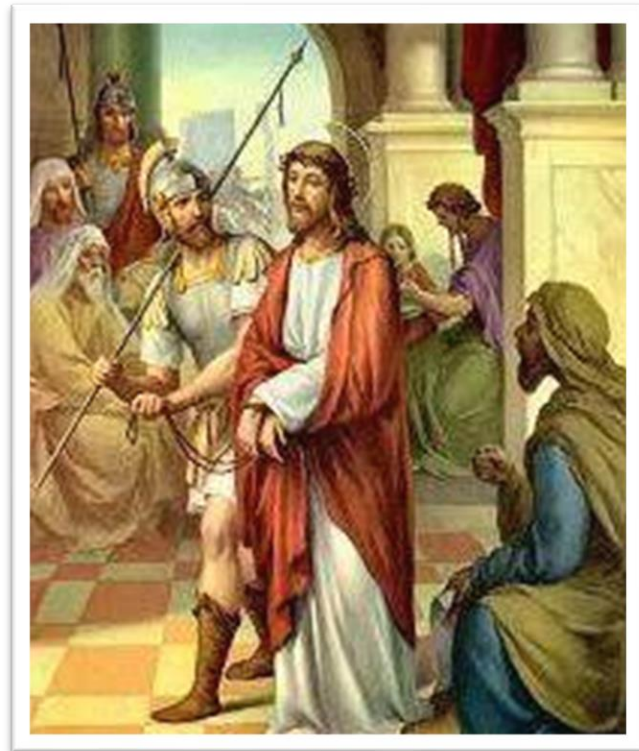


## **Jesus condemned to be crucified**

Pilate, who did not desire to know the truth, but was solely anxious to get out of the difficulty without harm to himself, became more undecided than ever; his conscience whispered—‘Jesus is innocent;’ his wife said, ‘he is holy;’ his superstitious feelings made him fear that Jesus was the enemy of his gods; and his cowardice filled him with dread lest Jesus, if he was a god, should wreak his vengeance upon his judge. He was both irritated and alarmed at the last words of Jesus, and he made another attempt for his release; but the Jews instantly threatened to lay an accusation against him before the Emperor. This menace terrified him, and he determined to accede to their wishes, although firmly convinced in his own mind of the innocence of Jesus, and perfectly conscious that by pronouncing sentence of death upon him he should violate every law of justice, besides breaking the promise he had made to his wife in the morning. Thus did he sacrifice Jesus to the enmity of the Jews, and endeavour to stifle remorse by washing his hands before the people, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just man; look you to it.’ Vainly dost thou pronounce these words, O Pilate! for his blood is on thy head likewise; thou canst not wash his blood from thy soul, as thou dost from thy hands. Those fearful words, ‘His blood be upon us and upon our children,’ had scarcely ceased to resound, when Pilate commenced his preparations for passing sentence. He called for the dress which he wore on state occasions, put a species of diadem, set in precious stones, on his head, changed his mantle, and caused a staff to be carried before him. He was surrounded with soldiers, preceded by officers belonging to the tribunal, and followed by Scribes, who carried rolls of parchments and books used for



inscribing names and dates. One man walked in front, who carried the trumpet. The procession marched in this order from Pilate's palace to the forum, where an elevated seat, used on these particular occasions, was placed opposite to the pillar where Jesus was scourged. This tribunal was called Gabbatha; it was a kind of round terrace, ascended by means of staircases; on the top was a seat for Pilate, and behind this seat a bench for those in minor offices, while a number of soldiers were stationed round the terrace and upon the staircases. Many of the Pharisees had left the palace and were gone to the Temple, so that Annas, Caiphas, and twenty-eight priests alone followed the Roman governor on to the forum, and the two thieves were taken there at the time that Pilate presented our Saviour to the people, saying: 'Ecce homo!'

Our Lord was still clothed in his purple garment, his crown of thorns upon his head, and his hands manacled, when the archers brought him up to the tribunal, and placed him between the two malefactors. As soon as Pilate was seated, he again addressed the enemies of Jesus, in these words, 'Behold your King!' But the cries of 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' resounded on all sides. 'Shall I crucify your King?' said Pilate. 'We have no King but Caesar!' responded the High Priests.

Pilate found it was utterly hopeless to say anything more, and therefore commenced his preparations for passing sentence. The two thieves had received their sentence of crucifixion some time before; but the High Priests had obtained a respite for them, in order that our Lord might suffer the additional ignominy of being executed with two criminals of the most infamous description. The crosses of the two thieves were by their sides; that intended for our Lord was not brought, because he was not as yet sentenced to death.

The Blessed Virgin, who had retired to some distance after the scourging of Jesus, again approached to hear the sentence of death pronounced upon her Son and her God. Jesus stood in the midst of the archers, at the foot of the staircase leading up to the tribunal. The trumpet was sounded to demand silence, and then the cowardly, the base judge, in a tremulous undecided voice, pronounced the sentence of death on the Just Man. The sight of

the cowardice and duplicity of this despicable being, who was nevertheless puffed up with pride at his important position, almost overcame me, and the ferocious joy of the executioners—the triumphant countenances of the High Priests, added to the deplorable condition to which our loving Saviour was reduced, and the agonising grief of his beloved Mother—still further increased my pain. I looked up again, and saw the cruel Jews almost devouring their victim with their eyes, the soldiers standing coldly by, and multitudes of horrible demons passing to and fro and mixing in the crowd. I felt that I ought to have been in the place of Jesus, my beloved Spouse, for the sentence would not then have been unjust; but I was so overcome with anguish, and my sufferings were so intense, that I cannot exactly remember all that I did see. However, I will relate all as nearly as I can. After a long preamble, which was composed principally of the most pompous and exaggerated eulogy of the Emperor Tiberias, Pilate spoke of the accusations which had been brought against Jesus by the High Priests. He said that they had condemned him to death for having disturbed the public peace, and broken their laws by calling himself the Son of God and King of the Jews; and that the people had unanimously demanded that their decree should be carried out. Notwithstanding his oft repeated conviction of the innocence of Jesus, this mean and worthless judge was not ashamed of saying that he likewise considered their decision a just one, and that he should therefore pronounce sentence— which he did in these words: ‘I condemn Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, to be crucified;’ and he ordered the executioners to bring the cross. I think I remember likewise that he took a long stick in his hands, broke it, and threw the fragments at the feet of Jesus.

On hearing these words of Pilate the Mother of Jesus became for a few moments totally unconscious, for she was now certain that her beloved Son must die the most ignominious and the most painful of all deaths. John and the holy women carried her away, to prevent the heartless beings who surrounded them from adding crime to crime by jeering at her grief; but no sooner did she revive a little than she begged to be taken again to each spot which had been sanctified by the sufferings of her Son, in order to bedew them

with her tears; and thus did the Mother of our Lord, in the name of the Church, take possession of those holy places.

Pilate then wrote down the sentence, and those who stood behind him copied it out three times. The words which he wrote were quite different from those he had pronounced; I could see plainly that his mind was dreadfully agitated—an angel of wrath appeared to guide his hand. The substance of the written sentence was this: ‘I have been compelled, for fear of an insurrection, to yield to the wishes of the High Priests, the Sanhedrin, and the people, who tumultuously demanded the death of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they accused of having disturbed the public peace, and also of having blasphemed and broken their laws. I have given him up to them to be crucified, although their accusations appeared to be groundless. I have done so for fear of their alleging to the Emperor that I encourage insurrections, and cause dissatisfaction among the Jews by denying them the rights of justice.’ He then wrote the inscription for the cross, while his clerks copied out the sentence several times, that these copies might be sent to distant parts of the country.

The High Priests were extremely dissatisfied at the words of the sentence, which they said were not true; and they clamorously surrounded the tribunal to endeavour to persuade him to alter the inscription; and not to put King of the Jews, but that he said, I am the King of the Jews.

Pilate was vexed, and answered impatiently, ‘What I have written I have written!’ They were likewise anxious that the cross of our Lord should not be higher than those of the two thieves, but it was necessary for it to be so, because there would otherwise not have been sufficient place for Pilate’s inscription; they therefore endeavoured to persuade him not to have this obnoxious inscription put up at all. But Pilate was determined, and their words made no impression upon him; the cross was therefore obliged to be lengthened by a fresh bit of wood. Consequently the form of the cross was peculiar—the two arms stood out like

the branches of a tree growing from the stem, and the shape was very like that of the letter Y, with the lower part lengthened so as to rise between the arms, which had been put on separately, and were thinner than the body of the cross. A piece of wood was likewise nailed at the bottom of the cross for the feet to rest upon. During the time that Pilate was pronouncing the iniquitous sentence, I saw his wife, Claudia Procles, send him back the pledge which he had given her, and in the evening she left his palace and joined the friends of our Lord, who concealed her in a subterraneous vault in the house of Lazarus at Jerusalem. Later in the same day, I likewise saw a friend of our Lord engrave the words, *Judex injustus*, and the name of Claudia Procles, on a greenlooking stone, which was behind the terrace called Gabbatha—this stone is still to be found in the foundations of a church or house at Jerusalem, which stands on the spot formerly called Gabbatha. Claudia Procles became a Christian, followed St. Paul, and became his particular friend.

No sooner had Pilate pronounced sentence than Jesus was given up into the hands of the archers, and the clothes which he had taken off in the court of Caiphaz were brought for him to put on again. I think some charitable persons had washed them, for they looked clean. The ruffians who surrounded Jesus untied his hands for his dress to be changed, and roughly dragged off the scarlet mantle with which they had clothed him in mockery, thereby reopening all his wounds; he put on his own linen undergarment with trembling hands, and they threw his scapular over his shoulders. As the crown of thorns was too large and prevented the seamless robe, which his Mother had made for him, from going over his head, they pulled it off violently, heedless of the pain thus inflicted upon him. His white woollen dress was next thrown over his shoulders, and then his wide belt and cloak. After this, they again tied round his waist a ring covered with sharp iron points, and to it they fastened the cords by which he was led, doing all with their usual brutal cruelty. The two thieves were standing, one on the right and the other on the left of Jesus, with their hands tied and a chain round their necks; they were covered with black and lived marks, the effects of

the scourging of the previous day. The demeanour of the one who was afterwards converted was quiet and peaceable, while that of the other, on the contrary, was rough and insolent, and he joined the archers in abusing and insulting Jesus, who looked upon his two companions with love and compassion, and offered up his sufferings for their salvation. The archers gathered together all the implements necessary for the crucifixions, and prepared everything for the terrible and painful journey to Calvary. Annas and Caiphas at last left off disputing with Pilate, and angrily retired, taking with them the sheets of parchment on which the sentence was written; they went away in haste, fearing that they should get to the Temple too late for the Paschal sacrifice. Thus did the High Priests, unknowingly to themselves, leave the true Paschal Lamb.

They went to a temple made of stone, to immolate and to sacrifice that lamb which was but a symbol, and they left the true Paschal Lamb, who was being led to the Altar of the Cross by the cruel executioners; they were most careful not to contract exterior defilement, while their souls were completely defiled by anger, hatred, and envy. They had said, 'His blood be upon us and upon our children!' And by these words they had performed the ceremony, and had placed the hand of the sacrificer upon the head of the Victim. Thus were the two paths formed—the one leading to the altar belonging to the Jewish law, the other leading to the Altar of Grace: Pilate, that proud and irresolute pagan, that slave of the world, who trembled in the presence of the true God, and yet adored his false gods, took a middle path, and returned to his palace. The iniquitous sentence was given at about ten in the morning.