

LESSON EIGHTH.

ON OUR LORD'S PASSION, DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND ASCENSION.

THE Passion, that is, the terrible sufferings of Our Lord, began after the Last Supper, and ended at His death. On Thursday evening Our Lord sat down for the last time with His dear Apostles. He had been talking, eating, and living with them for over three years; and now He is going to take His last meal with them before His death. He told them then how He was to suffer, and that one of them was going to betray Him. They were very much troubled, for only Judas himself knew what he was about to do.

78 Q. What did Jesus Christ suffer?

A. Jesus Christ suffered a bloody sweat, a cruel scourging, was crowned with thorns, and was crucified.

After the Supper, Our Lord went with His apostles to a little country place just outside Jerusalem, and separated from it by a small stream. He told the three Apostles, Peter, James, and John, to stay near the entrance, and to watch and pray, while He Himself went further into the Garden of Olives, or Gethsemani, as this place was called, and throwing Himself upon His face, prayed long and earnestly, but the Apostles fell asleep.

We often find persons who are in great anguish or dread covered with a cold perspiration. Now, Our Lord's agony in the garden was so intense that great drops, not of sweat, but of blood, oozed from every pore, and trickled to the ground. There are three reasons given for this dreadful agony.

(1) The clear, certain knowledge of the sufferings so soon to be endured. If we were to be put to death to-morrow and knew exactly the manner of our death and the pain it would

inflict, how great would be our fear! Our Lord, knowing all things, knew in every particular what He would have to undergo. Moreover, His sufferings were greater than ours could be, even if we suffered the same kind of death; because His body was most perfect, and therefore more susceptible of pain than ours. A wound in the eye, because the most sensitive and delicate part of the body, would cause us greater pain than a wound on the foot or hand. Thus, all the parts of Our Lord's body being so perfect and sensitive, we can scarcely imagine His dreadful torments, the very thought of which caused Him such agony.

(2) The sins, past, present, and future of all men. He knew all things, as we have said, and looking back upon the world He saw all the sins committed, of thought, word, and deed, from the time of Adam down to His own; and seeing all these offences against His Father, He was very much grieved.

(3) The third reason why He grieved. He looked forward and saw how little many persons would profit by all the sufferings He was about to endure. He saw all the sins that would be committed from the time of His death down to the end of the world. He saw us also sinning with the rest. No wonder then that He suffered so much in the garden. This suffering on that night is called "Our Lord's agony in the garden." That night Judas, who had betrayed Him to His enemies, came with a great band of soldiers and people, with swords and clubs, to make Our Lord a prisoner. He did not try to escape, but stood waiting for them, though all His apostles, who had promised to stay with Him, ran away. Then the soldiers led Our Lord to the house of the Chief Priest. Then they gathered the priests, and gave Him a kind of trial, and said He was guilty of death. But at that time the Jews had no power to put persons to death according to the law; so they had to send Our Lord to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, to be condemned, because they were under the power of the Romans. The Jews acted against their laws in the trial of Our Lord.

(1) They tried Him at night ; and (2) they allowed Him no witnesses in His defence, but even employed false witnesses to testify against Him, and thus acted against all law and justice. Early in the morning they led Him to Pilate, who commanded that He should be scourged. Then they stripped Our Lord of His garments, fastened His hands to a low stone pillar, and there He was "scourged" by the Roman soldiers. The lashes used by the Romans were made of leather, with pieces of bone, iron, or steel fastened into it, so that every stroke would lay open the flesh. It is most likely these were the lashes used upon Our Lord till every portion of His body was bruised and bleeding, and they replaced His garments upon Him. Now, you know if you put a cloth upon a fresh wound the blood will soak into it and cause it to adhere to the mangled flesh. Our Blessed Lord's garment, thus saturated with His blood, adhered to His wounded body, and when again removed caused Him unspeakable pain. Next, the soldiers, because Our Lord had said He was a king—meaning a spiritual king—led Him into a large hall and mocked Him. They made a crown of long, sharp thorns, and forced it down upon His brow with a heavy rod or reed ; every stroke driving the thorns into His head, and causing the blood to roll down His sacred face. They again took off His garments, and opened anew the painful wounds. Because kings wore purple, they put an old purple garment upon Him, and made Him a mock king, genuflecting in ridicule as they passed before Him. They struck Him in the face and spat upon Him ; and yet it seems our patient Lord said not a word in complaint. Then they put His garments upon Him, and Pilate asked the people what he should do with Him, and they cried, "Crucify Him." It was then Friday morning, and probably about ten or eleven o'clock. They made a cross of heavy beams, and laying it upon His shoulders, forced Him to carry it to Calvary—the place of execution, just outside the city ; for it was not allowed to execute any one in the city. Our Lord had not eaten anything from Thursday evening, and then with all He suffered and the loss of blood, He must

have been very weak at eleven o'clock on Friday morning. He was weak, and fell many times under the cross. His suffering was increased by seeing His Blessed Mother looking at Him. When He arrived at Calvary they tore off His garments and nailed Him to the cross, driving the rough nails through His hands and feet. It was then about twelve o'clock. From twelve to three in the afternoon Our Blessed Saviour was hanging on the cross, with a great multitude of His enemies about Him mocking Him and saying cruel things. Even the two thieves that were crucified with Him reviled Him, though one of them repented and was pardoned before death. Our Lord's poor Mother and His few friends stood at a little distance witnessing all that was going on. When Our Lord was thirsty His executioners gave Him gall to drink. At three o'clock He died, and there was an earthquake and darkness, and the people were sorely afraid.

But you will ask, how could these soldiers be so cruel? They were Romans; and in those days men called gladiators used to fight with swords before the Roman Emperor and all the people—just as actors play now for the amusement of their audience. People who could enjoy such scenes as men slaying one another in deadly conflict would scarcely be moved to pity by seeing a man scourged. Again, in the early ages of the Church, during the persecutions, the Emperors used to order the Christians to be thrown to wild beasts to be torn to pieces in the presence of the people—who applauded these horrible sights. They who could see so many put to death would not mind putting one to death, even in the most terrible manner.

79 Q. On what day did Christ die?

A. Christ died on Good Friday.

“Good Friday,” so called since that time.

*** 80 Q.** Why do you call that day “good” on which Christ suffered so sorrowful a death?

A. We call that day good on which Christ died, because by His death He showed His great love for man, and purchased for him every blessing.

81 Q. Where did Christ die?

A. Christ died on Mount Calvary.

“Mount Calvary,” a little hill just outside the city of Jerusalem. For every city they have a special prison or place where all their criminals are executed. Now, as the great Temple of God was in Jerusalem, the city itself was called the City of God, because in the Temple God spoke to the priests in the Holy of Holies. The Temple was divided into two parts: one part, something like the body of our churches, called the Holy, and the other part, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, called the Holy of Holies. It had about the same relation to the Temple as our altar and sanctuary have to our churches. The Ark of the Covenant was a box about four feet long, two and a half feet high, and two and a half feet wide, made of the finest wood, and ornamented with gold in the most beautiful manner. In it were the tables of stone, on which were written the Commandments of God; also the rod that Aaron—Moses’ brother—changed into a serpent before King Pharaoh; also some of the manna with which the people were miraculously fed during their forty years’ journey in the desert when they fled out of Egypt. All these things were figures of the true religion. The Ark itself was a figure of the tabernacle, and the manna of the Holy Eucharist. The Holy of Holies was hidden from the people by a veil. Only the Chief Priest was allowed into that sacred place, and but once a year. The veil—called the veil of the Temple—hiding that Holy of Holies, though the things mentioned above were no longer in it, was torn asunder when Our Lord died on the cross (Matt. xxvii. 51); because after His death there was no need any longer of figures; for after His death we have the tabernacle itself and the real manna, the real bread from heaven, viz., the body of Our Lord. The veil was rent to show also that God would not remain any longer in the Temple, but would be for the future only in the Christian Church. On account of all these things, therefore, Jerusalem was called the Holy City, and no criminals were put to death in it, but were conducted to Calvary—which

means the place of skulls—and were there put to death. I now call your attention to one thing. If the Jews showed such great respect and reverence for the Ark containing only figures of the Blessed Sacrament, how should we behave in the presence of the tabernacle on the altar containing the Blessed Sacrament itself!

* 82 Q. How did Christ die?

A. Christ was nailed to a cross and died on it, between two thieves.

“Two thieves,” because they thought this would make His death more disgraceful—making Him equal to common criminals. One of these thieves, called the penitent thief, repented of his sins and received Our Lord’s pardon before his death. The other thief died in his sins. Holy writers tell us that one of these thieves was saved to give poor sinners hope, and to teach them that they may save their souls at the very last moment of their lives if only they are heartily sorry for their sins and implore God’s pardon for them. The other thief remained and died impenitent, that sinners may fear to put off their conversion to the hour of death, thus rashly presuming on God’s mercy. Persons who wilfully delay their conversion and put off their repentance to the last moment, living bad lives with the hope of dying well, may not accept the grace to repent at the last moment, but may, like the unfortunate, impenitent thief, die as they lived, in a state of sin.

83 Q. Why did Christ suffer and die?

A. Christ suffered and died for our sins.

It was not necessary for Our Lord to suffer so much, but He did it to show how much He loved us and valued our souls, and how much He was willing to give for them. We, alas! do not value our souls as Christ did; we sometimes sell them for the merest trifle—a moment’s gratification. How sinful!

* 84 Q. What lessons do we learn from the sufferings and death of Christ?

A. From the sufferings and death of Christ we learn the great evil of sin, the hatred God bears to it, and the necessity of satisfying for it.

We learn "the great evil of sin" also from the misery it brought into the world; the "hatred God bears to it," from the punishment He inflicted on the wicked angels and on our first parents for it; and lastly, the "necessity of satisfying for it," from the fact that God allowed His dear and only Son to suffer death itself for the sins even of others.

* 85 Q. Whither did Christ's soul go after His death?

A. After Christ's death His soul descended into hell.

* 86 Q. Did Christ's soul descend into the hell of the damned?

A. The hell into which Christ's soul descended was not the hell of the damned, but a place or state of rest called Limbo, where the souls of the just were waiting for Him.

Hell had many meanings in olden times. The grave was sometimes called hell. Jacob, when he heard that wild beasts had devoured his son Joseph, said: "I will go down with sorrow into hell." He meant the grave. Limbo is not the same as Purgatory. It does not exist now, or, if it does, is only for little children who have never committed actual sin and who have died without baptism. They will never get into heaven or see God, but they will not have to suffer pains as they who are in Purgatory or hell endure.

* 87 Q. Why did Christ descend into Limbo?

A. Christ descended into Limbo to preach to the souls who were in prison—that is, to announce to them the joyful tidings of their redemption.

* 88 Q. Where was Christ's body while His soul was in Limbo ?

A. While Christ's soul was in Limbo His body was in the Holy Sepulchre.

"Sepulchre" is the same as tomb. It is like a little room. In it the coffin is not covered up with earth as it is in the grave, but is placed upon a stand. We call such places vaults, and you can see many of them in any cemetery or burying-ground. Sometimes they are cut in the side of elevated ground with their entrance level with the road; and sometimes they are built altogether under the ground. The one in which Our Lord was placed was cut out of the side of a rock, and had for a door a great stone against the entrance. Our Lord was not placed in a coffin, but was wrapped in a linen cloth. It was the custom of the Jewish people and of many other ancient nations to embalm the bodies of the dead, wrap them in cloths, and cover them with sweet spices (Matt. xxvii. 59). Thus it was that Mary Magdalene and other good women came early in the morning to anoint the body of Our Lord. But you will say, why did they not do it on Friday evening or night? The reason was this: The day with the Jews began at sunset—generally about six o'clock—and ended at sunset on the next evening. We count our twenty-four hours, or day, from twelve at midnight till twelve the next night. Therefore, with the Jews six o'clock on Friday evening was the beginning of Saturday. They kept Saturday, or the Sabbath, instead of Sunday as a day of worship. On that day, which they kept very strictly, it was not allowable to do work of any kind; so they could not anoint Our Lord's body till the Sabbath ended, which was about six o'clock, or sunset on Saturday evening. So, as the Holy Scripture tells us, they came very early in the morning; for Mary Magdalene and these good women were Jews, and strictly observed the Jewish law. You must know that Our Lord Himself, the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the apostles were Jews; and that the Jewish religion was the true religion up to the coming of Our Lord; but as it was only a figure and a promise of the Chris-

tian religion, it ceased to have any meaning or to be the true religion when the Christian religion itself was established by Our Lord.

89 Q. On what day did Christ rise from the dead?

A. Christ rose from the dead, glorious and immortal, on Easter Sunday, the third day after His death.

“Rose” by His own power. This is the greatest of all Our Lord’s miracles, because all He taught is confirmed by it and depends upon it. A miracle is a work that can be performed only by God, or by some one to whom He has given the power. If any one performs a real miracle to prove what he says, his words must be true; for God, who is infinite truth, could not sanction a lie—could not help an impostor to deceive us. Now Our Lord said He was the Son of God; that He could forgive sins, etc.; and He performed miracles to prove what He said. Therefore He must have told the truth. So all those whom God sent to do any great work were given the power to perform miracles that the people might know they were really messengers from God. They, on the other hand, who claim—as many have done from time to time in the world—that they have been sent by God to do some great work, and can give no convincing proof of their mission, are not to be believed. Thus, when Martin Luther claimed that he was sent by God to reform the Catholic Church—which had existed nearly 1500 years before he was born—he performed no miracles, nor did he give any other proof that he had any such commission from God; and he cannot therefore be believed.

God has established all the laws of nature permanently. They will not vary or change, so that we can depend upon them. We can always be sure that the sun will rise and set; that the seasons will come; that fire will burn, etc. Now, if we see three young men in a great fiery furnace without being burned (Daniel iii.), we say it is a great miracle; because naturally the fire would burn them up if God did not prevent it. Again, water will not stand up like a high wall without

something keeping it back ; it will always run about and fill every empty spot near it. If, therefore, we see water standing up like a high wall, as it did in the Red Sea at the command of Moses, and in the river Jordan, we say it is a miracle. So in all cases where the laws of nature do not work in the ordinary manner, we say a miracle is being performed. Now Our Lord performed many such miracles—many times He suspended the laws of nature—which God alone can do, since He alone established them. Our Lord called back the soul to the body after death, thus raising the dead. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, cured the lame, etc., when all medicine and natural means were useless. He did all these things instantly as a rule, and without remedies. Therefore His miracles prove His divine power. Since the resurrection was a great miracle, and Our Lord performed it to prove that He was the true and only Son of God, He must have been just what He said He was.

“Glorious.” Our Lord rose in the same body He had before His death ; but when He rose it had new qualities—it was glorified. The qualities of a glorified body are four, viz.: brilliancy, agility, subtilty, and impassibility. (1) It has brilliancy ; that is, it shines like a light ; it gives forth light ; the soul shines through the body. You have heard of the Transfiguration of Our Lord. One day He took three of His apostles—Peter, James, and John—unto a high mountain (Matt. xvii.) ; and as He was speaking to them, suddenly His whole body began to shine like the sun. Then Moses and Elias—two great and holy men of the Old Law—came and conversed with Him. The apostles were astonished and delighted at the sight, and wished to remain there always. Our Lord's body at that time showed one of the qualities of a glorified body. The same three apostles that saw Him thus transfigured and heard the voice of the Heavenly Father saying, “This is My beloved Son,” were present in the garden during Our Lord's agony. He allowed them to see the Transfiguration, so that when they should see Him suffering as man, they would remember that they saw Him on the mountain

glorified as God. (2) Agility; that is, a glorified body can move rapidly from one place to another, like the lightning itself. After His resurrection Our Lord was in Jerusalem, and almost immediately He appeared near the village of Emmaus to two disciples going there (Luke xxiv.). They had left Jerusalem after the crucifixion, probably through fear, and were going along together talking about what had happened during the days of Our Lord's Passion. Suddenly Our Lord came and walked and talked with them, but they did not know Him. They asked Him to stay that night at their house, for it was growing dark. He did stop with them, and at supper they knew Him, and then He vanished from their sight. An ordinary person would have to get up and walk away; but He vanished, showing on this occasion the second quality of His glorified body—agility. (3) Subtility; that is, such a body can go where it pleases and cannot be resisted by material things. It can pass through closed doors or gates, and even walls cannot keep it out. It passes through everything, as light does through glass without breaking it. At one time after Our Lord's resurrection the apostles were gathered together in a room, for they were still afraid of being put to death, and the doors were tightly closed. Suddenly Our Lord stood in the midst of them and said: "Peace be to you" (John xx. 19). They did not open the door for Him; neither wood nor stone could keep Him out; and thus He showed that His body had the third quality. (4) His body had the fourth quality also—impassibility—which means that it can no longer suffer. Before His death, and at it, Our Lord suffered dreadful torments, as you know; but after His resurrection nothing could injure or hurt Him. The spear could not hurt His side, nor the nails His hands, nor the thorns His head. Shortly after His resurrection Our Lord appeared to His apostles while Thomas, one of them, was absent (John xx. 24). When Thomas returned, the other apostles told him that they had seen the Lord risen from the dead; but he would not believe them, saying: "Unless I see the holes where the nails were in His hands and feet, and

put my finger into His side, I will not believe." Now Our Lord, knowing all things, knew this also; so He came again when Thomas was present, and said to him: "Now, Thomas, put your hand into My side." Thomas cried out: "My Lord and my God!" He believed then, because he saw. Now if this body of Our Lord's had been an ordinary body, it would have caused Him pain to allow any one to put his hand into the wound; but it was impassible. It seems very strange, does it not, that Thomas would not believe what the other apostles told him? God permitted this. Why? Because, if they all believed easily, some enemies of Our Lord might say the apostles were simple men that believed everything without any proof. Now they cannot truly say so, because here was one of the apostles, Thomas, who would not believe without the very strongest kind of proof. Another person, one would think, would have been satisfied with seeing Our Lord's wounds; but Thomas would not trust even his eyes—he must also touch before he would believe: showing, therefore, that the apostles were not deceived in anything Our Lord did in their presence, for they had always the most convincing proofs.

After the resurrection, at the last day, the bodies of all those who are to be in heaven will have the qualities I have mentioned; that is, they will be glorified bodies.

Speaking of Our Lord's wounds, I might tell you what the Stigmata means, if you should ever hear or read of it. There have been some persons in the world—saints, of course—who have had upon their hands, feet, and side wounds just like those Our Lord had, and these wounds caused them great pain. For example, St. Francis of Assisi (See Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, Oct. 4th). Up to 1883—that is, only a few years ago—there lived in Belgium a young girl named Louise Lateau who had the Stigmata. We have the most positive proof of it, as you may see in the accounts of her life now published. Her wounds caused her great pain and bled every Friday for many years. She was a delicate seamstress, and lived with her mother and sisters in almost continual

poverty. She had always been remarkable for her true piety, patience in suffering, and charity to the sick. I mention this young girl because she lived in our own time, and is the latest person we know of who had the Stigmata, or wounds of **Our Lord**. So if you ever hear of the Stigmata of St. Francis or others, you will know that it means wounds like those of **Our Lord** impressed on their bodies in a miraculous manner.

“**Immortal**”—that is, never to die again, as it will be with us also after the resurrection.

“**The third day.**” It was not three full days, but the parts of three days. Suppose some one should ask you on Friday evening how long from now to Sunday; you would answer: Sunday will be the third day from to-day. You would count thus: Friday one, Saturday two, and Sunday itself three. So it was with **Our Lord**. He died on Friday at about three in the afternoon, and remained in the sepulchre till Sunday morning.

* 90 Q. How long did Christ stay on earth after His resurrection?

A. Christ stayed on earth forty days after His resurrection, to show that He was truly risen from the dead, and to instruct His apostles.

After **Our Lord's** resurrection He remained on earth forty days: but you must not think He was visible all that time. No. He did not appear to everybody, but only to certain persons, and not all the time to them either. He appeared to His apostles and others in all about nine times; at least, we know for certain that He appeared nine times, though He may have appeared oftener. He showed that “**He was truly risen,**” for He ate with His apostles and conversed with them (Luke xxiv. 42). It was after the resurrection that He breathed on them and gave them the power to forgive sins (John xx.).

91 Q. After Christ had remained forty days on earth, whither did He go?

A. After forty days Christ ascended into heaven. and

the day on which He ascended into heaven is called **Ascension-day**.

One day He was on a mountain with His apostles and disciples; and as He was talking to them He began to rise up slowly and quietly, just as you have sometimes seen a balloon soar up into the air without noise. Higher and higher He ascended; and as they gazed up at Him, the clouds opened to receive Him, then closed under Him: and that was the last of Our Lord's mission as man upon earth. The ascension took place forty days after the resurrection (Acts of the Apostles i.).

* 92 Q. Where is Christ in heaven?

A. In heaven Christ sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

* 93 Q. What do you mean by saying that Christ sits at the right hand of God?

A. When I say that Christ sits at the right hand of God, I mean that Christ as God is equal to His Father in all things, and that as man He is in the highest place in heaven next to God.