

## **Death, Burial, and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin**

And now the altar with its covers, one red, the other white, was placed in front of the Crucifix of the Blessed Virgin's own oratory. Peter here celebrated the Holy Mass with the same ceremonies as I had seen him first observe in the church at the Pool of Bethesda.

Tapers, not lamps, were burning on the altar. Mary was in a sitting posture on her couch during the whole celebration. Peter was vested in the large mantle and the pallium, whose colors glanced from white to red. These he wore over the white robe. The four Apostles assisting him were also vested in festal mantles. After the Communion, Peter gave the Blessed Sacrament to all present. During this Holy Mass, Philip arrived from Egypt. Weeping bitterly, he received the benediction of the Blessed Virgin, and after the others the Blessed Sacrament.

Peter bore the Blessed Sacrament to Mary in the cross hanging on his breast, and John carried on a shallow dish the chalice containing the Most Sacred Blood. This chalice was white, small as if for pouring, and of the same shape as that used at the Last Supper. Its stem was so short that it could be held with two fingers only. Thaddeus now brought forward a little incense basin. Peter first gave the Blessed Virgin the last anointing, just as that Sacrament is administered at the present day. Next he administered Holy Communion, which she received sitting up without support. Then she sank back again on her pillow, and after the Apostles had offered a short prayer, she received the chalice from John, but not now in so upright a posture.

After Communion, Mary spoke no more. Her countenance, blooming and smiling as in youth, was raised above. I no longer saw the roof of her chamber, and the lamp appeared to be suspended in the open air. A pathway of light arose from Mary up to the heavenly Jerusalem, up to the throne of the Most Holy Trinity. On either side of this pathway I saw clouds of light out of which gazed angelic faces. Mary raised her arms to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Her body with all its wrappings was floating so high above the couch that I could see under it. A figure of light, also with upraised arms, appeared to issue from Mary. The two choirs of angels united under this



figure and soared up with it, as if separating it from the body, which now sank back upon the couch, the hands crossed upon the breast. Many holy souls, among whom I recognized Joseph, Anne, Joachim, John the Baptist, Zachary, and Elizabeth, came to meet her. But up she soared, followed by them, to her Son, whose Wounds were flashing light far more brilliant than that which surrounded Him. He received her and placed in her hand a scepter, pointing at the same time over the whole circumference of the earth. At last I saw, and the sight filled me with joy, a multitude of souls released from Purgatory and soaring up to Heaven, and I received the surety that every year, on the feast of Mary's Assumption, many of her devout clients are freed from Purgatory. The hour of Mary's death was made known to me as that of None, at which time also Jesus had died on the cross. Peter and John likewise must have seen the glory of Mary's blessed soul, for their faces were turned upward, but the other Apostles were kneeling bowed to the ground. The body of the Blessed Virgin lay radiant with light upon the couch, the eyes closed, the hands crossed upon the breast. All present knelt, adoring God.

At last the women covered the blessed remains with a sheet, put all the furniture of the house aside and covered it, even covering the fireplace. Then they veiled themselves and prayed together in a space in the front of the house, sometimes kneeling, sometimes sitting. The Apostles too enveloped their head with the scarf they wore about their shoulders, and ranged in order for prayer. They took turns, two at a time, to kneel and pray at the head and feet of the blessed remains. I saw them exchanging places with one another four times in the day, and I likewise saw them making the Way of the Cross.

Andrew and Matthias were busy preparing the place of burial, which was the little grotto that Mary and John had arranged at the end of the Way of the Cross, to represent the Holy Sepulcher of Christ. It was not so large as Jesus' tomb, being scarcely as high as a man, and was surrounded by a little garden hedged in by stakes. A pathway ran obliquely down into it, and the stone couch, which was like a narrow altar, was hollowed on top to the shape of a body enveloped in its winding sheet, the head being a trifle higher than the foot. The Station of Mount Calvary (the Crucifixion) was on a hill nearby. No cross was erected on it, but there was one cut out on the stone. Andrew was especially active in preparing the grotto, and setting up a door firmly in front of the tomb proper.

The blessed body was prepared by the women for burial. Among them I remember having seen a daughter of Veronica and John Mark's mother. They brought spices and pots of fresh herbs, in order to embalm it according to the

Jewish custom. They closed the house, and worked by the light of lamps. They opened up the apartment back of the fireplace and removed the screens that enclosed the little alcove used by the Blessed Virgin as a sleeping place, in order to have more room for their work of embalming. The wicker screens of the alcove were not again replaced, for immediately after the obsequies they, along with those of the clothes press, were put out of sight by the maidservant. Only the altar was allowed to remain standing before the Crucifix in Mary's sleeping apartment. The whole house had now become like a little chapel in which the Apostles prayed and celebrated the most holy and unbloody Sacrifice. While the women were preparing the holy body for burial, the Apostles prayed, choir and choir, sometimes in the front apartment, sometimes outside the house. The women went about their task most devoutly and reverently, just as had been done when preparing the most Sacred Body of Jesus for burial. The body of the Blessed Virgin was lifted in the linen of the deathbed and laid in a long basket, which had a lid and which was filled with covers, so that when lying on them, it rose above the edge. The body was of a dry, indescribable whiteness as if shining with light, and of so little weight that, like a mere husk, it could be raised quite easily on the hands. The face was fresh and blooming. The women cut off some locks of hair to keep as relics. They laid bunches of herbs around the neck and throat, under the arms, and in the armpits.

Before the holy body was shrouded in its white garments and enveloped in the winding sheets, Peter celebrated the Unbloody Sacrifice on the altar of the oratory and gave Holy Communion to the other Apostles. After that Peter and John approached the body in their mantles of ceremony. John carried a vessel of oil, with which Peter anointed, in the form of a cross and with accompanying prayers, the forehead, hands, and feet of the holy body, which was afterward entirely enveloped in linens by the women. They placed on the head a wreath of flowers, white, red, and sky-blue, as a symbol of Mary's virginity, and over the face a transparent veil, through which it could be seen encircled by the wreath. The feet also, which were bound up in aromatic herbs, could be traced through the linens that enveloped them. The arms and hands were bound crosswise on the breast. Thus prepared, the holy body was laid in a coffin of snow-white wood with a tightly fitting, arched cover, which was fastened down at the head, the foot, and in the middle, with gray straps. The coffin was then laid on a litter. Everything was done with the utmost solemnity, and all were penetrated with deep emotion. The sorrow of the mourners was more human and more openly expressed than at Jesus' burial, at which holy awe and reverence pre-dominated.

When it was time to bear the coffin to the grotto, one half-hour distant,

Peter and John raised it from the litter and carried it in their hands to the door of the house, outside of which it was again laid on the litter, which Peter and John then raised upon their shoulders. Six of the Apostles thus carried it in turn. The coffin hung between the bearers as in a cradle, for the poles of the litter were run through leathern straps, or matting. Some of the Apostles walked before the coffin praying, and after it came the women. Lamps, or lanterns on poles, were carried.

Before reaching the grotto, the litter was set down. Four of the Apostles bore the coffin in, and placed it in the hollow of the tomb. All went, one by one, into the grotto, where they knelt in prayer before the holy body, honoring it and taking leave of it. Then the tomb was shut in by a wicker screen that extended from the front edge of the tomb to the top of the vaulted wall above. Before the entrance of the grotto they made a trench, which they planted so thickly with blooming flowers and bushes covered with berries that one could gain access to it only from the side, and that only by making his way through the underwood.

On the night following the burial took place the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into Heaven. I saw on this night several of the Apostles and holy women in the little garden, praying and singing Psalms before the grotto. I saw a broad pathway of light descend from Heaven and rest upon the tomb. In it were circles of glory full of angels, in the midst of whom the resplendent soul of the Blessed Virgin came floating down. Before her went her Divine Son, the marks of His Wounds flashing with light. In the innermost circle, that which surrounded the holy soul of Mary, the angels appeared like the faces of very young children; in the second circle, they were like those of children from six to eight years old; and in the outermost, like the faces of youths, I could clearly distinguish only the face, the rest of the figure consisting of perfectly transparent light. Encircling the head of the Blessed Virgin like a crown, was a choir of blessed spirits. I know not what those present saw of all this. But I saw that some gazed up in amazement and adoration, while others cast themselves prostrate in fright upon the earth. These apparitions, becoming more and more distinct as they approached nearer, floated over the grotto, and another pathway of light issued from it and arose to the heavenly Jerusalem. The blessed soul of Mary, floating before Jesus, penetrated through the rock and into the tomb, out of which she again arose radiant with light in her glorified body and, escorted by the entire multitude of celestial spirits, returned in triumph to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Next day, when the Apostles were engaged in choir service, Thomas made his appearance with two companions. One was a disciple named Jonathan

Eleasar, and the other a servant from the most remote country of the Three Holy Kings. Thomas was greatly grieved when he heard that the Blessed Virgin was already buried. He wept with an abundance of tears quite astonishing to behold, for he could not forgive himself for coming so late. Weeping bitterly he threw himself, with Jonathan at his side, on the spot upon which the blessed soul of Mary had left her body, and afterward knelt long before the altar. The Apostles, who had not interrupted their choir-singing on account of his coming, now gathered around him, raised him up, embraced him, and set before him and his companions bread, honey, and some kind of beverage in little jugs. After that they accompanied him with lights to the tomb. Two disciples bent the shrubbery to one side. Thomas, Eleasar, and John went in and prayed before the coffin. Then John loosened the three straps that bound it, for it rose high enough above the trough like couch to admit of being opened. They stood the lid of the coffin on one side and, to their intense astonishment, beheld only the empty winding sheets lying like a husk, or shell, and in perfect order. Only over the face was it drawn apart, and over the breast slightly opened. The swathing bands of the arms and hands lay separate, as if gently drawn off, but in perfect order. The Apostles gazed in amazement, their hands raised. John cried out: "She is no longer here!" The others came in quickly, wept, prayed, looking upward with raised arms, and finally cast themselves on the ground, remembering the radiant cloud of the preceding night. Then rising, they took the winding sheet just as it was, all the grave linens, and the coffin to keep as relics, and returned to the house by the Holy Way, praying and singing Psalms. When they entered the house, John laid the folded linens on a little flap-table before the altar. Thomas and the others were in prayer, but Peter went a little apart, as if pondering some mystery. After that I saw him celebrating divine service at the altar before Mary's Crucifix, and the Apostles standing in order behind him, praying and singing. The women were standing in the doorways and by the walls of the fireplace.

The young servant that had come with Thomas looked quite unlike any of those present. He had small eyes, high cheekbones, forehead and nose remarkably flat, and his complexion was brownish. He was already baptized. He was perfectly innocent, and obeyed orders simply. He did all that he was told, remained standing or sitting wherever they told him to do so, turned his eyes in any direction indicated to see whatever was pointed out to him, and smiled upon everyone. When Thomas wept, he wept also. He always remained with Thomas, and I saw him dragging immense stones when Thomas was building a chapel.

I often saw the Apostles and disciples standing together in circles and relating

where they had been and giving their experience.

Before the Apostles left Mary's house to journey again into distant parts, they rendered the grotto of the tomb wholly inaccessible by raising an embankment of earth before the entrance. At the rear, however, they made a low passage to the back wall of the tomb proper and an opening in the wall, by which one could look down upon it. This passage was known only to the holy women. Above the grotto they built a chapel of wood and wickerwork, and hung it with mats and tapestry. The little altar consisted of a stone slab; the step, too, was of stone. Behind the altar hung a strip of stuff on which was sewed or embroidered quite simply, in the colors of her festal robes, a picture of Mary. The little garden in front of the tomb, and especially the whole of Mary's Way of the Cross, was beautified by them. While engaged in this task of love, they prayed continually and chanted Psalms. The apartment of the house in which Mary had had her oratory and sleeping alcove was converted into a little church. Mary's maid continued her abode in the front part of the house, and two of the disciples were left there by Peter for the benefit of the Faithful dwelling in that section of the country. The Apostles, with tears and embraces, took leave of one another after they had once more celebrated solemn service in Mary's house. An Apostle or disciple often returned at different times to pray there. I saw also that here and there, out of devotion and in reverence for the Blessed Virgin, churches were built by the Faithful in the same style as her house, and that her Way of the Cross and her tomb were for a long time devoutly visited by the Christians. I had a vision of those early times, just after Mary's Assumption into Heaven: A woman living near Ephesus, who entertained great love for Mary, visited her house. On her return she caused an altar like that she had seen there to be made, and covered it with a very costly cloth of tapestry. The woman was very poor, and had to defray the debt she thereby incurred by the sale of a piece of her property. Finding herself after some time in dire distress, she went, though very sorrowfully, to a married Christian and sold to her the beautiful altar.