

**Blood and Water**  
**Good Friday**  
**(Jn 18-19)**

*“An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth” (Jn 19:35).*

Again today, as we did on Palm Sunday, we heard the detailed account of the Lord’s Passion and death, but this time from St. John, another one of the great “eyewitnesses” to these events, who knows of what he speaks, and solemnly testifies to the veracity of his account.

As with Mark’s account, and that of the other Gospels, John gives many details, most of which are corroborated in another account, some of which are unique to his Gospel. The details are important, because they were all foreseen and prepared by God since the beginning, and revealed in the course of history through ancient prophecy. Thus, all mankind is able to verify for himself that what happened to Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the fulfillment of Scripture, and therefore he is the true Messiah and Son of God: *“...he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may come to believe, for this happened so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled” (Jn 19:35).*

Among these details, for instance: *“when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs...” “...this happened so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled: ‘Not a bone of it will be broken’” (Jn 19:32,36).* It is an important detail, because John recognized Jesus to be the *“Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29)*, and every Jew knows that in order to sacrifice a Passover lamb, none of its bones may be broken (Ex 12:46).

Another significant detail which St. John mentions: *“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden” (Jn 19:41).* From history and archaeology of the city of Jerusalem, we learn that the place of crucifixion was located just outside a city wall on the western side of the city (the Temple being on the east). It was next to the road that entered the western gate. Thus the many pilgrims coming into the city were easily able to read the charge against him, published above his head in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin (Jn 19:20). Jesus was crucified in an abandoned limestone quarry, which at this time was a cemetery-park.<sup>1</sup> In that old quarry was an outcrop of rock that was never used because it had a large crack in it. It was about 12-15 feet high, and from a certain angle resembled a skull. Hence it was nicknamed the “skull place” or “Calvary” (Hebrew: *Golgotha*; Latin: *Calvarium*).

---

<sup>1</sup> The soft limestone of the quarry was ideal for carving tombs.

It was a perfect location for the Romans, and just large enough to accommodate three crosses.<sup>2</sup>

St. John, and every Jew, as well as ourselves, are very familiar with the Bible and remember another incident that took place “in a garden.” At a tree. With the devil inflicting terrible and universal suffering upon a man. Jesus is the New Adam, and the crucifixion is an event as big as the Fall of Man. Bigger! But in the other direction.<sup>3</sup>

And this brings us to the most striking and important detail of all, the one which St. John observed with his own eyes and which opens up the full meaning of Christ’s sacrifice and death:

*“One soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out...”* (Jn 19:34). Medical examiners will explain that the “water” was pericardial fluid that collected around a traumatized heart, released together with the blood when the heart was pierced by the spear. Besides John’s Gospel, this detail is also documented by the blood stain on his burial shroud, which can be viewed in the cathedral of Turin.

For St. John, the medical explanation is less important than the theological significance of this marvelous and unexpected phenomenon: *“This happened so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled: ‘They will look upon him whom they have pierced’”* (Jn 19:37).<sup>4</sup>

This detail of water coming from his side together with the blood recalls another prophecy, from Ezekiel, not directly referenced by St. John here but obvious from the context of many things Jesus had said about his Body being the Temple (Jn 2:19-21, Mk 14:58), and how from his heart would flow “*rivers of*

---

<sup>2</sup> Vertical beams were inserted into three permanent holes. Prisoners affixed to horizontal beams would then be lifted and fastened onto the vertical beam, forming a “cross.” Behind and down from the mound was a storage cave where the wood beams and implements of crucifixion were kept, to be reused again and again. After the sack of Jerusalem (70 A.D. and again in 135 A.D.), all this area got buried under rubble, sealed away until the excavations undertaken by St. Helena in 325 A.D. In the Church of the Holy Sepulcher all these features may still be observed today: the crack in the rock, the hole on top of Calvary for the crosses, the storage cave where the three crosses were discovered. Unfortunately, “Calvary” is now walled up and its original shape is no longer be observable.

<sup>3</sup> To remember this juxtaposition of Jesus’ death with the fall of Adam, and the undoing of Adam’s sin by the New Adam, many crucifixes show a skull and crossbones at the bottom. It is an ancient and early tradition of the Church that the crucifixion took place over the grave of Adam, over his bones; that Jerusalem is, in fact, the location of the original Garden of Eden, where the sacred trees originally stood. This ancient tradition is also observable in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, where there is a small “Chapel of Adam” immediately behind and against Calvary, on ground level.

<sup>4</sup> The full verse from the prophet Zechariah which St. John quotes: *“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Ha'dad-rim'mon in the plain of Megid'do [i.e. as great as Armageddon]”* (Zech 12:10-11)

*living water*” (Jn 7:37-39). The great prophecy fulfilled by the piercing is of course that of the water flowing from the side of the Temple, which became in time a mighty flood throughout the whole world (Ez 47:1-12).

But there is another even more ancient and primordial prophecy which is fulfilled by this important incident, once again going back to the Garden of Eden. In order to form the woman, God put Adam into a “deep sleep” (Gn 2:21), i.e. a sleep deep as death, and then took from his “side” the flesh which he formed into the woman. Many translations say “rib,” but the crucifixion of Jesus reveals it was more than the rib, it was actually the *heart*. The woman is formed from the *heart* of the man, since the heart is the seat of love and self-giving in the human person.

The death of Jesus thus not only “fulfills” the Old Testament prophecies, it “explains” them fully. We now understand exactly what was happening in those ancient events and why God accomplished them in the mysterious ways He did.

On the Cross, God forms the New Eve from the New Adam, bringing forth the Church from his side by means of Baptism (water) and Eucharist (blood). It is these two saving streams that constitute the Church; it is from these two sacraments that the Church is formed and enfleshed.

And there is a connection between the Church and Mary: “*Standing by the cross of Jesus was his mother*” (Jn 19:25). She is the image and representative of the Church, the New Eve. Mary is “*Mother of the Church*” in the same way that Eve was “*Mother of the Living*” (Gn 3:20). Jesus says to her, “*Behold your son*” and to the Beloved Disciple John (who represents all the Lord’s beloved disciples): “*Behold your mother*” (Jn 19:26-27; cf. Rv 12:17).

From the Cross, the Church is born. On the Cross, Jesus sacrifices himself for his Church, literally giving her his own Sacred Heart. By means of his death, Christ intervenes with the Serpent who, even though he was able to approach and infect Eve (Gn 3:1), is not able to touch or harm Mary and those who remain close to her in the Church (Rv 12).

“*Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*” (Eph 5:25-27).

In conclusion, as we today remember the Lord’s Passion and venerate his Cross, the greatest and most important way we can honor him and show our gratitude, is to be “beloved disciples” ourselves and do what John did: “*He took Mary to his home*” (Jn 19:27). We do this by taking the Church into our homes, being faithful and true to our faith, praying the Rosary, living what we believe.