Homily on the sufferings and death of our Lord

Eusebius of Emesa (c. AD 300–360)

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On the Sufferings and Death of our Lord.
[Translated by S. C. Malan] BRETHREN, we cannot hold our peace on the sufferings of Christ; we must speak of them; for both the time and place constrain us to do so. For, since He died for us, shall we not tell of His Passion? Yea, rather, we will dwell on it, and proclaim it aloud. He is on the Cross, for thy sake, O sinner; and thou, be at His feet, for thy own sake also. Thou darest not think or say nothing of thy Lord's sufferings; for where He suffered, there Satan died.

The traitor is come to look about him; and when come, he is on the alert and ready, not in places unknown, but in a spot which he knows full well. That place is near you. But what is meant by 'near you?' To that very place which you yourselves had shown to others is the traitor come, bringing with him a crowd; as if much people could overrule the power of God! The devil's son is come with swords, that are the wiles of his father who came to Adam as a friend, while he acted by him as an enemy: for he deceived and overcame him like a man that was taken in. And here he hid his guile under a kiss; although he remonstrated when his friendship was doubted. Did he come to betray with a kiss? No; he came not to kiss, but to betray. I resist not, said the Lord; do what thou listed: thou alone art the cause of thy own destruction. That was to the traitor himself; but to those who came to lay hands on Him, He said: What seek ye? They answered: Jesus of Nazareth. And the Lord replied: I am He; I resist you not, I flee not from you; for this very purpose am I come, and to this end was I born. But while He spake they and the traitor fell backwards to the earth; to show that He had come there of His own accord, for if they could not stand His speaking to them, how could they have bound Him against His will? "If ye seek Me," said the Lord, "let these go their way."

But Peter, who was the most fervent of all the disciples, comes forward also on this occasion. For at times he stepped rightly before the others; at other times it was very much as he thought best himself. He who knew how to come out of the ship boldly and walk on the water to his Lord, he who believed fervently, nevertheless suddenly fell back. But that was ere he was made a Rock, and ere he had received of the Spirit. For when once he had

received the Spirit, he no longer quailed before a maid, nor shook in the wind; but he abode unmoved and faithful in the place in which he was put. Do not find fault with me, brethren, if I gather, one by one, every merit of our Lord; while I endeavour as well as I can, to tell His virtues. I pray you, do not grow weary; for I tell you of the Cross.

Peter drew his sword, which the Lord bade him take with him in order to fulfil every particular dispensation connected with His humanity; according to what S. Luke declares, that this saying should be fulfilled, "He was reckoned among the transgressors a saying which the other Evangelists apply to Christ on the Cross. He cut off the servant's ear, well and deservedly; for the ear that hears not, ought not to remain in its place. But the Lord showed kindness even then to those who laid hands on Him; for although He healed the servant's ear by a miracle, yet He did not hinder their hands from taking Him. Having bound Him they led Him away captive, that the prophecy of Esaias should not come false, which said, that "He was brought as a Lamb to the slaughter." The Jews were pleased at His being taken; and the traitor rejoiced as if he had done a good work.

Peter then follows to see the end, full of doubt and forethought on the denial his Lord had foretold him should take place. He had been told that he would deny Him; and he repelled that, saying, he would never do so. His readiness was both good and becoming; but it was ignorance on his part: for he did not know how far he was about to show himself weak and mean. He follows anxiously and doubting: full of misgivings: his heart beating all the while. He meets the maid, who says to him: "Art thou not a Galilean also?" But Peter denies, and declares he is not. Yet that denial was not without meaning in one who was to be witness of his Lord's Resurrection. For if He who had died, was dead and not alive, then why should Peter think it fitting that he should be crucified with his head downwards for One who was dead? Then Peter moves further, goes from his place, but not from his denial. When about to speak, so troubled is he as to wish to change his language. "Thou art a Galilean, says the maid." Nay; I am not a Galilean, says Peter, with a lip that betrays him. Yet see how he who was thus troubled in his speech by an ignorant maid, afterwards persuaded even Roman orators. But we will presently speak of the Resurrection; meanwhile let us tell more about the Cross.

The high priests, servants by birth, sat in council, and the Judge of all stood before them as a servant. The lawyers themselves who had not learned the law, asked Him: Art Thou the Son of God? like the devil, of whom the Lord had said before, that he was their father. "I adjure Thee, said the high priest, tell me if Thou be the Son of the living God." Not that he cared to know it; but he wished to destroy Him. Then they brought the King of the judge before that judge. He stood before him "like a sheep before his shearer," as Esaias says. The judge trembled; not so the accusers. They say: "He maketh Himself a King," that His sentence might be irrevocable. Then the wife of the judge, who had suffered in a dream because of Him, sends a message to her husband; he was better disposed than the rest, he even wished not to kill Him, but to release Him, and he commanded Him to be scourged, in order to allay their fury; thus fulfilling the saying of the prophet: "With His stripes we are

healed." But they cried with one voice: "Away with Him, away with Him, and crucify Him that might be fulfilled what was said of the Lord: "He lifted up his voice against Me."

What crime could the Jews bring against Him? What blind man was there that had not received sight, or lame that had not walked? Maybe some of those that had once been healed by Him, were among them who then railed at Him. No doubt many whose tongue He had loosed, cried against Him to please the Jews. I trow that of them was said: "What could be done to My vineyard that I have not done to it? I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and behold, it hath brought forth wild grapes." Pilate grew weary of denying the Jews their request; but he was overcome by those shameless miscreants. He washed his hand, because he had not soiled it: but they cried, that His blood might be on them and on their children. If what they at first required had not been done, then He would neither have been put to death nor risen again. While they prevailed in their impious intreaties, while they raged in their savage fury, and the judge refused to give way to their wickedness, they brought to pass and fulfilled the truth of the prophet's words who, because he knew beforehand the malice of the Jews, foretold that the Anointed of the Lord should suffer at their hands. Pilate wished to stop their evil deeds, but he could not.

Jesus went forth out of the city, bearing Himself the Tree of His own Cross; like another Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrifice. Will anyone say that this was done without purpose? The daughters of Jerusalem wept on that occasion, not knowing over whom they would have to weep. "Weep over yourselves and your children," said the Lord, "and not over Me, for I am now fulfilling that which I chose of Mine own free will." And they would weep hitherto if He whom the Jews did away with was not risen again from the dead. But now let us speak with joy of our salvation. Jesus went forth and walked between malefactors; that it might be fulfilled, "He was reckoned among the transgressors." He who only did good, our Saviour and our Lord, went forth among thieves and sinners.

And now the day of His crucifixion, was the day of Adam's transgression. God created Adam on the sixth day; and on that day he transgressed. On that day too Jesus became obedient and endured His sufferings at the sixth hour, when Adam tasted of the fruit; that we should overcome in Christ at the same hour that we were overwhelmed in Adam. The Tree of Life in the Garden, is the Tree of the Cross. There was a woman, through whom sin came into the world; here is a virgin who heard Him say: "Behold thy mother." On that day Adam put forth his hand for evil; and Jesus spread His holy arms for our good. Adam drew near to the tree; and Jesus laid His hands and His feet on the Tree to which they were fastened with nails. Adam tasted of the fruit through lust; and Jesus tasted of vinegar mingled with bitter gall. Adam heard this sentence: The earth shall bring forth to thee thorns and thistles. Our Jesus of His own will was crowned with the thorns of Adam. Adam brought down a curse upon himself; but Jesus who is blessed by them that are condemned, was hanged on the Tree as one accursed.

We run as it were in a race; one on the right, the other on the left; for the types given by Moses are complete and realised. For as he went up the mountain at the time when the

people of God was fighting with Amalek, and Joshua the Son of Nave, as leader, held out his rod in his hand, he showed beforehand the figure of the Cross, with his arms and his rod. There Hur and Aaron, one on the right hand of Moses, and the other on the left; and here two thieves, one on the right and the other on the left of Jesus. And why thieves? that thou mayest know, O sinner, that His sufferings were for such as thou art. One reviled; but the other blessed.

And what didst thou see, O thief, or rather, O thou bringer of glad tidings to us? Neither a sign nor a miracle. He is nailed to the Cross as well as thou; and He tastes of gall which thou hast not drunk. He is crowned with thorns, which thou hast not worn. Then one reviled and would not learn of his fellow. What seest thou? A Man hanging on the Cross and the scorn of His foes, and thou sayest: "Remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom. What! dost thou call Him Lord who is thus hanging on the Cross, sentenced to it by His Judges; and is He a Judge who is thus condemned? Thou didst feel and acknowledge that He was crucified for sinners, and was doing His utmost to give life to those that were lost: for He is the Lamb slain and offered in sacrifice for many. What then dost thou ask, O thou believer, and no longer thief?—That Thou wouldst remember me in Thy kingdom. Thou askest a thing that is far and distant, but I will give it thee at once. Thou hast not been slow in believing; and I will not withhold My grace: today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise. So that he really rose to Paradise, who was about to descend into hell to which he was doomed. And why this day? Because while on this day Adam was driven from Paradise, at this hour the thief opened it and went into it.

And from the hour at which Adam ate of the fruit of the garden until he left it, Jesus remained on the Cross, until He fulfilled the spreading of Moses' hands towards heaven. "They pierced My hands and My feet," according to the saying of David. Gall in the cup is offered because of Adam's lust to Him Who is crowned with thorns. In order that the adversary should be put to shame, He carried the conquest of His enemy as far as the Cross, and endured patiently his infamous treatment.

But in like manner as the heavens showed the place of the Nativity by means of a brilliant star in the East, so also they made known how they mourned for the sufferings of Christ, by withholding the light of the sun, in order to hide the fury and audacity of His enemies. The light hid itself for three hours, as long as the Sun of Righteousness remained on the Cross and in sufferings; afterwards the sun reappeared, lest they might think night had arrived. But the sun did not shrink from being darkened; it hid itself three hours in order to represent as it were the stay of the Son of Man for three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, and His appearing again. When the heavens withheld their light and gave it back they proclaimed a miracle; and the earth shook at the fight it could not bear. For it was fitting and becoming all creation to bear witness of Him Who was suffering on the Cross. And the bosom and bars of the earth were torn asunder in order to receive Him Who was free among the dead.

The types and examples of Joseph the patriarch, as handed down by the ancient Jews, were realised in the Son Who was betrayed to death by them, and dwells for ever with His Father, Let us then abide by Jesus who endures Agony for our sake. At the foot of His Cross thieves were crucified with Him, as being necessary to the fulfilment of the dispensation, that we might learn how men do die, and how God was separated from him by His will and not without it. Those who were subject to the law of nature had their legs broken, that they should endure death according to that nature. But He who had power to lay down His life and power to take it again in like manner as He took of His own will and not against it, a body out of the Virgin, also of His own accord and not otherwise made on the Cross, a separation between His Spirit and His body. "Father, in Thy hands I commit My Spirit:" not in the hands of the wicked who, reviled and reproached Him on all sides. This is a great wonder: for He died willingly and not unwillingly; and there need not of necessity be any pain connected with it, for when He will, He gives up His Spirit.

He is then in every respect the One Only-begotten; for as He alone was begotten of the Father, and He alone was born of the Virgin according to the flesh, so also in death, He dies of His own will and not otherwise. Those who heard this could hardly believe it, and they asked; Can a man give up the ghost when he likes, of his own will? So that one of the soldiers who could not believe that He was already dead, made a gash in His side with a spear, and some in wonder said: "Of a truth He was the Son of God." But why did he not pierce with his spear the heart or other parts near it? Because it was where the serpent hid his fangs. For Eve Was taken from Adam's side, and he who wishes to heal the bite of the serpent, must cut the part in which the venom lies. It was therefore fitting and right that one side should be wounded for another; that the saying might come true; "All things concerning Me have an end."

Mark also the day: for when the days of unleavened bread, then also the passover of sufferings; and when the Lamb, then also Him that is without blemish and without spot. If the reckoning of days does not exactly fit, care not for it; for the Church makes no mistake in her reckoning, but the Jews have altered their own. This day was the death of death, and the destruction of sin: this day was the sacrifice offered for the propitiation of our sins, but the shame of our foe. This was the beginning of our life, the signal of victory over the great adversary. But of that death no one doubts; for all admit and confess it. The Gentiles ridicule it; the Jews say: we put Him to death. But they will bear the doom they have brought down upon themselves; while the Church rejoices in Jesus Christ our Lord; to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[Footnotes renumbered and moved to the end]

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only

divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.