

A Meditation on the Agony of Jesus

So Many Souls Lost in Spite of His Passion



Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with Him Peter, and Zebedee’s two sons. Grief and anguish came over him, and he said to them, “The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and watch with me.” He went a little farther on, threw himself face down to the ground, and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me! But not what I want, but what you want.”

(Good News for Modern Man, Mt 26:36-40.)

This passage speaks of the night following Jesus celebration of the Passover meal with his apostles, the meal we know as the Last Supper because it was the last He would have with them until the Banquet feast of heaven. At that Last Supper Jesus instituted the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and the priesthood. As often before, Jesus took the apostles to the Garden of Gethsemane. With His chosen three Jesus went off a distance from the rest to pray; He bid them pray and watch lest they enter into temptation. Satan accosted Jesus with terrible torments there in the cave of Olivet. Three times Jesus returned, seeking comfort from His apostles, but each time they were sleeping, oblivious of His agony. On His third return, He told them the hour had come for the Son of Man to be handed over to the power of sinful men.

Sacred Scripture gives us the bare essentials regarding Jesus’ agony and Passion, but the mystic, Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, who lived from 1774 to 1824, helps us reflect on Christ’s agony and imagine its true horror.

It was here, on Mount Olivet, that Adam and Eve took refuge when driven out of Paradise to wander homeless on earth, and they had wept and bewailed themselves in this very grotto....He [Jesus] fell on his face, overwhelmed with unspeakable sorrow, and all the sins of the world displayed themselves before him, under countless forms and in all their real deformity. He took them all upon himself, and in his prayer offered his own adorable Person to the justice of his Heavenly Father, in payment for so awful a debt. But Satan...filled with diabolical joy at the sight of them, let loose his fury against Jesus...”Art thou prepared to satisfy for all these sins?”...When the huge mass of iniquities, like the waves of a fathomless ocean, had passed over his soul, Satan brought forward innumerable temptations, as he had formerly done in the desert...He reproached him with the faults of his disciples, the scandals which they had caused,He reproached Jesus with having been the cause of the massacre of the innocents, as well as the sufferings of his

parents in Egypt, with not having saved John the Baptist from death... In one word Satan, in the hopes of causing Jesus to waiver, suggested to him every thought by which he would have tempted, at the hour of death, an ordinary mortal ...for it was hidden from him that Jesus was the Son of God.

(Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, THE DOLOROUS PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, Dover Publications, Pgs. 99-101.)

Blessed Anne also saw her own sins and faults within a stream that flowed toward her from the temptations that encircled Jesus. She describes how the soul of Jesus became terrified at the sight of the innumerable crimes of His creatures and their ingratitude towards God and how this wickedness and the sight of the expiatory sufferings about to come over him crushed him to the earth. (Emmerich, Pg. 102.)

He fell from side to side, clasping his hands; his body was covered with a cold sweat, and he trembled and shuddered. He then arose, but his knees were shaking and apparently scarcely able to support him; his countenance was pale, and quite altered in appearance, his lips white, and his hair standing on end...{Thus he sought out his apostles for comfort.} When he found that they were asleep, he clasped his hands and fell down on his knees beside them, overcome with sorrow and anxiety...."Simon, sleepest thou?"..."Could you not watch one hour with me?"...Had he not been still surrounded by a well-known halo of light, they would never have recognized him as Jesus.

When Jesus returned to the grotto, he fell prostrate...his soul had to sustain a second interior combat, which lasted three-quarters of an hour. Angels came and showed him, in a series of visions, all the sufferings that he was to endure in order to expiate sin; how great was the beauty of man, the image of God, before the fall, and how that beauty was changed and obliterated when sin entered the world. ... He beheld how all sins originated in that of Adam, the signification and essence of concupiscence, its terrible effects on the powers of the soul, and likewise the signification and essence of all the suffering entailed by concupiscence... The debt of the whole human race had to be paid by that humanity which alone was sinless—the humanity of the Son of God...No tongue can describe what anguish and what horror overwhelmed the soul of Jesus at the sight of so terrible an expiation—his sufferings were so great, indeed, that a bloody sweat issued forth from all the pores of his sacred body... [The angels tried to console him.] For one instant there appeared to be, as it were, a struggle between the mercy and justice of God and that love which was sacrificing itself. (Emmerich, Pgs. 103-106.)

According to Blessed Anne, Jesus saw all the future sufferings of his apostles and His Church, all the heresies and schisms, the tepidity and corruption of so many Christians, the lies of proud teachers, the sacrileges of wicked priests, the abomination of desolation in the kingdom of God....He saw the scandals and errors throughout the ages. He saw those who passed on in disgust at the sight of the wounds of his Church, just as the Levite had passed by the poor man who had fallen among robbers. He saw the scattered who refused to see his City high on a hill so it could not be hidden, the House of his Spouse, His Church built upon the rock, which He promised to remain with til the end of time. He saw those blinded with pride and self-esteem, asserting that the Church of the Word made flesh was invisible,

refusing to come in. He beheld with such bitter anguish the ingratitude and corruption of the Christians of the first and all succeeding ages. (Emmerich, Pg. 108.)

The frightful visions of the future ingratitude of the men whose debt to Divine Justice he was taking upon himself, continued to become more and more vivid and tremendous. Several times I heard him exclaim: "O my Father, can I possibly suffer for so ungrateful a race? "[Blessed Anne Catherine continues...] I saw that often the poorest of men were better lodged in their cottages than the Master of heaven and earth in his churches. ...I saw ... the Adorable Sacrament profaned, the churches deserted, and the priests despised. This state of impurity and negligence extended even to the souls of the faithful, who left the tabernacle of their hearts unprepared and uncleaned when Jesus was about to enter them. ... I saw irreverent Christians of all ages, careless or sacrilegious priests ...unworthy communicants, wicked soldiers profaning the sacred vessels, and servants of the devil making use of the Holy Eucharist in the frightful mysteries of hellish worship. Among these bands I saw a great number of theologians, who had been drawn into heresy by their sins, attacking Jesus in the Holy Sacrament of his Church, and snatching out of his Heart, by their seductive words and promises, a number of souls for whom he had shed his blood...I saw the Church as the body of Christ, as all these bands of men who were separating themselves from the Church mangled and tore off whole pieces of his living flesh. ...I beheld whole nations thus snatched out of his bosom, and deprived of any participation in the treasure of graces left to the Church. Finally, I saw all who were separated from the Church plunged into the depths of infidelity, superstition, heresy, and false worldly philosophy; and they gave vent to their fierce rage by joining together in large bodies to attack the Church, being urged on by the serpent which was disporting itself in the midst of them. Alas, it was as though Jesus himself had been torn into a thousand pieces. (Emmerich, Pgs. 111-115.)

When Jesus returned to his apostles the second time and again found them asleep, He was barely recognizable or able to stand. As the apostles arose and lovingly supported him in their arms, He told them that the next day he should be put to death,-- that in one hour's time he should be seized, led before a tribunal, maltreated, outraged, scourged, and finally put to a most cruel death. He besought them to console his Mother, and also Magdalen. James and John then helped Jesus back to the grotto. (Emmerich, Pg. 116.)

During this agony of Jesus, I saw the Blessed Virgin also overwhelmed with sorrow and anguish of soul...She had sent messengers to make inquiries concerning him, but her deep anxiety would not suffer her to await their return, and she went with Magdalen and Salome as far as the Valley of Josaphat. She walked along with her head veiled, and her arms frequently stretched forth towards Mount Olivet; for she beheld in spirit Jesus bathed in a bloody sweat, and her gestures were as though she wished with her extended hands to wipe the face of her Son. I saw these interior movements of her soul towards Jesus, who thought of her, and turned his eyes in her direction, as if to seek her assistance. I beheld the spiritual communication which they had with each other, under the form of rays passing to and fro between them....I saw Jesus still praying in the grotto, struggling against the repugnance to suffering which belonged to human nature, and abandoning himself

wholly to the will of his Eternal Father. Here the abyss opened before him, and he had a vision of the first part of Limbo. He saw Adam and Eve, the patriarchs, prophets, and just men, the parents of his Mother, and John the Baptist, awaiting his arrival in the lower world with such intense longing, that the sight strengthened and gave fresh courage to his loving heart. His death was to open Heaven to these captives,--his death was to deliver them out of that prison in which they were languishing in eager hope.....When Jesus had, with deep emotion, looked upon these saints of antiquity, angels presented to him all the bands of saints of future ages, who, joining their labours to the merits of his Passion, were, through him, to be united to his Heavenly Father. Most beautiful and consoling was this vision, in which he beheld salvation and sanctification flowing forth in ceaseless streams from the fountain of redemption opened by his death. (Emmerich, Pgs. 116-118.)

On May 29, 1954, well over a century since Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich's visions, Our Lord spoke to Sister Mildred Neuzil regarding man's continued refusal to accept His love, man's incessant ingratitude for all He had suffered for our redemption.

“My Heart beats with compassion for the sorrows of man. Oh, how gladly would I help him bear the weight of his terrible cross, fashioned, for the most part, by his own guilt! But alas, he will have none of My help. So I am forced to stand by the side of the road and watch him struggle hopelessly in his agony.” “Oh, the pride of souls! How they resist My grace! ... What am I to say of you, my best beloved? How long will you resist My love? It is from you I expect everything, and you give Me but the husks of your affections. How long will I bear with you, O My chosen ones? How long will your spurn My approaches?

“O man, what have I done to you that you should refuse My aid?”

(Sister Mildred Neuzil, The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Fostoria, Ohio, Pgs. 5, 33.)

May the Most Holy, Most Sacred, Most Adorable, Most Incomprehensible and Ineffable Name of God be always praised, blessed, loved, adored and glorified, in Heaven, on earth, and under the earth, by all the creatures of God and by the Sacred Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar. Amen.

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