

“THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST”
LENTEN COURSE OF MATTIA DA SALÒ
English translation of “The Sufferings of Christ”
by Mattia da Salò

Translated by Patrick Colbourne O.F.M.Cap.

Translator’s note.

This translation is based on the introduction, text and footnotes which were published by P. Costanzo Cargoni O.F.M. Cap. In I Frati Cappuccini: Documenti e testimonianze dell primo secolo, Edizioni Frate Indovino, Perugia, vol III/2, pp.2507-2529. The only additions to the notes made by the translator are references to Francis of Assisi: The Early Documents, edited by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. and William J. Short O.F.M. Conv., New York City Press, New York, London, Manila, (1999) for an English version of quotations from the Writings or Biographies of St Francis.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction by Costanzo Cargoni O.F.M.Cap.</i>	1
<i>1. One should think about Christ’s Passion especially about his suffering</i>	2
<i>2. The magnificence of Christ’s suffering as an object of meditation.</i>	7
<i>3. The sacred Passion of our Lord</i>	12

Introduction by Costanzo Cargoni O.F.M.Cap.

In his preaching Mattia da Salò gave special prominence to Christ’s Passion. This is not strange to anyone who knows something about his life. He was always meditating on these topics. They were so impressed on his mind and heart that it was difficult for him to think about anything else. During his many travels he continually expanded his “Spiritual Rosaries” of Christ’s Passion. In his incessant preaching his point of emphasis was on meditation on the history of the sufferings of the Crucified Christ. He coupled an incessant affective awareness with strong austerity and penance which give rise to wonder. This reached such a point that just a few months before his death, as Father Guiseppe Francesco of Brescia said in his eulogy, during his funeral, that “last Good Friday, after he had preached continuously for six hours (not without shedding copious tears, as usual) on the entire Passion of Our Lord he still wanted to fast on bread and water while kneeling on the ground, as the Order was accustomed to doing, having taken a lengthy discipline in public refectory with the other friars: he was an old man of 70 years.” (Funeral Prayers, p. 20).

On this topic, which he had mulled over at length in his Practice of Mental Prayer and in Spiritual Rosaries, as well as repeatedly in his sermons, especially the Lenten sermons, he left a masterpiece, that is a volume that came out of the Lenten course delivered in Milan in 1597 that was promoted by Cardinal Charles Borromeo, to whom it had been dedicated. It bore the title: The Sufferings of Christ Our Lord. As Father Cuthbert has noted: “This work is full of perceptive thought that flies freely on the wings of agile fantasy with melody in the words. He contemplates his subject in a lively way and, in part, makes his hearers do so too. Beneath his severe reprisals one

is always aware of a real tenderness. Few sermons are of the same calibre as Mattia's sermons on the Passion of Our Lord for lyricism and purity. Yet his lyricism is not only in the language but also in the clear vision of his thought. Mattia's most marvellous quality is his use of Sacred Scripture which he mixes in as if it was part of his own thought, using imagination as a natural means of expression. With a minimum of effort, he restates the mysticism in the letters of St Paul in images from Isaiah and the Song of Songs. Other Capuchins have to work hard to use Scriptural images, but none do it as easily and effectively as Mattia da Salò." (I cappuccini. Un contributo alla storia della controriforma, Firenze 1930, 397s).

The few pages of this masterpiece of meditations on the sufferings of Jesus Christ which are incisive, illuminating and enflaming that we wish to reproduce represent only a part of his profound preaching which might be called contemplation from the pulpit.

1. One should think about Christ's Passion especially about his suffering

6048 St Paul the Apostle dispersed the holy and honourable memory of the Passion of Christ our Lord throughout his writings making it the unique basis of his Epistles the crucial basis of his discussions and the burning conclusion of his apostolic and divine discourse. Because he was the perfect imitator of Jesus the Saviour, the most faithful and wise interpreter of his Gospel, and the most zealous pastor and teacher of heavenly behaviour and Christian life, by means of what he said and did he enflamed everyone to always have this holy and Christian outlook imprinted on their heart thinking about how much the great Son of God suffered and endured. Thus if someone looks to the Apostle as he looked at Christ, they will see that he had the name of Christ on his lips, the wounds of Christ on his body, and that he had nothing but Christ crucified in his heart and in everything he did outside and felt within himself.¹

St Clare was guided by the same spirit and we remember how the cross was the bed where she gathered the fruit of her loving and heavenly espousal and where she always looked for her spouse with the words "*At night in my bed I sought whom my heart loved.*"²

Thus so that all the faithful may always keep fresh in their minds the sweet memory of the bitter day when the author of life died for them, they use a thousand different prompts, but especially, during the solemnity of this season, they keep images of this sacred mystery before their eyes. The great priest St Ambrose wanted that for the entire six weeks of Lent there should be a vivid representation of that Friday that would depict alongside the vivid image of the death of God, an image of God on the sixth day of the creation of the world.³ Because of this, Milan, I resolved to speak to you each Friday on the Passion, especially concerning the sufferings of Christ. I shall begin today. May you also begin to listen to me!

¹ This is a splendid portrait of the Apostle Paul which was a strong characteristic of Sixteenth spirituality and that of the Capuchin Reform.

² Song. 3, 1. This image was used frequently by the mystics, especially Angels da Foligno.

³ This is a feature of the Ambrosian rite during Lent. E. Cattaneo, *Il culto cristiano in Occidente. Note storiche*, Roma 1984 (2), 144-149 and note 59 (bibliog..)

6049 What great fruit, benefit and advantage accrues to the contemplative soul when it begins to attentively consider the works of God in order to soar to considering God himself!⁴

O faithful lover, gaze on Jesus Christ in his pain and suffering with a discerning eye. Clear logic and truthful information can be gained from his words: *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and die it will not bear fruit.*⁵ As a symbolic representation this represented those who were looking at the serpent on the high pole. When they were bitten by poisonous serpents it was a threat to their life and salvation.⁶ Christ was not talking only about the fruit that came from the dead grain. Rather he was referring to the fruit that is developed in a continuous process in the world. This does not happen all at once with Christ's death. It takes place little by little when knowledge of his death is spread throughout the land by preaching and when this is accepted through faith by the people and the fruit is generated and vividly impressed on human minds. Through Christ's death God planted an infinite power for generating children of God; as it is written: *He shall lay down his life for sin, he shall see a long lived seed.*⁷ Therefore, we gain as much of that great power as we engrave that death on our hearts by means of faith; and thus as faith grows fruit multiplies. Where faith is more ardent, more abundant and more effective in producing acts of vivid and attentive contemplation there will result more marvellous abundance which will testify to the truth of the words: *When the grain of fruit dies, it produces much fruit.*

6050 O if we too only possessed this recurrent, vivid, ardent memory, this contemplation that would cover the entire world with heavenly manna! A sacred flood would nourish the entire Church, submerge sins, bring forth holy virtue, spread peace throughout the world and spread salvation everywhere. This would fulfil the words: *Iniquity shall no more be heard in your land, wasting nor destruction in your boarders. And salvation shall possess the walls, and praise your gates.*⁸

Knowledge through living faith and contemplation and through conscientious memory of the Passion of Jesus is the knowledge through which we are justified and made into saints from sinners. Have you not heard what God said through Isaiah: *My just servant shall find justification through his knowledge! He shall bear the iniquities of many.*⁹ St Paul put such knowledge above any other. He was satisfied, with this alone. He glorified it and served it.

[6] The Apostle based his plan on this. Christ's Passion is the moving force in his Epistles, the point of his reasoning and the root out of which every ripe fruit springs. If he wished to be a faithful interpreter of the Gospel he had to do this because the Passion is the source of all grace and the ocean of virtue. It is the tree of life, the paradise of will, the ark of salvation and mercy, the twig of virtue, the city of safe haven, the region of light, the centre of the kingdom, the adornment of grace and the crown of glory.¹⁰

⁴ This is the subject of the first part of the sermon.

⁵ Jn. 12, 24-25.

⁶ Cf. Num. 21, 9.

⁷ Is. 53, 10.

⁸ Is.; 60, 18.

⁹ Is. 53, 11.

¹⁰ We note here, as well as elsewhere, the splendid lyricism of style and the intimate knowledge of the letters of St Paul which are cited frequently.

6051 The tree in the dream that represented the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar¹¹ did not have as many fruit nor was as admirably great as the cross was abundant with humility, glorious splendour and interminably capable of producing infinite virtue.. {...}

[10] The big tree is the cross, the imperial throne, sceptre of the Emperor, banner of the army, the soldier's shield, the spoils of war, palm of victory, the payment of the worker, the wages of toil, and the fruitful root of everything that is good, a gushing spring and immense ocean. *A tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was exceeding great.* It stood in the middle of the earth with its branches taking up an immense space: *the sight of it reached to the ends of the entire earth.* Its height touched the sky: *the height thereof reached unto heaven.* Thus there is nowhere under heaven that the cross does not reach with its power and strength. *The tree is great and strong, all living things dwell beneath it: under it dwell cattle and beasts and in its branches the fowls of the air have their abode.*¹²

The empire of the cross embraces whoever lives on earth. Whoever belongs on earth, even if he does not wish it, is subject to it. Whoever belongs in heaven, flies to its branches and finds rest there. They remain on the cross so as not to fall to earth. All on earth shine because of its hidden beauty. The Church sings: *Beautiful and refulgent tree adorned in royal purple.*¹³ The prophet said: *its leaves were most beautiful.*¹⁴ I ask you listeners, is this not very beautiful way in which the divine enlightenment is explained in terms of the divine substance itself, where it dwells and from where it is shared? All who are alive live by means of this since it is the only tree of life. [...]

6052 [13] Thus the Sacred Passion is the living, eternal spring that fills us with heavenly water. It is the tree that bears divine fruit. It is the heaven that is filled with eternal power. Although St Paul ascribes the plenitude of grace to the Ascension, basically this comes from the Passion which is its source,¹⁵ what merited it and caused it. The Ascension demonstrates the outcome and the result by demanding a heavenly decree that authenticated the bodily presence of the Saviour, for we would have only been enriched and consoled by his spiritual presence. For certain ministers of the Church to be effective on earth what is required is what Christ alone can achieve when he is working with us. It was required that the different graces for so many varied works should come from heaven. This is conferred by the sign of the Cross which is the main cause of their being merited. O cross, O Passion, O death of the great Son of God, who by emptying himself of his riches enriched the world that was empty! [...] The Passion is the source, the waters are the graces, and the receptacle to catch them is the faith. The larger the receptacle, the more it will hold. The ardour and the brightness of the faith that is within the soul make space within the soul for the abundance of living water that flows from the cross. Great faith means great capacity, great multiple favours from God: one goes with the other.

6053 Pay attention then, Milan, to the conclusion of all that I have been saying. Let these heavenly waters run continuously so that they may arouse faith. The most marvellous exercise is to gaze on the cross with a faithful and devout heart. Thus

¹¹ Dan. 4, 7-9.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ From a hymn by St Venanzio Fortunato (+ 600/610) *Velilla regis prodeunt*, sixth verse.

¹⁴ Dan. 4, 9a.

¹⁵ Italian equivalents *sorgive, sorgenti, fonte.*

among all the exercises that are beneficial for a Christian the most special and efficacious is meditating in a holy and affective manner on the most holy Passion of Jesus our Redeemer. Thus on that royal tree, which is a meaningful sign of the cross, there appears plentiful fruit: *it became such that it could nourish all the living: it bore food for the universe*. In fact it fed every animal *all flesh fed on it*. [...]

[15] When all the mysteries of our faith are dipped in the blood of the Lamb they become soft, tender, warm, loving, contrite, full of holy affection and full of sweetness. O tears that flow from the eyes that gaze on the Crucified Christ, were you not formed by what you contemplated in the light of the cross? When seeing such great glory of paradise undergoing the ignominy of the cross who would not feel soft of heart? When thinking of God's infinite majesty that willed to undergo immense abuse and most bitter pain, who would not be moved to the depth of his heart? [...]

By studying the sacred writings and discovering all that was written in blood, filled with Passion, and all the teachings that were nailed to the cross, who would not come to think how such pain was undertaken willingly? O fruitful Passion. O abundant tree! *Its fruit was very much* [...]

6054 [16] The mercy that moved Christ to cry over you is the same mercy that moves him to help you with what you want, to support your weakness, to provide for your needs and to console you in your tribulations. Can a mother forget the child whom she has brought forth with so much pain? Was there ever anyone who experienced as much pain in giving birth as our Jesus suffered in generating us and making us his children? Is there anyone who could think that when the child needs him that he will forget that child? *Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? If she should forget, I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you in my hands.*¹⁶ The wounds in my hands which are always before his eyes always keep fresh the memory of what he suffered for us. Because of this recollection he can never abandon us. How could I not love one who has loved me so much? Shall I not love someone who has been loved so much by my God? Can I despise my brother who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus who loved him? Shall I leave a poor person to perish for whom God undertook death so that he would not perish? When I feel frigid about loving God I shall kindle the fire with the wood of the cross. With that I shall feed the fire that will never be extinguished on the altar of his temple, *which we are.*¹⁷ O loving Passion, O infinite cross, set our hearts afire with gospel love! I need love. I languish. I wander around the earth because I have not been well fed with love. Pick me this fruit *because I languish with love.*¹⁸ You have it n abundance *the fruit is plentiful*.

6055 [22] In the eyes of the mind would it not appear to be blind, foolish and great and extreme madness for God to have created mankind? Mankind that is poor, vile, despicable, that willingly kills, and is cruel and shameful? [...] This is the foolhardiness and weakness of God of which the Apostle speaks. *The foolishness of God is wiser than men:*¹⁹ more wise and shrewd than all human wisdom and prudence. This divine inebriation appears in the wine of sorrow: *your breasts are*

¹⁶ Is 49, 15-16.

¹⁷ Cf 1 Cor. 3, 16-17; 2 Cor. 6, 16.

¹⁸ Song. 2, 5.

¹⁹ 1 Cor. 1, 25.

better than wine. ²⁰ This is God's foolishness, which as he is most holy; he wanted to be very sweet. O wine, O sorrow, O love!

We have to become intoxicated not only in appearance but in reality and in fact. It is necessary for us to come out of ourselves, to put aside our way of thinking so that we no longer know Christ according to the flesh.²¹ We should consider his infinite love that was shown to us in his sorrow. Let us be astounded, beside ourselves, dazed, not able to find suitable words to express it or respond to it just like St Paul who when unable to find the right words said with regard to divine charity: *But God for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us sent his Son.* ²² O excesses of love, O charity that goes beyond the bounds of all human knowledge! *Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth for your breasts are better than wine.* The dear and sweet embrace took place at the death of the Son of God, when he alone trod the winepress and pressed the wine of his precious blood. This is the final result, the ultimate fruit of his love.

It began with the traitor's kiss: *He who betrayed him had given them a sign, saying: Whomever I shall kiss, that is he. Lay hold of him and lead him away carefully.* ²³ The spouse required this beginning in order to have a sacred embrace in the end that was better than wine. O soul, if you love your spouse how could you dare ask him to submit to such a Passion? He himself is the one who inspired and aroused this holy desire, since his infinite love was no longer content until the boiling wine flowed out from the immense fullness of his heart. All the other outcomes and fruits of Christ's love are less. His death was the embrace, the highest merging and the most penetrating union.

6056 O wise ones why do you not read the book of life which is that of Christ's death? Why not taste his suffering? Is the book closed? Is it sealed? Can you not open it? Who forbade you to contemplate and gaze continually on the sacred Passion and most holy suffering? Vain studies, worldly occupations, carnal affection, earthly plans and you yourself have closed and sealed it. O uneducated and simple why do you not study the book? Is it because you are uneducated and cannot understand it? What in the world is easier to understand than this? What height of genius, skill of study, knowledge of literature is needed to contemplate a man hanging on a cross, brought before judges, flogged, ridiculed, condemned and carrying a cross? Is it hard to experience grief over such things or so very difficult to think about them? Indeed, there is nothing that prevents this study except the perversity of our will, the inscrutable negligence and blindness of our heart which is brought about by sin. [...]

Delight in the world goes along with hatred of God. Whoever loves the world is hated by God. The suffering of Christ is all love, divine love and heavenly charity. Just as sorrow is contrary to delight so they both also have opposite results. One produces love the other hatred. Love accompanies sorrow; hatred accompanies delight. [...] Rise up, are you too attached to delight? St Paul sympathises with you. *Be filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual*

²⁰ Song. 1, 1. This is taken from the second part of the sermon that consists in an exhortation to consider in a particular way Christ's sufferings set out under the image of wine that is a symbol of the blood of Christ. This love is sorrow contemplated to the point of being inebriated by the kiss of love in the joy of the Holy Spirit.

²¹ Cf. 2 Cor. 5, 16.

²² Eph. 2, 4.

²³ Mk. 14, 44.

canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. ²⁴ You cannot sing psalms and spiritual canticles without rejoicing. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

6057 Fill yourself with the Holy Spirit and you will be content and singing, happy and joyful. Such spiritual joy is better than carnal contentment. O God, why do we not experience it? Through his suffering Christ has won this for me. It comes from him. Whoever experience him experiences this, because he is joyful, consoling and exhilarating suffering. This is the way and having put aside all other wine we should drink the wine of Christ. Take, take, O faithful and devout soul, the grape from the tree of the cross. Christ crucified said himself *I am the true vine.* ²⁵ Press out the wine. See the grape stork being carried by two men one at one end the other at the other. ²⁶ See it, I say, on the pole where it hangs. Gaze on the cross that is between two men, one good the other bad. Take the wine of all his suffering. Drink it and take it into your heart. Always taste it and it will satisfy you, for you will be immersed in the sufferings of Christ. You will find yourself submerged in the joy of heaven and you will see how sweet and gentle the Lord is. ²⁷ If so much happiness can come out of suffering, it means that this is joy itself and paradise.

O adored Jesus, who by your suffering freed us from suffering, as the sufferings that you took from us were mortal, grant us what is immortal, so that in tasting your sweetness we will love you alone and being united with you we may share the gifts and the riches of eternal glory that we ask you to deign to give us. Amen.

2. The magnificence of Christ's suffering as an object of meditation. Sermon VII

6058 As the truly wise man that he was Solomon associated the beauty of the saintly soul with the lucidity of the eyes speaking about them in the name of the heavenly spouse: *Behold you are fair. Behold you are fair, your eyes are as those of doves,* ²⁸ because all your beauty comes from gazing at and contemplating the supreme beauty of him who is beautiful beyond all the sons of men, ²⁹ the angels, the stars and the sun. This is the splendour and brightness of the infinite glory of God himself. ³⁰ Thus he catches those divine rays that cannot be perceived except by eyes like his own, through the use of his own eyes. Indeed when we gaze on them he enlightens us, as far as this is possible, by his own radiance so we may cope with the level of their individual brightness.

Because of this when you wish to praise the beautiful spouse by asserting his beauty he replies: *behold you are fair, my beloved, and comely.* ³¹ The reason why a Christian is so truly amiably beautiful is that he is virtuous and he should always keeps his mind's eye on the glorious virtues of the Son of God and thus always gaze on his Passion, in which he, like midday, coming forth from the eternal sun, manifests

²⁴ Eph. 5, 18.

²⁵ Jn. 15, 1.

²⁶ Num. 13, 23.

²⁷ Cf. Ps. 33, 9 (*Vulg.*); Wis. 12, 1.

²⁸ Song. 1, 16.

²⁹ Cf. Ps 44, 3 (*Vulg.*)

³⁰ Cf. Heb. 1, 3

³¹ Song 1, 15.

himself with the utmost immense transparency and makes himself known to whoever is not miserably blind. Thus he appears clearly in the bitterest sufferings that he endured, in his great patience, in submission with humility, in being accused though innocent, in obedience to being condemned, in dying out of love, and in the indefinable accumulation of many sufferings and the incomprehensible achievement of perfect justice. His bed makes the soul of a person who gazes on him beautiful; it is splendid in his Passion. The high point of the Passion is the extreme scale of the sufferings.

6059 Therefore let us contemplate this so that we may be adorned with such beauty that we may be pleased and thankful that the divine eye is fixed on us. The spouse runs without delay and the lover who has placed all his love in Christ comes to the common bed with face and tongue where both rejoice, saying: *Our bed is flourishing*.³² When the one who is beautiful and comely is praised by him she experiences it and returns the compliment by praising him. The exchange of admiration of beauty that one offers to the other appears to me to be nothing but a loving and holy acknowledgment in which loving delight and this delightful love cannot be contained and bursts out in the sweet words; *Behold your are fair, my soul, Behold your are fair my beloved*.³³ Therefore he adds: our bed is flourishing. No expert in the contemplation of the divine mysteries could deny that this bed is the cross onto which he lifted his spouse, the Holy Church, and shared with her the ultimate fruits of love.

6060 Therefore the cross is the bed where divine love is brought to fulfilment and put into practice: *Our bed is flourishing*. However it is a bed that is very unyielding since the characteristic of the cross is that it crucifies. This bed is completely different from the love beds in this world. In these beds there is delight; in this bed suffering. Flowers bloom in them with beauty and pleasure; here there is nothing but an increase in suffering. This is why we call the loving spouse a flourishing bed because the spouse of the Holy Church, the loving Christ, was not satisfied to suffer alone on the cross in order to show his love on this unyielding bed. He made it bloom. He made it beautiful. He decorated it by wanting to suffer more. This is what we are about to investigate. First the flowers come and provide perfume and then he lies on the bed. We smell them and contemplate them first, leaving the cross till last. Indeed by considering them let us see what is great so as to see how the cross blossomed when the Passion was filled with extreme suffering. We have considered the greatness of the vase and the great strength and resolve of the actors. It remains to see the objective of this great suffering. What we have to look for and discern most of all is the inner suffering.³⁴

6061 In this respect we find three kinds of unpleasant experiences in Christ: what he endures as punishment for others; what he endures personally because of what is happening to him; what he endures because of his bodily sufferings. The three kinds of suffering that he endured may³⁵ be associated with the mind, the spirit and the soul, what we also know as the higher part of the soul, the lower part and the living body; the intellectual part, the inner sensitive part and exterior sensitive part. Thus we have three kinds of objects: mental, spiritual and bodily. The objects of mental activity are

³² Song 1, 15

³³ Song 1, 15a, 16a

³⁴ The basic subject of this sermon is Christ's inner mental suffering.

³⁵ *Possoms* in the text = *possono*

sins by which wicked men dishonour God. The objects of spiritual activity are the insults, the dishonesty and other offenses offered to him by means of which, without affecting the body, they crucify the inner person. Finally there are those that directly affect the body that are known as corporal objects.

Scripture and faith teach us that Christ's Passion was a holy and immaculate sacrifice that made him the High Priest. *By the Holy Spirit he offered himself unspotted to God.*³⁶ This sacrifice was a holocaust in which everything was burnt. The fire was the suffering and this suffering left nothing that was not consumed. Thus he offered himself as an oblation in all three kinds of activities, suffering each of them and offering himself to God.

6062 Everything that our Saviour suffered exteriorly penetrated his spirit and his mind, so that when he suffered exteriorly in his body and was afflicted and crucified with external sensations, he experienced this internally and thus was profoundly crucified and tormented. Let us not stop here but go onto the sanctuary of the mind where because he experienced these things and accepted them personally he was amazingly afflicted. The blood that was poured out is the same as the blood that flowed from the first tabernacle. It repeats this offering in the most sacred place where God dwells. It tells us that when the good Jesus suffered torment in his sacred body such suffering afflicted his soul even more, above and beyond this, so that his sacrifice was complete, a real holocaust fully burnt and consumed.³⁷

6063 O my Christians, I want you to think about this. When you read in the Holy Gospel about the ensnarement the Jews committed against the Saviour, the curses, the false accusations, the bogus questioning, the deception, the anger, the sacrilegious treatment, then call to mind how, in these disgusting moments, his soul was infinitely sad more than he often showed externally. In these circumstances he suffered exhaustively.

This is how the ropes, the scourges, the thorns, tormented his body; how the curses, the treatment of those who persecuted him and moved him about afflicted his spirit through what he experienced within; how the sins, our wretchedness and the offense and disrespect we showed towards his divinity crucified his mind. By entering his spirit and being accepted and making a deep impression there, they pierced into him. As they progressed and arrived at the higher faculties striped of what was material, they reached the mind. Through this change and transformed by this new refurbishing, they became a more munificent and perfect offspring which was more fine and excellent. Becoming immaterial in an immaterial faculty they caused strong, penetrating suffering in the thirsting soul. Once this mass of experiences had passed from the lower faculties it struck very bitterly.

Milan, do not think that I am understating the sacred Passion and its suffering. This thought could never be overdone or be too excessive or even adequately expressed. If we said a thousand times more we would never understand these divine sufferings. If God suffered like this does it not give mankind something to think

³⁶ Heb. 9, 14

³⁷ The manner in which Mattia da Salò analyses Christ's sufferings frequently using Biblical quotes and images is profound. Here he uses the image of the tabernacle, with the atrium, the inside of the first tabernacle and of the second tabernacle as symbols of Christ's sufferings, the tabernacle "of the new and eternal' alliance". He makes use of material objects from the atrium. In the first tabernacle he invokes spiritual images. From the second tabernacle he derives mental images. Each of these is portrayed as a holocaust or sacrifice.

about? Never cast aside the words of that holy soul: *Our bed is flourishing*. These few words are full of what is sacred. Each one is meaningful. Each one is full of thoughtful, deep consideration.

6064 The bed is the cross. The flowers are the ornaments on it. Christ said to the spouse, this flower-filled bed is ours, Milan, did you think that the cross belonged to Christ alone? Did you think, as the heretics think and dream, that once he had suffered that there was nothing left for us to do? ³⁸ This bed is shared. It belongs to Christ and to the Church. Loving spouses do not have two beds, one for one and the other for the other. The Church and every soul that wants to be saved ought to lie down on Christ's bed.

When he said that we have not received the spirit of fear any longer, but of love and thus we are no longer slaves but children and heirs, St Paul added: *If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us.*³⁹ The spirit of love is the spirit that was given to the Church because she is the daughter and spouse of God. *The Spirit himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God.* ⁴⁰ The paternal inheritance belongs to the children. The bride is the consort of the husband. They are one in union, dignity and prominence. *The one nature, the same state.* If the bride and husband belong to the same nature and status, then in fact we shall inherit their glory, since we become part of their activity. *If we share with them we shall be glorified with them.* We shall share this in heaven just as we have shared suffering on earth. We are God's heirs, and heirs together with Christ.⁴¹

6065 Just as Christ, the firstborn, gained his inheritance by blood, we too will receive our inheritance. How did the inheritance belong to him? *Christ had to suffer these things and so enter his glory.* ⁴² Thus there was no other way for us other than that of suffering. Suffering, I say, together with Christ in order to reign with him in glory. *If we suffer we shall enter glory.* So that you will not think that he is only referring to the suffering of compassion the Apostle adds: *For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us.* The sufferings of this world are not enough to merit such glory. Nevertheless without them we cannot have the glory. We gain it with them because our suffering is joined to that of Christ whose sufferings are of infinite value. Thus just as we have to accompany Christ in his suffering to be coheirs to his glory it is necessary that he suffer with us so that what is impossible for us, by virtue of his sufferings, will procure our objective. See how necessary it is for you and for the Church to share the bed of the cross with Christ

6066 People with little discernment or faith, do not be deceived! Those who should sleep on the cross with Christ know that this is our bed. By sleeping here, after having had a dream about death, Christ awoke to the resurrection and got up and grasped God's hand. Do you not know this? *I have slept and taken my rest and I have risen*

³⁸ This is a knock against the Protestant reform.

³⁹ Rom. 8, 15-18

⁴⁰ Rom. 8, 16

⁴¹ Rom. 8, 17

⁴² Lk. 24, 26

*up, because the Lord has protected me.*⁴³ We should do the same thing. By taking our rest here we shall be awakened. By suffering we shall be rewarded and glorified.

Remember that this is a cot. *Lectulus noster*. The Hebrew version and the Septuagint simply say *lectus (bed)* or *cubile (couch)*. Our version⁴⁴ uses the diminutive *lectulus* perhaps in order to denote love more clearly. These diminutive expressions seem to convey greater sweetness. Thus Christ said to his disciples: *Little children, yet a little while I am with you.*⁴⁵ St Paul said: *My little children, of whom I am in labour again.*⁴⁶ St John said: *Little children, let no man deceive you.*⁴⁷ O what a love bed is that of the cross! Here Christ shows how much he loves us. Now we should do the same with regard to him. His spirit is the spirit of love. Whoever possesses this spirit of love is united to him and is one with him. Thus when he suffers it is required that we too suffer.

6067 You O Milan, how great a unity should there be between Christ and a Christian? *Lectulus noster*. Because that loving diminutive is characterised by love it shows how tiny the bed is. It is a narrow little bed that is uncomfortable to lie on. Those who occupy it are very close together. There the union between us and our most blessed spouse Jesus Christ should be very close. I say that he should be close to us on the cross so that it will bind us to his suffering which we should contemplate vividly and imitate strongly and receive with great love. O the holy, sacred little bed that is the blessed cross!

How wretched are those who lie outside it and sleep on the ground! You who flee from suffering, and find rest in the earthly things to which you cling, upon which you sleep peacefully and dream and muse as if you were happy even though you are miserable and rich while being very poor! I tell you that you are the one, who has no place in the bed of Jesus, and so you do not sleep with him and you will neither awaken nor rise with him.

6068 The holy Church has slept here for a long time. Her spouse has commanded her: *stir not up, nor make the beloved to awake, till she pleases.*⁴⁸ She has suffered for a long time in order to be conformed to Christ to the extent of not wishing to disturb God by asking him to free her from the tyrants that annoy her though she still suffered. She has suffered in the realm of the princes of this world. She always continues to suffer in her members. The ones whom she holds dearest, more keenly experience the sufferings of her spouse Jesus Christ. O Christian souls, sufferings are what bind us closely to Christ and make us one with him! There is nothing that binds us more closely to suffering with him than to see the pain and suffering that he endured for us.

Christian souls, remember the Son of God, along with other important motives, wanted to be placed on the cross so that we might gaze on him intensely. God kept the cross hidden from the eyes of the world because the world was not capable of appreciating what it meant. In the eyes of the outside world it was

⁴³ Ps. 3, 6

⁴⁴ Note the author's biblical scholarship as he consults the different old versions of Sacred Scripture. The last mentioned, that is the Vulgate, had only been published in 1594. The Latin of this version is used in this passage.

⁴⁵ Jn. 13, 33.

⁴⁶ Gal. 4, 19

⁴⁷ 1 Jn. 3, 7.

⁴⁸ Song 2, 7b

completely despicable and confusing. To those who are within the fold it is something that is glorious, holy and divine to behold. This is why it was reserved for the eyes of the faithful and those whose minds had been enlightened. Only those who consider it to be beautiful, desirable, and approach it with purity of heart and able to see it. For such as these it is lifted up and placed in clear sight. May we not cease to gaze on it and carefully consider the many suffering it involved and turn this over in our minds!

6069 Do not begin to philosophise or fantasise that he is now beyond suffering and that his suffering ended while he was alive and ended when that time was over. Be certain of this. He feels sorrow over every sin. Each one makes him experience grief and thus an increase in your sins increases his sorrow. The less sin that there is the less grief there will be. Is this thought alone not sufficient, O Christian, to restrain you from sinning? Does it not hold you back from pomp, from women, knowing that such things are many thorns in the brow of blessed Jesus? That they are so many acts of disrespect and ridicule? Is your concupiscence, greed and lust not subdued by the realisation that this was a burning flame that burnt the heart of Jesus Christ more than any number of coals and flames could torment the martyrs or any one else on earth? Do you want to increase this flame? Do you want to crucify your merciful and loving Saviour any more?

You, who are cruel to your neighbours, abandon those who are poor, hate your enemies offend the innocent and who whip the heart of the kind innocent Lamb with your acts of mercilessness! Nonetheless you continue to strike ruthlessly! When your cruel acts increase why do your sorrows not grow? This is how blasphemers act, unjust judges, false witnesses, greedy tricksters, to take control and become legislators. This is how each sinner acts against the suffering Son of God. *They add to the suffering of my wounds.*⁴⁹ Therefore, Christian soul, do not be cruel to your Christ! Rather be compassionate and supportive and, if possible, ease his torment!

6070 You, O most sweet Lord, who on the bed of the cross suffered the harsh dream of death and wished that your spouse would suffer with you in imitation of you and in union with you, accept the sinful soul who comes to you doing penance. Make room for it on the cross, even embrace it. Clasp it to your breast. Have it experience the love whose shining rays are the sufferings, so that it will love you alone, rest, sleep and relax on your side, drinking the milk of your breast that is sweeter than wine. *Because your breasts are better than wine.*⁵⁰ O what are your sufferings O my Lord, most bitter for you, most sweet for us! O, sufferings why can I not experience and taste them? O good Jesus, make me experience what you experienced. May I be separated never more from you by sinning, but live and reign with you forever! Amen.

3. The sacred Passion of our Lord Sermon VII

6071 This great tearful day produces many tearful thoughts in the devout minds of pious Christians as it confronts them with the vast area of the sacred Passion of Jesus Christ, our most loving and sad Father. This Passion like the earth that God cursed in ancient times because of the transgression of mankind, is full of thorns and thistles,⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ps. 8, 27 (*Vulg.*)

⁵⁰ Cf. note 20.

⁵¹ Cf. Gen 3, 17b-18.

revolting, uncultivated, bitter and lacking in beauty and fruit. It brought forth the weapons, the lanterns, the clubs, the ropes, the scourges, the thorns, the sharing out of garments, the cross, the nails and all of the implements that God decreed in heaven and the devil produced in hell and that men used on earth and which the loving Christ in person suffered from on earth, so that his sacred flesh, like the cursed earth, might be afflicted, crucified, torn and be reduced to extreme suffering and death.

However the holy mercy of the kind heavenly Father turned into becoming the Father of mercy and consolation,⁵² changing curses into blessing, torment into consolation, and instruments of death into sacraments of life. He ordained that the horror and suffering of the Passion would be changed for contemplative spirits so that this statement would be true: *I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys.*⁵³ Thus the thorns became real flowers, the thistles lilies, Christ's disfigurement our adornment, and his bitterness our delight provided that we open our minds extensively with devotion to the multitude, variety and harshness of his sufferings and the affliction of Jesus as he suffers, and allow our eyes, like flooded valleys, to be filled with tears, to love and be moved with Christian compassion for Christ's Passion.

6072 Therefore is there a soul who would not become involved in devoutly thinking about these things today? Which eyes, when they see so many things to cry about with respect to their Lord would not burst into bitter tears? Because of this, the Holy Church, who is our sorrowful mother and the dear spouse of the dying God, remembers all the events of the most sacred Passion of Jesus Christ including the bitter steps that he took when he was exhausted. She remembers the bitter suffering that he had to endure when he was afflicted. She remembers the strange events of this sacred mystery that were accompanied by heartfelt sighs, by tears and bitter wrangling. Thus, once we have witnessed the bitter suffering of the Son of God, we too ought to accompany him with compassion.

He suffered a great number of painful events that moved him to burst into tears. By uniting our tears to his we immerse our tears in his blood. Then these tears purify the inner eye so that it may see the most holy Passion more clearly, experience it more vividly and share it personally with Christ as the Apostle urged when he said: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself and humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even to the death of the cross.*⁵⁴

6073 Thus let us see him humbly washing the feet of vile sinners and giving himself to men as food, patiently enduring the presence and malice of his traitor, praying to the Father with tears and sweat, willingly turning to the cohort that arrested and bound him, being thrown to the ground and healing the wounded soldier's ear with divine power, sweetly accepting the very bitter kiss of wicked Judas, meekly correcting the sacrilegious servant who struck his face, showing respect for the divine name as he freely admitted that he was the Son of God for which he was condemned to death, and enduring the very bitter torment and shame, the sufferings and jeering that the worthless and wretched servants offered him throughout he night.

6074 Let us consider the unappreciated woman who gave up her holy Messiah as he suffered by being cast into the hands of idolaters and the worst kind of sinners. Let us see him falsely accused of serious offenses while offering silence as his only

⁵² Cf. 2 Cor. 1, 3

⁵³ Song 2, 1

⁵⁴ Phil. 2, 5. 7a-8.

defence. Let us watch the leaders coming together to dishonour and strike him, mocking him by using a white robe in front of Herod and the red robe in front of Pilate, while he remained like a meek lamb, neither crying out nor showing any sign of resentment. His body was covered in wounds from the scourging and he could do nothing about it. His head was pierced with a painful crown, and there was no way that he could give it relief. He was brought before the people with the semblance of royal trappings in utter embarrassment, and he did not hide from such shame. He allowed them all to cry out for his crucifixion and he accepted those cruel cries as swords that broke his heart. His sentence was to die on a cross. He accepted this iniquitous judgement as coming from the hand of his most just and merciful heavenly Father. He carried the cross on his shoulder on the journey to Calvary enduring a great deal of pain and suffering. He walked shamefully together with sentries and thieves. He was stripped naked, remaining with nothing that belongs to this world. He drank wine and gall instead of being comforted. He was nailed to the cross with cruelty that was beyond the comprehension of anyone on earth. Here he remained and drank vinegar, receiving no assistance from man or God. Here he prayed for those who were persecuting him, promised heaven to those who repent, cared for those whom he loved with parental and filial concern, obeyed his Father to whom he committed his spirit as he yielded it to the very cruel fate of death.

6075 Christian souls, these events become flowers for us to gather from the large field of the holy Passion. Because of the great variety of its flowers in springtime our eyes are invited to gaze with delight. There is a great variety of sufferings in the Passion for the Christian to contemplate in the Passion.

Solomon joined the field to the valley when he said: *I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valley (Song 2, 1)*, and none of these mysteries ought to be passed over without devout tears. Rather we should consider them all with an abundance of tears. It is not fitting that our eyes would remain dry while we meditate on the Passion and the great love of God that motivated him to undergo such a bitter Passion. We do not own the Passion because it was endured for us as a gift. We derive from it all that is good including our salvation. We should not act with cruelty towards the very meek Jesus who was content to undergo the Passion out of the infinite mercy that he feels towards us unhappy people. If our cross is as hard and dry as a rock in the desert, but we strike it and strike forcefully, not just once but many times, even though it is hard, and if our consideration and attention is fixed on the cross and on the suffering of the Lord repeatedly and frequently, *it will bring forth water.*⁵⁵ However we are too weak to do this and are without a doubt half-hearted, cold and remiss.

6076 Therefore, we turn to you the suffering and crucified Jesus begging of you that by special, spring fruit, by the first blooms of the cross, you would mercifully grant that us miserable spirits, compassionate hearts, tearful eyes and devout thoughts and understanding of your sufferings so that we may share in them in a Christian manner. O sweet and bitter Jesus, give your children the bread of sorrow! Feed them the bread of tears! At least bathe our eyes in your precious, sacred blood. As you have already shed this to cleanse our souls, cause it to enter our hearts in such a way that it will soften them, cause them to give up their stony inflexibility, and once softened, move on from the constraint of the cross and shed tears from their eyes.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ex. 17, 6 Num. 20, 11

6077 Our Father, what a merciful Father you are! We ask for your mercy. Which you will bring about by giving us tears to cry with you over ingratitude. O cross, which today is bathed in blood, rich in heavenly treasures, loaded with divine fruit, made a source of grace by the Son of God, grant to us poor people a torrent of your immense abundance. The blood of the Lamb of God is still in you. At least let the sacred water flow into us so that it may submerge our souls and eyes to make them cry along with the weeping, suffering and dying Jesus, our God, our Father, and the one whom we love. We adore you O Cross for you represent the One who was crucified. We beg you, as our prayers rise up to you through him and we bless you and greet you humbly and devoutly.

*How blest thine arms, beyond compare,
Which Earth's Eternal Ransom bare!
That Balance where His Body laid,
The spoil of vanquished Hell outweighed.*

*O Cross! all hail! sole hope, abide
With us now in this Passion-tide:
New grace in pious hearts implant,
And pardon to the guilty grant!*⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Verses Vi and X of *Vexilla regis prodeunt*.