

A HOMILY FOR GOOD FRIDAY CONCERNING THE DEATH AND PASSION OF OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Part I

Beloved in Christ, it would not be fitting for us, having been redeemed from the devil, from sin and death, and from everlasting damnation, to let this day pass without meditating upon the excellent work of our redemption accomplished on that first Good Friday through the great mercy and love of our Savior Jesus Christ for us, even though we were wretched sinners and his mortal enemies. If we would take care to remember what a mortal man has done for the benefit of his country, how much more should we remember the benefit of Christ's death, through which he has purchased the sure pardon and forgiveness of our sins and through which he made us to be at one with our Father in heaven, who has accepted us as not only his loving children, but also with his only Son Jesus Christ,¹ fellow heirs of the kingdom of heaven!

Christ's kindness appears even greater to us when we consider that it pleased him to divest himself of all the godly honor that he held equally with his Father in heaven and to come down into this vale of misery to be made a mortal man. Furthermore, he came in the state of a lowly servant,² serving us for our profit, even though we were his sworn enemies who had renounced his holy law and followed the lusts and sinful pleasures of our corrupt nature. Despite all this, Christ put himself between God's deserved wrath and our sin, to expunge the charge that was against us,³ by which we were in danger to God. He paid our debt, a debt so great that we could never pay it, and without payment, God the Father could never be at one with us. It was not possible for us to be set free from this debt by our own ability. Therefore, Christ was pleased to pay it, completely settling our account.

Who could even consider the grievous debt of sin that could not be paid except by the death of an innocent, without hating sin in his heart? If God hates sin so much that neither man nor angel could pay the price of redemption—only the death of his only and well-beloved Son—who will not stand in fear of sin? If we, my friends, consider that for our sins this most innocent Lamb was driven to death, we shall have much more cause to grieve that we were the cause of his death than to cry out of the malice and cruelty of the Jews who were there that day to pursue him to his death. We did the deeds for which he was stricken and wounded: they were only the ministers of our wickedness.

It is proper, then, for us to thoroughly examine our hearts and mourn our own wickedness and sinful living. If the most dearly beloved Son of God was stricken for sins he did not commit, how much more ought we to be punished for the manifold sins which we commit against God daily, if we do not earnestly repent, and if we are not sorry for them! No man can love sin, which God hates so much, and be in God's favor. No man can say

¹ Romans 8:17

² Philippians 2:6-7

³ Colossians 2:14

that he truly loves Christ while maintaining friendship with sin, which is Christ's great enemy and the author of his death. Our love for God and Christ is equal to our hatred for sin. Therefore, we should take care not to favor sin, or else we will be found enemies to God and traitors to Christ. For those who nailed Christ to the cross are not his only tormentors and crucifiers; rather, everyone who commits immorality and sin (which brought him to his death) crucifies again the Son of God.⁴

If the wages of sin is death⁵ and death is everlasting, surely it is no small danger to be in service of sin. If we live according to the flesh and the sinful lusts thereof, we shall surely die, as Almighty God warns us through the words of St. Paul.⁶ The only way we can live to God is to die to sin.⁷ As St. Paul says,

And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.⁸

But, if sin rules and reigns in us, then God, who is the fountain of all grace and virtue, has departed from us; then the devil and his ungracious spirit has dominion over us. And surely, if we die in such a miserable state, we shall not rise to life, but fall down to eternal death and damnation.

For Christ has not redeemed us from sin so that we may safely return to it again; instead, he has redeemed us so that we should forsake every sinful deed and live in righteousness.⁹ We are therefore washed in our baptism from the filthiness of sin that we should live thereafter in purity of life. In baptism we promised to renounce the devil and his influence, and we promised to be, as obedient children,¹⁰ always following God's will and pleasure. Then, if he is truly our Father, let us give him his due honor.¹¹ If we are his children, let us freely show him our obedience, just as Christ openly declared his obedience to his Father, for as St. Paul writes, Christ was obedient even to the very death, the death of the cross.¹² And he did this for all who believe in him. Jesus Christ was not punished for any sins of his own, for he was pure and undefiled by any sin. He was wounded, says Isaiah, for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.¹³ he suffered the penalty of them himself, to deliver us from danger. Isaiah says that he bore all our sores and infirmities upon his own back: no pain did he refuse to suffer in his own body so that he might deliver us from pain everlasting. It was his pleasure to do this for us: we did not deserve it.

⁴ Hebrews 6:6

⁵ Romans 6:23

⁶ Romans 8:13

⁷ Romans 6:11

⁸ Romans 8:10-11

⁹ Titus 2:14

¹⁰ I Peter 1:14

¹¹ Malachi 1:6

¹² Philippians 2:8

¹³ Isaiah 53:4-5

As a result, the more we see ourselves bound to God, the more we ought to thank him and the more hope we have that we shall receive all other good things of his hand, in that we have received the gift of his only Son through his liberality. For as St. Paul says, he who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?¹⁴ If we need any thing either for body or soul, we may lawfully and boldly approach God as our merciful Father, to ask what we desire, and we shall obtain it. For such power is given us to be the children of God, to as many as believe in Christ's name.¹⁵ Whatever we ask in his name will be granted. For Almighty God the Father is so well pleased with Christ his Son that for his sake he favors us and will deny us nothing. This sacrifice and oblation of his Son's death, which he so obediently and innocently suffered, was so pleasing to God that he was willing to take it for the only and full amends for all the sins of the world. And such favor did Christ purchase by his death from his heavenly Father for us that for the merit thereof (if we are true Christians indeed, and not in word only) we are now fully in God's grace again, and clearly discharged from our sin.

Surely no tongue is able to express the worthiness of so precious a death! For in this stands the continual pardon of our daily offenses, in this rests our justification, in this we are accepted, in this is purchased the everlasting health of all our souls; indeed, there is nothing else that can be named under heaven to save our souls¹⁶ except for this work of Christ's precious offering of his body upon the altar of the cross. Certainly no work of any mortal man, no matter how holy, can be added to the merits of Christ's most holy act. For no doubt all our thoughts and deeds were of no value, if they were not allowed in the merits of Christ's death. All our righteousness is far imperfect when compared with Christ's righteousness. For in his acts and deeds there was no spot of sin or any imperfection (which is why they could be the true amends of our unrighteousness), whereas our acts and deeds are full of imperfection and infirmities, and therefore nothing worthy of themselves to stir God to any favor, much less to challenge the glory that is due to Christ's act and merit: for "Not to us," says David, "Not to us, but to your Name give the glory, O Lord."¹⁷

Let us therefore, good friends, glorify his Name with all reverence; let us magnify and praise him forever. For he has dealt with us according to his great mercy; by himself he has purchased our redemption. He did not spare himself and send an angel to do this deed. Instead, he did it himself so that he might do it the better and make it the more perfect redemption.¹⁸ Not even the intolerable pains that he suffered in the whole course of his long passion could turn him from his purpose of doing good to his enemies, but he opened his heart for us, and gave himself wholly to ransom us. Let us therefore now open our hearts again to him, and study in our lives to be thankful to such a Lord, and always to be mindful of so great a benefit.

¹⁴ Romans 8:32

¹⁵ John 1:12

¹⁶ Acts 4:12

¹⁷ Psalm 115:1

¹⁸ Hebrews 1:3

In fact, let us take up our cross with Christ, and follow him. his passion is not only the ransom and whole amends for our sin, but it is also a most perfect example of all patience and endurance. For, if Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead,¹⁹ how should it not be appropriate for us to bear patiently our small crosses of adversity and the troubles of this world? For surely, as St. Peter says, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps.”²⁰ And, if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.²¹ Not that the sufferings of this life are worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,²² but we should gladly be content to suffer, to be like Christ in our life, so that by our works we may glorify our Father in heaven.²³ And, even though it is painful and grievous to bear the cross of Christ in the sorrows and unhappiness of this life, doing so brings forth the joyful fruit of hope in all who endure this discipline.²⁴ Let us not focus on the pain so much as the reward that shall follow that labor.²⁵ Rather, let us strive in our suffering to endure innocently and guiltlessly, as our Savior Christ did. For, if we suffer for our own faults, then we would be expected to endure without complaint: “For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?”²⁶ But, if we suffer loss of goods and life through no fault of our own, if we suffer to be evil spoken of, for the love of Christ, this is “commendable before God,”²⁷ for that is how Christ suffered.

he never sinned; neither was there any guile found in his mouth. Even when he was reviled with taunts, he reviled not again; when he was wrongfully dealt with, he threatened not again, nor revenged his quarrel, but delivered his cause to him who judges rightly.

Perfect patience cares not what or how much it suffers, nor of whom it suffers, whether of friend or foe; but seeks to suffer innocently and without deserving. The one who possesses perfect charity cares so little for revenge that he studies how to return good for evil, to bless and say well of those who curse him, to pray for those who persecute him, according to the example of our Savior Christ, who is the most perfect example and pattern of all meekness and patience. For even while he was hanging upon the cross in most fervent anguish, bleeding in every part of his blessed body, being set in the midst of his enemies and crucifiers, who mocked and scorned him despitefully without compassion, even though they saw how terribly he was suffering, Jesus Christ had towards them such compassion of heart that he prayed to his Father of heaven for them, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”²⁸ What patience he also

¹⁹ Acts 17:3

²⁰ 1 Peter 2.21

²¹ 2 Timothy 2.12; Romans 8:17

²² Romans 8:18

²³ Matthew 5.16

²⁴ Hebrews 12.11

²⁵ James 5:11

²⁶ 1 Peter 2.20

²⁷ 1 Peter 2.20

²⁸ Luke 23:34

showed when one of his own trusted Apostles and servants came to betray him to his enemies to the death! he said nothing worse to him than, “Friend, why have you come?”²⁹

Thus, good people, we should call to mind the great examples of charity which Christ showed in his passion, if we are to profit by remembering his passion. We should bear the same sort of charity and love to one another, if we want to be true servants of Christ. As he says, “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”³⁰ We must be more perfect in our charity than this, even as our Father in heaven is perfect,³¹ who makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.³² In this same way, we should show our charity impartially, as well to one as to another, as well to friend as foe, like obedient children,³³ after the example of our good Father in heaven. For, if Christ was obedient to his Father even to the death, and even to the most shameful death (as the Jews esteemed it), the death of the cross,³⁴ why should not we be obedient to God in lesser points of charity and patience?

Let us therefore forgive our neighbors their small faults, as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven us our great faults.³⁵ It is not fitting that we should desire God to forgive our great offences while we refuse to forgive the small trespasses of our neighbors against us. We call for mercy in vain if we will not show mercy to our neighbors. For if we will not banish wrath and displeasure toward our Christian brother from our hearts, God will not forgive the displeasure and wrath that our sins have deserved of him. For under this condition God forgives us: that we forgive others.³⁶ It is not suitable for Christian men to be hardhearted to one another or to think their neighbor unworthy to be forgiven. For no matter how unworthy your neighbor may be, Christ is worthy to have you do much for his sake: he has deserved it of you that you should forgive your neighbor. And God is also to be obeyed, who commands us to forgive, if we will have any part of the pardon which our Savior Christ purchased of God the Father by shedding his precious blood. Nothing becomes Christ’s servants so much as mercy and compassion.

Let us then be merciful to one another and pray one for another, that we may be healed from all frailties of our life,³⁷ that we may reduce the opportunities to offend one another and that we may be of one mind and one spirit, agreeing together in brotherly love and concord, as dear children of God. By these means we will move God to be merciful to us for our sins. Furthermore, such behavior will prepare us to receive our Savior and Maker in his blessed Sacrament to the everlasting comfort and health of our souls. Christ delights to enter and to dwell in that soul where love and charity rule, and where peace

²⁹ Matthew 26:50

³⁰ Matthew 5:46-47

³¹ Matthew 5:45

³² Matthew 5:48

³³ I Peter 5:14

³⁴ Philippians 2:8

³⁵ Ephesians 4:32

³⁶ Matthew 6:14–15

³⁷ James 5:16

and concord are seen. As St. John writes, “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”³⁸ And by this, he says, we shall know that we are of God, if we love our brothers.³⁹ Furthermore, by this shall we know that we have been delivered from death to life, if we love one another.⁴⁰ But he who hates his brother, says the same Apostle, abides in death, even in the danger of everlasting death; and is moreover the child of damnation and of the devil, cursed of God, and hated (so long as he remains in hatred) by God and all his heavenly company. For just as peace and charity make us the blessed children of Almighty God, hatred and envy make us the cursed children of the devil.

May God give us all the grace to follow Christ’s example in peace and charity, in patience and endurance, so that we may have him as our guest to enter and dwell within us. By this, we may have full assurance, having such a pledge of our salvation. If we have him and his favor, we may be sure that we have the favor of God by his means. For he sits on the right hand of his Father as our advocate and attorney, pleading and interceding for us in all our needs and necessities.⁴¹ Therefore, if we lack any gift of godly wisdom, we may ask it of God for Christ’s sake, and we shall have it.

Let us examine ourselves to determine what we lack in the virtue of charity and patience. If we see that our hearts are not inclined to forgive those who have offended against us, then let us acknowledge our lack and pray that God will supply what is needed. But, if we lack this virtue and still see in ourselves no desire to have it, we are truly in a dangerous case before God and need to pray earnestly that God will change our hearts, grafting in a new one. For unless we forgive others, we shall never be forgiven of God. No, not all the prayers and merits that others may offer can pacify God’s wrath toward us, unless we are at peace and in unity with our neighbor: not all our deeds and good works can move God to forgive us our debts to him unless we forgive others. He values mercy more than sacrifice.⁴² Mercy moved our Savior Christ to suffer for his enemies; it is right for us to follow his example. For it will profit us little to meditate on the fruits and price of his passion, to magnify them, and to delight in them and trust them, if we do not also intend to follow his examples in passion. If we remember Christ’s death and will hold fast to it with faith for the merit of it, and will also frame ourselves so as to give ourselves and all that we have by charity for the good of our neighbor, as Christ spent himself wholly for our profit, then we truly remember Christ’s death; and, being thus followers of his steps, we shall surely follow him to where he sits now with the Father and the Holy Ghost, to whom be all honor and glory. Amen.

³⁸ I John 4:16

³⁹ John 13:35

⁴⁰ I John 3:14

⁴¹ Romans 8:34

⁴² Hosea 6:6

Part II

That we may better understand the great mercy and goodness of our Savior Christ in suffering death universally for all men, it is fitting for us to descend into the bottom of our conscience, and deeply to consider the first and principal cause wherefore he was compelled so to do.

When our great-grandfather Adam followed his wife's suggestion and broke⁴³ God's commandment in eating the forbidden fruit, he purchased not only to himself but also to his posterity forever, the just wrath and indignation of God, who according to the sentence he had pronounced at the giving of the commandment, condemned both him and all his posterity to everlasting death, both of body and soul. For it was said unto him⁴⁴: *You shalt eat freely of every tree in the garden: but as touching the tree of knowledge of good and ill, you shalt in no wise eat of it; for in what hour soever you eatest thereof you shalt die the death.* Now as the Lord had spoken, so it came to pass. Adam took upon himself to eat thereof, and in so doing he died that death; that is to say, he became mortal, he lost the favor of God, he was cast out of Paradise, he was no longer a citizen of heaven, but a firebrand of hell and a bond slave to the devil. Our Savior bears witness to this in the Gospel, calling us⁴⁵ *lost sheep*, which have *gone astray* and wandered from *the true Shepherd of our souls*.⁴⁶ St. Paul also bears witness to this,⁴⁷ saying that *by the offence of only Adam death came upon all men to condemnation*. So that now neither he nor any of his descendants had any right or interest at all in the kingdom of heaven, but had become plain reprobates and castaways, being perpetually damned to the everlasting pains of hell fire.

In this very great misery and wretchedness, if mankind could have recovered himself again and obtained forgiveness at God's hands, then his situation would been somewhat tolerable because he might have attempted in some way to deliver himself from eternal death. But there was no way left to him; he could do nothing that might please God's wrath; he was altogether *unprofitable* in that behalf; *there was none that did good, no not one*.⁴⁸ And how then could he work his own salvation? Should he go about to pacify God's heavy displeasure by offering up⁴⁹ burnt sacrifices according as it was ordained in the old Law? By offering up the blood of oxen, the blood of calves, the blood of goats, the blood of lambs, and so forth? O these things were of no force nor strength to take away sins; they could not put away the anger of God; they could not cool the heat of his wrath, nor could they bring mankind into favor again: they were only figures and shadows of things to come, and nothing else. Read the Epistle to the Hebrews,⁵⁰ where you shall find this matter largely discussed. There you shall learn in the plainest words

⁴³ Genesis 3:17–19

⁴⁴ Genesis 2:16–17

⁴⁵ Luke 15:4

⁴⁶ 1 Peter 2:25

⁴⁷ Romans 5:17–18

⁴⁸ Psalm 53:3; Romans 3:12

⁴⁹ Hebrews 9:9, 12

⁵⁰ Hebrews 10:1–4, 11

that the bloody sacrifice of the old Law was imperfect and unable to deliver man from the state of damnation by any means, so that mankind in trusting it should trust a broken staff, and in the end deceive himself. What should he then do?

Should he set about to observe and keep the law of God divided into two tables, and so purchase to himself eternal life? Indeed, if Adam and his posterity had been able to satisfy and fulfill the law perfectly in loving God above all things and their neighbor as themselves, then they should have easily quenched the Lord's wrath and escaped the terrible sentence of eternal death pronounced against them by the mouth of Almighty God. For it is written,⁵¹ *Do this, and you shall live*; that is to say, Fulfill my commandments, keep yourself upright and perfect in them according to my will; then shalt you live and not die. Here is eternal life promised with this condition, so that they keep and observe the law. But such was the frailty of mankind after his fall, such was his weakness and imbecility, that he could not walk uprightly in God's commandments, no matter how much he wanted to do so, but daily and hourly fell from his bounden duty, offending the Lord his God multiple ways to the great increase of his condemnation, insomuch that the Prophet David cried out,⁵² *All have gone astray, all are become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one*. In this case, what profit could he have by the law? None at all. For, as St. James says,⁵³ *he that shall observe the whole law, and yet faileth in one point, is become guilty of all*. And in the book of Deuteronomy it is written,⁵⁴ *Cursed be he, says God, which abideth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them*. Behold the law brings a curse with it and makes us guilty, not because it is of itself wicked or unholy, (God forbid we should so think) but because the frailty of our sinful flesh is such that we can never fulfil it according to the perfection that the Lord requires. Do you think Adam could hope or trust to be saved by the law? No, he could not. Rather, the more he looked on the law, the more he saw his own damnation set before his eyes, as though in a polished mirror. So that now of himself he was most wretched and miserable, destitute of all hope, and never able to pacify God's heavy displeasure, nor was he able to escape the terrible judgment of God into which he and all his posterity were fallen by disobeying the strict commandment of the Lord their God.

But O the abundant riches of God's great mercy!⁵⁵ O the unspeakable goodness of his heavenly wisdom! When all hope of righteousness had passed on our part; when we had nothing in ourselves whereby we might quench his burning wrath and work the salvation of our own souls and rise out of the miserable estate wherein we lay; then, even then, did Christ the Son of God, by the appointment of his Father, come down from heaven to be wounded for our sakes, to be *reputed with the wicked*,⁵⁶ to be condemned unto death, to take upon him the reward of our sins, and to give his body to be broken on the cross for our offenses. He, says the Prophet Isaiah,⁵⁷ meaning Christ, *has borne our infirmities*,

⁵¹ Luke 10:28

⁵² Psalm 53:3

⁵³ James 2:10

⁵⁴ Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10

⁵⁵ Romans 11:33

⁵⁶ Isaiah 53:12

⁵⁷ Isaiah 53: 4–5

and has carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes are we made whole. St. Paul likewise says,⁵⁸ *God made him a sacrifice for our sins which knew not sin, that we should be made the righteousness of God by him.* And St. Peter most agreeably writing in this behalf says,⁵⁹ *Christ has once died and suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust.* To these might be added an infinite number of other passages to the same effect; but these few shall suffice for now.

Now then, as it was said at the beginning, let us ponder and weigh the cause of his death, that thereby we may be the more moved to glorify him in our whole life. That cause, if you have comprehended, was nothing else on our part but the transgression and sin of mankind. When the angel came to warn Joseph that he should not fear to take Mary to his wife,⁶⁰ did he not therefore will the child's name to be called *Jesus*, because he should *save his people from their sins*? When John the Baptist preached Christ, and showed him unto the people with his finger, did he not plainly say unto them,⁶¹ *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world*? When the Canaanite woman asked Christ to help her daughter who was possessed with a devil, did he not openly confess that⁶² he was *sent to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel* by giving his life for their sins? It was sin then, O man, even your sin, that caused Christ the only Son of God to be crucified in the flesh and to suffer the most vile and slanderous death of the cross. If you had kept yourself upright, if you had observed the commandments, if you had not presumed to transgress⁶³ the will of God in your first father Adam, then Christ, *being in form of God*, needed not to have taken upon him the shape of a servant. Being immortal in heaven, he needed not to become mortal on earth; being *the true bread* of the soul, he needed not to hunger; being *the healthful water of life*, he needed not to thirst; being *life* itself, he needed not to have suffered death. But to these and many other such extremities was he driven by your sin, which was so manifold and great, that God could be only pleased in him and no other. Can you think of this, O sinful man, and not tremble within yourself? Can you hear it quietly, without remorse of conscience and sorrow of heart? Did Christ suffer his passion for you and yet you show no compassion towards him? While Christ was yet hanging on the cross and yielding up the ghost, the Scripture witnesses⁶⁴ that *the veil of the temple did rent in twain*, that *the earth did quake*, that *the stones clave asunder*, that *the graves did open, and the dead bodies rise*; and shall the heart of man not be moved to remember how grievously and cruelly he was handled by the Jews for our sins? Shall man show himself to be more hardhearted than stones, to have less compassion than dead bodies? Call to mind, O sinful creature, and set before your eyes Christ crucified; think you see his body stretched out in length upon the cross, his head crowned with sharp thorns, his hands and his feet pierced with nails, his heart opened with a long spear, his flesh ripped and torn with whips, his brows sweating water and blood; do you think you hear him now crying in an intolerable agony to his Father,

⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 3:18

⁶⁰ Matthew 1:20–21

⁶¹ John 1:29

⁶² Matthew 15:22, 24

⁶³ Romans 5:18–19

⁶⁴ Matthew 27:51–52

and saying, *My God, my God, why hast you forsaken me?*⁶⁵

Could you behold this woeful sight or hear this mournful voice without tears, considering that he suffered all this not because he deserved it but only for the grievousness of your sins? O that mankind should put the everlasting Son of God to such pains! O that we should be the occasion of his death and the only cause of his condemnation! May we not justly cry, Woe be unto the time that ever we sinned?

O my brethren, let this image of Christ crucified be always imprinted in our hearts; let it stir us up to the hatred of sin and provoke our minds to the earnest love of Almighty God! For why would you think sin is not a grievous thing in his sight, considering that for the transgressing of God's precept in eating of one apple he condemned all the world to perpetual death and would be pacified only with the blood of his own Son? True, yes, most true is that saying of David⁶⁶: *You, O Lord, hatest all them that work iniquity; neither shall the wicked and evil man dwell with thee.* By the mouth of his Prophet Isaiah he cries out fervently against sinners,⁶⁷ *Woe be unto you that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sins as it were with cart ropes.* Did God not give a plain sign of how greatly he hated and abhorred sin when he drowned⁶⁸ all the world except for eight persons? When he destroyed⁶⁹ Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone? When in the space of three days he killed⁷⁰ seventy thousand people with pestilence for David's offence? When he drowned⁷¹ Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea? When he turned⁷² Nebuchadnezzar the king into the form of a brute beast, creeping upon all four? When he allowed Ahitophel⁷³ and Judas to hang themselves over remorse of sin that was so terrible to their eyes? A thousand such examples are to be found in Scripture, if a man would seek them out. But why would we need to do so?

This one example that we have now in hand is of greater force and ought to move us more than all the rest. Christ, being the Son of God and perfect God himself, who never committed sin, was compelled to come down from heaven, and to give his body to be bruised and broken on the cross for our sins. Was not this a clear sign of God's great wrath and displeasure towards sin, that he could be pacified by no other means but only by the sweet and precious blood of his dear Son? O sin, sin, that ever you should drive Christ to such extremity! Woe be unto the time that ever you came into the world. But what profit is it now to bewail? Sin is come, and so come that it cannot be avoided. There is no man living, no, not the most righteous man on the earth, but he *falleth seven times a day*, as Solomon says.⁷⁴ And our Savior Christ has delivered us from sin, yet not so that we shall be free from committing sin, but so that it shall not be imputed⁷⁵ to our

⁶⁵ Matthew 27:46

⁶⁶ Psalm 5:4

⁶⁷ Isaiah 5:18

⁶⁸ Genesis 7

⁶⁹ Genesis 19:24

⁷⁰ 2 Samuel 24:13, 15

⁷¹ Exodus 14:28

⁷² Daniel 4:33

⁷³ 2 Samuel 17:23; Acts 1:18; Matthew 27:5

⁷⁴ Proverbs 24:16

⁷⁵ Romans 8:1

condemnation. He has taken upon him *the just reward of sin*,⁷⁶ which was *death*, and by death has overthrown death so that believing in him we might live forever and not die. Ought it not to engender extreme hatred of sin in us to consider that it violently plucked God out of heaven, as it were, and made him feel the horrors and pains of death?

O that we would consider this in the midst of our pomp and pleasures! It would bridle the outrageousness of the flesh; it would abate and assuage our carnal desires; it would restrain our fleshly appetites so that we should not run at random, as we commonly do. To commit sin willfully and desperately, without fear of God, is nothing else but to crucify Christ anew, as we are expressly taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews.⁷⁷ If this truth were deeply imprinted in everyone's heart, then sin would not reign everywhere as much as it does, to the great grief and torment of Christ now sitting in heaven.

Let us therefore remember and always bear in mind Christ crucified that in so doing we may be inwardly moved both to abhor sin completely and with an earnest and zealous heart to love God. For this is another fruit which the memorial of Christ's death ought to work in us, an earnest and unfeigned love towards God. *So God loved the world*, says St. John,⁷⁸ *that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believed in him should not perish, but have life everlasting*. If God declared so great love towards us his frail or unwise or foolish creatures, how can we rightfully do anything but love him again? Was not this a sure pledge of his love, to give us his own Son from heaven? he might have given us an angel or some other creature if he wanted, and yet his love would still have been far greater than we deserved. But he gave us not an angel but his Son. And what Son? his only Son, his natural Son, his well-beloved Son, even that Son whom he had made Lord and Ruler over all things. Was not this a singular sign of great love? But to whom did he give him? he gave him to the whole world, that is to say, to Adam and all that should come after him. O Lord, what had Adam or any other man deserved at God's hands, that he should give us his own Son? We were all miserable persons, sinful persons, damnable persons, justly driven out of paradise, justly excluded from heaven, justly condemned to hell fire, and yet (see a wonderful sign of God's love) he gave us his only begotten Son, us, I say, who were his extreme and deadly enemies; that we, by virtue of his blood shed upon the cross, might be purged clean from our sins and made righteous again in his sight.

Who can choose but marvel to hear that God should show such unspeakable love towards us, who were his deadly enemies? Indeed, O mortal man, you should indeed marvel at it and acknowledge therein God's great goodness and mercy towards mankind; which is so wonderful that no flesh, be it never so worldly wise, may comprehend it or express it. For, as St. Paul testifies,⁷⁹ *God greatly commendeth and setteth out his love towards us, in that he sent his Son Christ to die for us, when we were yet sinners and open enemies of his Name*. If we had in any way deserved it at his hands, then it would have been no marvel at all, but there was no deserving on our part that should cause him to do it. Therefore, you sinful creature, when you hear that God gave his Son to die for the sins of

⁷⁶ Romans 6:23

⁷⁷ Hebrews 6:6

⁷⁸ John 3:16

⁷⁹ Romans 5:8

the world, do not think that he did it for any deserving or goodness that was in you, for you were then the bond slave of the devil. Rather, fall down upon your knees and cry with the Prophet David,⁸⁰ *O Lord, what is man, that you art so mindful of him? or the son of man, that you so regardest him?*

And seeing he has so greatly loved you, endeavor to love him again⁸¹ *with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*, that in so doing you may not appear to be unworthy of his love. I appeal to your own conscience whether you would not think your love ill bestowed upon one who could not find in his heart to love you? If this is true—and it is most true—then think how greatly it belongs to your duty to love God, who has so greatly loved you that he has not spared his own only Son from so cruel and shameful a death for your sake. And concerning the cause of Christ's death and passion, which was on our part most horrible and grievous sin, so on the other side it was the free gift of God, proceeding from his pure and tender love towards mankind, without any merit or deserving on our part. The Lord for his mercies' sake grant that we never forget this great benefit of our salvation in Christ Jesus, but that we always show ourselves thankful for it, abhorring all kind of wickedness and sin, and applying our minds wholly to the service of God and the diligent keeping of his commandments.

Now it remains to show you how to apply Christ's death and passion to our comfort, as a medicine to our wounds, so that it may work the same effect in us for which it was given, namely, the health and salvation of our souls. For as it profits a man nothing to have a healing salve unless it is applied to the affected part, so the death of Christ shall be of no effect to us unless we apply it to ourselves in such sort as God has appointed. Almighty God commonly works by means, and in this thing he has also ordained a certain means by which we may take fruit and profit to our souls' health. What means is that? In truth, it is faith; not an inconstant or wavering faith, but a sure, steadfast, grounded, and unfeigned faith.⁸² *God sent his Son into the world*, says St. John. To what end? *That whosoever *believed in him should not perish, but have life everlasting*. Mark these words, *That whosoever believed in him*. Here is the means whereby we must obtain eternal life; namely, faith. *For*, as St. Paul teaches in his Epistle to the Romans,⁸³ *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*. Paul, being asked of the keeper of the prison⁸⁴ *what he should do to be saved*, made this answer: *Believe in the Lord Jesus; so shalt you and thine house be both saved*. After the Evangelist describes and expounds upon the life and the death of the Lord Jesus, he concludes with these words⁸⁵: *These things are written, that we may believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and through faith obtain eternal life*. To conclude with the words of St. Paul,⁸⁶ *Christ is the end of the law unto salvation for every one that doth believe*. By this then you may well perceive that the only means and instrument of salvation required on our part is faith—that is to say, a sure trust and confidence in the

⁸⁰ Psalm 8:4

⁸¹ Luke 10:27

⁸² John 3:16

⁸³ Romans 10:10

⁸⁴ Acts 16:30–31

⁸⁵ John 20:31

⁸⁶ Romans 10:4

mercies of God, whereby we persuade ourselves that God both has forgiven and will forgive our sins, that he has accepted us again into his favor, that he has released us from the bonds of damnation, and received us again into the number of his elect people, not for our merits or deserts, but only and solely for the merits of Christ's death and passion. He became man for our sakes and humbled himself to sustain the reproach of the cross so that we might be saved thereby and made inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. This faith is required at our hands; and if we it keep steadfastly in our hearts, we shall no doubt obtain salvation at God's hands, as did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of whom the Scripture says, that *they believed, and it was imputed unto them for righteousness*.⁸⁷ Was it imputed unto them yet not be imputed unto us? Indeed, *if we have the same faith as they had, it shall be as truly imputed unto us for righteousness, as it was unto them*. For it is one faith that must save both us and them, even a sure and steadfast faith in Christ Jesus; who, as ye have heard, came into the world for this purpose,⁸⁸ *that whosoever believed in him should not perish, but have life everlasting*.

But here we must take heed that we do not halt with God through an inconstant and wavering faith, but that it should continue strong and steadfast to our lives' end. He that wavers, says St. James,⁸⁹ *is like a wave of the sea; neither let that man think that he shall obtain anything at God's hands*. Peter coming to Christ upon the water,⁹⁰ because he fainted in faith, was in danger of drowning. So if we begin to waver or doubt, it is to be feared that we shall sink as Peter did, not into the water, but into the bottomless pit of hell fire. Therefore I say unto you that we must take hold of the merits of Christ's death and passion by faith; indeed, a strong and steadfast faith, not doubting that Christ,⁹¹ by his one oblation and once offering of himself upon the cross, has taken away our sins, and has so fully and perfectly restored us again into God's favor that no other sacrifice for sin shall hereafter be requisite or needful in all the world.

Thus you have heard the means whereby we must apply the fruits and merits of Christ's death unto us, so that it may work the salvation of our souls, namely, a sure, steadfast, perfect, and grounded faith. For as all of those who looked steadfastly at the brass serpent were, at the very sight of it, healed and delivered from their corporal diseases and bodily stings, even so all they who behold Christ crucified with a true and lively faith shall undoubtedly be delivered from the grievous wounds of the soul, regardless of how deadly or numerous. Therefore, dearly beloved, if we at any time should happen through frailty of the flesh to fall into sin—and we cannot choose but to fall often—and if we feel the heavy burden thereof to press our souls, tormenting us with the fear of death, hell, and damnation; then let us use the means which God has appointed in his Word, namely, the means of faith, which is the only instrument of salvation now left unto us. Let us steadfastly behold Christ crucified with the eyes of our heart. Let us only trust to be saved by his death and passion and to have our sins clean washed away through his most precious blood so that at the end of the world when he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead, he may receive us into his heavenly kingdom and place us in the

⁸⁷ Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 9, 22, 24

⁸⁸ John 3:16

⁸⁹ James 1:6–7

⁹⁰ Matthew 14:28–31

⁹¹ Hebrews 10:10–18

number of his elect and chosen people, there to be partakers of that immortal and everlasting life which he has purchased for us by virtue of his bloody wounds. To him therefore with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honor and glory world without end. Amen.