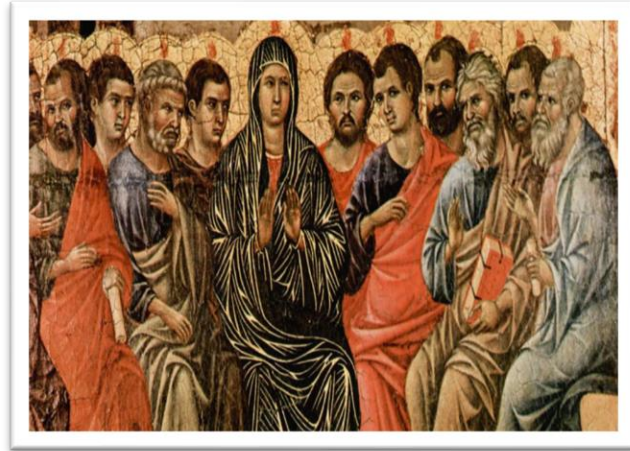


A Glance at the Disciples of Jesus on Holy Saturday

The faithful disciples of our Lord assembled together in the Cenaculum, to keep the eve of the Sabbath. They were about twenty in number, clothed in long white dresses, and with their waists girded. The room was lighted up by a lamp; and after their repast they separated, and for the most part returned home. They again assembled on the following morning, and sat together reading and praying by turns; and if a friend entered the room,



they arose and saluted him cordially.

In that part of the house inhabited by the Blessed Virgin there was a large room, divided into small compartments like cells, which were used by the holy women for sleeping in at night. When they returned from the sepulchre, one of their number lighted a lamp which was hanging in the middle of the room, and they all assembled around the Blessed Virgin, and commenced praying in a mournful but recollected manner. A short time afterwards, Martha, Maroni, Dina, and Mara, who were just come with Lazarus from Bethania, where they had passed the Sabbath, entered the room. The Blessed Virgin and her companions gave them a detailed account of the death and burial of our Lord, accompanying each relation with many tears. The evening was advancing, and Joseph of Arimathea came in with a few other disciples, to ask whether any of the women wished to return to their homes, as they were ready to escort them. A few accepted the proposition, and set off immediately; but before they reached the tribunal of Caiphias, some armed men stopped Joseph of Arimathea, arrested, and shut him up in an old deserted turret.

Those among the holy women who did not leave the Cenaculum retired to take their rest in the cell-like compartments spoken of above: they fastened long veils over their heads, seated themselves sorrowfully on the floor, and leaned upon the couches which were placed against the wall. After a time they stood up, spread out the bedclothes which were rolled up on the couches, took off their sandals, girdles, and a part of their clothing, and reclined for a time in order to endeavour to get a little sleep. At midnight, they arose, clothed themselves, put up their beds, and reassembled around the lamp to continue their prayer with the Blessed Virgin.

When the Mother of Jesus and her pious companions had finished their nocturnal prayer (that holy duty which has been practised by all faithful children of God and holy souls, who have either felt themselves called to it by a special grace, or who follow a rule given by God and his Church), they heard a knock at the door, which was instantly opened, and John and some of the disciples who had promised to conduct them to the Temple, entered, upon which the women wrapped their cloaks about them, and started instantly. It was then about three in the morning, and they went straight to the Temple, it being customary among many Jews to get there before day dawned, on the day after they had eaten the Paschal lamb; and for this reason the Temple was open from midnight, as the sacrifices commenced very early.

They started at about the same hour as that at which the priests had put their seal upon the sepulchre. The aspect of things in the Temple was, however, very different from what was usually the case at such times, for the sacrifices were stopped, and the place was empty and desolate, as everyone had left on account of the events on the previous day which had rendered it impure. The Blessed Virgin appeared to me to visit it for the sole purpose of taking leave of the place where she had passed her youth. The Temple was, however, open; the lamps lighted, and the people at liberty to enter the vestibule of the priests, which was the customary privilege of this day, as well as of that which followed the Paschal supper. The Temple was, as I said before, quite empty, with the exception of a chance priest or server who might be seen wandering about; and every part bore the marks of the confusion into which all was thrown on the previous day by the extraordinary and frightful events that had taken place; besides which it had been defiled by the presence of the dead, and I reflected and wondered in my own mind whether it would be possible ever to purify it again.

The sons of Simeon, and the nephew of Joseph of Arimathea, were much grieved when they heard of the arrest of their uncle, but they welcomed the Blessed Virgin and her companions, and conducted them all over the Temple, which they did without difficulty, as they held the offices of inspectors of the Temple. The holy women stood in silence and contemplated all the terrible and visible marks of the anger of God with feelings of deep awe, and then listened with interest to the many stupendous details recounted by their

guides. The effects of the earthquake were still visible, as little had been done towards repairing the numerous rents and cracks in the floor, and in the walls. In that part of the Temple where the vestibule joined the sanctuary, the wall was so tremendously shaken by the shock of the earthquake, as to produce a fissure wide enough for a person to walk through, and the rest of the wall looked unsteady, as if it might fall down at any moment.

The curtain which hung in the sanctuary was rent in two and hung in shreds at the sides; nothing was to be seen around but crumbled walls, crushed flagstones, and columns either partly or quite shaken down. The Blessed Virgin visited all those parts which Jesus had rendered sacred in her eyes; she prostrated, kissed them, and with tears in her eyes explained to the others her reasons for venerating each particular spot, whereupon they instantly followed her example. The greatest veneration was always shown by the Jews for all places which had been rendered sacred by manifestations of the Divine power, and it was customary to place the hands reverently on such places, to kiss them, and to prostrate to the very earth before them. I do not think there was anything in the least surprising in such a custom, for they both knew, saw, and felt that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, was a living God, and that his dwelling among his people was in the Temple at Jerusalem; consequently it would have been infinitely more astonishing if they had not venerated those holy parts where his power had been particularly demonstrated, for the Temple and the holy places were to them what the Blessed Sacrament is to Christians.

Deeply penetrated with these feelings of respect, the Blessed Virgin walked through the Temple with her companions, and pointed out to them the spot where she was presented when still a child, the parts where she passed her childhood, the place where she was affianced to St. Joseph, and the spot where she stood when she presented Jesus and heard the prophecy of Simeon: the remembrance of his words made her weep bitterly, for the prophecy was indeed fulfilled, and the sword of grief had indeed transfixed her heart; she again stopped her companions when she reached the part of the Temple where she found Jesus teaching when she lost him at the age of twelve, and she respectfully kissed the ground on which he then stood. When the holy women had looked at every place sanctified by the presence of Jesus, when they had wept and prayed over them, they returned to Sion.

The Blessed Virgin did not leave the Temple without shedding many tears, as she contemplated the state of desolation to which it was reduced, an aspect of desolation which was rendered still more depressing by the marked contrast it bore to the usual state of the Temple on the festival day. Instead of songs and hymns of jubilee, a mournful silence reigned throughout the vast edifice, and in place of groups of joyful and devout worshippers, the eye wandered over a vast and dreary solitude. Too truly, alas, did this change betoken the fearful crime which had been perpetrated by the people of God, and she remembered

how Jesus had wept over the Temple, and said, 'Destroy the Temple and in three days I will build it up again.' She thought over the destruction of the Temple of the Body of Jesus which had been brought about by his enemies, and she sighed with a longing desire for the dawning of that third day when the words of eternal truth were to be accomplished.

It was about daybreak when Mary and her companions reached the Cenaculum, and they retired into the building which stood on its right-hand side, while John and some of the disciples re-entered the Cenaculum, where about twenty men, assembled around a lamp, were occupied in prayer.

Every now and then new-comers drew nigh to the door, came in timidly, approached the group round the lamp, and addressed them in a few mournful words, which they accompanied with tears. Everyone appeared to regard John with feelings of respect; because he had remained with Jesus until he expired; but with these sentiments of respect was mingled a deep feeling of shame and confusion, when they reflected on their own cowardly conduct in abandoning their Lord and Master in the hour of need. John spoke to everyone with the greatest charity and kindness; his manner was modest and unassuming as that of a child, and he seemed to fear receiving praise. I saw the assembled group take one meal during that day, but its members were, for the most part, silent; not a sound was to be heard throughout the house, and the doors were tightly closed, although, in fact, there was no likelihood of anyone disturbing them, as the house belonged to Nicodemus, and he had let it to them for the time of the festival. The holy women remained in this room until nightfall; it was lighted up by a single lamp; the doors were closed, and curtains drawn over the windows. Sometimes they gathered round the Blessed Virgin and prayed under the lamp; at other times they retired to the side of the room, covered their heads with black veils, and either sat on ashes (the sign of mourning), or prayed with their faces turned towards the wall; those whose health was delicate took a little food, but the others fasted.

I looked at them again and again, and I saw them ever occupied in the same manner, that is to say, either in prayer or in mourning over the sufferings of their beloved Master. When my thoughts wandered from the contemplation of the Blessed Virgin to that of her Divine Son, I beheld the holy sepulchre with six or seven sentinels at the entrance—Cassius standing against the door of the cave, apparently in deep meditation, the exterior door closed, and the stone rolled close to it. Notwithstanding the thick door which intervened between the body of our Saviour and myself I could see it plainly; it was quite transparent with a divine light, and two angels were adoring at the side. But my thoughts then turned to the contemplation of the blessed soul of my Redeemer, and such an extensive and complicated picture of his descent into hell was shown to me, that I can only remember a small portion of it, which I will describe to the best of my power.