because they were not legionaries but cohort *auxiliaries* and so had probably been recruited for the most part from among the neighboring people hostile to the Jews, especially the Syrians and the Samaritans, the latter of whom were the Jews' most bitter enemies but extremely loyal to the Romans. Hence for them it was a particularly diverting pastime to shower their scorn and ridicule on a king of those Jewish scoundrel they hated so much”⁷

Based on the Shroud of Turin, it seems that the thorns would have pierced the fifth cranial nerve, responsible for all the pain sensing in the head. “This . . . [would have caused] severe facial pain that may be triggered by light touch, swallowing, eating, talking, temperature changes, and exposure to wind. Stabbing pain radiates around the eyes, over the forehead, the upper lip, nose, cheek, the side of the tongue and the lower lip. Spasmodic episodes of stabbing, lancinating, and explosive pain are often more agonizing during times of fatigue or tension. It is said to be the worst pain that anyone can experience.

As the soldiers struck Jesus on His head with reeds, He would have felt excruciating pains across His face and deep into His ears, much like sensations from a hot poker or electric shock. These pains would have been felt all the way to Calvary and while

⁶ Oraa, 535-536.

⁷ Ricciotti, *Life of Christ*, 622.

on the Cross. As He walked and fell, as He was pushed and shoved, as He moved any part of His face, and as the slightest breeze touched His face, new waves of intense pain would have been triggered.”⁸

“As for his crown being one of thorns, it did not need to be made of anything else. There is nothing in this world with which the crown he deserved could have been made. Everything in this world comes to an end, deteriorates, dies. What abides is the love acquired by suffering things that pierce and wound like thorns. And there are in this life lots of thorns that the Lord chose to make his so that we might not suffer from them: thorns that we merited, and that he took. What for us would have been eternal death, for him was merit and eternal glory. Those thorns that he took from us brought forth flowers of immortality; with them was made a crown that will never deteriorate. His crown was of thorns well driven into his head; it had to be thus, because his kingdom was to be firm and perpetual and only pain gives firmness and stability. Only thus would his crown never fall, and no one be able to take it away from him.”⁹

“Why did our Lord want to suffer this horrible torment? For me! For my vain thoughts and, above all, for thoughts against chastity, those sharpest of spines that nail themselves into the heart of Jesus. When such thoughts assail us, we should think that to accept them is to add new spines to our Lord’s crown of thorns, and then we will certainly reject them. If we have already set some of those spines in His heart, let us try, with loving acts of reparation and apostolic zeal, to make atonement and repay them.”¹⁰

At this point, too, **Christ was given a purple robe**: Clothing is the mark of sinners; before their fall, Adam and Eve had no need of clothing. Christ it, however, they needed to cover themselves and their sinfulness. Being essential holiness Christ could not strictly speaking feel the remorse of sin. But in His infinite mercy He could assume its appearance, and experience its temporal effects. Hence our Lord was first stripped of that sacred garment which He had received from the immaculate hands of His most holy Mother. Thus He was in appearance deprived of the essential attribute of His inseparable holiness. Then a soiled and worn out red cloak of a Pagan soldier was temporarily cast over His sacred shoulders. This cruel and humiliating insult was permitted by Divine Wisdom to enable us to understand that our merciful Savior wished, through this action, to signify that He consented to assume the filthy dress of sin, deeply dyed in the blood and crimes of mankind during the long period of four thousand years. In assuming and wearing before Heaven and earth the degrading livery of sin, our dear Lord had also to bear the

⁸ <https://catholicinsight.com/the-physical-effects-of-the-scourging-and-crucifixion-of-jesus/>

⁹ Luis de la Palma, *The Sacred Passion*, 112-113.

¹⁰ Oraa, 541.

burning shame and confusion due to all sinners.

Christ was mocked and bruised with a reed: "As the scarlet cloak was the figure of our sinfulness, as the thorns were the sign of our barrenness and sterility; so the reed is a striking emblem of human frailty, emptiness and inconstancy. A reed is an empty, hollow, frail, light and inconstant plant. It has no solidity. It is moved about in every direction by the least breath of wind. This despicable plant was never more honored than when it was in derision put in the Divine hand of our Lord.

What an admirable figure is this of our fallen human nature! What can be more hollow and empty than the reed of a poor sinful man? Sin strips him of every supernatural grace, virtue and merit. Like the merchant of Jericho, he is robbed of all his wealth and he is left prostrate upon the ground wounded and bleeding to death. Like the eminent man of the Apocalypse who in his greedy and ridiculous vanity flatters himself that he is rich, wealthy and wants nothing, sin has made him "wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked." (Apoc. 3:17)

Then what is more weak and frail than a sinner? Stripped of the supernatural strength of grace, left to his own innate weakness, urged by temptation, impelled by his own evil passions, he totters and falls at every step. Like a frail reed he bends to every whim of fancy and to the slightest whisper of seduction. Such is the reed of fallen human nature left to itself.

But since our Blessed Lord took this reed in His hand it has been completely changed; its hollowness has been filled with the solidity of His grace and love. In the hand of our Savior we become firmer and stronger than the cedars of Lebanon. Through faith and confidence in Him we can resist the most violent temptations of Hell and the fiercest storms of human persecutions. By assuming our frail nature the Son of God has endowed us with the power and strength of His Divine Omnipotence."

The last and most shocking insult offered to our Savior crowned with thorns was that of spitting upon His sacred face. St. Gregory remarks that we know a person by his face. This vulgar insult comes then from those who know our Lord. These then are those who spit upon His face by their bad example by which they scandalize their fellow-Christians, they dishonor their religion and make the enemies of God blaspheme His holy name.

Yet, in all of this, "Jesus did not cower before his torturers. . . . He had more ability to suffer than his enemies had to hurt him. He sat there with as much dignity and serene elegance as if they had actually crowned him king. He took the insulting mock praises as if they had been real praises of His Person. Never has there been,

anywhere in the world, a king or emperor who wore the purple with such gladness, and accepted the scepter and the crown with such pleasure, as the Lord did that old rag and the reed and the thorns. More than any king of this world, the suffering king desired that everyone be present at his coronation. Those hundred or hundred twenty-five soldiers, plus all the people of Jerusalem who were looking on, seemed new to him who had invited everyone. . . . This holy king . . . needed to be crowned not with earthly jewels but with riches that his eternal Father gave to him to be glorified with: obedience to the point of death, and love.

It was fitting that the purple be worthless and old, because his real clothing as king was his wounds and his blood and his future faithful friends for whom he should die. His faithful friends were at present like that scarlet cape – old, dirty, and worn out. So he needed to soak them, as he was soaking the cape, in his blood, and thus make them new, clean, and full of grace. . . . It was in this way that he would become the King of Kings, for all his subjects would be clothed in scarlet dyed with his precious blood.”¹¹

Seeing this example of Jesus, Saint Peter Faber, one of the first Jesuits, prayed:

“Jesus Christ, may your death be my life
and in your dying may I learn how to live.
May your struggles be my rest,
Your human weakness my courage,
Your embarrassment my honor,
Your passion my delight,
Your sadness my joy,
in your humiliation may I be exalted.

Colloquy: With a dialogue I will speak with Him, and renew my petition: sorrow with Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish, tears and deep grief because of the great affliction Christ endures for me.

Also, I can reflect on myself and ask...

- What have I done for Christ?
- What am I doing for Christ?
- What will I do for Christ?

¹¹ Luis de la Palma, *The Sacred Passion*, 111-112.