

The Great Day of the Cross - The crucifixion of Jesus

Fr. Matthew the poor



The Day of the Cross is a great day. Without exception, it is the greatest day of humanity. This is the day when humankind entered the great judgment and came out of it justified and absolved from their sins.

The message today is a living message. I wish the Lord would enable us to feel what the great Apostle Paul felt, to realize and believe with him that "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20.) How did Paul receive this great principle? Even though the Cross did not have its effect on Paul the Apostle through the direct words of Christ during His life on earth, Paul received a revelation of the Cross, when he opened his heart to the Saviour. Thus, his eyes were opened, as well. Consequently, today Paul's words inspire, and even more his spirit, to embrace the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We feel we were crucified with Christ, to live not for ourselves, but for Him who died, lived, and was resurrected for our sake (2 Cor. 5:15.)

My talk today will be limited to one small verse, quoting the words the Lord said on the Day of the Cross when darkness filled the earth.

The Lord spoke seven times as He hung on the Cross, three of which were before the earth was covered with darkness, one during the darkness, and the last three after the darkness receded.

The first three He uttered before the darkness were:

- 1) "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34.)
- 2) "Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43.)
- 3) "'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!'" (John

19:26,27.)

During the period when great darkness covered the whole earth, i.e., from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, the Lord Jesus spoke the following critical words. I note them here for their depth and because of the great importance they hold for our personal lives. There are numerous explanations for the meaning of these verses, but the profundity and importance of each for our lives is beyond measure. His words are:

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)

Three hours elapsed following these words, from the sixth to the ninth hour, during which He was silent. When the darkness receded and the sun began to appear once more, He uttered these words:

"I thirst" (John 19:28.)

When they gave Him a sponge full of vinegar and herbs on the hyssop branch, He tasted it, but would not drink, saying:

"It is finished" (John 19:30)

These were the second words spoken after the darkness receded.

Following this, he said:

"Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46.)

Christ's Freedom in Going to the Cross

Christ proceeded to the Cross by His free will. He did not hesitate or retreat for a second. He came to the Cross by the freedom of His will, not for Himself, but as a representative of all mankind.

Christ went to the cross as a representative of mankind, in order to enter the Divine judgment on mankind, while knowing exactly the judgment that was to follow.

He advanced towards God's strict judgment as a lawyer for mankind, but with the shackles of a prisoner.

He came in our place, not asking for the acquittal of mankind, but entering peacefully and calmly into the prisoner's cell, shutting Himself, and standing to receive heaven's retribution.

For the first and only time in history, we observe the presentation of a lawyer's defense without the utterance of a single word, and yet yielding the acquittal to all mankind. He, the Living Word of God, defended His case without words, accepted the punishment of Heaven, and came out absolved, bearing with Him the absolution of all mankind.

The Lord, before entering Jerusalem in the last week, said, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be delivered to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spat upon; they will scourge him and kill him" (Luke 18:31-33.)

Who is speaking in these verses? It is Christ Himself, but it is as if He were speaking about someone else. With what calmness and serenity does He advanced towards death! This proves He was going to the Cross according to His own free will and power.

We then notice His words, "The Son of Man will be delivered." His words, "the Son of Man" show that Jesus is the representative of all mankind; He is its delegate, its lawyer, the receiver of all retribution in its stead.

The "Son of Man" is the primary expression Christ used for Himself, and it carries with it the powerful meaning that he is the representative of humankind, coming from heaven to undergo judgment, taking our retribution on Himself, the final absolution.

"Will be delivered" is here in the passive voice. Who will deliver the Son of Man? The Jewish nation was represented by a High Priest, priest, and High Courts, which were known as the Sanhedrim. The Sanhedrim consisted of all the great teachers and sages of Israel, as well as the people's official counsel.

He also said, "He will be delivered to the Gentiles." Here, "the Gentiles" is a clear allusion to the Romans in the person of Pontius Pilate and his judicial authority.

Presented here are two judicial systems: (1) A judicial system in accordance with God's law and representing God's judgment; and (2) the Roman law, i.e., the worldly system of judgment. This is an ignominy to the Roman law and its judicial system, as it is no longer represented a system of lawmaking and judgment, but was merely a system of implementation.

These two judicial systems have a spiritual meaning, which shall be discussed later.

Judgment and Retribution

After prophesying His deliverance to the Gentiles, the Lord said, "...and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spat upon." These three retributions represent the first part of the judicial

system. The words "...they will scourge Him" represents the second part of the judicial system. Finally, the words "...and kill Him" represent the third part.

Regarding the first part, "...and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spat upon" is the law's retribution on the echelon of shame and dishonor.

"...[T]hey will scourge Him" is the retribution of the echelon of chastisement.

"...and kill Him" is the retribution of the echelon of the judgment, the judgment of sin, i.e., "The soul that sins, it shall die" (Ez. 18:20.)

To continue our assertion of Christ's complete freedom in going to the Cross, and that He went with joy and hope, not merely with resolution, consider His words in Luke 22:24, where He considered the coming judgment of the Cross. Christ's words addressed to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane are illuminating. "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done" (Luke 22:24.) The language here is clear and simple. Christ proceeded not in all His glory, but in the powerless and weak nature of mankind, as He know advance the degree of retribution He was facing, its frightful length, breadth, and depth. He approached the Cross with firm and certain steps, yet "with loud cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7.) He stood before the Father praying and interceding, asserting in the end, "For this purpose I have come to this hour" (John 12:27.)

His words, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given Me?" (John 18:11) are the third proof of His freedom in taking the Cross. He spoke these words in response to any doubt regarding the necessity of the Cross.

The fourth proof of His freedom in proceeding to the Cross is as follows. "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18.) Here, He forestalls the time of His death.

Each of these references displays the degree of freedom and resolution with which the Lord proceeded to the Cross.

The Meaning of the Cross

Where do we stand in relation to the Cross?

Though it is the day of mankind's judgment, the Day of the Cross is marked with joy and wonder, in spite of the sadness with which the Church is enrobed on that day, and in spite of the gloomy hymns we sing that confound the inner being. The day holds a sense of doom and inevitability, because it is the great Day of judgment. It is the day the prophets referred to as the Day of the Lord. Who can stand on this day? It is truly a fearful day of judgment.

Where is the judge?

The judge in the court of the Cross was the Law; the Law of the Old Testament that Moses received from the hand of God. The Law was the verbal image of God's will, portraying it in commandment that consisted of warnings and retributions.

What was the position of the people's leaders? In today's judicial language, they represented the Attorney General.

Their accusations were true. The High Priest stood with the people's elders to present the case before the only source of authority at the time, the Roman judicial system. He stood and spoke, as was his right as the Attorney General, the defender of the law, and the administrator and custodian of Moses' law. He set the maximum punishment for a person being accused of acting against the Law.

First, He was a blasphemer of God.

Second, He had defiled the Sabbath.

Third, He had violated Moses' law, thus the label, "an evildoer;" "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed Him over" (John 18:30.) This means he had a history full of violations against the Law.

With these three accusations, the High Priest was completely speaking within his authority, declaring the sentence such a person deserved. Thus, he demanded, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" And again, "We have a Law, and by that law He ought to die, because He has made Himself the Son of God" (John 19:6-7.)

Thus, the judgment here is a correct application of the law.

What was Christ's opinion concerning the sentence?

It was without doubt the correct judgment. "For this purpose, I have come to this hour" (John 12:27.) Christ knew this judgment would be the fulfillment of the Father's will.

But...

The sentence the High Priest declared and placed in the mouths of the people, in spite of its accuracy, was the standard for every man by which to be judged, and primarily the man who first uttered the judgment, i.e., the High Priest. Without realizing it, the High Priest had issued a judgment against himself and against the entire assembly of priests and rulers of the law,

beginning first with them, and then against the people, both the knowledgeable and educated, and the ignorant among them.

Christ alone realized this truth. For this reason, He received the judgment of the High Priest, not only willingly and joyfully, but with a clear view that the case would be closed in fulfillment of the Father's will.

Christ proceeded bearing all of humankind in His flesh.

my beloved, this is the concept of incarnation. We must have the correct theological concept of incarnation in our hearts. Christ took on man's flesh, and was called the Son of Man. He took your body and mind. He took only the body of sinners. Christ could not take the body of the righteous because He knew that He had come to this hour for the judgment that was to come upon sinners... all sinners. Everyone who sees himself as innocent or righteous has overstepped the reaches of the Cross. Christ came only for sinners: "For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13.)

Until now, my beloved, this is Christ's message. This is His mission. That is the Cross and that is its depth. The Cross is the atonement for sinners alone. As for those who see their soul as pure and innocent, they have no part and no place in the great Day of the Cross. He is an outsider to the scene, an onlooker that can only say, "He has saved others; as for my soul, He could not save it."

Christ is still taking on my body, yours, and every sinner's body on earth from the day Adam was created until the last man appears on the face of the earth.

This is the incarnation, and with this incarnation, Christ proceeded to the Cross.

What was He bearing?

He bore every human sin. He bears every sin committed by man in his fallen state since the fall of Adam, including every sin procreated by Adam since the beginning and until the end of time.

The following question might come to our minds: How did Christ take on sin in His flesh, while we know He was without sin, and was born from a pure body without sin, and lived without sin?

Contemplate this with me a while, my beloved. When Christ was slandered and accused of being a sinner, and did not defend Himself, He accepted these accusations, and on the exterior, became a representative of sinners. Internally, He received the sins of mankind as His own when He deferred from defending Himself from their slanderous accusations of Him being an evildoer.

When they accused Him of being a blasphemer, and He accepted the accusation without defense, He became a blasphemer to represent blasphemers.

When the accusation was made that He had defiled the Sabbath, even though He had often explained to them that He was the Lord of the Sabbath, and did not defend Himself, He immediately accepted the sin of defiling the Sabbath.

You know, my beloved, that, "A man who has violated the Law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deut. 17:6, Heb. 10:28.)

The signposts of sin and retribution are beginning to become clear:

- Christ accepted being considered a violator of the law.
- Christ accepted being considered a defiler of the Sabbath.
- Christ accepted being considered a blasphemer of God.
- Christ accepted being considered an evildoer.

Thus, my beloved, all kinds of sin and violations of the law were placed upon Him. He accepted them all, and was satisfied that they had put these abuses of the Law on His head. They did not forget a single sin, from the greatest to the least.

Minor sins were treated by forty lashes according to the Law (Deut. 25:2,3.) Whosoever defiled the rulers and elders of Israel were banned from the Council as a violator of the Law (Ex. 22:28,) even if the action was not a violation of the Law (i.e., when the people disobeyed the High Priests, even if the people were more or less right, the punishment was proper, because speaking against "a ruler of your people" was a sin.) For that reason, the Apostle Paul in his conversation with the High Priest amended His words, even though he had been in the right (Acts 23:5.)

When Miriam spoke against Moses and God struck her with leprosy, Moses implored God to heal her. God replied to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside of the camp seven days, and after that she may be brought in again" (Num. 12:14.) This is a significant parallel, because here they spat on Christ's face, hit Him on the head, and pulled the hair of His beard (although the pulling of His hair was mentioned in the prophecies about Christ (Is. 50:6,) and was not mentioned in the Gospels, but in liturgical and Apostolic tradition.)

The punishments and retributions Christ bore for the minor sins were scourging, banishing Him from the Council, spitting on Him, and pulling the hair of His beard.

Christ then advanced to the Cross to pay for the deadly sins committed against the ancient Law, one of which was the violation of the Sabbath, as he who defiled the Sabbath was to be stoned.

Now that Christ had fulfilled the punishment for minor sins, he embraced the punishment for all the major sins.

How wonderful is that which You have accomplished for our sakes, O Lord, while we were oblivious to that which You did for us, O Son of God!

My beloved, I beg of you, see yourself as a recipient of those lashes on your back, as the one being spat upon, and as though the cane falling on the Savior's head is falling yours. Today is the Day of your judgment. If you desire or acknowledge it, then it is also the Day of your innocence.

You approach this day in genuine trepidation with Christ, with back bared, shamed before men, spat upon, the beard ripped from your cheeks, your head beaten with a cane. From here, you advance by your own free will and spread your arms to carry the Cross. In your own strength, you rise with Him, enabled only by your weakness to be presented in such degradation: shamed, naked, with hands and feet nailed to the Cross, in the body that carried every sin, rising with the pure body of the One who took the punishment for you. At that point, you receive with Him a share of innocence.

Today is the day of your judgment. Do not fear. Come, bare your back with Him who bared His back and was not ashamed. Come, turn your face, and turn it without looking backward, as Isaiah said about Him, "I turned not backward (never)" (Is. 50:5.)

Do not be afraid. Walk, step by step. That is the price of your minor sins, the cost of violating God's minor commandments. Come, come with me, share this punishment that can wash you flesh, blood, and bones, and make you reborn with the flesh of a newborn babe.

Today is the Day of Judgment of mankind for minor sins. Come, come, O sinners, those with a heavy conscience, those burdened by sin; come, for this Day is yours. Come to sate the passions of your conscience, to live without a conscience burdened by sin, not with a conscience that has sinned, but with a conscience that has been purified and cleansed to become whiter than snow (Psalm 51.)

They clothed Him with a crimson robe on the Day of the Cross, which is in fulfillment of the prophecy: "Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah" (Is. 63:1,) i.e., crimson robes stained with blood. The mention of a crimson robe here has a beautiful reference to the cross: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool" (Is. 1:18.) The wool here refers to the robe of the Lamb on the Cross. They stripped Him, dressed Him in a crimson robe, and lifted Him up, revealing the royal robe. Christ donned the robe of glory, the robe of eternal purity.

This is the way we approach God today. We are all wearing the crimson robe stained with terrible sins, some of which are small and others that are big.

Today, my beloved, our robes are stained with blood. From a distance it is seen as one blot, as if the robe were stained with a single dye, but if you look closely you will find innumerable crosses, by the millions, that are your sins and mine. Some of these are small and minute; they are the sins paid for with the stripes of His back. Christ received these marks and in their place gave us a cleanliness that exceeds description, a whiteness that is comparable to the pure white wool of a lamb, the lamb of the Divine Offering that removed the sins of the world.

Some of the stains are great. They cannot be removed except by the blood of the transgressor, the blood which Christ shed in our place, which bought our innocence.

So, my beloved, if leading Christ from the judgment seat of the High Priest they dressed Him in a crimson robe, it is the sinner's robe stained with blood, and the same robe that the prophet had previously seen and spoken about. They led Him to a place of fictional judgment, the Roman judgment. All the Romans did was validate, in shameful submissiveness and fear, the sentence of the High Priest as Attorney General.

Pontius Pilate tried feebly, a hopeless human attempt, to give the Roman law its honor and save its face from these priests who were adept in setting plots. He told them, "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him" (Lk. 23:16; representing the punishment for minor sins.)

They replied to him, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

"Why? What evil has He done?"

"If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed Him over."

How cruel was the tyranny of the High Priest, the Attorney General!

At this point, Christ's heart was shaken, because if Pilate's attempt was to succeed, then the Cross was lost. The matter would end with the chastisement of minor sins.

We notice once again the freedom of His will. He did not falter a moment, but prayed in His heart that this ruler should not waver, but would issue the maximum sentence for the case, as they desired.

Pilate asked, "Have you no answer to make?" (i.e., "Defend yourself!")

Pilate did not realize that Christ's only defense for humankind would be His shed blood!

The Lord was silent in order not to hinder the coming of the Cross, though human rationale does not recognize the meaning of the Cross.

"You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release You, and power to crucify You?" (Such humiliation!)

The Lord answered, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above."

This is the greatest indication that the case's sentence was a Divine order, an order that had been issued before Pilate had uttered His judgment. This is clear, because the case did not have clear material proof. As the Roman judge confessed and said, I have found no crime in him deserving death."

The angry insistence of the crazed masses, pitted against the persistence of the Attorney General, made it inevitable that the case be lifted to heaven, to the king, in order for Him to ratify the judgment.

According to Roman law, the case was terribly flawed. Therefore said Pilate to them:

"Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law," and again, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."

Christ here in His glory and honour returned order to the Roman law, and responded to the High Priest's antagonism with calmness. He countered their cries to crucify Him with an act of justification; by taking this punishment on Himself, he fulfilled the terms of the case made against Him. God ratified the case the moment Christ declared the following:

"You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above."

This is the final judicial authority, and the final source of judgment and implementation. It was issued from all the authorities:

- It was issued by the authority of the priests that represent the judiciary of the Old Testament Law.
- It was issued by the authority of Pontius Pilate who represented the executive worldly law.
- Heaven ratified it.

All of this, my beloved, is to calm your spirits, too. Christ did not advance to the Cross feeling

He was wronged or that He did not deserve death according to the Law. No, Christ became, according to His own free will and power, worthy of death according to the violation of the Law in which all humanity fell. Christ bore our punishment willingly and happily, and laid it before heaven's judgment, in order to reap for us an innocence from heaven, an innocence that never was nor ever will be.

This is the great judgment by which humankind was made innocence on this day, an innocence that cannot be measured or realized. Only an official registered copy of this judgment can be acquired that makes every man innocent who stands before the Heavenly Supreme Court without gold or silver.

Come, come to a salvation and a heavenly innocence that indisputable. For it is a case that cannot be retried again, having been previously presented and tried, and the official sentence of innocence issued.

Let everyone who has such a case present himself before God, to acquire innocence and to receive "the same sentence" in today's judicial words, from the heavenly authority sealed by God.

O sinners of the whole world; O you sinner, any sinner, come with whatever sins are in your heart, mind, body, and conscience, whether they be great or small, or tearing your heart with grief.

Come today and take the official copy of innocence, by which you can stand, not before earthly priests, but before the heavens, before Jesus Christ, your lawyer, judge, and bearer of innocence in your stead. Take your innocence from heaven itself, an innocence that is indisputable.

Today, my beloved, Christ entered the world in the firm of a criminal, carrying with Him every sin that can enter a man's mind, uncontested and indisputably sentenced by absolute death. Christ entered the earthly and heavenly court with all their punishments sanctioned in Himself from when they whipped and stripped Him at Golgotha, with the blood pouring from His hands, feet, and from the wounds of the thorns planted on His head. Every part of his body was bleeding.

The offering was presented for all the sins of mankind, and the blood on the body became a new cleansed robe for the sins of humankind. With this same body, that is itself your body and mine, Christ rose glorified on the third day and sat at the right hand of God in heaven to continually intercede and bear forgiveness for each sin.

Today, my beloved, is the day of your judgment and the day of your innocence.