

The Last Weeks Before the Passion. Jesus' Discourse in the Temple

The day after His return to Bethania, Jesus repaired to the Temple to teach, and His most holy Mother accompanied Him a part of the way. He was preparing her for His approaching Passion, and He told her that the time for the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy, that a sword would pierce her soul, was near at hand. They would, He said, cruelly betray Him, take Him prisoner, maltreat Him, put Him to death as a malefactor, and all would take place under her eyes. Jesus spoke long upon this subject, and Mary was grievously troubled. Jesus put up at the house of Mary Marcus, the mother of John Mark, about a quarter of an hour from the Temple and, so to say, outside the city. Next day, after the Jews had left the Temple, Jesus began to teach in it openly and very earnestly. All the Apostles were in Jerusalem, but they went to the Temple separately and by different directions. Jesus taught in the circular hall in which He had spoken in His twelfth year. Chairs and steps had been brought for the audience, and a very great concourse of people was gathered.

Jesus' Passion, properly speaking, was now begun, for He was undergoing an interior martyrdom from His bitter sorrow over man's perversity. On this and the following day He lodged in the house outside the Bethlehem gate where Mary had put up when she brought Him as a child to present in the Temple. The lodgings consisted of several apartments adjoining one another, and a man acted as superintendent. When Jesus went to the Temple, He was accompanied by Peter, James the Greater, and John; the others came singly. The Apostles and disciples lodged with Lazarus in Bethania.

On the next day, after teaching in the Temple from morn till noon, the Pharisees having been present at His instructions, Jesus returned to Bethania, where He again spoke with His Mother of His approaching Passion. They talked standing in an open bower in the courtyard of the house.

Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon's sons, and other secret disciples did not appear openly in the Temple during Jesus' discourses. When the Pharisees were not present, these disciples listened to Jesus from distant corners.

In His instruction on this day, Jesus repeated the parable of the field



overgrown with weeds. It was to be worked cautiously that with the weeds the good grain, which was to be allowed to ripen, might not be rooted up also. Jesus presented this truth to the Pharisees in words so striking that, though full of wrath, they could not stifle a feeling of secret satisfaction. At a later instruction, their vexation led them to close the entrance to the hall so that the listeners might not increase. Jesus taught on this day till late into the night. He made no violent gestures in preaching, but turned sometimes to this side, sometimes to that. He said that He had come for three sorts of people, and saying this, He turned to three different sides of the Temple, indicating three different regions of the world, wherein were all the elect comprised. Before this, on His way to the Temple, He had said to the Apostles with Him that when He should have departed from them, they should seek Him in the noonday. Peter, always so bold, asked what that meant, Then I heard Jesus saying: "At noon the sun is directly above us and there is no shadow. At morn and eve shadows follow the light, and at midnight darkness prevails. Seek Me, therefore, in the full noonday light. And you shall find Me in your own heart, provided no shadow obscures its light." These words bore some allusion also to different parts of the world, though I cannot now recall it.

The Jews had become still more insolent. They closed the railing around the teacher's chair and even shut in the chair itself. But when Jesus, with the disciples, again entered the hall, He grasped the railing and it opened of itself, and the chair was freed by the touch of His hand. I recall that many of John the Baptist's disciples and some secret partisans of Jesus were present, and that He began by speaking of John and asking what they thought of him and what they thought of Himself. He desired that they should declare themselves boldly, but they were afraid to speak out. He introduced into this discourse the parable of a father and two sons. The latter were directed by their parent to dig up and weed a certain field. One of them said "Yes," but obeyed not. The other replied "No," but repenting, went and executed the order. Jesus dwelt long upon this parable. Later on, after His solemn entrance into Jerusalem, He again taught upon it.

Next day when Jesus was going from Bethania to the Temple, whither His disciples had preceded Him to make ready the lecture hall, a blind man cried after Him on the road and implored Him to cure him, but Jesus passed him by. The disciples were dissatisfied at this. In His discourse, Jesus referred to the incident, and gave His reasons for acting as He did. The man, He said, was blinder in his soul than in the eyes of his body. His words were very earnest. He said that there were many present who did not believe in Him and who ran after Him only through curiosity. They would abandon Him in the critical

hour of trial. They were like those that followed Him as long as He fed them with the bread of the body, but when that was over, they scattered in different directions. Those present, He added, should now decide. During this speech I saw many going away, and only some few over a hundred remaining around the Lord. I saw Jesus weeping over this defection on His return to Bethania.

It was toward evening on the following day when Jesus left Bethania to go to the Temple. He was accompanied by six of His Apostles, who walked behind Him. He Himself, on entering the hall, put the seats out of the way and arranged them in order, to the great astonishment of the disciples. In His instruction He touched upon His reason for so doing, and said that He was not soon to leave them.

On the next Sabbath Jesus taught in the Temple from morning till evening, part of the time in a retired apartment in presence of the Apostles and disciples only, and another part in the lecture hall where the lurking Pharisees and other Jews could hear Him. He foretold to the Apostles and disciples, though in general terms, much of what was to happen to them in the future. Only at noon did He pause for awhile. He spoke of adulterated virtues: of a love wherein self-love and covetousness predominate; of a humility mixed up with vanity; and He showed how easily evil glides into all things. He said that many believed it was an earthly kingdom and some post of honor in it that they were to expect; and that they hoped by His means to become elevated without pain or trouble on their own part, just as even the pious mother of the sons of Zebedee had petitioned Him for a distinguished place for her children. He forbade them to heap up perishable treasures, and He inveighed against avarice. I felt that this was aimed at Judas. He spoke also of mortification, of prayer, of fasting, and of hypocrisy which influences many in these holy practices; and here He made mention of the wrath of the Pharisees against the disciples when the latter, one year before, had stripped some ears of corn. He repeated many of His former instructions, and gave some general explanations upon His own manner of acting in the past. He spoke of His recent absence from them, praised the conduct of the disciples during it, made mention of those that had accompanied Him, commending their discretion and docility and recalling in what peace the journey with them had been made. Jesus spoke with much emotion. Then He touched upon the near fulfillment of His mission, His Passion, and the speedy approach of His own end, before which, however, He would make a solemn entrance into Jerusalem. He alluded to the merciless treatment He would undergo, but added that He must suffer, and suffer exceedingly, in order to satisfy Divine Justice. He spoke of His

Blessed Mother, recounting what she too was to suffer with Him, and in what manner it would be effected. He exposed the deep corruption and guilt of mankind, and explained that without His Passion no man could be justified. The Jews stormed and jeered when Jesus spoke of His sufferings and their power to satisfy for sin, and some of them left the hall to report to the mob whom they had appointed to spy Jesus. But Jesus addressed His own followers, telling them not to be troubled, that His time was not yet come, and that this also was a part of His Passion.

In this instruction He made some allusion, though without naming it particularly, to the Cenacle, to the house in which the Last Supper was to be eaten and in which later on they were to receive the Holy Spirit. He spoke of their assembling in it and of their partaking of a strengthening and life-giving Food in which He Himself would remain with them forever. There was some mention made also of His secret disciples, the sons of Simeon, and others. He excused them before the open disciples and designated their caution as necessary, for, as He said, they had a different vocation. As some people from Nazareth had come to the Temple out of curiosity to hear Him, He said, in a way for them to understand, that they were not in earnest.

When the Apostles and disciples alone were standing around Jesus, He touched upon many things that would take place after His return to the Father. To Peter He said that he would have much to suffer, but he should not fear, he should stand firm at the head of the Community which would increase wonderfully. For three years he should with John and James the Less remain with the Faithful in Jerusalem. Then He spoke of the youth who was to be first to shed his blood for Him, but without mentioning Stephen by name, and of the conversion of his persecutor, who would afterward do more in His service than many others. Here too, He forbore giving Paul's name. Jesus' hearers could not readily comprehend His last words.

He predicted the persecutions that would arise against Lazarus and the holy women, and told the Apostles whither they should retire during the first six months after His death: Peter, John, and James the Less were to remain in Jerusalem; Zacheus was to go to the region of Galaad; Philip and Bartholomew, to Gessur on the confines of Syria. At these words, I saw in a vision the four Apostles crossing the Jordan near Jericho, and then proceeding northward. I saw Philip healing a woman in Gessur where at first he was greatly beloved, though later on he was persecuted. Not far from Gessur was Bartholomew's birthplace. He was descended from a king of the city, a relative of David. His refined manners distinguished him among the other Apostles. These four Apostles did not remain together; they worked in different parts of the country. Galaad, whither Andrew and Zacheus went,

was at no great distance from Pella, where Judas had passed his early years. James the Greater and one of the disciples were sent to the pagan regions north of Capharnaum. Thomas and Matthew were dispatched to Ephesus, in order to prepare the country where at a future day Jesus' Mother and many of those that believed in Him were to dwell. They wondered greatly at the fact of Mary's going to live there. Thaddeus and Simon were to go first to Samaria, though none cared to go there. All preferred cities entirely pagan. Jesus told them that they would all meet twice in Jerusalem before going to preach the Gospel in distant pagan lands. He spoke of a man between Samaria and Jericho, who would, like Himself, perform many miracles, though by the power of the devil. He would manifest a desire of conversion, and they must kindly receive him, for even the devil should contribute to His glory. Simon Magus was meant by these words of Jesus. During this instruction the Apostles, as in a familiar conference, questioned Jesus upon whatever they could not understand, and He explained to them as far as was necessary. Everything was perfectly natural.

Three years after the Crucifixion all the Apostles met in Jerusalem, after which Peter and John left the city and Mary accompanied the latter to Ephesus. Then arose in Jerusalem the persecution against Lazarus, Martha, and Magdalen. The last-named had up to that time been doing penance in the desert, in the cave to which Elizabeth had escaped with John during the massacre of the Innocents. The Apostles, in that first reunion, brought together all that belonged to the body of the Church. When half of the time of Mary's life after Christ's Ascension had flown, about the sixth year after that event, the Apostles were again assembled in Jerusalem. It was then they drew up the Creed, made rules, relinquished all that they possessed, distributed it to the poor, and divided the Church into dioceses, after which they separated and went into far-off heathen countries. At Mary's death they all met again for the last time. When they again separated for distant countries, it was until death.

When Jesus left the Temple after this discourse, the enraged Pharisees lay in wait for Him both at the gate and on the way, for they intended to stone Him. But Jesus avoided them, proceeded to Bethania, and for three days went no more to the Temple. He wanted to give the Apostles and disciples time to think over what they had heard. Meantime they referred to Him for further explanations upon many points. Jesus ordered them to commit to writing what He had said relative to the future. I saw that Nathanael the Bridegroom, who was very skillful with the pen, did it, and I wondered that it was not John, but a disciple who recorded the predictions. Nathanael at that time had no other name. It was only at Baptism that he received a second.

During these days, three young men came to Lazarus at Bethania from the Chaldean city of Sikdor, and he procured them quarters at the disciples' inn. These youths were very tall and slight, very handsome and active, and much nobler in figure than the Jews, Jesus spoke only a few words to them. He directed them to the Centurion of Capharnaum, who had been a heathen like themselves, and who would instruct them. Then I saw the youths with the Centurion, who was relating to them the cure of his servant. He told them that through shame of the idols that were in his house, and because it was just the time at which the pagan carnival was celebrated, he had begged Jesus, the Son of God, not to enter into his idolatrous household. Five weeks before the Jewish feast of Easter, the pagans celebrated their carnival, during which they gave themselves up to all kinds of infamous practices. The Centurion Cornelius after his conversion gave all his metallic idols in alms to the poor, or to make sacred vessels for the Temple. The three Chaldeans returned from Capharnaum to Bethania and thence back to Sikdor, where they gathered together the other converts, and with them and their treasures went to join King Mensor.

Up to this time Jesus had gone to the Temple with only three companions; but now He began to go thither escorted by His whole company of Apostles and disciples. I saw the Pharisees retiring from Jesus' chair into the surrounding halls, and peering at Him through the arches when He began to preach and to predict His Passion to the disciples.

In the wall of one of the fore courts just in front of the entrance of the Temple, seven or eight vendors had taken up their quarters to sell eatables and some kind of red beverage in little flasks. They were like sutlers, and I know not whether they were very devout or not, but I often saw the Pharisees sneaking around to them. When Jesus, who had passed the night in Jerusalem, went next morning to the Temple and reached the hall in which these vendors were, He ordered them to be off instantly with all their goods. As they hesitated to obey, He put His own hand to the work, gathered their things together, and had them removed. When He afterwards entered the Temple, He found the teacher's chair occupied by others, but they retired as hurriedly as if He had chased them away.

On the following Sabbath, after the Jews had finished their sacred services, Jesus again taught in the Temple and prolonged His instruction late into the night. In it He made frequent allusions to His journey among the pagans, so that it could be easily understood how good they were and how willing to receive His teachings. In support of His words, He appealed to the recent arrival of the three Chaldeans. They had not seen Jesus when He was in Sikdor, but they had heard of His doctrine, and were so impressed by it that

they had journeyed to Bethania for more instruction.

On the following day Jesus caused three arches in the lecture hall to be closed, that He might instruct His Apostles and disciples in private. He repeated on this occasion His early instructions upon His own fast in the desert. He alluded also to many events connected with His own past life, and said why and how He had chosen the Apostles. During this last part of His discourse, He placed the Apostles in pairs before Him. With Judas, however, He spoke but few words. Treason was already in his heart. He was becoming furious, and had had an interview with the Pharisees. After finishing with the Apostles, Jesus turned to the disciples, and spoke of their vocation also.

I saw that all were very sad. Jesus' Passion was near.

Jesus' last instruction in the Temple before Palm Sunday lasted four long hours. The Temple was full, and all who wanted to hear Him could do so. Many women listened from a space separated by a grating. He again explained many things from His former instructions and His own actions. He spoke of the cure of the man at the Pool of Bethesda, and said why He had healed him just at that time; of the raising of the son of the widow of Naim, also that of the daughter of Jairus, and said why the former had immediately followed Him, but the latter not. Then He referred to what was soon about to happen, and said that He should be abandoned by His own. At first He would with splendor and openly, as in triumph, enter the Temple, and the lips of the suckling that had never yet spoken would announce His entrance. Many would break off branches from the trees and strew them before Him, while others would spread their mantles in His way. The one, He explained, namely those that strewed branches before Him, would not renounce for Him what they possessed, and would not remain faithful to Him; but they that spread their garments on the way would detach themselves from what they had, would put on the new man, and would remain faithful to Him. Jesus did not say that He was going to enter Jerusalem on an ass; consequently, many thought that He would celebrate His entrance with splendor and magnificence, with horses and camels in His train. His words gave rise to a great whispering in the crowd. They did not take His expression, literally. They understood it to mean a longer time; therefore, Jesus repeated significantly: "Three times five days!"

This instruction occasioned great anxiety among the Scribes and Pharisees. They held a meeting in Caiaphas' house, and issued a prohibition against anyone's harboring Jesus and His disciples. They also set spies at the gates to watch for Him, but He remained concealed in Bethania with Lazarus.