

LENT / 6

Jesus scourged, a sign of Love without limits

ECCLESIA

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We publish below the sixth text (here the **first, second, third, fourth and fifth**) taken from the Commentary of Father Cornelio a Lapide (1567-1637) focused on the Passion according to the Gospel of Saint Matthew. The commentaries of the Jesuit and exegete Cornelius a Lapide, aimed above all at offering support to preachers, are also precious because they contain numerous quotations from the Fathers of the Church and other subsequent exegetes.

Then (when the Jews had taken on themselves the guilt of Christ's death) released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. S. Matthew, as usual, slightly touches on the scourging; St. Mark and St. Luke speak of it more fully, and reckon this as Pilate's fifth appeal to the compassion of the Jews, to induce them to ask for His life.

Observe:

1. Scourging among the Romans was the punishment of slaves. ...St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, protested against being scourged (Acts xvi.). Martyrs were scourged by way of disgrace, of which many instances are given.
2. Free persons also were scourged after they had been condemned to death, as though they had thus become slaves.....
3. This scourging of Christ was before His condemnation, and He was thus spared the usual scourging afterwards

Christ was fastened to a column to be scourged, and this column was afterwards placed in the Church of St. Praxedes at Rome. ...But in what respects was this scourging so cruel and savage?

Christ being bound to a short column, and standing with the whole height of His body above it, was quite at the mercy of those who scourged Him. Again, the mere exposure of His most pure and virgin body to these filthy mockers was a sore affliction to Him. But He was twice, or as some say thrice, stripped; first, at His scourging; secondly, when crowned with thorns. This stripping was attended with the greatest pain; for as His garment stuck to His wounds, they were forcibly reopened as it was torn away.

The forty martyrs were animated by this example, when they boldly stripped themselves and plunged into the freezing water. (See St. Basil's Homily.)

Pilate wished to excite the compassion of the Jews by saying, "Behold the man."

Behold Him who has no longer the appearance of a man, but of some slaughtered

animal, so besmeared was He with blood and marred in His form.

The soldiers had of their own wanton cruelty crowned Him with thorns, and perhaps had been bribed by the Jews to scourge Him with greater severity. The blessed Magdalene of Pazzi, a nun of Florence, saw in a trance Christ scourged by thirty pairs of men, one after the other. Some say that He had 5,000 blows inflicted on Him. S. Bridget is said to have had the exact number (5,475) revealed to her. From such a scourging as this He would have died naturally again and again, had not His Godhead specially sustained Him.

His bodily frame was most delicate, and acutely sensitive to pain, as fashioned by the Holy Spirit, and He consequently felt the scourging more severely than we should have done.

The prophets, and also Christ Himself, foretold that this scourging would be most heavy and severe. See St. Matt. xx. 19, and Job xvi. 14, "He brake Me with wound upon wound." They added, i.e., blows to blows, wounds to wounds, so that the whole body seemed one continuous wound. Conf. Ps. lxxiii. 14, "All the day long have I been scourged;" and Ps. cxxix. 3, "The sinners wrought upon my back as smiths on an anvil;" but the Hebrew [and A.V.], "The ploughers ploughed upon My back," they made furrows on My back with scourges. So, too, Aquila and Theodot. This is also indicated by Jacob's words (Gen. xlix. 11), "He shall wash His garments in wine, and His clothes in the blood of the grape," meaning by His garments and clothes His flesh, and by the wine His blood.

Christ was scourged, as slaves were, with small ropes or thongs. Some suppose that He was scourged: 1. with rods of thorns; 2. with cords and iron goads; 3. with chains made of hooks. ...

Bridget says that the Blessed Virgin was present at the scourging, and that her pain and sorrow added wondrously to His. She describes also the mode and the barbarity of His scourging (St. Bridget, Rev. i. 10).

Now Christ wished in this way to atone for our evil lusts and manifold sins. And in doing this (says St. Thom., par. iii. sec. 46, art. 6, ad. 6), He considered not only the great virtue of His sufferings from the union of His Godhead with His human nature, but also how much it would avail even in that nature for making satisfaction. Moreover, He wished to obtain power and strength for all martyrs, in order to their enduring every kind of scourging. Cf. Isa. liii. 5. In all this Christ manifested most marvellous patience. He uttered not a groan, gave no indication of pain, stood firm as a rock. Nay, He lorded it over all sufferings, as being above them. Such a temper obtained heathen admiration.

St. Cyprian (*de Bono Patient.* cap. iii.), among the proofs of His Divine Majesty,

speaks of "His continuous endurance, in which He exhibited the patience of His Father." Tertullian, too (de Pat. cap. iii.), "He who had proposed to hide Himself in man's form, exhibited nought of man's impatience. And in this ye Pharisees ought to have specially recognised the Lord." St. Ambrose, too (Serm. xvii. in Ps. cxviii.) [cxix.], speaks of His "triumphant silence under calumny." The Jews ought to have gathered from this the conclusion of the Centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God."

All this was caused by His love of God and man. Love triumphed over pain, and made His pains as nothing. And hence He was willing to suffer in all points, and in all His members and senses. St. Thomas (par iii. qu. 46, art. 5) thus writes, "He suffered in the desertion of His friends, in His credit, in His honour, in the spoiling of His goods, in His soul by sorrow, in His body by His wounds. He suffered too in all parts of His body, and in every sense."

But His sufferings of mind were by far the greatest. For He was specially wounded by the sins of each single man. He grieved also for the multitude of the lost. He had sympathy for the martyrs and others who had to endure sufferings. But His boundless love urged Him on to endure all this. For love is the measure of pain, and we cannot live in love without pain. Hence it is said of Christ, "Sculptured, thou seest His love in every limb."