

F L E U R D E L Y S S E R I E S

*THE MYSTICAL VINE*

A Treatise on the Passion of Our Lord  
by Saint Bonaventure

Translated from the Latin by  
A Friar of S.S.F.



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## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

The value of this treatise, written by a Doctor of the Church, is self-evident. God speaks to all faithful Christians through Saint Bonaventure's meditation. Reissuing *Vitis Mystica* provides wider exposure to this previously hard-to-find translation, not the least bit outdated despite being over 60 years old. Classics, by their nature, continually find surprising ways to lead us closer to Christ Jesus.

Martin Thornton's *English Spirituality* prominently suggests this work for students of the English School of Catholic spirituality, or “Catholic Anglicanism.” Thornton counseled Anglicans look to Saint Bonaventure because he gave order to the spirituality of Saint Francis. In terms of affective emphasis, he complements Saint Anselm and Richard Rolle, and prepares us for more pastorally refined theology of Walter Hilton and Dame Julian of Norwich.

The Fleur de Lys series, here begun to be reissued—works by William of Saint Thierry, Saint Bernard, Saint Aelred of Rievaulx, Hugh of Saint Victor—are “of incalculable importance to Anglican spirituality, and indeed to ascetical theology,” wrote Thornton in 1960. Having studied all of them, and returning constantly—Franciscan, Cistercian, and Victorine influences on Prayer Book spirituality are palpable and poignant through Thornton's guidance—I confess that I wholeheartedly agree.

Matthew Dallman  
Lent 2016



## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is regrettable that the translation into English of the spiritual writings of Saint Bonaventure, the Seraphic Doctor and the 'Prince of mystics,' has been so neglected in modern times. In an age when in many of the contemporary lay movements emotionalism was tending to outstrip reason, we have in his writings sentiments of an almost Bernadine tenderness towards the humanity and passion of Christ together with a sound theological and philosophical foundation. In him we do not find any of that morbid sentimentality which mars some of the later devotion to the passion. His is an affective spirituality, far removed from the sort of emotionalism which, divorced from reason, tends to weaken the will and dispersing our energy along abortive bypaths. Emotion, of course, has its place as a by-product of affection, and it is a mistake to be afraid or ashamed of it, but, as modern psychology teaches, sentiments guided by reason are the key to the control of the instinctive forces within us, and in them lie the most effective springs of action. Bonaventurian affectivity is such that again and again the fire of the Franciscan movement has been blown into flame when the embers have been growing cold.

Saint Bonaventure became Minister-General of the Order at a time when it was being torn in two by extreme factions. On the one hand, there were those who, in the interest of a learning which was deemed to be necessary to combat the heretical tendencies of the day, desired certain relaxations of the rule, especially as regards poverty. On the other hand, there were the "spirituals" who were trying to

impose a literal following of Saint Francis' heroic ideals upon all the members of the Order alike. The latter were also affected by the movement, inspired by the Abbot Joachim, which believed that with the Franciscan revival a new age of the spirit had dawned, which could no longer be shackled to the discipline of an institutional church founded by Christ, as they believed, only for an interim period.

Our Saint had the qualities of a peacemaker, and was an ideal mediator in such a situation. He combined an enthusiastic admiration for the way of Saint Francis, the way of the poor Christ, together with a profound belief that learning could be used in the service of sanctity. All learning, he thought, should "make us better, lead us to love, and unite us to God." Nor was he afraid to point to the highest states of mystical union with God as the end and climax of all asceticism and all knowledge.

In his *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum* he describes how, when contemplating Saint Francis' Vision on Mount Alverna, he saw again the six-winged seraph as a "ladder" of knowledge leading up to an ecstatic experience of God in the vision of the crucified Christ. The bottom two wings of the seraph represented the traces of the wisdom, power, and love of God in the natural world, considered first objectively, then subjectively. The middle two wings represent the image of God as reflected in the natural man with his gifts, and in man as restored in Christ. The top two wings represent Being and the Good. In the unity of Being he sees the unity of God, and in the communicability of the Good he sees the Trinity. These are like the two cherubs, which face each other across the Mercy-seat in the ark. The Mercy-seat represents the

Cross, which is also the rod which enabled Moses to cross the Red Sea. "He who turns his face fully towards this Mercy-seat and contemplates him on the cross with faith, hope, and charity, with devotion, wonder, exultation, appreciation, praise and rapturous joy is ready to keep the passover with him; in other words, to make with him the transition from things temporal to things eternal." Here the intellect is left behind, and the affection entirely centred on God in rapturous ecstasy. Here is the reconciliation of Being and the Good.

For Bonaventure the Cross was the means of purging the soul from its sloth, its lust, and its malice, thus making possible the way of illumination in which the imitation and the embracing of the Cross leads to the resplendent truth about God, man, the world, heaven, hell, virtue, and sin. Even in the way of union the Cross is the means by which pure love is offered to God; for union with Christ means allowing the world to be crucified to us, being ourselves crucified to the world, and being ready to be crucified for the world. "The true Christian who desires to resemble the crucified Saviour ought above all things to strive to carry the Cross of Christ Jesus either in his soul or in his flesh in order to feel himself, like Saint Paul, nailed to the Cross."

The Cross is so central in his thought that it is not surprising to find Saint Francis de Sales saying of him that he had "no other paper than the Cross, no other pen but the lance, and no other ink but the blood of Christ." If there are some passages which strike the modern ear as fanciful, we must take into account that he was a poet, whose art is always designed to hammer at the heart and will. He never stopped

at our Lord's physical sufferings, but let them lead him on to the contemplation of the wounds of his love, so that his grief at the passion was always transfused with rapturous joy. Of no passages could this be more true than those from the present work and from the *Lignum Vitae* which have been incorporated into the night office of the Feast of the Sacred Heart. The wound in the physical heart is a symbol of the wound in his spiritual heart. The one is the door to the other. Here we have one of the earliest examples of devotion to the Sacred Heart. But like Saint Thomas à Kempis he also sees the whole life of Christ as a perpetual martyrdom.

Saint Bonaventure's treatment of the subject of the Church as Christ's Mystical Body should also be noted in this work. Christ shares the sufferings of His martyrs, and the Mystical Body is called upon to share the sufferings of its Head. The doctrine of the Mystical Body had among the Scholastics suffered a certain decline. According to Mersch (*The Whole Christ*, chap. 6) this was due partly to its intractability to precise definition, its Platonic affinities, and the legalistic atmosphere of the age. Nevertheless, they did develop the doctrine as it appeared in the anti-pelagian writings of Saint Augustine, where we find the idea that the grace of the Head is shared by the Mystical Body, and His supernatural life thereby communicated to the whole Church. Saint Bonaventure follows his master Alexander of Hales in teaching that the physical body of Christ is the sacred sign or sacrament of the mystical Body. He treats of this in his *Commentary on the Sentences* and in the *Breviloquium*.

The idea of the Mystical Vine, of course, goes back to our Lord's allegory in John 15, and the Apocalypse identifies

our Lord with the Tree of Life (*Rev 2:7*). But Henri de Lubac has recently traced the ancestry of the idea of the Tree of Life (*Aspects of Buddhism*, chap. 2). The symbol of the tree is found in many ancient civilizations—Persia, India, the Far East, Assyria, and the Semitic races. It appears identified with Wisdom or Law in Proverbs 3:18. The Shepherd of Hermas identified the Law with the Son of God (*Similitudes 8.3*), but it was Origen who first brought the Tree into association with the idea of the Redemption. Apocryphal legend had it that the Cross was actually made from the wood of the Tree of Good and Evil. There are many instances in art of the Cross depicted as a tree or even as Christ Himself. Lubac gives instances of living crosses in a fresco at Bruneck in the Tyrol (late sixteenth century) and at the museum in Beaune (French School, seventeenth century). In the Catacombs there are crosses covered with flowers, reminding us of the blossoming of Bonaventure's Mystical Vine. And of course there is the beautiful hymn we sing in Holy Week, the *Cruz Fidelis*. The theme is "one of the oldest and most widely found in Christian tradition."

The *Vitis Mystica* is often to be found included in the works of Saint Bernard, and it was for long thought to be his work. But one of the best known MSS. Dating from the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth, the Codex Linciensis, calls it a sermon of Saint Bonaventure, and Mabillon in his edition of Bernard's works admits that it is by "some other pious author, who is neither unlearned nor inelegant."

The matter is complicated by the fact that there is both a longer and a shorter version. The latter has much in

common with Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae*, though the *Lignum* is more restrained and compressed in character, doubtless being meant for use in meditation. The additions in the longer work are mainly in the second half and are decidedly inferior in style. They develop in a somewhat artificial way the symbolism of the various vine blossoms. No longer a "lamentation" on the passion as some MSS. Describe it, it seems to be a rather drawn-out treatise on the religious life intended for nuns. It is "very ordinary in content, sentimental in places, and over-burdened with figures of speech" (cf *Medieval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross*, by a Benedictine of Stanbrook, p. 78).

The Quarracchi editors agree that the shorter version is the original and is by Saint Bonaventure. The earlier part may have been a sermon, or possibly more than one sermon, extended in the latter part to further meditations on the Passion. The style of this latter part is characteristic of the Saint, but it may have been worked over by other hands.

The following translation is from the shorter version, as edited by the Franciscan Fathers at the College of Saint Bonaventure at Quarracchi (1900, 2nd ed.). The scriptural quotations are taken as a rule from the Revised Version, but there are some places where a direct translation has been made from the Vulgate or the Septuagint, where they differ from the Revised Version. It is never easy to translate spiritual writing of another age into the language of our own time, and one has led to steer between a literal translation of the Latin and a paraphrase of the colloquial English, realizing that some of the things said just would not be said to-day, however clearly paraphrased. This translation

cannot claim to be anything more than the work of an amateur in such matters, but it is hoped that it will serve to whet the lips and stimulate renewed interest in the writings of the Saint.

May the translator take here the opportunity of expressing his gratitude to those who have helped him with their suggestion and corrections, those who have done some of the typing, and those who have read the proofs.



# THE MYSTICAL VINE

## PROLOGUE

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.”

Come, Jesus, thou fruitful Vine! Thou art the tree of life, which stands in the midst of Paradise, whose leaves are for healing, and whose fruit bestows eternal life. How blessed is the blossom and the fruit borne by that happy stock,<sup>1</sup> the Virgin Mother most chaste!

Apart from thee there is no wisdom, for thou art the wisdom of the eternal Father. Do thou deign to refresh my parched and drooping mind with the bread of understanding and the water of wisdom.<sup>2</sup> When thou openest, Key of David, all that is now hidden from me will be revealed. When thou shinest, true Light, all that is dark in my mind will be dispersed.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VINE

“I am the true vine.” Let us examine some of the characteristics of the ordinary vine, so that with the help of the Lord Jesus we may discern those of the heavenly Vine.

1. This is a reference to Aaron’s blossoming rod of Numbers 17:8, where the word in Latin is *virga*, so making a play on the words.

2. Cf. Sirach 15:3.

We must consider not only the nature of the vine, but its culture. We notice first that the vine is not sown, but planted, and that what is planted is the shoot of another vine.

This is superlatively true also of the conception of Jesus. He, who is God, and begotten of God, Son begotten of the Father, co-eternal and consubstantial with him from whom he proceeds, has a great resemblance to the ordinary vine, which also springs from a single original.

Moreover, that shoot, which is the Christ, is planted in soil to make it fruitful. The soil in which he is conceived, is the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thus “he becomes what he was not, whilst remaining what he was.”

Blessed indeed is that soil in that it extends its blessing to all peoples. How truly blessed is that soil which, in the loving-kindness of God, yields so fruitful an increase! Scripture has description of it in this passage, “There was not a man to till the ground; but . . . a river when put out of Paradise to water it.”

No human hand tilled this soil; it was irrigated by the water of the Holy Spirit. So we read, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.”

Again, we find an allusion to this in the following passage, “Let the earth open and let it bring forth our Salvation.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, the earth was indeed opened, for it was the Blessed Virgin Mary, who in faith believed, and, obeying the words of the angel, brought forth our Savior, the Vine of our Salvation, thus bestowing on us the reward of eternal life.

1. Is 45:8.

So, as we delineate the nature of the heavenly Vine, the Christ, we find that his “culture” takes the same course as that of the natural vine.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PRUNING OF THE VINE

If a vine is to be of any use, it must be pruned. This also may be taken literally or figuratively.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was, in fact, circumcised, but not because he had any need of circumcision. He endured his suffering in order to give us consolation in ours. He underwent it not because he had any sin himself, but because of our sin. He was wounded not for his own transgressions, but that he might heal our sorrows.

But we may take the pruning of this Vine, our most loving Jesus, in another way. We may say that he was being pruned whenever in his earthly life he was denied anything to which as God-man he was entitled. The apostle seems to suggest this when he says of him, “who, though in the form of God, . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” This self-emptying was a kind of pruning, for, just as a vine when it is cut is reduced in size, so our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Vine, was made “lower than the angels.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed this humiliation went to the extent of putting him below all men.

1. Heb 2:7.

How so? His glory was cut by the knife of ignominy, his power by the knife of abasement, his pleasure by the knife of poverty. See the extent of his pruning!

He, ministered to by the whole glory of heaven, indeed the very source of that glory, as it were spurned it, and allowed himself to be clothed in servile garments, to suffer dishonour, to be covered with shame; and all this to redeem us from our shame, and to restore us to our original glory.

He, to whose powerful decrees the infernal, the terrestrial, and the heavenly places are subject, became so abased that he was accounted the lowest of men. He was subject to hunger and thirst, to heat and cold, to physical weakness, and finally to the penalty of death itself.

He, who dwells in light unapproachable, upon whom the angels desire to look, whose very savour so inebriates the saints that they pursue him with the utmost vigour, unmindful either of the things around them or even of themselves, he, I say, was subject to such pain that there was fulfilled that which he had already said through the prophet, "All ye that pass by the way, turn and see if there is any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

He, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, who is alone rich in all things and lacking in nothing, became, according to his own witness, so poor that he was found to be poor than the foxes in the earth, or the birds in the air. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."

He was poor indeed in his birth, but poorest of all when hanging on the cross. When he was born, the only food he

had was the milk of his virgin mother, and rough garments were his only covering. Though he had sufficient to clothe him during his life, he often went short of food. In this death, however, he was both naked and parched with thirst—unless you prefer to imagine that the vinegar, mixed with myrrh and gall, served to slake his thirst.

At last the knife of fear cut away all his friends and family from him, so that among his lovers he had none to comfort him.<sup>1</sup> He trod “the winepress alone, and of the peoples there were no man with” him,<sup>2</sup> and “his heart endured reproach;” he “looked for someone to be sorrowful with him but there was none,” neither found he “any to comfort him.”<sup>3</sup> See now the extent to which our Vine, the most kind Jesus, was pruned! What other vine ever had such a pruning? But though this unparalleled pruning was so thorough, the compensation came in the fruit-bearing.

### CHAPTER THREE

## THE TILLING OF THE VINE

The vine has to be dug around. One might imagine the trench that is dug to be like a trap, laid by people lying in wait to catch someone, because a man who plans to ensnare someone will often dig a pit for him to fall into. It is of this

1. Cf. Lam 1:2.

2. Is 63.3.

3. Ps 69:20.

that the psalmist complains when he says, “They have digged a pit before my face.”

But it is impossible to keep a snare hidden from one who is covered with eyes before and behind, and who sees the past and the future, as if they were always present.

Here is an example of such digging. “The brought to the Lord Jesus,” says the evangelist, “an adulterous woman, and they said, Moses in the law commanded that such should be stoned, but what sayest thou?”

The traps thus laid for the true Vine, and dug for our blessed Vine by those malicious husbandmen, were not intended to make it grow, but rather to dry it up. However, their intention was thwarted, and though there was a great deal of digging around, our Vine was still able to distill for us the water of his mercy.

It would take too long to tell of all the traps that those malicious husbandmen prepared for him. They tried to deceive him by every sort of word and deed. But when they saw that the Vine was in no way harmed by this digging, and that they the diggers fell into their own traps, they ceased digging around the Vine, and began to dig through it instead, to the end that it might dry up for ever, as other trees do when thus treated.

So they dug and dug, not only through his hands, but his feet also.<sup>1</sup> And then with the lance of their fury they pierced not only his side, but the very depths of his most sacred heart.

But this sacred heart had already a little time before been pierced with the lance of his love. “Thou hast wounded my

1. Cf. Ps 22:17.

heart, my sister, my spouse,” he said; “thou hast wounded my heart.”<sup>1</sup> This heart of thine, most loving Jesus, was wounded by thy spouse, thy sister.

But why did thine enemies have to wound thee again? Why, O enemy, did you do this? If he was already wounded—and the heart of the most dear Jesus was indeed wounded—why did you add a second wound? You cannot be ignorant of the fact that, if the heart receives one wound, it dies entirely, and becomes in a certain way insensible. The first wound alone was the cause of death to the heart of my dearest Lord Jesus. The heart of Jesus my bridegroom had received love’s wound; it also received love’s death.

But how can death come twice? “Love is a strong as death.”<sup>2</sup> It is indeed far stronger than death. The first death was his love for the many, who themselves are dead, and it cannot be expelled from the heart’s house. Such a wound engendered in his heart a love that can never be quenched. If there is a struggle between two equally strong men, one being inside the house and the other outside, what doubt is there but that the man within will prevail? See then the great strength of that love, which, while it occupies the house of the heart, is stabbed to death by the wound of love. This is true, not only of the Lord Jesus, but of his servants also.

And so the heart of Jesus was already a little while before “killed all the day long” for our sake, and “counted as sheep for the slaughter.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, physical death also came to

1. S. of S. 4:9.

2. S. of S. 8:6.

3. Ps 44:22.

him, and won the day in the temporal realm, though defeated in the eternal.

Once we have reached the heart of our dearest Lord Jesus, we find “it is good to be there,” and we shall not lightly depart. Wherefore it is written, “they that depart from me shall be written in the earth.”<sup>1</sup> But what is said of those that come to thee? “We shall run after thee, . . . we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy heart.”<sup>2</sup>

O how good and pleasant a thing it is to dwell in thy heart, O most good Jesus! Thy heart is a goodly treasure; it is a heart that is precious. It was when the field of thy body had been dug that we found it. Who would cast away such a pearl? Nay, rather, I will give all the pearls in my possession for it; I will exchange for it all my thoughts and affections. To gain possession of the heart of the good Jesus, I will direct my whole mind towards it, and he will surely nourish me.

“I will worship towards thy holy temple,” for in it there are holy things for holy people, and the ark of the covenant is there. “I will praise the name of the Lord,” saying with David, “I have found in my heart to pray to my God.”<sup>3</sup> Yes, I have found the heart of my Lord, my King, my brother and my pearl, the heart of my most gracious Jesu! Should I not pray then? Indeed I will; I will boldly say, “His heart is also mine.”

If, or rather because, Christ is my Head, we may ask how it is that what belongs to my head does not belong also to

1. Jer 17:13.

2. S. of S. 1:4.

3. Cf. 2 Sam 7:27.

me? Just as the eyes of my physical head belong to me, so is the heart of my spiritual Head mine also. This is much to my advantage. Jesus and I share one heart. Should we be surprised at this, when we read in the Acts that the whole multitude of believers were of “one heart”?

Having discovered, dearest Jesu, your heart and mine to be thus united “I will pray to thee, my God.” Let my prayers enter the sanctuary of thy hearing; yes, draw me wholly unto thy heart. It may be that the tortuous winding of my sins will be an obstacle. Yet because that heart of thine dilates and abounds in a love that passes understanding, and because thou alone canst bring forth cleanness from what is conceived in uncleanness, I beseech thee, whose beauty has no compeer, “to wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” Having been thus purified, I can approach thee, who art most pure, and I will be found worthy to dwell in thy heart all the days of my life. In this way I shall both see thee and be able to do thy will.

Thy side was pierced that we might be shewn the door by which it can be entered. Thy heart was wounded, that being delivered from all outward distress, we might abide in the Vine. But it was also wounded that we might perceive behind the visible wound the invisible wound of love.

The ardent love always receives a wound of love. Could there be any better way of displaying the ardour of his love than by his allowing, not his body only, but his very heart to be wounded by a spear? In this way the physical wound reveals the spiritual wound, and Scripture in a beautiful way hints at this in the passage quoted above, where the words “thou hast wounded” are repeated twice. Both wounds were

on account of his sister and spouse, so in effect the Bridegroom declares plainly, "Because thou hast wounded me with the seal of love, I have also been wounded by the spear of the soldier." For who would allow his physical heart to be wounded on behalf of his friend, if he had not previously received in his spiritual heart the wound of love? This is why he said, "Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast wounded my heart."

But why "sister and spouse"? Would not the relation of sister alone or of the spouse alone have sufficed to demonstrate the loving Bridegroom's affections? Also, why "spouse" and not "wife"? For both the Church and every faithful soul are continually raising the offspring of good works for Christ.

Let me explain briefly. The love of lovers is usually more ardent while the marriage is still young, than later when in the course of time their love has become more formal. So our Bridegroom, to mark the greatness of his love, which time cannot abate, calls his friend "spouse," to show that his love abides ever fresh.

But since the love of lovers is normally of a carnal nature, he calls his spouse "sister," lest we should suspect that there was anything carnal in his love, for however great a love for a sister is, there is nothing carnal in it. This is the reason he says, "Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister and spouse." It is as if he should say, "Because my love for thee is as great as that of a Bridegroom towards his spouse, and as chaste as that of a brother towards a sister, therefore is my heart wounded for thy sake."

Who would not love a heart so wounded? Who could forbear to respond to a heart so loving? Who would not embrace a heart so chaste? The lover thus wounded can only accept as true a love that proceeds from one who is herself wounded by love, who can cry, "I am wounded with love."<sup>1</sup> The loving Bridegroom accepts a return of love from one who says, "Tell my beloved that I languish for love."<sup>2</sup>

So we who are yet carnal must give back as much love as we can to our Lover. We will embrace our wounded Bridegroom, whose feet and hands, as also his side and heart, have been dug into by those wicked husbandmen. Let us pray that our hearts, still so hard and impenitent, may be found worthy to be bound by the chain of his love, and be wounded by his spear.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TRAINING OF THE VINE

A vine has also to be trained, and who can fail to observe the bonds by which our Vine is tied? The first bond was, I think, the bond of obedience. "He was obedient to the Father even unto death, the death of a cross." Also he was obedient both to his mother and to Joseph, as Scripture affirms, "He came with them to Nazareth and the subject unto them." He also obeyed his earthly rulers, and paid his didrachma.

1. S. of S. 2:5 (Septuagint).
2. S. of S. 5:8.

The second bond was the Virgin's womb, as says the Respond, "Thou didst bear in thy bosom him whom the heavens cannot contain."<sup>1</sup>

The third bond was the crib, as the Office Hymn<sup>2</sup> says, "*Vagit infans inter arcta positus praesepia*" (the infant whimpers as he lies in his narrow crib).

The fourth bond was the rope with which he was bound when they took him captive. Wicked men laid their hands on Jesus and bound him.

O King of kings, O Lord of lords, why should you have to be bound with such bonds? Vines have to be tied up to prevent them falling to the ground; otherwise their crop would be poor and would perhaps go bad. But thy fruit is incorruptible. Why are thou then bound? Well spoke Alexander the king when he had been pierced by a crooked arrow, and they asked him to allow himself to be bound up till he should die, so that he might undergo death with as little suffering as possible. "A king," he said, "ought never to be bound; a king's power should always be free and unlimited."

O God of gods, what deprivation of thy liberty and power didst thou suffer! How many were the bonds that bound thee, who alone knew true freedom and alone had the power to bind and to loose! It was out of compassion for us that thou wert bound; it was that we might be released from our miserable condition.

1. Respond for Christmas, second nocturne, for the sixth lection.
2. Office Hymn for Matins on Passion Sunday.

O most gentle Lamb, what cruel bonds were those with which those cruel men did bind thee! As far as I am able, Lord Jesus, I will try to imagine thee bound by those hard bonds. Like a common robber thou wast dragged before the chief priest's seat of judgment, and then before Pilate. The picture makes me tremble with horror, and I would faint with astonishment did I not clearly realize that thy heart had already been bound by bonds of love, and that it was these that enabled thee to suffer the hardship of the physical bonds more patiently. Thanks be to God, good Jesus, for thy bonds, which have been so effective in breaking ours.

The fifth bond was that by which he was bound to a pillar, when he was scourged, though we might call the scourges themselves bonds, since they encircled his body. Yet, cruel, hard, and unjust as they were, I love those bonds, those scourges which thou didst permit to touch thy most holy body, and which became not a little soaked in thy most pure blood. The scourging, good Jesus, caused thy blood to be shed so copiously that the column is said to still preserve the red marks of thy blood.<sup>1</sup> How much of thy blood must also have adhered to the scourges that rent thy body!

We observe, too, that in the process of binding, it is proper for a vine to be bound to a pole. What better thing could serve for a pole than the pillar to which our Lord was bound? Thus Christ was bound to a pillar as a vine to a pole.

The sixth bond was the crown of thorns, which pressed with great severity upon that adorable head, leaving upon it the marks of many pricks, drawing out all round it a circle of

1. Saint Jerome mentions this in Letter 108, par. 9.

blood drops, which, I think, must have streamed down upon the venerable face, before it was scarcely dry of the Jews' spittle.

The bond was indeed a cruel one, and we notice that those sufferings which appear to us to bear most the marks of dishonor were taken by him as marks of honour.

O good Jesus, thou King of glory, the crown of all who trust thee, all who follow thee, all who fight for thee, all who share thy victory, and all who abide in thee, who could have delivered thee over to so bitter a bond of shame? Behold "shame hath covered thy head and thine adorable face." The honour of derision in the form of a crown was heaped upon thee by a crooked and perverse generation. But the pain inflicted by the points of the thorn was truly real. Here we see shame and pain vying with one another. I know not which of them hurts him most, the mockery of the crown or the prickling of the thorns.

"Go forth, then O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown, wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart."<sup>1</sup> A soul that claims to be a daughter of Zion—that is to say, of the Church—should relinquish all secular business and all vain imagination, and in contemplation behold this King Solomon. This is Jesus Christ, called "our Peace" because he destroys the enmity and restores the friendship between God and man.

Behold him, then, faithful soul, crowned with the crown with which his mother crowned him—his mother being the

1. S. of S. 3:11.

Jewish synagogue or the Jewish people. O harsh mother, how has thy good Son sinned that he should be bound with these thorny bonds? It is he who “looseth thy prisoners,” who “raiseth up them that are bowed down,” relieving the “fatherless and the widow.”<sup>1</sup> Does such a man deserve to be bound? Is this his dowry? Is this the mean gift you provide for his nuptials? The day of espousals should be a great day for him; yet, I say, it is become a day of indignation and blasphemy; a day of tribulation and misery; a day of beating a sorrow; a day of bonds and death.

Such is the day of his espousals; and this is the pledge of marriage, faithful soul, with which thy Bridegroom, “fairer than the sons of men,” has pledged thee. As a “Bridegroom he goes forth,” crowned not with gold and gems, but with thorns.

Nor does he lack a purple garment of scorn; for they clothed him with a scarlet robe, even though he himself had already liberally dyed his garments in the super-abundant outpouring of his most holy blood. Purple garments were not usually dyed more than twice. Yet not twice but three times he thoroughly dyed the purple garment of his body with the torrent of his blood.

O spouse, behold your Bridegroom, red with the sweat, with the scourging, and with the crucifixion. Raise your gaze and in imagination see if this coat belongs to your Bridegroom or no.<sup>2</sup> Lo, those evil beasts, those rabid dogs, the Jewish people have devoured him. Those evil beasts have

1. Ps 146:7,9.

2. Cf. Gen 37:32.

condemned One who is your Son, your Brother, and your Bridegroom. Who would withhold their grief, who would restrain their tears and groans? Right as it is to rejoice with Jesus, it is also right to mourn with him.

The seventh bond was of iron. This bound him to the cross, and it was a much stronger and more savage bond than the others, for it not only rent the framework of his most holy hands and feet, but parted his most righteous soul from the hospitality of his earthy body.

Now go ye forth, O daughter of Zion, and behold how our man of peace has fallen as he fights the battle for our liberty! See how for our sake the Author of Life enters the portals of death in order to recall us to the way of life. See how cruelly those iron nails, the hardest of his bonds, penetrate those hands and feet that were always directed towards our salvation. Using them, he “worked out our salvation in the midst of the earth.”<sup>1</sup> See how the trunk of the cross is blended with our Bread,<sup>2</sup> that Bread so pure and refined, the Bread of angels that came down from heaven to feed us with himself. By the hardship he underwent, he desired to refresh our souls with no other food but himself.

He became incarnate for us, not only in order to change himself into our flesh, but also to transform us into his spirit.

Behold then, dearest one, how he was bound, and how he, our so noble and good a Bridegroom, was “reckoned with the transgressors.” He who is our Life died not indeed for himself, but for us. O let rivers of tears be shed for this death

1. Ps 74:12.

2. Jer 11:19 (Douay-Rheims).

in the midst of so many bonds. We he not the first to weep for us?

Stand close by him as he hangs there. “Let be and know”<sup>1</sup> how bitter was this death to which he was condemned, and how ignominious.

He looked round and diligently searched whether “any would take pity of him,” and whether he could discover a comforter. Was there anyone who would dry those streams of blood, or who would dress his eyes, or who would draw out the nails with which he was fastened to the cross? Was there anybody who would be able to place his body in a clean linen cloth, who would let him down from the cross, not in a blanket like Saint Paul, but by cords, and follow the blessed women to the sepulchre, “weeping with those who wept”?

Let us therefore follow the counsel of blessed Paul, and go with our Bridegroom, the good, the very good Jesus, “outside the camp,” that is to say, beyond the world and its lusts.

Let us bear with him the reproach of the cross and the roughness of his bonds; for “it is not fitting that a member that lives delicately should belong to a crucified head,”<sup>2</sup> nor that a limb should claim membership of the body without sharing the suffering of the head.

Let us be bound with the passion-bonds of our good and loving Jesus, that we may be worthy of sharing his bonds of charity. For it was those bonds of charity that drew him from heaven to earth to endure the bonds of his passion. On the

1. Ps 46:10.

2. From Saint Bernard’s fifth sermon for the Feast of All Saints, par. 2.

other hand it was those very passion-bonds which drew us to our Head, when we had a desire to be taken up from earth to heaven. When through the bonds of his passion we have gained the bonds of his charity, we shall become one with him.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE VINE HIMSELF—HIS BODY

We have examined some of the things which belong to the culture of the vine. Now let us turn to our true Vine himself, so that we may more thoroughly and in greater detail contemplate him in some of his aspects.

We find his body to be more disfigured than any other tree or bush. It looks as if it were completely useless and abject, quite incapable of being put to any more service. But what makes us say this? The body of the ordinary vine should resemble that of our heavenly Vine, the Lord Jesus; unless the deformity of his physical form should seem to make the likeness too remote. Somewhere it is written of him, "Thou art fairer than the children of men."<sup>1</sup> Yet we hear Isaiah saying, "Behold, we saw him, but he had no form or beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected of man; a man of sorrows and acquainted with weakness. He hid as it were his face from us, and was despised, and we esteemed him not . . . yet we thought of him as a leper,

1. Ps 45:2.

smitten of God and brought low.”<sup>1</sup> This is the prophet’s description of him.

Let us now come to the accomplishment of his passion. We might, of course, say that his whole life was both an example to us and a martyrdom. Though the telling will be brief, we should tarry the longer in meditation on the great poverty revealed in his abstinence, the length of his vigils, the frequency of his prayers, the zeal revealed in his work and in the sweat of his face as he went around the villages and towns, “preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.” Think how often he, the “living Bread,” “the fountain of water springing up into eternal life,” suffered hunger and thirst. Let us see him in that forty days fast, at the end of which, we are told, he was hungered. Then let us meet him as he returns from the desert to the haunts of men. This is the way to reflect upon that lovable countenance.

Lastly, as we approach the final conflict, we must not shrink from recording the things that caused his body’s disfigurement. Our consideration of these begins to be “sore amazed and very heavy,” and his soul “exceeding sorrowful under death.” We observe his exhausted limbs, and the bloody sweat which in his agony poured out so profusely that it did not dry, but fell in drops upon the ground.

To proceed, let us pass quickly through the unhappy events of that night, when he was taken captive, bound, dragged, jostled, blindfolded, spat upon, smitten with buffets and blows, crowned with thorns and arrayed in purple, mocked at with feigned worship and genuflection, smitten

1. Is 53:2-4.

with a reed, made sport of in a white garment, lacerated with the sharpest scourges, and laden with the cross, which, at first, he had to carry himself, but which soon after was carried for him.

Contemplate Jesus in this situation. What room is there here for a soft way of life? There is apparent here no outward beauty. Who would think to find beauty in the form of this body so desecrated?

But let us go on to the end. Our most loving Lord Jesus was stripped naked. Why? Was it not that we might see the disfigurement of that most pure body? Yes, he, the good Jesus—indeed the all good—was stripped naked.

Alas! He who reigned before all ages and was “appalled with majesty . . . and with strength”<sup>1</sup> was stripped naked. Thou wast “clothed with honour and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment.”<sup>2</sup> “He was made a spectacle and reproach unto the world . . . and to men,”<sup>3</sup> as a “wonder unto many,”<sup>4</sup> and a “shaking of the head among the peoples.”<sup>5</sup> Thou, good Jesus, art our Head, our joy, and our honour!

But why tarry here? He was lifted up on the cross. His hands and feet were pierced. Here was blood drawn, if anywhere. Our Mediator “stood in the breach” before the

1. Ps 93:1.

2. Ps 104:1.

3. 1 Cor 4:9.

4. Ps 71:7.

5. Ps 44:14.

Father to “turn away his wrath lest he should destroy” us.<sup>1</sup> And though he was was “breached” throughout his whole body, his spirit did not flinch, but stood fast with a steady good will.

Thus do I behold thee, dear Jesus! A dearest and most loving and good Jesus, who alone, as our Saviour, couldst save us from our ancient wounds, who delivered thee over to so bitter a death? Who could so lower thee with the indignity of those wounds so harsh and moreover so degrading?

O good Jesus, thou dearest vine? That vineyard of thine, which thou broughtest out of Egypt, has restored thee this fruit. Until the day of thy nuptials thou “lookest that it should bring forth grapes, but it brought forth thorns.”<sup>2</sup> For it crowned thee with thorns, and set them about thy head. See how sour the vine has turned. It is now nought but a “strange vine.”<sup>3</sup> For it denied thee, declaring with a shout, “We have no king but Caesar.”

Thus wast thou cast out of the vineyard, that is, out of the city or community. It was those sacrilegious husbandmen that killed thee, and it was not done in a moment, but in the long-drawn-out agony of the cross. The torture thou didst endure came not only from the many lashed of the scourges, but also from the nails.

O how many there were that smote thee, good Jesus! Even thy Father was one of them, for, it is said, “He spared not

1. Ps 105:23. There is a play on the words in the Latin here—breach (*confractio*) and breached (*confractus*).

2. Is 5:2 (Septuagint).

3. Jer 2:21 (Septuagint).

even his own Son,” and thou were that Son. Moreover, he “delivered” thee “up for us all.”<sup>1</sup>

Thou didst smite thyself, for thou didst deliver unto death that life “which no man can take from thee” without thy consent. Again thine own disciple smote thee, by delivering thee up with a kiss. The Jews smote thee with buffets and blows; the Gentiles smote thee with scourges and nails. O how great was thy smiting and thy humiliation! How many there were that smote thee!

How many also were there that delivered thee up! Thy heavenly Father delivered thee, “He delivered thee us for us all.” Yes, and thou didst deliver up thyself. Did not one of thy servants say joyfully of thee, “Who loved me and delivered thyself for me.”<sup>2</sup> “O truly wondrous trafficking.”<sup>3</sup> The Master delivered himself up for the servant, God for man, the Creator for the creature, the Guiltless for the guilty.

Yes, and thou didst deliver thyself into the hands of that false disciple, by who thou wast delivered up. He in turn delivered thee up to the Jews, and the Jews the worst of all thy deliverers, delivered thee up to the Gentiles to be mocked, spat upon, scourged, and crucified.

Thou didst foretell these things, and lo! they came to pass. When all things had been accomplished, behold they crucified thee, “being reckoned among the transgressors.” But they were not content with wounding thee; no, they

1. Rom 8:32.

2. Cf. Eph 5:2.

3. Antiphon for first Vespers and Lauds on Feast of Circumcision.

“added unto the pains of thy wounds,”<sup>1</sup> and gave three myrrhed wine mingled with gall to quench thy thirst.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE LEAVES OF THE VINE—A GENERAL VIEW

It could be said that the leaves of the ordinary vine are finer than those of any other tree. But no leaves could be more admired than the words of our true Vine. As the natural vine shows itself at its best in its leaves, so Jesus in his words.

But the leaves of the vine are generally more appreciated in those places where the vine is fastened up to some wooden structure, and the shade thereby increased. Let us then see whether our true Vine was in any way fastened up and extended. If this is so, let us go on to consider the leaves or the sweet words that he put out for our comfort.

That our Vine was raised up in this way, our Lord himself testified, when he said of himself, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” It is clear that this exaltation of our Vine refers to the cross. Observe how like the cross the wooden structure is, upon which vines are usually fastened up. So that the vine may be stretched out aloft, the wood is fixed cross-wise. Could the likeness be greater? The wood of the cross, too, is fixed cross-wise; and our Vine, the good Jesus, is then fastened up and his arms and whole body stretched thereon. To such an extent was he

1. Ps 69:27 (Vulgate, Septuagint).

stretched on the cross, that his limbs could all be counted. Or this he spoke through the lips of the prophet, “They pierced my hands, and my feet, they counted all my bones.”<sup>1</sup> It was if he was to say, “I was stretched to the left and to the right, upwards and downwards; and my body like the skin of a drum was so extended that all my bones could be counted with ease.”

Look, O Christian soul, upon the face of Christ your Saviour. Raise your eyes full of tears, and lift up your heart contrite and sobbing towards his torments. See what great distress came to him, as he went seeking to find you. Open, therefore, your eyes wide, that you may gaze upon the face of Christ your Saviour; listen attentively with your ears to the things he has to say in his distress; and when you have heard them, lay them up in the cell of your heart, for such treasure is priceless. Behold, too, the rough bed on which he was laid—I mean that bed of death, the cross.

If, therefore, you desire to gain an ‘inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled,’ treasure carefully the last charges of your Bridegroom. The words he uttered, as he was dying, were not many, so a true spouse of Christ should not find them difficult to remember.

1. Ps 22:7 (Vulgate).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE LEAVES OF THE VINE IN DETAIL: CHRIST'S FIRST WORD FROM THE CROSS

Our Vine uttered seven words while he was raised upon the cross. They are, as it were, seven leaves that are ever green. Or if you prefer, your Bridegroom can be thought of as a kind of lute, which is an instrument that consists of a piece of wood shaped like a cross. His body, in place of the strings, is stretched across the wood, but the seven words are the individual strings.

The first word uttered by our most compassionate Jesus, as he hung on the cross, was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

O how green is this leaf! How proper a word for One who is the Word of the Father most high! This good teacher practices what he preaches. He does not pray for his friends alone, but for his persecutors and those who spake against him. Lay this leaf up in the treasury of your heart, so that whenever your enemies rage against you, you may be able to utter this memorial of the good Jesus' overflowing kindness. Hold his word up against the insults of enemies, as if it were a shield. If your Bridegroom can pray for his murderers, can you not also pray for your detractors?

Let us, however, examine the words in greater detail. He says, "Father." Why does he use the title Father? Do not children, when they want something from their fathers, shew their affection by calling them by some paternal name? They

thus remind them of their natural love, in order to get what they desire more easily.

So Jesus, “gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy,” good to all comers, though he knows that the Father always hears him, by this word sets us an example, shewing the affection with which we ought to pray for our enemies. He uses that affectionate title as if to say, “By that paternal love which is the basis of our unity, by which I know thou always hearest me, I beseech thee on behalf of my murderers to forgive and overlook their deeds. Look at the love of your Son, and overlook the behavior of his enemies.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE SECOND LEAF OF THE VINE

Our Vine’s second leaf, or if preferred the second string of our Lute, is the word which Christ our Lord spoke to the thief when the latter confessed his faith in Christ and sought his society. “Verily I say unto thee: this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”

O how great is the vigour of the leaf! How sweet the sound of this string! How swiftly was the enemy converted into a friend, the foreigner into an intimate, the stranger into a relation, the robber into a saint! How great the faith of the robber! Though he was an accomplice in all wickedness, a ne’er do well, a law-breaker, a taker of life as well as of wealth, now, at the end of his life, he had the audacity to

aspire to and make a bid for the life to come, which he never merited, and which he had practically intended not to merit. If hope was still possible for this robber, can anyone despair?

And so out Bridegroom listens to this soul, not now the soul of a robber, but that of a confessor, his spouse; and because he deemed the tone of his prayers worthy, he comforts him with the words, ‘Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.’ How is this “thou”? “Thou who didst confess me on my cross of agony.” He did not merely say to him, “Thou wilt be in Paradise with the angels,” but “Thou wilt be with *me*.” “Thou wilt be in the company of your heart’s desire. Thou wilt see him in whom thou believest, once set in weakness, but now arrayed in majesty.” Nor will there be any delay in his promise, for he says, “Thou wilt be with me *to-day*.” In truth how prompt was the response of our good and dear Jesus! How prompt his promise, how prompt his gift! Could anyone despair at so generous a response, so swift a promise, and so immediate a fulfilment? “We had hoped in thee, for we knew the sweetness of thy name; for thou dost never fail them that seek thee.”<sup>1</sup>

So, good Jesus, in imagination we come to thee as thou sittest on the throne of thy majesty. We pray that we may be brought thither to thee and by thee, for it was through thee that that robber who confessed thee on the throne of the cross entered.

1. Cf. Ps 9:10.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE THIRD LEAF OF THE VINE

The third leaf of string of the Lute—the third word—is, “Mother, behold thy son”; and “Behold thy mother.” A sweet and gentle word, yet wonderful and profound, full of filial affection.

Good and kind as Jesus was, we do not hear that he maintained very intimate relations with his mother after he was come to manhood, nor that he often supped with her, nor that his words to her were more gentle than to others. But what loving affection towards his mother does this short sentence convey, and that just as his bodily presence was about to be withdrawn!

If I pass over in silence the suffering caused him by the cross, we must bear in mind how deep must have been the affection he felt for his blessed mother, especially in view of her immeasurable share in his passion. For he knew how deeply that sword of profound grief had pierced that softest of hearts. The knowledge of that maternal compassion added to the sufferings he endured from his wounds.

He saw her standing bravely by him in her whole bodily strength—her heart so full of grief, her hands clenched, her eyes overflowing with torrents of tears, her face drawn, her voice trembling. Imagine how frequent must have been her sighs as she stood there, with, I think, her head covered, because of her virginal modesty and her tremendous grief, lamenting over her son, saying, “Jesus, my son, would that I could die with thee and for thee, my son, my dearest Jesu!”

Imagine how often she must have lifted those modest eyes of hers up towards those cruel wounds, if, indeed, her gaze was ever averted, of if she could see them at all through the increasing flow of her tears. Perhaps she could not persuade herself to withdraw because of her tremendous grief of heart, a grief which I greatly wonder did not kill her. Remaining alive, she nevertheless shared his death; and being thus living, the pain she endured was more cruel than death itself.

But to prevent death intervening to cause her departure her son strengthened her both interiorly and exteriorly by his words and actions. How? As she stood by the cross, he said to her, "Behold thy son." It was as if he were to say, "You will never be able to endure the bodily withdrawal of me, your son; I will, therefore, give you as your son my friend, whom I love above all else. When I am gone, his presence will be your consolation." "You, John, are being deprived of me, your father; I will, therefore, hand over my dear mother to you, that she may be yours."

How generous, good Jesus, hast thou become in thy nuptials! How bountifully hast thou, Kind and Bridegroom, disposed of all thou didst possess! Lo! thou hast bestowed thy loving prayer upon those who crucified thee, paradise upon the robber, a son upon thy mother, a mother upon thy son, life upon the dead, thy spirit into the hands of thy Father, and a sign of thy power upon the whole world.

For the redemption of thy servant thou hast poured out all thy blood, and that not from one part of thy body only, but from numerous great gashes. To the betrayer, the traitor, thou hast bequeathed the penalty of his offence, and to the earth, for a while, thine incorruptible body.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE FOURTH LEAF OF THE VINE

About the ninth hour, the Lord uttered the fourth word—the fourth leaf or fourth string of the Lute. This was when he cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Could any eyes remain blind to this leaf? Could any ears remain deaf to this string? Why did he cry out thus loudly, except it was that he thought he would be heard the better? We can imagine how intense the violence of our good Jesus’ pain must have been, when his body was being so stretched, to cause him to cry out thus. Yet we must beware of thinking that this cry meant that the Lord Jesus had in any way lost patience. No, as we shall point out, when we treat of the next leaf of string, he preserved his patience even in the bitterest hour of his passion. Here he was but revealing the intensity of his pain.

The use of the words “My God” makes it clear that this word was spoken in the name of the assumed manhood of Jesus, though, of course, he was still one person with the Son of God. They could not have been said by one who was one with the Father unless he had assumed a human nature.

But what does he say next? “Why hast thou forsaken me?” Could the Father ever forsake his only Son? God forbid. The most kind Jesus, therefore, must have spoken in this way on behalf of the whole Church, of which he is the Head. Desiring to commend the union and loving relation he had with his spouse the Church, he, who as the Head had already

endured suffering in his own body, which he received from the Virgin, now shewed himself prepared to share the suffering of all the members of his body, the Church. So he, who in his own divine nature could not be forsaken, cried out that he was forsaken, because he knew that so many members of his body would endure great tribulation. This was the reason why he appeared to be so inwardly forsaken by God.

Blessed be our adorable God, our most kind Jesus, for condescending to share the tribulation, which we so justly suffer, first by himself on our behalf, but now both with us and in us! In order to ground our trust in him more firmly, mindful of our suffering, he cries, “I will be with him in trouble.”<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE FIFTH LEAF OF THE VINE

The fifth leaf or string is the fifth word uttered by our most loving Jesus from the cross. He said, “I thirst,” and they gave him wine mingled with myrrh and gall to drink.

All our dearest Jesus’ limbs had now received their chastisement except his tongue. So when he thirsted, “a strange wine, whose fruit was turned sour,”<sup>2</sup> have him a sour drink, the purpose of which was not to quench his thirst, but

1. Ps 91:15.

2. Jer 2:21 (Septuagint)

to torment his tongue, since but to taste the drink was torture enough.

But though it is true that these things were done that the Scripture might be fulfilled, I think that this word, “I thirst,” implies something more. In my opinion he said it to commend to us his tremendous love. For a man who is thirsty craves for drink much more ardently than a hungry man does for food. So when in his thirst he manifested to us his desire for something that created so ardent a desire in him, he was in a figure revealing his zealous love for us.

Nonetheless I do also accept his physical thirst as really genuine, for his whole body must have been parched through the outpouring of his sacred blood. As the Psalmist says, he possessed “bones burnt up as a firebrand.”<sup>1</sup> Yet it is difficult to believe that he complained of physical thirst, realizing that he was on the point of death. We prefer to believe that his thirst was really a most burning desire for our salvation.

However, our opinion that the thirst was also physical is strengthened by the fact that, at the beginning of the last our of his passion, as he began to pray, our most gracious Lord Jesus fell on his face and said in his prayer, “My Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me”; and this he did not once only, nor twice, but three times. The chalice which he was about to drink stood for the passion he was about to suffer. But now that the chalice of his passion had been completely drained, he said, “I thirst.” What did he mean by this? Before thou didst accept the chalice, good Jesus, thou

1. Ps 102:3.

didst ask that the cup should be altogether removed; but now that it has been drained, thou dost still thirst. Thou seemest to me to be a peculiar kind of drinker!

Was that chalice of thine filled with a pleasant tasting wine? Was it not rather full of the wine of compunction and exceeding bitterness? It was, indeed, filled with the bitterest compunction, and it would engender disgust rather than thirst.

But I imagine that it was not for any lack of love for the chalice that thou didst pray for its removal before the passion, since it was in order to suffer the passion that thou didst come. Apart from it the human race could not have been brought to its salvation. No, the request was made lest anyone should think that thou, though true man, didst not experience the full bitterness of the passion because of thy unity with God. These words, asking for the removal of the chalice, uttered not twice but thrice, reveal to such a doubter the great bitterness of thy passion.

But this thou didst also prescribe to us, who follow in the footsteps of thy doctrine and example, that, when in imminent danger, or whenever it might pertain to our advantage, we can and ought to pray frequently that the Lord might see fit to turn away from us the scourge of his wrath. Nonetheless, even though it should not be removed, we should rejoice in the example of thy suffering, and bear ours perseveringly in all patience and courage.

Before the passion thou didst ask for the chalice to be removed, but now in think exhaustion thou sayest, "I thirst," thus commending thy great love to us. It was as if thou hadst said, "Although on account of the sensitiveness of my

humanity I sought to refuse the suffering because it was so great, my love for you, O man, overcame me. It surmounted the agony of the cross to such an extent that I was prepared, if necessary, to submit not only to the agony of the cross, but even to a suffering of a greater kind. For there is nothing I would refuse to suffer for you, since it was for your sake that I laid down my life.”

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE SIXTH LEAF OF THE VINE

The sixth leaf or string of the Lute is the sixth word which that true and supreme sweetness, the Lord Jesus, spoke as he received that sour vinegar. He said, “It is finished.”

What does he mean by this? A little before it had been said, “The Lord knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst . . . and when he had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished.” Here indeed the testimony of Scripture was accomplished and fulfilled, where it says, “They have me gall for my meat.” In a similar way every Scripture concerning Jesus had its fulfilment.

As then our Head, in order to fulfil and perfect all scriptural passages concerning himself, endured for ours sins the bitterness of his passion and patiently persevered, so should we, if we wish to remain members of our Head, always guard the virtue of patience, so that, when we have reached the limit of our suffering, we, led by our most

gracious Jesus himself, may confidently be able to affirm, “It is finished,” that is to say, “With thy help and not of our own strength we have fought the good fight, we have finished the course, we have kept the faith.”

Give, therefore, what, according to thy promise, is laid up for those who struggle in lawful combat, that is, the “crown of righteousness,” which thou, “the righteous judge, shall give” in that clear day of thine, that “day in thy courts” which shall be “better than a thousand,” that day when thou wilt be the only sun.<sup>1</sup>

O Sun of righteousness, gracious Jesus Christ, shining in thy strength, give thyself as an eternal reward to all who have fought the fight, and to all those who have continued to fight in the thick of the battle. May they receive from thee everlasting glory to enjoy happily for evermore. But it is impossible for anyone who does not persevere to the end to acquire this glory; for “virtue consists in perseverance in good works.”<sup>2</sup>

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE SEVENTH LEAF OF THE VINE

The seventh and last leaf of our Vine or string of the Lute is the last word to be uttered by our most loving Jesus from the

1. Cf. 2 Tim 4:7,8; Ps 84:10,11.

2. Gregory the Great, in the second book of homilies on the Gospels; homily 25, n. 1.

cross, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” The meaning is clear. But why did the co-eternal and consubstantial Son of the Father commend himself publicly into the hands of his Father in this way, when he knew that he would nonetheless have received commendation had he not spoken as he did? Surely he who, only a little while before, had said, “The prince of this world,” that is, Satan, “is come, and hath nothing in me,” knew that his most holy spirit had already the Father’s commendation?

He commended his spirit into the hands of his Father in order to edify us, who are nothing but dust and ashes. He said it that we might also learn to commend our spirit into the hands of our eternal Father, lest as it leaves the body it should be seized by the prince of this world, for he, alas, is far from finding nothing that belongs to him in us.

It was certainly not of necessity but for our example that he commended into the hands of his Father his holy spirit, which spirit, being itself most pure, was on the point of leaving a body that was wholly pure, for him himself owed nothing to sin. Indeed, he came to take away all sins.

#### CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE BLOSSOM OF THE VINE

And so it was that the Son of God “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” It was in our soil that he was planted, and our vile flesh that he took upon himself. But then, in order to unite us to his divinity through union with his

humanity, he put forth leaves and blossom, and bore much fruit. But my most gracious Lord Jesus put forth blossom first, because without previous blossom there can be no fruit. What else is this blossom but his virtues?

The blossom this illustrious Vine brought forth was wonderful, unique, superlative. Unlike other vines and trees, its blossom was not all of one kind. It comprised flowers of all sorts and kinds—the violet of humility, the lily of chastity, the rose of patience and love, and the crocus of abstinence.

We will not treat of them all, but will go on to consider the rose.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THE ROSE OF THE VINE

The blossom of the rose on our Vine, the most gracious Jesus, is of a red and glowing strain. It is red with the blood of the passion, and glowing with the fire of charity. It is also bedewed with the tears that our dear Jesus shed.

It was that I might rejoice, and that the angels might rejoice, that our most good Lord Jesus wept and was straitened. As the Apostle says, “In the days of his flesh” he “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death,” and was “heard for his godly fear.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Heb. 5:7.

Hear, O heart made not of flesh, but of stone! Hear how our great and good Jesus, in the days of his flesh, that flesh which he assumed for me, became drenched in tears, and will your eyes still remain dry? Hear, O hard heart, how we, who cannot ever be moved, is moved to tears on your behalf, and will not even this move you to tears?

Let me add also the fire of charity and the blood of the passion. Perchance they will warn and soften your heart, that at least the tears and blood which our most dear Lord Jesus shed for you may induce you to shed your tears for him.

Yes, and in addition I will take a heavy hammer and strike iron anvils upon you, in the hope of moving you. If you were arid, as a thirsty land, you would easily be softened by the moistening tears of Jesus Christ alone; but if you have become hard as stone by the frost of your many sins, I will have to add stronger instruments. For a hammer I add the cross, and for anvils the iron nails. These I will strike into you that you may be broken and pour forth a healing fountain of tears.

But if you will still not be moved, O hard impenitent heart, you must be harder than that rock in the wilderness, which, after Moses had struck it twice with his rod, released an abundance of water; especially as the hammer of the cross is a stronger tool than the rod of Moses. Those three iron nails, thrice struck in, should be more a powerful and effective means of obtaining water than the double blow of Moses' rod.

But if you still remain unshaken by what should convert one who clings lovingly to his obstinacy, perhaps you are one

of those who can only be softened by the blood of a goat.<sup>1</sup> If this is so, I will fetch you the abundant blood of something similar to a goat. I will bring you the blood of the Lamb without blemish, the blood of the most good Jesus himself.

His blood glows with the ardour of a love without compeer. The strength of his love will entirely reduce and dissolve that adamant wall which stands between man and God, which his enemies have erected, and which has remained firm for so many thousands of years, though hammered by so many precepts and warnings. Neither law nor prophecy could reduce it. But at the approach of a young goat, even our Lamb, the adorable Jesus, it was not only broken down, but utterly destroyed.

But why do you call the Lord Jesus a young goat, which is an unclean animal? It is because he bore that human nature of ours, which is laden with the filth of our sins, though, of course, in him there was found no sin. He is a lamb, too, because of his extraordinary purity. Having no sin in himself, he nevertheless bore the sins of the whole world.

Therefore, O adamant heart, immerse yourself in the abundant blood of that young goat, our Lamb; throw yourself into it, that it may warm your heart, and when it has become warm, let it soften you, and when you have been softened, then let your tears flow as from a fountain.

O most gentle Jesus, I will then search and discover a well of tears in thy tears, in the cross and nails, and finally in thy red blood. I will then search and find out, as far as he himself

1. Cf. Pliny, XX, *Histor. Natur.*, ch. 1 and XXXVII, ch. 15; Jerome, III, *Commentary on Amos* 7, 7 ff.; Augustine, XXI, *City of God*, ch. 4.

will allow, the redness of my Beloved's flesh and soul, which exceeds that of any other bridegroom.<sup>1</sup> For he is red in two ways. He is naturally red in the flesh, as all flesh is red by nature. He is also red with the blood of the passion. Forced by his love for us, his flesh was frequently and abundantly made wet with his blood. He endured so many bloodsheddings in order to make us free. Of these we have spoken before.

But perhaps it may seem that we purposely are dwelling on these things so briefly, lest the reader should be offended. Yet who, except he be wholly carnal and unspiritual, could take offence at that blood? And could anyone who desires to be set free from the flesh,<sup>2</sup> or sins contracted in the flesh, fail to be touched by the healing blood of our most pure Jesus? Would not a man, once inebriated by that most sweet blood, "which God of his goodness has prepared for the poor,"<sup>3</sup> keep on drinking it more and more? Would he not hear and recognize the true voice of God's wisdom, when he says, "They that eat me shall be yet hungry, and they that drink me shall be yet thirsty"?

It is, I believe, true that human blood is naturally so much sweeter than the blood of other animals, that when some beast or another has once tasted it, it ever after craves for it above all other blood. Spurning all other animals, it lies in wait for human blood, even being ready to perish in

1. S. of S. 5:9.

2. The Latin for "flesh" here is literally "bloods," an allusion to Jn 1:13.

3. Ps 68:10 (Septuagint, Vulgate).

procuring it. Think how much more sweet the blood of the Son of Man, true God and true man, the most sweet Jesus, must be. Look how irrational beasts thirst after the blood of man. Should I not then thirst after the blood of the God-man, the blood of the most good Jesus? With beasts, the more they taste of human blood, the more they thirst after it. Shall I then spurn the blood of the most gracious Jesus, who is both God and man? Beasts rush to their death in seeking the sweetness of human blood. Should I not hasten towards life in the blood of my “white and ruddy”<sup>1</sup> Jesus?

Yes, indeed, I will hasten towards it; I will drink of it. “I will buy the wine and milk without price,”<sup>2</sup> which the wisdom of the Father, most high, the most gracious Jesus, has mingled in the bowl of his flesh, that blood which is the ransom of our life.

Come with me, all who love our beloved Jesus, come with me. Buy not that wine and milk with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the coin of good manners and behaviour. For that most pure blood is the wine that inebriates the full-grown, and the milk that nourishes the babes. If you are a full-grown man, if you are perfectly strong, then the wine for you is the blood of Jesus, the purest blood of the grape; but if you are still weak, and milk is what you need, then let that milk be your nourishment. So I counsel you to take a draught of that most pure blood.

1. S. of S. 5:10.

2. Is 55:1.

## THE ROSE OF CHARITY

We have looked at the rose itself. Now it is time to examine the rose of charity and the rose of the passion.

To estimate the ardour of the rose of charity, we must look in greater detail at our compassionate and wonderful lover. We must discover *who* this lover is, *why* he loves, the *quality* and *extent* of his love. This lover of ours has no compeer in greatness, richness, strength. Every spirit is manifest to him, for, as the psalmist says, “Thou art my God.”<sup>1</sup>

This verse helps us to understand clearly *who* our lover is—he is our God. In the words which follow in the psalm we discover *why* he loves. “He has no need of our good.” He does not therefore love us for anything that we can give me. His love is purely gratuitous. But if, in fact, there did happen to be anything good in us, which he might desire, it would not be anything belonging to us, but something we have received from him.

The *quality* of his love is described by the apostle, where he says, “while we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to God.”<sup>2</sup> Such is the love of the righteous one for the unrighteous, of the lovely one for the unlovely, of him, who alone is good and pious, for sinners and the impious. What great honour should we pay him!

1. Ps 16:2 (Vulgate).

2. Rom 5:10.

Next we shall examine the *extent* of his love, but could anyone ever give an adequate description of it?

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE ROSE OF THE PASSION

Observe that when we are describing the extent of our lover's love, we have to combine the rose of charity with the rose of the passion. As the rose of charity takes on a deeper red in the passion, so the rose of the passion glows more brightly in the fire of charity.

The love of our lover is so great that, driven by the fire of charity, he goes to meet the redness of the passion, hazarding his life in death. But this death by crucifixion is no momentary affair. No, indeed! From the first moment of his life until the harsh death he endured at the last, he was suffering death. Everything that our good Jesus endured during the days of his flesh gave the rose of his passion a deeper red, but the frequent outpouring of his most sacred blood contributed more specially to this deepening of colour.

However, since it would not be possible for us to enumerate everything that he suffered, it may not seem irksome if we tell again of the salutary outpourings of his blood, so that these never-to-be-forgotten events may be impressed more deeply on our minds.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THE FIRST BLOODSHEDDING OF CHRIST

We read of Jesus' first bloodshedding at his circumcision, at the time when his name was called Jesus.

There is a mystical meaning in this: in that, by this bloodshedding he was to become to us a true Jesus or Saviour. All young boys and girls should hear this and understand. May the martyrdom of the man Jesus Christ be often impressed upon their minds! Whence also Isaiah, speaking of the nativity of this man, our most dear Jesus, said, "Unto us a boy is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders . . ." Here Isaiah links the cross, which he indicates by the term "government," to the nativity, since the nativity of the cross begins at his birth.

It was also an enhancement of our Lord's rosy passion that he was born of a poor little mother away from home in the middle of winter, in the middle of the night, outside the inn. Though no blood was shed then, it was not long before some was, after an interval of seven days.

What an example of charity! Our most sweet and loving boy Jesus—the glory, wealth, and delight of heaven—is scarcely born, and lo! though of so recent a birth, he is conjoined to the ignominy, the pain, and the extreme poverty of the cross.

But the very term "government" compensates for the wretchedness of the cross. For the mighty Jesus, who hath

reigned “from the wood,”<sup>1</sup> made the whole world and hell as well subject to him. In the cross “he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the Father, even to death . . . wherefore God the Father highly exalted him and gave unto him the name that is above every name.”

So it was but fitting that, at the first bloodshedding of this most pure Lamb, his name should be called Jesus, for here was his first bloodshedding for our salvation. The same blood was eventually to be wholly poured out to secure our salvation.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE SECOND BLOODSHEDDING

We find our dearest Jesus’ second bloodshedding, that dyed the rose of the passion, in the bloody sweat, which came from him while in the agony of his prayer; for “being in any agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat became as it were great drops falling down upon the ground.”

Were we to ignore all the other bloodsheddings, would not this one alone suffice to deepen the red hue of our rose? In truth it would. Let my miserable heart tremble; let it be rent and become bedewed with bloody tears, for lo! it was for me that my Creator was drenched with a bloody sweat, and that not a little, for it ran right down to the ground. Alas that my

1. Ps 96:12. Justin Martyr’s reading, and in Cyprian, Lactantius and Augustine, but not in Jerome.

wretched heart is not moistened with a sweat like his, and to the same extent!

See the anguish which tortured that most gentle heart, for it caused a bloody sweat to break out from every part of his body. So great an amount of sweat like this would not have poured out of his visible body, unless the heart within had been breaking under the strain of his overwhelming sorrow. “My heart within me is broken,”<sup>1</sup> said the prophet. His heart within was broken, as also was the external veil of the true Solomon, our most loving Jesus. His most bloody sweat is poured out upon the earth. Thus does the rose of charity and of the passion become reddened by the redness of Jesus. See how wholly red he has become.

This general blood effusion of our most good Jesus has a mystical meaning also. He who came to bear the infirmities belonging to our flesh and blood, sweated throughout his whole body. This bloody sweat, which covered every part of the body of our head, Jesus, was to serve to strengthen and heal his mystical body the Church. Therefore, we are “delivered from bloodguiltiness, by the God of my salvation.” We are delivered by our most kind Jesus, who poured out his blood for us. Surely this bloody sweat may also signify the poured-out blood of the martyrs, which was to redden the whole body—his mystical body—the Church.

1. Jer 23:9.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THE THIRD BLOODSHEDDING

The third bloodshedding occurred when they plucked his cheeks. The prophet testifies of this, where, in speaking of the adorable person of our Lord Jesus, he says, "I gave my body to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair."<sup>1</sup>

Some interpret this of the laceration which his jaws suffered from the finger nails of those impious Jews, other as pulling of his beard. Whichever is right, neither could have been done without the shedding of blood. And so I envisage the sacrilegious hands of those wicked people, who, not content with blows, buffets, and spittings upon the most good Jesus' loving face, were inflamed with passion, and by plucked his cheeks drew blood from his most dear countenance. So was the colour of our rose deepened still more.

I observe how admirable and how worthy of imitation was that patience of that unblemished Lamb, manifested in so much meekness, when those unchaste men lacerated his most chaste cheeks with their nails. All this was suffered that we might be helped to bear our sufferings more patiently, when in some way "shame has covered our face for his sake."

1. Is 50:6. But the Septuagint, followed by R.V. and A.V., has "back" instead of "body."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### THE FOURTH BLOODSHEDDING

The fourth bloodshedding took place when that harsh and thorny crown was not just gently placed, but spitefully forced down upon our Jesus' most dear head. It is typical of the haters of truth that they should require that the Truth himself should suffer torture as well as dishonor.

Here again we must not imagine that there were lacking streams of blood. From the dear Jesus' head, so mockingly and spitefully crowned, blood flowed down from his face even on to his neck. For had they not intended to add suffering to their mockery of him whom they had crowned, they could easily have plaited the crown with the withies or twigs of some other tree. But to emphasize the harshness of their conduct, they crowned the Lord Jesus, that most meek Lamb, who is now crowned with glory and honour, with prickly thorns.

This crowning was meant as a mockery; yet in their ignorant derision they, in effect, gave witness that he was a crowned king, for is not any crown part of the insignia of a king? So he was declared king by men who did not recognize his kingship, but the thorns revealed the malice of those who crowned him.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### THE FIFTH BLOODSHEDDING

The cruel scourging of our most gentle Lamb, our rose-hued Jesus, constitutes the fifth bloodshedding. What a tremendous amount of that very sacred blood must have dripped from his torn flesh on to the ground through the scourging! Ponder the great cruelty of those raging sinners. Ponder the great rage of those cruel men, who scourged the dear Jesus. Yes, he accepted all this to save us from the scourge. “The ungodly,” he says, “compassed me about and scourged me without a cause.”<sup>1</sup>

“Without a cause” is true enough—unless those miserable and perverse men deemed his good works to be worthy of punishment. If so, it must be said of them that they “held down the truth”<sup>2</sup> in falsehood.

But, as usual, these sufferings have something to teach us. From them we learn to bear our most blessed Father’s chastenings with equanimity, just as our most dear Lord Jesus bore for us so patiently the chastisement he received from those most evil men.

For what scourges would not a man, born to labour, reared in an environment of sin, and deprived of his heavenly heritage, be prepared to undergo, when he sees the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the most loving Jesus, worn down by such severe scourgings—“he who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth”?

1. Roman Breviary. Palm Sunday respond to the ninth lection, and respond for third lection for Feria IV on a greater Saturday.

2. Rom 1:18.

“Hear now this, O man, foolish and without understanding,” receive instruction. The temptation to escape from instruction must be resisted, but also “you must lay hold of it, lest your Lord be angry and ye perish in the way”;<sup>1</sup> for he “spared not his own Son,” but delivered him up to scourging for your sake.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH BLOODSHEDDINGS

The most profuse of these bloodsheddings is to be found in the piercing by the nails. Who could doubt but that our innocent Jesus must have poured out a tremendous amount of his sacred blood, when his hands and feet were pierced? In those streams of blood our rose became empurpled. Here we find the most ardent charity and suffered of the deepest dye. Ponder awhile the ardour of this rose of charity in the red of its suffering. Who ever endured such hard and painful things? And remember here that it is God himself who is the sufferer. He whose habit was to remove completely, or at least to alleviate, the violence of their pains in his servants, refused to allow any alleviation at all in his own case, and endured to the full the harsh wine-press of his passion.

Them he knew how to spare, but himself he refused to spare. The Gospel of Saint John witness to this in that passage, where we read how, on his captors saying that they

1. Ps 2:12.

were seeking him, he gave himself up to them, saying, "I am he. If therefore ye seek me let these go their way."

O what ardour of a true charity—indeed of the truest charity! Here charity itself reveals itself and delivers itself over to the hands of its savage enemies. Charity seeks not to spare itself, but supplicates for the salvation of its own. And so our most gentle Saviour, the dear Jesus, after much derision, was seized both by the Jews and the Gentiles, and, after much shedding of blood was pierced by nails both in his hands and his feet, being at length fastened to the wood of the cross.

Examine and see how red this rose of sanguinary passion becomes in order to express its burning charity. Charity and passion vie one another: the one for more ardour, the other for a deeper red. But it is through the ardour of charity that the passion acquires its redness in a wonderful way, since apart from love there would be no suffering. And it is the redness of the passion that manifests so great and incomparable an ardour of charity.

But just as a rose closes when the cool of the night comes on, and opens right out in the warmth of the sunrise, its expanding petals proclaiming by their redness the welcome heat, so the most lovely flower of heaven, the most good Jesus, was for a long time shut up, as it were by the cool of the night, that is, the sin of the first man, the full bounty of grace not yet having touched it. But when the fullness of time at length drew near, he was warmed by the rays of a burning charity, and then, every part of his body becoming exposed, the ardour of the rose of charity flared up in the redness of his poured-out blood.

See then how our Jesus, so red, blossoms into a rose. Examine every part of his body. Where is there a flower not to be found? Look first at one hand, then at the other; look at each foot in turn. Perchance you may discover a rose there. Look into the opening in his side. There is not lacking a rose there, though it is less red, being mixed with water, for “there came out blood and water.” This is he that came by water and blood, even the most good Jesus Christ.

O dearest Lord and Saviour of all, O good Jesus, what can I do to shew my gratitude in a worthy manner? For from the very beginning of thy life, from thy birth until thy death so hard, yes, and after death, thou didst pour out thy blood for me alone. Thou hast been at pains thus to demonstrate the ardour of thy supreme charity in the frequent outpourings of thy blood. O how manifold and beautiful has thy rose become with its many petals! Who can count them all? Count the drops of blood, shed from the most loving Jesus’ side and from his body, and you will have the number of passion roses and their petals of charity, for each drop of blood is a petal.

The seventh of our Lord’s bloodsheddings has already been briefly spoken of, when we told of the opening in his side, “whence came out blood and water.” This is the source from which we have received the sacrament of Baptism.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### AN EXHORTATION TO THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE PASSION AND CHARITY OF CHRIST

Now then, my soul, gather your strength. You weak and miserable thing, arise, and with the wings of faith and hope mount up to the garden of charity. The mind tends to range over many subjects, so draw together the whole attention of your thought into one. To obtain the honey of devotion, copy of the method of the little bee. Ascend, ascend, I say, to the paradise of charity, to the “depth of your heart,”<sup>1</sup> for, behold, he whom you seek is exalted.

But fear not, for, “being exalted, he was also humbled.”<sup>2</sup> It was not that he might appear difficult of approach to those who desire to come to him, that he was lifted up on the cross, but rather that all might find him the more easily. Approach this Paradise, then, with faith, that you may know, from the stretching out of his arms, the affection in which he holds you, and that you may experience his embrace when he invites himself to your house, and you to his.

“Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee.”<sup>3</sup> Return from your malice, from your evil deeds, from your obstinacy and your despair; return to me, for you have been turned away from me. We would look upon you with the same gracious aspect with which we looked upon the woman who was a sinner and the robber on the cross.

1. Ps 64:6 (Vulgate).

2. Ps 88:16 (Vulgate, Septuagint).

3. S. of S. 6:13.

Read, the, to me that “book of life which is written within and on the back,”<sup>1</sup> and understand what you are reading. Gather to yourself those flowers of mine, that you may enter that Paradise, outside of which stands the Cherubim with the sword of flame. You can learn from me fully the knowledge that will avail to remove that obstacle of the Cherubim. Moreover, these sanguinary flowers will extinguish the flame of that sword that turns all ways.

Therefore, O soul, meditate with affection on all these things, for that is the only possible way by which you can enter that Paradise which is better than all paradises. Later you will become worthy enough to enter it in body as well as in soul.

Nor should you curtail your embrace of this Paradise, but you should like a bee fly into each flower and lick each petal. As the streams of his blood are sprinkled now on his right hand, and now on his left, he draws closer to us, and our approach to him becomes more intimate. Everywhere we may cull devotion, and the grace of a tearful compunction. From either side we may ponder the rough way in which those nails were driven in, the sensitiveness of his nerves, and how painful must have been the rupture of the bones in his hands, those hands that made heaven and earth.

See how he has wrought “salvation in the midst of the earth.”<sup>2</sup> You should often meditate on these things. “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation”<sup>3</sup> in the manner of the little bee, who while flying makes a continual buzz and is only silent when he enters a flower, where he gathers and sucks

1. Rev 5:1.

2. Ps 74.12.

3. Ps 51.12.

the sweet honey for which he has longed so much. Oh, how happy will you be if, after you have entered these sanguinary flowers, the wounds of Christ, which belong to our garden so blooming, a garden sweeter than all other, you are found worthy of a complete release from the din of this world and from all bouts of temptation, and be free to attend to Jesus alone.

Then when you have come to him, you will “taste and see how gracious the Lord is.”<sup>1</sup> In the same way you must also look upon his feet, for there was just as much blood on them, and as much pain in them as in his hands. They, too, were pierced and perforated; they, too, were dripping and besprinkled with sanguinary streams and drops of blood.

Finally, through the door of his lanced side, we enter that humblest of all hearts, the heart of Jesus the most high. Here without any doubt lies that ineffable treasure, the love for which we have ever longed. There, too, we shall find that devotion whence the grace of tears is drawn, and from which we may learn gentleness and patience in adversity and sympathy with all who are afflicted. In particular we shall find there a humble and contrite heart. So great a love longs for and craves for your heart; such love longs to embrace you.

That head, so full of blossom, pierced with so many pricks, inclines towards you. It offers you the kiss of peace, and say, as it were: “See how transfixed, how pierced, how immolated I am.” I suffer all this that I may place you, my wandering sheep, upon my shoulders, and bring you back to my garden of heavenly pastures. I bid you, in your turn, to yield yourself

1. Ps 34:8.

to me. Allow yourself to be moved with pity at my wounds, and “set me” just as you see me “as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm,”<sup>1</sup> so that my image may be impressed upon you, and that in all the thoughts of your heart and in all the works of your hands you may be found such as you see me to be.

I will have you formed to the image of my deity, in which I created you. It was in order that I might fashion you that I myself was fashioned in the image of your humanity. Do you, then, who failed to preserve the likeness of my deity impressed upon you in your creation, at least preserve that humanity of yours, which was impressed upon me at your re-creation. If you no longer preserve the form in which I created you, preserve at least the form in which I have re-created you. If the virtues I was hoping to bestow upon you are beyond your reach, at least lay hold of the great wretchedness of that humanity that I accepted, when I re-created you, when I refashioned you for participation in delights that are even greater than those I wished to give you at your first creation.

The reason I became visible was in order that you might see me and give me of your love, for I was not loved at all in my Godhead, because I was unseen and invisible. Render me, then, some return for my incarnation and my passion. I became incarnate and endured the passion for you. I gave myself to you; do you give yourself to me?

O most dear and good Jesus, “Father of lights, from whom is every good gift and every perfect boon,”<sup>2</sup> look in pity on

1. S. of S. 8:6.

2. Jam 1:17.

all who humbly confess and truly know thee, for without thee we can do nothing.

Do thou, who gavest thyself to us as a ransom, grant that we, unworthy as we are of so great a ransom, may by thy grace be so wholly and perfectly restored that, being conformed to the image of thy passion, we may also, at our Lord's appearing, be refashioned according to that which we lost through sin, namely to the image of thy deity.

AMEN