

There is nothing in what precedes in the life of the Saviour - - if we except His own hints and warnings - - that prepares the mind for the terrible events to take place in the week of the Triumphal entry into Jerusalem (on Palm Sunday). The hatred and jealousy of the conventional priests and princes of the people foreshadow their resolve to bring about His death and thus destroy His influence. The plot against Jesus' life was to be expected; but expected as one that would take a long time to mature before there would be a chance of success. Nothing pointed to such a sudden and catastrophic moment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Up to the time of, and even in the very preparation for the Last Supper, Jesus always showed Himself as being with utmost ease master of the situations in which He found Himself. He met with much hatred and antagonism; He yielded to it at times and retired before it. But whenever He chose to face the conflict, the opposition melted away before Him. As He sat at table at the Last Supper with an unbroken series of triumphs behind Him, nothing indicated to human prevision that before the sun should set on the following afternoon He would be a mangled corpse hanging on the Cross. And even if one could possibly surmise, from the machinations in the camp of the priests and princes of the people, that death would come to Him with a stride ere the festival should close, who could possibly dream of the accumulated horrors and cruelties that should be packed into those few short hours? If death were to come, who could expect it to be attended with such fiendish brutality? Who could believe that the world would ever present such a scene of tragic irony as that of the pagan procurator Pilate, the worshipper of idols, pleading with the chosen people for the life of their God - - the One true God, Who had led them out of the bondage of Egypt and had showered favours on them? What is it that caused the insane choice of this people, in which, for their king, they preferred Caesar to God, and rejected the beneficent Christ in favour of the murderer, Barabbas? Pilate clearly was kindly disposed to the inoffensive Nazarene and meant the scourging to be but an excuse for setting Him free. He thought that a disgraceful chastisement would appease the fury of the Jews. He had no desire to inflict any undue suffering. How then came it about that the Roman soldiers, who had nothing whatsoever to stir them up against the Christ, should indulge in such an orgy of brutality in the scourging and crowing with thorns and in the gibes and mocking that accompanied these sufferings? Why should the scourging have taken place at all, since it availed nothing towards the purpose intended by Pilate? What could be the reason of this apparently meaningless and yet appalling suffering? One feels one's mind crushed and overwhelmed in the presence of such things! What is here contemplated attains proportions that go far beyond the scope of the human mind. In the darkness in which the reason of man gropes around, - aided of course by the dim light of faith - it is faintly perceived that one is in close contact with the ultimate in things, that is, the ineffable sanctity of the Divinity and the awful horror of its opposite, sin. It is felt that the titanic happenings of the Passion are the supreme effort of God to present sensibly to man these ultimate and stupendous realities. It is felt that nothing but the interplay of these "ultimates" could explain events on a scale of such magnitude. It is not astonishing that the soul falters somewhat as it brings itself to the contemplation of the tragic horrors of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Yet, as can be learned from the revelations made to the saints from time to time, Jesus earnestly desires that the faithful should, not occasionally, but constantly, place themselves in presence of this overpowering mystery to contemplate it. It is evident from Scripture that in the mind of Christ the baffling nature of this great mystery of faith does not dispense the Christian from a steady contemplation of it. Of course, if it is only the intellect alone that is brought to bear on the mystery, no fruitful results will be obtained. The heart and the will, as well as and even more than the intelligence, have their part to play in the work. The study of the Passion must be approached in a spirit of compunction, of humility and of earnest prayer to the Saviour Himself to vouchsafe to us the great grace of being able to penetrate to some extent into the secret of His sufferings, so incomprehensible to human reason.