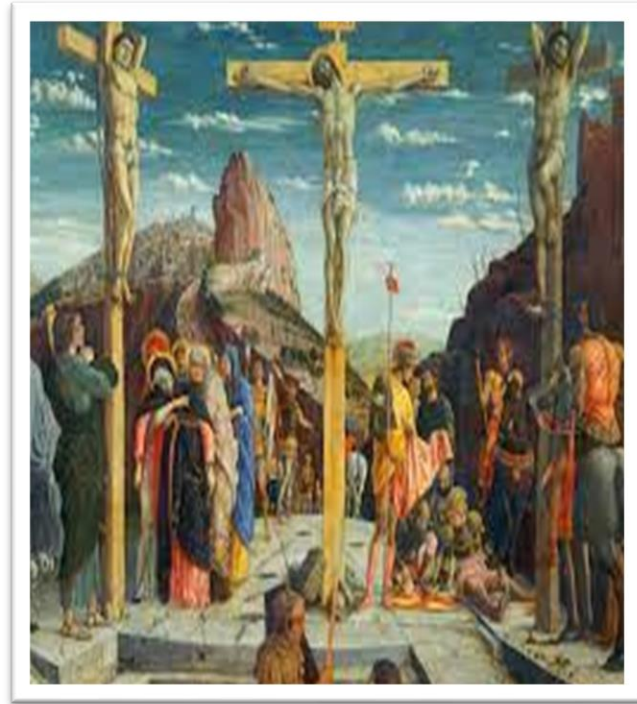


Crucifixion of the Thieves

During the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, the two thieves were left lying on the ground at some distance off; their arms were fastened to the crosses on which they were to be executed, and a few soldiers stood near on guard. The accusation which had been proved against them was that of having assassinated a Jewish woman who, with her children, was travelling from Jerusalem to Joppa. They were arrested, under the disguise of rich merchants, at a castle in which Pilate resided occasionally, when employed in exercising his troops, and they had been imprisoned for a long time before being brought to trial. The thief placed on the left-hand side was much older than the other; a regular miscreant, who had



corrupted the younger. They were commonly called Dismas and Gesmas, and as I forget their real names I shall distinguish them by these terms, calling the good one Dismas, and the wicked one Gesmas. Both the one and the other belonged to a band of robbers who infested the frontiers of Egypt; and it was in a cave inhabited by these robbers that the Holy Family took refuge when flying into Egypt, at the time of the massacre of the Innocents.

The poor leprous child, who was instantly cleansed by being dipped in the water which had been used for washing the infant Jesus, was no other than this Dismas, and the charity of his mother, in receiving and granting hospitality to the Holy Family, had been rewarded by the cure of her child; while this outward purification was an emblem of the inward purification which was afterwards accomplished in the soul of Dismas on Mount Calvary, through that Sacred Blood which was then shed on the cross for our redemption. Dismas knew nothing at all about Jesus, but as his heart was not hardened, the sight of the extreme patience of our Lord moved him much. When the executioners had finished putting up the cross of Jesus, they ordered the thieves to rise without delay, and they loosened their fetters in order to crucify them at once, as the sky was becoming very cloudy and bore every appearance of an approaching storm. After giving them some myrrh and vinegar, they stripped off their ragged clothing, tied ropes round their arms, and by the help of small ladders

dragged them up to their places on the cross. The executioners then bound the arms of the thieves to the cross, with cords made of the bark of trees, and fastened their wrists, elbows, knees, and feet in like manner, drawing the cords so tight that their joints cracked, and the blood burst out.

They uttered piercing cries, and the good thief exclaimed as they were drawing him up, 'This torture is dreadful, but if they had treated us as they treated the poor Galilean, we should have been dead long ago.'

The executioners had divided the garments of Jesus, in order to draw lots for them; his mantle, which was narrow at the top, was very wide at the bottom, and lined over the chest, thus forming a pocket between the lining and the material itself; the lining they pulled out, tore into bands, and divided. They did the same with his long white robe, belt, scapular, and under-garment, which was completely saturated with his Sacred Blood. Not being able to agree as to who was to be the possessor of the seamless robe woven by his Mother, which could not be cut up and divided, they brought out a species of chessboard marked with figures, and were about to decide the point by lots, when a messenger, sent by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, informed them that there were persons ready to purchase all the clothes of Jesus; they therefore gathered them together and sold them in a bundle. Thus did the Christians get possession of these precious relics.