



DAY 43: Contemplation

SCOURGING, CROWNING WITH THORNS, & ECCE HOMO [295]

The supreme act by which Jesus Christ founded a universe of redemption by dying on the Cross, He calls His “Hour,” the hour of His Passion. This is what now concerns us.

Placing Oneself in the Presence of God

Preparatory Prayer:

[46] ...to ask grace of God our Lord, that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be purely ordered to the service and praise of His Divine Majesty.

History:

See the Account of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 19:1–42) & Parallel Gospels (Mk 15:15–19), (Mt 27:26–30)

Composition of Place:

Here, to see Jesus being led before Pilate, to see the praetorium, the Jews shouting for the crucifixion of Jesus, etc.

Petition:

[203] ... it is proper to ask in the Passion, sorrow with Christ sorrowful, affliction with Christ afflicted, tears, interior pain for so much pain that Christ passed through for me.

Points For Meditation

Follow the points already known for every contemplation, using the supplemental material provided:

[194] **1st point:** to see the persons, and reflecting within myself, to seek to draw some profit from them.
2nd point: to hear what they say, and likewise to draw some profit from it.
3rd point: to look at what they do and to draw some profit.

[195] ... to consider what Christ our Lord suffers in His humanity or wishes to suffer; [...] and with great effort to strive to feel sorrow, to grieve, and to weep.

[196] ... to consider (also) how the Divinity hides itself, that is, how He could destroy His enemies and does not do so, and how He allows His most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly.

[197] ... to consider how He suffers all this for my sins, etc., and what I ought to do and suffer for Him.

THEY MOCKED THE KING

When Pilate saw that Herod returned Jesus to him without wanting to get involved in the matter, he became thoughtful and began to understand that this was something more serious and complex than it had first seemed. Then addressing the accusers, he made this argument:

“You brought this man to me and accused him of inciting the people to revolt. I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him, nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him. Therefore, I shall have him flogged and then release him” (Lk 23:14–16).

Neither Pilate nor Herod found anything guilty in Jesus and therefore nothing worthy of death. How then could the punishment carried out—far from light, but rather the terrible Roman scourging—be justified? And even more, how justify the sentence of death? How do they mock the King of the universe?

a. They choose Barabbas

Pilate offers the accusers another motive to calm them. It was customary, on the occasion of Passover, for the procurator to release from prison a prisoner chosen by the crowd.

It then seemed to Pilate an opportunity to grant the favor to Jesus and thus free Him from those slanderers and also come out well himself. His logic was that everyone would benefit. This Barabbas whom Pilate presents to them was a robber, perhaps a zealot, and some even argue that he was not a common thief but a pseudo-messianic rebel involved in guerrilla resistance against the Romans. The Jews, as you know, chose this Barabbas to be released.

The contrast is striking: Jesus, the Messiah, presented to the Jews, compared with Barabbas—a false messiah! The mere fact of comparing Him is already an offense and an injustice. The result is tragic: the Jews reject their King, the true Messiah, and choose a robber, Barabbas.

Fr. Luis de la Palma: “Perhaps this offense that He received from His people was what hurt the Lord most in all His Passion, because a generous soul does not fear blows as much as contempt.” This scene becomes truly significant when we ourselves experience rejection; when others are preferred and we are set aside; when we are unjustly condemned.

Do we realize that we have the opportunity to share the fate of Jesus, who was rejected, cast aside because a thief was preferred? When we are offended, let us think of how little the opinion of men, of the world, is worth, and let us seek only to please God.

b. Scourging and crowning of Jesus

Pilate then granted the request of the crowd and released Barabbas. But afterward he carried out his previous promise to have Jesus scourged. Among the Romans, scourging ordinarily preceded crucifixion; but at times it constituted a punishment in itself and could be carried out in capital cases.

The condemned, after being stripped, was bound by the wrists to a post or a column, so that his back would be bent. The blows were delivered with a special instrument called a “flagellum,” a sturdy whip with many leather thongs weighted with metal balls and even armed with sharp points (called scorpions). Whereas among the Jews legal scourging was limited to a fixed number of blows, among the Romans it was limited only by the will of the executioners or the endurance of the victim.

It is said that the one who suffered Roman scourging was generally left as a terrifying and repulsive figure. Gradually, skin and muscles were torn, blood vessels were ruptured, and the whole body streamed with blood.

The fourth Gospel continues: “And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ And they struck him repeatedly” (Jn 19:2–3).

The Synoptics mention a great number of outrages inflicted upon Jesus (cf. Mk 15:15b–19; Mt 27:26–30). Fr. Luis de la Palma says that “the Lord left joined to His crown as King, for His friends, two precious jewels: suffering and mockery [...] The ceremonies of mockery that Jesus endured were also necessary for His kingdom, because His kingdom requires that it be founded on patient men, who know how to despise the applause of the world, who truly know how to renounce all worldly things that draw them away from God.”

c. Ecce Homo

“Pilate went out again and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no guilt in him.’ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak. And he said to them, ‘Behold, the man!’” (Jn 19:4–5).

It is known from historical documentation that the Romans scourged and crucified a considerable number of men, but there is not a single known case—except that of Jesus—who was crowned with thorns. Across the entire forehead of Jesus—again according to what can be seen on the Shroud—at least 13 perforations can be observed. In the occipital region, at least 20 perforations can be counted. Therefore, 33 wounds from thorns are reported. Taking into account the regions where there are no marks, it is deduced that at least 50 thorns tormented the head of the Crucified. They coincide with important blood vessels. The crown, with its sharp thorns, caused deep and very painful wounds. With these data we can form a better idea of the state in which Jesus is presented to the crowd. Then, before this lamentable spectacle, we can consider several things:

Consider the shame Our Lord had in being presented before the people as a criminal: with a ridiculous garment, humiliated and in a horrendous appearance, in contrast to how on a high mountain, on Tabor, He showed Himself radiant (He let us glimpse something of His divinity); here, on the height of the praetorium, He is presented as a figure that moves one to compassion.

Before the people Pilate says: “Ecce homo.” These words can be considered as spoken not only by Pilate but also by the Spirit of God and by the Father:

(a) By Pilate: He presents Him to the people as a mere man so that, humbled and destroyed as He was, they might be moved to compassion seeing a man like themselves suffer... it is as if he said, “although he hardly seems a man, he is... have compassion.” The words of the psalm come to mind: “But I am a worm, not a man, scorned by men, despised by the people” (Ps 22:7). He who used to be called the most handsome of men (cf. Ps 45:3), is now the most disfigured, in whom there is scarcely anything to behold (cf. Is 53:2).

(b) *By the Holy Spirit:* It is as if He said, “behold this man, who, although he appears to be a man, is much more than a man, for He is the natural Son of God, the Messiah promised by the Law, longed for by the prophets, head of men and of all the angels, redeemer of the human race and the only reconciler with God for all miseries.” c. By the Eternal Father: “Behold this Man” whom I sent into the world to be a teacher of virtue for all men and a model of perfection for all. Look at Him and learn from Him the final lessons; look at His humility amid so many insults, look at His poverty in such nakedness, look at His meekness amid so many and such grave injuries, look at His modesty before so many blasphemers, look at His immense charity in the midst of so many who hate Him and to whom He did nothing but good... look at this figure and, copying it, imprint it upon your soul.

See the cruelty of the Jews in asking for the death of Jesus: “When the chief priests and the guards saw him they cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’” (Jn 19:6). Think of the incredible hatred in the hearts of the chief priests who, seeing Him in the midst of so much suffering, insist more and more on making Him suffer and securing for Him the most cruel death (and they also campaign, inducing others to ask for the crucifixion).

See the complete inaction of Pilate, who, although he recognizes the innocence of Christ and becomes more convinced of it, and likewise sees the malice and falsity of the Jews who are against Him, nevertheless does not resolve to act rightly: he is lukewarm and ambitious, incapable of freeing the innocent and increasingly cooperating in His condemnation.

See Pilate’s attitude of suspecting something great in Jesus, but his inability to discern correctly: “Where are you from?” ... ‘Do you not answer me?’ ... ‘What is truth?’” Unfortunately, he was deeply attached to the world and filled with carnal desires: one who does not distance himself from the world and does not renounce the affections and appetites that come from the flesh cannot discern properly. See how behind failures of discernment there is always some disordered passion hidden, which prevents us from having a serene, objective, and true judgment.

See and admire the extraordinary prudence that shines in Christ in His silence and in His speech: He remains silent when it concerns something that affects Him personally, and He speaks—and very clearly—when not His reputation but the honor of God is at stake and the correction of the proud: “You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above” (Jn 19:11).

See the rage of the Jews against Christ: “Take him away, take him away! Crucify him!” (cf. Jn 19:15). They hate Him so much that they no longer want Him before their eyes—crucify Him and let this be

over. Hearing these words of the Jews brings to mind those of the Book of Wisdom: “Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law and charges us with violations of our training. He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the LORD. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways” (Wis 2:12–15).

“We have no king but Caesar” (Jn 19:15). See the blindness and malice of the people who abandon the true King for one who is cruel, tyrannical, and self-indulgent; they abandon the gentle Jesus for one who took away their property and their freedom. Whoever abandons the true King and does not bow his head to serve Him when circumstances require it ends up enslaving himself to the impious and cruel tyranny of creatures and worldly men.

Fulton Sheen says: “Christ is not exactly a king who failed: He is a king who failed in the eyes of the world in order to win an eternal victory in the eyes of God. Hence, if we are to reign with Him in heaven, we must begin our reign with Him on earth, just as He began His on the Cross. It is the things that are not of this world that must be done: yes. The world first eats sumptuously and then fasts; it becomes satiated and then grows weary of its excesses; it laughs and then weeps. But the King of the Cross reverses the order: the poor will not always be poor; the crucified will not always be on the cross; the poor will be rich; the humbled will be exalted; those who sow in tears will reap in joy; those who mourn will be comforted; and those who suffer with Christ will reign with Him. The solution is clear: what we call suffering, pain, and crucifixion is nothing but ‘the shadow of His hand lovingly extended.’”

Colloquy:

May our attentive consideration, with the light of the Holy Spirit and the interior grace of our will, help us to understand how much Jesus has done for me, and, loving Him, I may ask myself and decide what I must do for Him, and that which I must suffer for Him.

Let us ask the Most Blessed Virgin Mary to grant to all of us this grace in this contemplation and in these Spiritual Exercises. Pray a *Hail Mary*.