

**Passion Sunday**  
**(First Sunday of Passiontide)**  
**18 March 2018**

*“Amen, amen, I say to you before  
Abraham came to be, I am.” Jn. 8:58*

This Sunday is called Passion Sunday because the sufferings of Jesus are predominant as we approach the Paschal Mysteries of our Redemption. Dom Prosper Gueranger in *The Liturgical Year, Vol. 5* reminds us: **“Everything around us urges us to mourn. The images of the saints, the very crucifix on our altar, are veiled from our sight. The Church is oppressed with grief. During the first four weeks of Lent, she compassionated her Jesus fasting in the desert; His coming sufferings and crucifixion and death are what now fill her with anguish. We read in today’s Gospel, that the Jews threaten to stone the Son of God as a blasphemer; but His hour is not yet come. He is obliged to flee and hide Himself. It is to express deep humiliation, that the Church veils the cross. A God hiding Himself, that He may evade the anger of men – what a mystery! Is it weakness? Is it, that He fears death? No; we shall soon see Him going out to meet His enemies; but at present He hides Himself from them, because all that had been prophesied regarding Him has not been fulfilled. Besides, His death is not to be by stoning: He is to die upon a cross, the tree of malediction, which from this time forward, is to be the tree of life.”** Gueranger, p. 106 On this day, and on all days, we need to see how much Jesus loves us, and we need to love Him in return. Let us open our hearts with a lively hope, for our salvation is in the Passion of Christ. In today’s *Epistle to the Hebrews* (9:11-15) St. Paul **“presents to us the majestic figure of Christ, the Eternal High Priest, who ‘by His Blood entered once into the holies (that is, heaven) having obtained eternal redemption.’ (Heb. 9:12) The Passion of Jesus has redeemed us; it has opened once again our Father’s house to us; it is then the motive of our hope.”**Fr. Gabriel, OCD, *Divine Intimacy*, p. 371-2

*“...how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the Holy Spirit offered himself unblemished unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* Heb. 9:14 In today’s Epistle St. Paul tells us why Christ’s sacrifice was so necessary. All the ancient

sacrifices of the Old Testament were of no avail to achieve man’s redemption. Only Jesus Christ, **“as the Lamb of God, took on Himself men’s sins and bore them away; the bond which stood against us He cancelled by fastening it to the cross: He broke by His death the power of sin, and rescuing men from its slavery, made them children of God and heirs of heaven.”** Msgr. Patrick Boylan, *The Sunday Epistles and Gospels*, p. 219 Christ redeemed us by His own blood: **“nor again by virtue of blood of goats and calves, but by virtue of his own blood, into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption.”** Heb. 9:12 How grateful we should be for so great a sacrifice as Msgr. Boylan tells us: **“No adequate thanks can be offered by us for His sacrifice to our great High Priest. But we can please Him by joining with Him in His self-oblation to the Father. He has entered as a Victim into the most holy place of heaven, and He shows perpetually the marks of His wounds to the Father. Let us join with Him in asking the Father to accept for our sins the Blood of His Son. There is no other like offering that we can make to God to counterbalance our debt of sin.”** *Ibid*, p. 218

*“Which of you can convict me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe me.”* Jn. 8:46

In today’s Gospel (Jn. 8:46-59), St. John shows the continuing opposition of the Jewish leaders to Jesus. None of them can challenge Him on His holy life, but yet none of them will believe Him when He tells them that truth: **“Which of you can convict me of sin? If I speak the truth, why do you not believe me?”** Jn. 8:46 Jesus tells them the reason that they do not believe in Him is because they are not of God: **“He who is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear is that you are not of God.”** Jn. 8:47 The Jews cannot give any better argument than the “ad hominem” attack which is the poorest of arguments; they cannot say anything better than to call Jesus names: **“Are we not right in saying thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.”** Jn. 8:48 The Jews hated the heretical Samaritans and would not even talk to them; to call Jesus a devil is blasphemous. It was their way of retaliating for what Jesus said of them: **“The father from whom you are is the devil.”** Jn. 8:44 When Jesus tells them solemnly, **“Amen, amen, I say to you, if anyone keep my word, he will never see death,”**(Jn. 8:51) they attack Him: **“Art thou greater than our father Abraham who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom dost thou make thyself?”** Jn. 8:53. Jesus then tells

them that His Father will glorify Him and that Abraham rejoiced that he would see His day: **“Abraham your father rejoiced that he was to see my day. He saw it and was glad.”** Jn. 8:55 The Jews again fail to understand Jesus as they see only the appearances and believe that Jesus is talking of the present life: **“Thou are not yet fifty years old, and has thou seen Abraham?”** Jn. 8:57 It is here that Jesus, using the words of God to Moses, solemnly claims His eternal generation as God: **“Amen, amen, I say to you before Abraham came to be I am.”** Jn. 8:58 For them this is too much and they take up stones to kill him, but Jesus hides Himself as it is not His time to die. He will sacrifice Himself on His terms!

#### **“Strange blindness” and “hardness of heart”**

Dom Gueranger comments on the obstinacy of the Jews to the truth that Jesus reveals to them: **“Their obstinacy in refusing to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, has led these men to ignore the very God, whom they boast of honouring; for if they knew the Father, they would not reject His Son. Moses, and all the Psalms, and the Prophets, are a dead letter to them; ...Strange blindness, that comes from pride and hardness of heart! The feast of the Pasch is at hand; these men are going to eat, and with much parade of religion the flesh of the figurative lamb; they know full well that this lamb is the symbol, or figure, which is to have fulfilment. The true Lamb is to be sacrificed by their hands, and they will not know Him. He will shed His Blood for**

**them, and it will not save them. How this reminds us of those sinners, for whom this Easter promises to be as fruitless as those of the past years!”** Gueranger, p. 114-5

#### **“The Great Work of Christ”**

In *Mediator Dei*, (1940) Ven. Pope Pius XII also speaks of our debt to Christ: **“The great work of Christ was to reconcile man with God. This he did all his life by means of a complete offering of himself to the Father. This sacrificial offering continued all his life, to be consummated on Calvary. All his activity has no other purpose.... lifted up between heaven and earth, he offers the sacrifice of his life and, from his pierced heart burst forth, in some way, the sacraments, which distribute to souls treasures of the redemption. In doing all this he had as his main purpose the glory of his Father and the greater sanctification of men.”** Let not our eyes be blind and our hearts be hardened to all that Jesus Christ has done for us with His sacrifice on the Cross. He has merited for us our redemption and our eternal salvation.

**“Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle!  
With completed victory rife:  
And above the Cross’s trophy  
Tell the triumph of the strife:  
How the world’s Redeemer conquered  
By offering of His life.”**  
(Hymn for Good Friday)