

## **The Opening of the Side of Jesus**

**Death of the two thieves.**

**Whilst these events were taking place in Jerusalem, silence reigned around Calvary. The crowd which had been for a time so noisy and tumultuous, was dispersed; all were panic stricken; in some that panic had produced sincere repentance, but on others it had had no beneficial effects. Mary, John, Magdalen, Mary of Cleophas, and Salome had remained, either standing or sitting before the Cross, closely veiled and weeping silently.**



**A few soldiers were leaning over the terrace which enclosed the platform; Cassius rode up and down; the sky was lowering, and all nature wore a garb of mourning. Six archers soon after made their appearance, bringing with them ladders, spades, ropes, and large iron staves for the purpose of breaking the legs of the criminals, in order to hasten their deaths. When they approached our Lord's Cross, his friends retired a few paces back, and the Blessed Virgin was seized with fear lest they should indulge their hatred of Jesus by insulting even his dead body. Her fears were not quite unfounded, for when they first placed their ladders against the Cross they declared that he was only pretending to be dead; in a few moments, however, seeing that he was cold and stiff, they left him, and removed their ladders to the crosses on which the two thieves were still hanging alive. They took up their iron staves and broke the arms of the thieves above and below the elbow; while another archer at the same moment broke their legs, both above and below the knee. Gesmas uttered frightful cries, therefore the executioner finished him off by three heavy blows of a cudgel on his chest.**

**Dismas gave a deep groan, and expired: he was the first among mortals who had the happiness of rejoining his Redeemer. The cords were then loosened, the two bodies fell to the ground, and the executioners dragged them to a deep morass, which was between Calvary and the walls of the town, and buried them there.**

**The archers still appeared doubtful whether Jesus was really dead, and the brutality they had shown in breaking the legs of the thieves made the holy women tremble as to what outrage they might next perpetrate on the body of our Lord. But Cassius, the subaltern officer, a young man of about five-**

and-twenty, whose weak squinting eyes and nervous manner had often excited the derision of his companions, was suddenly illuminated by grace, and being quite overcome at the sight of the cruel conduct of the soldiers, and the deep sorrow of the holy women, determined to relieve their anxiety by proving beyond dispute that Jesus was really dead. The kindness of his heart prompted him, but unconsciously to himself he fulfilled a prophecy. He seized his lance and rode quickly up to the mound on which the Cross was planted, stopped just between the cross of the good thief and that of our Lord, and taking his lance in both hands, thrust it so completely into the right side of Jesus that the point went through the heart, and appeared on the left side.

When Cassius drew his lance out of the wound a quantity of blood and water rushed from it, and flowed over his face and body. This species of washing produced effects somewhat similar to the vivifying waters of Baptism: grace and salvation at once entered his soul. He leaped from his horse, threw himself upon his knees, struck his breast, and confessed loudly before all his firm belief in the divinity of Jesus.

The Blessed Virgin and her companions were still standing near, with their eyes fixed upon the Cross, but when Cassius thrust his lance into the side of Jesus they were much startled, and rushed with one accord up to it. Mary looked as if the lance had transfixed her heart instead of that of her Divine Son, and could scarcely support herself. Cassius meantime remained kneeling and thanking God, not only for the grace he had received but likewise for the cure of the complaint in his eyes, which had caused the weakness and the squint. This cure had been effected at the same moment that the darkness with which his soul was previously filled was removed. Every heart was overcome at the sight of the blood of our Lord, which ran into a hollow in the rock at the foot of the Cross. Mary, John, the holy women, and Cassius, gathered up the blood and water in flasks, and wiped up the remainder with pieces of linen.

Cassius, whose sight was perfectly restored at the same moment that the eyes of his soul were opened, was deeply moved, and continued his humble prayer of thanksgiving. The soldiers were struck with astonishment at the miracle which had taken place, and cast themselves on their knees by his side, at the same time striking their breasts and confessing Jesus. The water

and blood continued to flow from the large wound in the side of our Lord; it ran into the hollow in the rock, and the holy women put it in vases, while Mary preached the faith and Sister Emmerich added: 'Cassius was baptised by the name of Longinus; and was ordained deacon. He always kept some of the blood of Christ,—it dried up, but was found in his coffin in Italy. He was buried in a town at no great distance from the locality where St. Clare passed her life. There is a lake with an island upon it near this town, and the body of Longinus must have been taken there.' Sister Emmerich appears to designate Mantua by this description, and there is a tradition preserved in that town to the effect. I do not know which St. Clare lived in the neighbourhood.

Magdalen mingled their tears. The archers, who had received a message from Pilate, ordering them not to touch the body of Jesus, did not return at all.

All these events took place near the Cross, at a little before four o'clock, during the time that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were gathering together the articles necessary for the burial of Jesus. But the servants of Joseph having been sent to clean out the tomb, informed the friends of our Lord that their master intended to take the body of Jesus and place it in his new sepulchre. John immediately returned to the town with the holy women; in the first place, that Mary might recruit her strength a little, and in the second, to purchase a few things which would be required for the burial. The Blessed Virgin had a small lodging among the buildings near the Cenaculum. They did not re-enter the town through the gate which was the nearest to Calvary, because it was closed, and guarded by soldiers placed there by the Pharisees; but they went through that gate which leads to Bethlehem.