

Jews, from what lake of ill will have you drunk the poison of such blasphemies? What teacher instructed you, what doctrine persuaded you, that you ought to believe someone to be King of Israel, someone to be the Son of God, if he would not allow himself to be crucified or would shake his body free from the grip of nails? No mysteries of the law, no rites of the Paschal observance, no words of the prophets proclaimed this to you" (*Serm.* 55:2).

### Sermon 52

16 March 441—*Palm Sunday*

**T**ODAY'S PASSAGE from the Gospel has unfolded for us, dearly beloved, the mystery of our Lord's Passion. Our Lord Jesus the Son of God undertook it for the salvation of the human race. According to his promise, "he has drawn all things to himself in being lifted up."<sup>1</sup> So plainly and clearly has the Gospel unfolded this mystery that, to devout and holy hearts, hearing it read is the same as seeing the actual events. Since the sacred narrative holds undoubted authority, we are obliged to try, with the Lord's help, to have our intellect grasp what history has made known.

After that first and universal fall of human transgression—from which "through one man sin entered into this world, and through sin death, and death has thereby spread to all people, in that all have sinned"<sup>2</sup>—no one could escape the terrible domination of the devil nor the chains of harsh captivity. Reconciliation to pardon would lie open for no one, nor a return to life—had God the Son (co-eternal with and co-equal to God the Father) not condescended to become the son of a human being, coming "to seek out and to save what had been lost."<sup>3</sup>

As "death" came "through Adam," so "through" our Lord Jesus Christ came "resurrection of the dead."<sup>4</sup> According to the impenetrable design of God's wisdom, simply because "the Word became flesh"<sup>5</sup> "in these last days,"<sup>6</sup> this does not mean that the Savior's Birth from the Virgin profited the generations

1. Cf. Jn 12:32.

3. Lk 19:10.

5. Jn 1:14.

2. Rom 5:12.

4. Cf. 1 Cor 15:21.

6. Cf. 1 Pt 1:20.

of these last days only and did not pour itself out also for ages past.

Certainly all the ancients who worshipped the true God, the entire multitude of saints in former ages, lived in this faith and pleased God. There was no salvation or justification for patriarchs, or for prophets, or for anyone of the saints at all, except in the Redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the promise was foretold by many words and signs of the prophets, so it is now itself made present by the same grace and action.

2. Thus it is, dearly beloved, that in the whole course of the Lord's Passion, we should not make so much of human infirmity that we think divine power to have been lacking there. Nor should we look at this "form" of the Only-Begotten (co-eternal with and equal to the Father) in such a way that we should not believe true the things that seem unworthy of God. Certainly, in both natures and in the one Christ, neither the Word is cut off from the man, nor the man separated from the Word. Humility was not despised because majesty had not been diminished. Nothing which had to be inflicted on the suffering nature has harmed the inviolable one.

This whole mystery (which both humanity and divinity have completed together) was a dispensation of mercy and an act of love. With such chains are we held bound that only by this grace can we be released. Condescension by the divinity therefore becomes our advancement. "By so great a price" are we deemed,<sup>8</sup> at such great cost are we healed. What return would there be from wickedness to justice, from misery to blessedness, unless the just leaned down to the wicked and the blessed bent himself down to the miserable?

3. We must not, then, be ashamed of the Cross, dearly beloved, for it comes from the strength of divine wisdom, not from a state of sin. Our Lord Jesus truly suffered with our weakness and truly died. Yet he did not so deprive himself of his own glory that, in the midst of the insults of his Passion, he exercised nothing of his divine operations.<sup>9</sup>

7. Cf. Phil 2:6.

8. Cf. 1 Cor 6:20 and 7:23.

9. Cf. (for the following section) St. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannem* 112:2-3.



Wicked Judas—no longer covered in sheep's clothing but flushed out into the open as a ravenous wolf<sup>10</sup>—embarked upon the violence of crime through the appearances of peace, offering as the sign of his treason a kiss more deadly than any weapon. That raging crowd which had converged to apprehend the Lord with a cohort of armed soldiers, blinded by their own shadows, could not discern the true light amid torches and lanterns. At this point, the Lord (who had chosen to wait for the crowd rather than withdraw—as John the Evangelist shows), when he had not yet been recognized, asked whom they sought. When they said that they were looking for Jesus, he answered, "I am he."<sup>11</sup>

This response, like a blast of thunder, so struck and scattered that band (made up of the wildest men) that all of them—cruel, menacing, and fierce as they were—retreated and fell down. Where was the conspiracy of violence? Where was the fire of wrath? Where were the arms that had been drawn? When the Lord said, "I am he,"<sup>12</sup> the mob of wicked men was flung down at the utterance. What, then, will his majesty not be able to do when he sits in judgment, he whose lowliness could not be judged?

4. Indeed, however, the Lord (knowing what belonged more to the mystery he had chosen to undergo) did not insist upon using his power. He allowed his persecutors to return to their plan for the crime that had been arranged beforehand. For if he were unwilling to be taken, he certainly would not have been. But what human being could be saved if that human being had not allowed himself to be apprehended?

Blessed Peter—who lived with the Lord in the staunchest loyalty and burned with the fire of holy love against the attacks of violent men—used his sword on the servant of the high priest and cut off the ear of that fiercely threatening man. But the Lord did not allow this zealous initiative of the eager apostle to proceed further. He ordered him to sheathe his sword and did not allow himself to be defended against the attackers with hand or steel.<sup>13</sup>

10. Cf. Mt 7.15.  
12. Cf. Jn 18.4-5.

11. Cf. Jn 18.4-5.  
13. Cf. Mt 26.51-52.

It was contrary to the mystery of our Redemption that he who came to die for all should be unwilling to be apprehended. If the triumph of the glorious Cross would have been delayed, the domination of the devil would have continued longer and the captivity of humanity been drawn out. He therefore gives his attackers freedom to rage against himself, for divinity does not want to manifest itself to such as these. Christ's hand restores the servant's ear (already dead as a result of the cut and severed from the frame of the living body), returning it to its place on the injured head.<sup>14</sup> He forms again what he himself had formed in the first place, and the flesh at once follows the command of the one who made it.

5. These works now have divine force. Because the Lord conceals the power of his majesty and gives access to the force of his persecutor against him, it is from this very will that "he loved us and handed himself over for us."<sup>15</sup> Cooperating in this, the Father "did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all."<sup>16</sup> There is one will of the Father and the Son, just as there is one divinity. For the result of this action we owe no thanks to you, Jews, nor to you, Judas. Your wickedness served the purposes of our salvation indeed, though without your willing it, and through you there happened "what the hand of God and the plan of God had decreed to happen."<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, the Death of Christ frees us but accuses you. According to justice, you alone do not possess what you wished to destroy for all. Still, so great is the goodness of our Redeemer that even you can receive pardon—if, by confessing Christ to be the Son of God, you put aside this murderous ill will. It was not in vain that the Lord prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."<sup>18</sup>

This healing would not have passed you by, Judas, if you had fled to that penitence which would recall you to Christ—and not to that which would urge you on to the noose. But, though saying, "I have sinned, handing over innocent blood,"<sup>19</sup> you persisted in the wickedness of your disloyalty. Even in the ulti-

14. Cf. Lk 22.51.  
16. Rom 8.32.  
18. Lk 23.34.

15. Eph 5.2.  
17. Cf. Acts 4.28.  
19. Mt 27.4.



mate danger of your own death, you believed Jesus to be not God the Son of God, but only a man of our own race. You would have drawn his mercy to you if you had not denied his omnipotence.

(2) These things that I have put into your devout ears are enough today, dearly beloved, lest the weariness caused by too many words distress you. What still needs to be added we promise to give you on Wednesday, God willing, since he who has given what we have said, will give, we believe, what to say then, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### Sermon 53

*19 March 441—Wednesday of Holy Week*

Fidelity demands, dearly beloved, that we should return to that part of the sermon which we promised concerning the Lord's Passion, he himself helping us, and I do not doubt that you are helping us in this with your prayers as well. It is to our common advantage if you can consider me beholden, for whatever has been attributed to my skill would be spent on your edification.

(2) After that wicked and detestable bribery of Judas—by which the Redeemer of the world was betrayed by him to the hostile Jews—and after those sacrilegious mockeries in which his meekness was led right up to the place of his punishment, two thieves were crucified with him, their crosses on either side.

One, up to now the equal in all things of his companion, a robber on the roads and always a danger to the safety of people, deserving the cross, suddenly becomes a confessor of Christ. Among those sharp tortures of body and soul—which at the same time both the pressure and the distress of death were increasing—he was changed by a wonderful conversion and said, "Remember me, Lord, when you enter into your kingdom."<sup>20</sup> What discourse urged him to this faith? What doctrine infused it? What preacher aroused it? He had seen none of the miracles that had been performed earlier. By that time, cures

20. Lk 23:42.

of the sick had ceased, as had giving light to the eyes of the blind and giving life to the dead. On the other hand, those things which were soon to be done had not yet arrived. Nevertheless, he confessed him to be Lord and King, the one he sees as a companion in his own punishment.

Thence came this gift in which faith itself received a response, for Jesus said to him, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."<sup>21</sup> This promise surpasses the human condition, for it issued not so much from the wood of a cross as from a throne of power. From that height is reward given to faith. There the debt of human transgression is abolished,<sup>22</sup> because the "form of God" did not separate itself from the "form of a servant."<sup>23</sup> Even in the midst of this punishment, both the inviolable divinity and the suffering human nature preserved its own character and its own oneness.

2. For the reinforcement of our hope, the witness of all creation has been added. When Christ gave up his spirit, all the elements trembled, the brightness of the sun (obscured with thick shadows) turned the day into unnatural night, the earth (struck with deep shocks) could not keep its stability, and the firmness of rocks (their solidity broken) burst asunder. In addition, the veil of the temple (no longer to shadow the mysteries of the past) was torn, the bodies of many saints were stirred up, and—to strengthen faith in the coming resurrection—tombs were opened.<sup>24</sup>

Heaven and earth passed sentence against you, Jews—as the sun withdrew its service of giving daylight, and the laws of nature denied you their function. When the service of creation departs from its laws, it is your blindness and your confusion that have been signified. When you said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children,"<sup>25</sup> you received what was coming to you. That which the faithless part of your race has lost, the believing "fullness of the nations"<sup>26</sup> would attain.

3. As a result, dearly beloved, our Lord Jesus Christ crucified

21. Lk 23:43.

23. Cf. Phil 2:6-7.

25. Mt 27:25.

22. Cf. Col 2:14.

24. Cf. Mt 27:50-53.

26. Cf. Rom 11:25.



is not an "obstacle" nor "foolishness" to us, but "the power of God and the wisdom of God."<sup>27</sup> We, I say, are the spiritual offspring of Abraham, not born as children of slavery but reborn into the family of liberty.<sup>28</sup> For us "was Christ" the true and spotless Lamb "sacrificed,"<sup>29</sup> the one who had been led "with mighty hand and outstretched arm"<sup>30</sup> from the oppression of Egyptian rule.

Let us, then, embrace the wonderful mystery of the saving Passover, and be re-formed into the image of the one who conformed himself to our deformity. Let us be raised to the one who made the dust of our lowliness into the body of his glory. That we might deserve to be companions of his Resurrection, let us adapt ourselves to his humility and patience in all things. We are undertaking the service of a great name, the discipline of a great profession.

Followers of Christ may not stray from the king's highway. We are bound not to be preoccupied with temporal affairs as we head for the eternal. Because we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, "let us glorify and carry God in our body,"<sup>31</sup> so that we may deserve to come to those things which have been prepared for the faithful through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

### Sermon 54

5 April 442—Palm Sunday

Among all the works of God's mercy, dearly beloved, which from the beginning have been devoted to the salvation of mortals, none is more wonderful, none more sublime, than that Christ was crucified for the world. All the mysteries of former times serve this mystery. Whatever details had been laid down by sacred decree—in the assortment of victims, in the prophetic signs, and in legal regulations—all these predicted an outcome and promised a fulfillment. Now that images and

27. Cf. 1 Cor 1:23–24.

29. Cf. 1 Cor 5:7.

31. Cf. 1 Cor 6:20.

28. Cf. Gal 4:31.

30. Ps 135(136):12.

figures have ceased, we profit by believing what has already been done, just as they did by believing that it was going to be done.

(2) In everything that pertains to the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, dearly beloved, Catholic Faith has handed this down, has demanded this. We need to know that two natures have come together in our Redeemer, and that, while its own characteristics remain, so great a unity of the two substances came about that, from the time when—as the course of human nature demanded—"the Word was made flesh"<sup>32</sup> in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, we cannot think of him as God without that which is man, nor can we think of him as man without that which is God.

Each nature expresses its own truth in its own distinct actions, but neither separates itself from its connection with the other. Neither one lacks anything there, but the whole lowliness is in his majesty, while the whole majesty in his lowliness. Unity brings no confusion, nor does the distinctiveness ruin the unity. One is subject to suffering, the other inviolable.

Yet reproach belongs to the very one to whom glory belongs also. It is the same [Person] in weakness who is also in strength; the same [Person] is capable of death who is also victor over death. God took on the whole man and bound himself to man and man to himself by the plan of his mercy and power, in such a way that each nature is in the other and neither crosses over into the other from its own distinctiveness.

2. But because the dispensation of the mystery, planned for our restoration before eternal ages, was not to be completed without human weakness nor without divine strength, "each form"<sup>33</sup> does what is proper to it in communion with the other, that is, the Word doing what belongs to the Word, the flesh carrying out what belongs to the flesh. One of these shines forth in miracles, the other succumbs to injuries. The former does not withdraw from equality with the Father's glory, while the latter does not relinquish the nature of our race.

32. Jn 1:14.

33. Cf. Phil 2:6–7.



Nevertheless, even the acceptance of sufferings has not been exposed to the tendencies of our lowliness so much that it is drawn away from the power of divinity. Whatever mockery and disgrace, whatever harassment and punishment the rage of wicked people inflicted on the Lord, it was not tolerated through necessity but undertaken by free will. "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."<sup>34</sup> Thus he used the malice of his persecutors for the redemption of all, so that even his murderers could be saved if only they would believe in the mystery of his Death and Resurrection.

3. You stand out, Judas, as more wicked than all the rest, and more unhappy, for penitence did not call you back to the Lord, but despair drew you to the noose. If only you had waited for the completion of your crime until the blood of Christ had been poured out for all sinners, you would have put off the gruesome death of hanging. When so many miracles of the Lord and so many of his gifts tortured your conscience, these mysteries at least would have called you back from your rash deed, the ones you had accepted when already at the Paschal meal you were detected in your treachery by the sign of divine knowledge.

Why do you distrust his goodness, who did not refuse you the communion of his body and blood, who did not deny the kiss of peace to you coming to arrest him with a crowd and a cohort of armed men? But, as you are an incorrigible man, "a breeze passing and not returning,"<sup>35</sup> you followed the madness of your own heart. "With the devil standing at your right hand,"<sup>36</sup> the wickedness that you had armed against the chief of all the saints you have now turned against your own head. Since your crime has surpassed all measure of punishment, your wickedness makes you the judge, and your punishment allows you to be your own executioner.

4. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,"<sup>37</sup> and the Creator himself was bearing the humanity that was about to be restored to the image of its Maker. Marvelous works

34. Lk 19.10.

36. Cf. Ps 108(109).6.

35. Ps 77(78).39.

37. 2 Cor 5.19.

of God had been accomplished, works that the prophetic spirit had foretold were one day to be done: "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will hear, then the lame will leap like stags, and the tongues of the dumb will be open."<sup>38</sup> Jesus knew that the time for the fulfillment of his glorious Passion was at hand and said, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death,"<sup>39</sup> and, on another occasion, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me."<sup>40</sup> Since these words expressed a certain fear, he cured the emotion of our weakness by participating in it, and drove away the anxiety in the experience of suffering by undergoing it.

In us, therefore, the Lord trembled with our terror, that he might clothe himself by the putting on of our weakness, and wrap our inconstancy in the firmness of his strength. He had come into this world as the rich and merciful ambassador from heaven. He had entered the economy of salvation in a wonderful interchange, receiving our state and giving us his own, giving honors for insults, health for pain, life for death.<sup>41</sup> He, whom more than "twelve thousand of his angelic legions"<sup>42</sup> could serve by annihilating his persecutors, preferred to accept our fear rather than to exercise his own power.

5. Blessed Peter the apostle was the first to learn how much this humility bestowed upon all the faithful. When the violent storm of a cruel assault had overwhelmed him, he was turned by a sudden conversion to the restoration of his energy. He drew a remedy from the Lord's example, and the trembling member returned at once to the firmness of its Head. This servant could not be greater than his Lord, nor this disciple greater than his Teacher,<sup>43</sup> a Teacher who would not conquer the anxiety of human frailty without first experiencing fear—and conquering it.

Then "the Lord looked at Peter."<sup>44</sup> Standing amid the insults of priests, the lies of witnesses, the injuries of those who struck

38. Is 35.5-6.

40. Mt 26.39 and Mk 14.36.

41. Cf. Augustine, *Enarratio in Ps. 30* (2.1.3).

42. Cf. Mt 26.53.

44. Lk 22.61.

39. Mt 26.38.

43. Cf. Jn 15.20.



him and spat on him, he met the troubled disciple with his eyes, the same eyes with which he had foreseen that Peter would undergo a struggle. In so doing, the gaze of Truth entered into Peter, directed toward the place where the amendment of his heart was to be grounded. It was as if the Lord's voice were resounding within him and saying: What are you thinking, Peter? Why do you withdraw into yourself? Turn to me, trust in me, "follow me."<sup>45</sup> This is the time for my Passion; the hour of your suffering has not yet come. Why do you fear what you yourself will also overcome? Let not the weakness which I have accepted disturb you. I was anxious for you, but you should not worry about me.

(2) "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people met in council against Jesus, that they might hand him over to death."<sup>46</sup> O Jews, this morning it was not the rising of light that touched you, but its setting. No, the usual daylight did not benefit your eyes, but the night of dark blindness lay over your wicked souls. This morning destroyed for you the temple and the altars, removed the law and the prophets, abolished the kingdom and priesthood, and changed all the festivities into eternal sorrow. You embarked upon that wild and blood-drenched plan as "fat bulls, many calves," raging beasts, "mad dogs,"<sup>47</sup> so that you might hand over to death the "Author of Life"<sup>48</sup> and "Lord of Glory."<sup>49</sup>

As if the magnitude of your fury might be lessened in your dependence on the judgment of the one who presided over your province, you led Jesus bound to Pilate, so that when the tremulous judge had been overcome by the unjust clamors, you might select the assassin for pardon and might seek out the Savior of the world for punishment. After this condemnation of Christ, which the ignorance (rather than the power) of Pilate carried out, with hands washed and mouth polluted, he sent Jesus to the cross with the same lips with which he had pronounced him innocent. The abuse of the people, with the

45. Cf. Jn 21:22.

47. Cf. Ps 21(22):13 and 17.

49. Cf. 1 Cor 2:8.

46. Mt 27:1.

48. Cf. Acts 3:15.

priests as their spokesmen, forced on the Lord many mockeries, and the wild crowd raged against the meekness of the one who bore these things willingly.

(3) But, since there is a great deal to be said here, dearly beloved, let the remaining things be put off until Wednesday (assuming that the day's sermon should cover it all) when the reading of the Lord's Passion will be repeated. With your prayers, the Lord will be present, that we might carry out with his help what we have promised, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

### Sermon 55

8 April 442—Wednesday of Holy Week

With the Lord's help, dearly beloved, I must repay the debt that you expect of me. Your prayers have earned that the one who gave you the inclination to ask for it should make me worthy to fulfill your expectation. Speaking in the last sermon about the Lord's Passion, we came to a point in the Gospel narrative where Pilate is said to have given way to the wicked clamor of Jews that Jesus should be crucified.

When everything that the divinity allowed to be done in the limiting veil of flesh had been carried out, Jesus the Son of God was nailed to a cross which he himself had carried—along with two thieves, one on his right, the other on his left, crucified in the same way.<sup>50</sup> Even in the very appearance of the gallows was shown that criterion which would be applied when he comes to judge all human beings. Faith on the part of the believing thief prefigured those who were to be saved, while wickedness on the part of the blasphemer foreshadowed those who were to be condemned.<sup>51</sup>

Christ's Passion, therefore, contains the mystery of our salvation. From the instrument which the iniquity of Jews devised as a punishment, the Redeemer's power has made for us a step up to glory. This is what the Lord Jesus undertook for the salvation of all when, as he was being held to the wood by nails, he

50. Cf. Mt 27:38 and Lk 23:33.

51. Cf. Lk 23:39-43.