

quenched his thirst. His desire is not satisfied even by excess; that rather increases it, just as fire burns more strongly when more fuel is added. The tyranny of wealth is like this; the more gold is added, the more it desires. To want more is a sign of poverty; and as the rich man is in this position, he must really be poor. And so we see that the soul is poor when it owns most riches; and is truly rich when it is most in poverty.

If you wish, think of an actual case. Let us say there are two men; one has ten thousand pounds, and the other ten. If you take the money away from both, which will grieve the more? The one who lost the ten thousand. But he would not have grieved more unless he had loved his money more. The more he loves, the more he wants. But the more he wants, the poorer he is. We desire most the things that we need most—for desire springs from need. But where there is satisfaction, there can be no desire; on the other hand our thirst is greatest when our need for drink is most urgent.

I have been saying all this to show that if we are on our guard no one can harm us. The damage comes from ourselves, not from poverty. And so I beg of you, use all your care to rid yourselves of this scourge of avarice, that we may be rich now, and enjoy eternal good things, which God grant that we may obtain, through the grace and love for men of our Lord Jesus Christ; to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



## HOMILIES OF ST LEO FOR HOLY WEEK

TRANSLATED FROM THE DOMINICAN BREVIARY BY E.H.

### *I. Maundy Thursday (from Sermon 58; P.L. 54, 332)*

**I**T is now time for us, beloved children, to turn our thoughts to the passion of our Lord. The sacrilegious leaders of the Jews and their impious priests had long and often been looking for a chance to hurl themselves on Christ and vent their furious spite on him. But it was only at the solemn feast of the pasch that they received the power to do so; for this is what had been deter-

mined, so we are to understand, in the very designs of God himself. Promises that had long been hinted at in the riddle of a mysterious rite, still required to be openly fulfilled; a variety of different sacrifices were still to be completed by one single oblation. Shadows must vanish before the solid reality, images give way to the presence of the Truth; and so the ancient form of worship is concluded by a new sacrament. Victim replaces victim, blood is abolished by blood; and by the very fact of being set aside, the feast which the law prescribes is fulfilled.

So then, as the paschal celebrations are beginning, those whose several duties should have had them decorating the temple, or cleansing the sacred vessels, or seeing to the victims, have banded together instead to perpetrate a single crime; and thus they miss the meaning of the new mysteries, while profaning the ceremonies of the old. They take precautions against a riot on the holy day, but it is not their celebrations they are thinking of, it is their misdeed. Their one anxiety is, not how to preserve the people from transgression, but to prevent Christ from slipping through their fingers. Meanwhile Jesus, master of his own design, was bringing the old dispensation to its close, and establishing the new pasch in its place. And while they were debating in Caiaphas' hall what the best way would be of having Christ killed, he was setting out the sacrament of his body and blood in the upper room, and teaching his disciples the best way of offering sacrifice to God; and this in the very presence of the traitor, to show that no injury could embitter him.

Indeed, by saying 'One of you will betray me', he made it clear that the traitor's disloyal intention was known to him. But instead of putting the impious villain to confusion by a harsh and open denunciation, he made advances to him with a discreet and gentle warning, since there would be a better chance of his correction and repentance if he was not submitted to the disparagement of being openly disowned. Then why, O Judas, you unhappy man, why not take advantage of such good will? See how patient the Lord is with your effrontery, how Christ shows you up to nobody but yourself. Neither your name nor your person is unmasked, but words are used, combining truth and mercy together, which will strike a hidden chord in your heart alone. Neither the honour of the apostolic order nor the communion of the sacraments is refused you. Come to your senses,

discard your crazy spite, return once more to your right mind. Kindness is calling you, salvation is knocking at your door; life is sending you a last summons to live.

*II. Good Friday I* (from Sermons 59 and 61; P.L. 54, 337 and 345)

By the words of his prayer in the garden our Lord revealed that in him there were really and truly two natures, a human and a divine, from the one of which sprang his reluctance, from the other his determination, to suffer. Then thrusting away from him all weakness and hesitation, and rallying the powers of his generous resolution, he re-affirmed the decision his eternal counsels had decreed. To the assaults which the devil, with the Jews as his pawns, launched against him, he presented the form of a servant, free from any trace of sin; in this way he would take upon himself the common cause of all mankind, who alone had mankind's nature without their common guilt. And so the sons of darkness flung themselves on the light of the world; they came with lamps and torches, but failed to dispel the night of their unbelief. They seize him, for it is his will to be caught, and because he is ready to be dragged off, off they drag him. If he wanted to resist, wicked hands could do nothing; but then the world's redemption would be delayed. Unharméd he would save no one, and it was for all men's salvation that he had come to die.

To Annas first then, Caiaphas' father-in-law, he is led away, and next to Caiaphas; there he has to listen to a crazy farrago of petty accusations, and then he is brought before Pilate for trial. Blandly disregarding the law of God, his accusers pretended to respect the statutes of Rome; but what they were looking for was less an impartial judge for their case than someone to satisfy their implacable thirst for blood. They presented Jesus, bound fast with fetters, battered and knocked about and beaten, befouled with spittle, his doom already pronounced by the yells of the mob, in order that amid this universal presumption of his guilt and the determination of everyone that he should be destroyed, Pilate would not dare to acquit him. At one stroke the judge proclaims the blamelessness of the accused and the fickleness of his own judicial sentence, by finding him innocent. But when he wanted to acquit him, they shouted all together, 'If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar's. Everyone who sets up as king is

defying Caesar.' It was foolish of you, Pilate, to be afraid. You would have had reason to tremble at the name of king, and suspect an intention of seizing the state, if you had been dealing with some bully and his bodyguard, if you had unearthed stocks of ammunition, collections of funds, concentrations of armed men.

But why do you listen to charges of ambitious plotting when they are brought against one whose special doctrine was humility? He has defied no laws of Rome, he has submitted to the tribute and paid the temple tax, he has not obstructed the levying of customs, he has ordained that what is Caesar's must be paid to Caesar. He has chosen poverty, and encouraged obedience, and preached submission. Surely this is not opposition to Caesar, but support. But your Excellency of course must assume that the Jews have some reason for their complaints; then enquire more carefully into what is known about the activities of the Lord Jesus, and what has been established about his powers. He has given sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, he has enabled the lame to walk, to the dumb he has restored their speech. He has rid the sick of their fevers and eased their pains, he has cast out devils and brought the dead back to life. Let the Jews complain of this power if they will. Let them charge him openly with what they grudge him in their heart of hearts. Why should they cavil about earthly matters, when what they really resent is the intervention of heaven?

### III. *Good Friday II* (from Sermon 59; P.L. 54, 338)

Pilate's guilt was certainly surpassed by the wickedness of the Jews, who used Caesar's name to overawe him and so drove him to carry out their villainy. Yet he did not come out of it guiltless either, since he forsook his own judgment and lent himself to other men's wrong-doing. But that Pilate allowed Jesus to be ignominiously ridiculed and maltreated, that he had him flogged and crowned with thorns and dressed up in the trappings of mock grandeur, and then paraded him in such a state before the gaze of his persecutors; all this he reckoned might soften the animosity of his foes and glut their hatred; it might perhaps make them think that there was no point in persecuting any further a man whom they saw so variously misused. But in fact their yells of rage were redoubled in intensity, and so they obtained to their own condemnation what they had been so persistently demanding. The Lord

therefore was handed over to their savage lust for blood. In mockery of his royal dignity he is bidden to be the bearer of his own gibbet. So the words were fulfilled, 'His government is upon his shoulder'. A beautiful touch, this; there he was, carrying his own battle-honours in triumph, and advancing against the kingdoms of the earth, under the standard of salvation which all of them were soon to be worshipping.

The crowds that went along with Jesus found a Cyrenaean called Simon, and to his shoulders they transferred the timbers of the Lord's gibbet. This was done to foreshadow the faith of the gentiles, for whom Christ's cross was not to be a thing of shame but of glory. Furthermore it was not in the temple nor within the city limits that he was crucified, but 'outside the camp', because with the passing of the old rites of sacrifice the new victim must be placed on a new altar, and this altar, the cross of Christ, must not be the temple's merely, but the world's.

And now that Christ has been lifted up on the cross, beloved children, you should not just picture to yourselves the sorry sight which met the eyes of the wicked, who were told through Moses 'Your life will be dangling before your eyes, and you will be afraid night and day, and you will not trust your own life'. But our minds should be clean and bright enough to catch the glory of the cross, as it sweeps heaven and earth with its beams; and to see what our Lord meant when he said, 'Now is the judgment of the world, now shall the prince of this world be thrown out, outside.' O the power and wonder of the cross, O the glory of the passion beyond telling! There is to be seen the Lord's seat of justice, and the world's judgment, and the power of the Crucified. You drew all things to yourself, O Lord, when the whole world acquired a sense of the praise due to your greatness. You drew all things to yourself, O Lord, when all the elements concurred in one verdict to abhor the villainy of the Jews, when the lights of heaven were darkened, and the earth shook with unwonted tremors, and the whole of creation refused its services to the wicked. You drew all things to yourself, O Lord, because when the veil of the temple was torn in two, the holy of holies was withdrawn from an unworthy priesthood; by this means would make-believe be turned into truth, prophecy into present fact, and the law give way to the gospel. You drew all things to yourself, O Lord, to provide a public and open sacrament, in which all

nations might dedicate themselves to the celebration of that mystery, which used to be tucked away under cover of shadowy symbols in one solitary temple of Judaea.

*IV. Holy Saturday* (from Sermon 60; P.L. 54, 343)

The triumph of our Saviour, beloved children, is complete at last, and he has put the finishing touches to those transactions which every utterance of the Old Testament had forecast; a turn of events no doubt to grieve the materialistic and literal-minded Jew, but one at which the spiritual-minded Christian should feel nothing but gladness. For them these sacred celebrations of the pasch have been turned into darkness, but for us they should be bursting forth in a blaze of light; because the cross of Christ, you see, is at once the boast of believers and unbelievers' undoing. It is of course true that the Lord of glory received nothing at the frantic hands of his adversaries but shocking cruelty and the most savage, heartless punishment; yet nonetheless those who have been ransomed by this passion of our Lord's have sounder reason, surely, for rejoicing than for giving way to sorrow.

At the time there was some excuse for the disciples' dismay, and the distress of the apostles could scarcely be blamed as want of confidence. There after all were the Jews and their leaders, all combining to commit this one misdeed, fat bulls, in the words of the psalm, subduing them with their overweening arrogance, wanton bullocks besetting them with brutal insolence. There under the very eyes of the sheep were wild beasts howling rabidly for the shepherd's innocent blood; there finally was he himself—though it was in order to suffer that he had come—saying by reason of the nature he shared with us, 'My soul is sorrowful unto death'.

But now that after taking our weakness on himself he has been glorified in all his power and strength, now there must be no sadness among the faithful to cast a gloom over the sacred paschal festivities, no sorrow for us as we live over again the course of these great events. The Lord after all has put the wickedness of the Jews to good use, since he achieved the purposes of his mercy by means of their criminal intent. If in Israel's departure from Egypt the blood of a lamb restored them their freedom, if the day on which the sacrifice of an animal turned aside the destroying angel's wrath became so sacred a holiday, what huge gladness

should be filling the hearts of all Christian people, seeing that for their sakes the almighty Father did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all? For in the slaying of Christ was to be realized the true pasch and the one and only sacrifice; a sacrifice potent enough to rescue not just one people from the tyranny of Pharaoh, but the whole world from the devil's chains.