

SERMON IV

ISAIAH 53, 7-8

He was punished and afflicted, but opened not his mouth: he was led to death like a sheep: and like a lamb before the shearer he was dumb and opened not his mouth. He was raised from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his age? He was cut off from the land of the living and suffered the wounds due to my people.

Having declared that each one of us ought to look to himself and his faults if he would acquire a love for the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prophet now adds that His sufferings were not forced upon Him but borne voluntarily. Without this we should not be justified, and no atonement would have been made between God and us—that is, if Jesus Christ had not made reparation for our transgressions by His obedience. If, then, the death of the Son of God had been forced upon Him and He had not submitted Himself to it voluntarily, it would not have been a sacrifice to blot out our sins. St. Paul also brings us back to this, when he says that our rebellions were wiped out by the obedience of one man.¹ For what cause has God become our enemy, and remains so now, but that we never cease to offend Him? He created us that in peace He might enjoy us; but when we refuse to bear His yoke, He cannot fail to detest us and disavow us as His creatures—and with good right, too.

So this is why it is said that our Lord Jesus has not only been chastised for our sins and iniquities, but that *He opened not His mouth*, and offered no resistance; but knowing that He was ordained to this end and that such was the eternal counsel of God His Father, He showed Himself obedient even unto death. So if we would feel more strongly the power of the death and passion of the Son of God, let each one of us think in how many ways he has opposed the will of God and His righteousness. We

¹ Rom. 5, 19.

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shall find that we never cease to make war on Him, as if we deliberately wanted to defy Him. So there is nothing to be surprised at that we need such a remedy—that is to say, that the Son of God, to cover the memory of all our rebellions, made Himself obedient in our place. It is true that our Lord Jesus did, in fact, speak before Pilate, His judge, but that was not to evade death.¹ Rather, He offered Himself to it, and did not even want to take any ⁶³⁷ opportunity of being acquitted, because it was very necessary for Him to be condemned in our place.

So the Prophet has good reason to say that He was like a dumb man. He compares Him to a sheep or a lamb, thinking of the figure of the ancient sacrifices; for when we are told of the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must look upon it as a sacrifice by which God has been appeased; for, as we have already shown, sins can only be abolished before God by such means. And, in fact, when under the Law men wanted to pray forgiveness for their faults, the sacrifice always had to be offered as well. They could not make any compensation; but God told them it was enough that they should ground themselves on the promise given to them of the Redeemer. So then, that the Jews might know that Jesus Christ would fulfil all that was then figured in the Law, this name of *Lamb* is particularly attributed to Him. Under a part the Prophet comprehended the whole—as if he said that in His death and passion Jesus Christ would first of all abolish all our iniquities by submitting Himself to the will of God His Father, and then, secondly, would be sacrificed like a lamb, so that by the shedding of His blood all our stains would be washed and cleansed. Now, whenever we are accused of the many faults that we have committed and must feel the wrath of God, let us have recourse to what is set before us here—that it was not without cause that our Lord Jesus Christ did not wish to reply. Although He endured extreme afflictions and although God showed great severity towards Him, He suffered it all quietly, that in His obedience we might be reconciled.

Moreover, we are also exhorted to conform to His example; not that we shall be able to humiliate ourselves perfectly before God, but yet we must force ourselves towards it. I say, that when God is pleased to chastise us and we feel great roughness at His

¹ Luke 23, 3.

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hand, so that it seems as if we are overwhelmed, we must nevertheless keep silence, confessing that God is righteous and fair, and not letting one murmur be heard from our mouths. Let us glorify God by our silence; even as if we were poor sinners convicted of their crimes and without an excuse. St. Peter applies the passage like this:¹ when we are afflicted by the hand of God, even persecuted by the hand of men, we must not cease to bear patiently all the injuries done to us: knowing ⁶³⁸ that God wishes to test us, or even to punish us for our faults. And let us take care not to make frivolous excuses, like many do, who bring forward their infirmity and say that they are too weak and cannot stay quiet while God presses them so straitly. We must therefore be conformed to the Son of God, for He is our mirror and pattern—not, as I have said, that we can have goodness equal to His; but although we cannot come near it, we must strive towards it. And moreover, we see that David, who was a weak man like we are, did not cease to practise this doctrine; as he says in one place: “O Lord, when I knew that it was Thy hand heavy upon me, I was as a dumb man.”² And in another passage: “Alas! since mine enemies have been given a free rein, I have suffered peaceably the wrongs and outrages that they have done to me.”³

So here is what we have to remember from this passage—that just as the Son of God was dumb that He might give glory to God, and neither contradicted nor replied in all His afflictions, let us also allow God to chastize us when it seems good to Him, or to test our obedience by loosing the reins of the wicked that they may persecute us. Now it is impossible to keep to this until we are firmly grounded in this doctrine, that because our Lord Jesus was silent before God His Father and before men He made reparation for all our faults and rebellions. Moreover, when it is said to us that by keeping silence He has gained righteousness for us, we see that such a silence carries a corresponding blessing; for it was to maintain our cause, and so He is now our advocate before God, and now His mouth is opened—that is to say, having His intercession ready to remedy all the offences that we have committed. For in that He endured persecution to the end without replying, He has won this office of advocate, so that if we are convicted in our consciences before God, and

¹ I Pet. 3, 14ff.

² Ps. 38, 13–14.

³ Ps. 39 (?).

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He must pass sentence on us and we have no excuse to make, yet we shall be defended by Him and God will judge us innocent, in that such reparation has been made for our faults. This, then, is the place we must start from and then we shall have higher courage and be the better disposed to be silent when we are afflicted by the hand of God.

Thereupon the Prophet adds; *he was raised from bondage* (or *from prison*, for that is what the word means) *and from judgment*. Some expound this as Jesus Christ being snatched away to death by sudden violence. But what is said is rather ⁶³⁹ that He was not overcome by death but was raised by the power of God His Father. It is much for us to know that our Lord Jesus suffered for our salvation, and that, having examined our lives, we feel that without such a remedy we are damned and lost; but if only the death and passion of the Son of God were mentioned, we should always be left with doubts and uneasiness. For how could we hope for life from one who was swallowed up by death? We should not perceive that Divine or heavenly power without which we cannot conceive a firm trust in Him; we should see in Him only the infirmity which distresses us. And since the Prophet has spoken of the fruit that the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ brings to us, he now adds that it is because He will be raised in the power of God His Father.¹ So he says: *He was raised from bondage and from judgment*. And although He had been condemned, God did not abandon Him in His need, but He was exalted to enjoy sovereign rule and to be Lord over all creatures. This is also what St. Paul shows us in the first chapter of the Romans, when he says that He was declared to be the Son of God by His resurrection. For if we look only at the life that Jesus Christ spent here among men and at His death, we shall not find in Him what is necessary for our salvation. It is true that the miracles He performed, the doctrine He preached, the other signs that He showed, would be sufficient to declare Him the Son of God, if our faith were not too weak. But as it is, we shall always be in a state of confusion and perplexity when Jesus Christ presents Himself as an ordinary man, even one who was despised, and when at the last we see Him subjected to this accursed and most ignominious death. But when we pass from His death to His resurrection we recog-

¹ Rom. 1, 4.

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nize that our Lord Jesus has won the victory for us. And this is what St. Paul says in that other passage in II Corinthians, that He died in the weakness of His flesh, but was raised in the power of God His Father.¹ So this order that the Prophet observes aims at making us certain that our Lord Jesus has possession of His life and is Lord and Master over it, seeing that this has been declared in His person. Let us understand, then, that the Son of God was brought to nothing for us, but was nevertheless not stript of His power; and that though He kept Himself hidden for a little while, His resurrection bears such certain witness to Him, that we have no excuse for not putting our trust completely in Him and boldly scorning the devil and sin. For Jesus Christ has triumphed over them and the hand of God upheld Him to free Him from His bonds; and likewise He was exalted to be the vicegerent of God His Father, and, as I have already said, to bear sovereign rule over the world. This then, in a word, is what we have to remember when it is said that *He was raised from prison and from judgment*.

Now, it was very necessary that our Lord Jesus should descend into the depths of the abyss before being exalted into the glory of the heavens; for if He had appeared only in His majesty, how could we to-day be assured that our sins were forgiven? We should indeed see the Son of God who is the fountain of life, but He would be, as it were, separated from us, and we should have nothing in common with Him, nor be able to draw near Him. Moreover, we should always have cause for despair, in that we are guilty of infinite faults. And if our Lord Jesus had descended into the abyss without being raised to the heavens, where should we be then? We should be always wretched creatures, petrified with fear and in endless and ceaseless anxiety; we should be in a horrible torment, for the wrath of God would ever be upon us. But when it is said in the first place that He was condemned, and suffered terrible pangs that we might be delivered from them, and that, having peace with God (as was said yesterday) we now know that He loves us, is favourable to us and receives us in mercy: when we know that Jesus Christ was raised on high, we can also conclude that it was to draw us to Him that we might share in the glory given to Him by God His Father.

¹ II Cor. 13, 4.

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Moreover, we must also observe what the Prophet adds: *who shall declare his age?* By this he wants to show that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ keeps its effect and power for ever, and that it is not a temporary thing, which will pass and vanish by and by. And this again is very necessary, for some have taken this “age” for the eternal generation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in that He was begotten of God His Father from all eternity. Others have strained these words of the Prophet into various meanings; but when we look at it all more closely, there is no doubt that he only wanted to show that the exaltation bestowed upon Jesus Christ was not for Him and His person, and moreover that it was not for one day only; but that He has gained for us permanent life—just as St. Paul says that He died for sin once but now lives unto God and shall never die again.¹ By ⁶⁴¹ that, he declares to us that the sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ offered ought to satisfy us, seeing that by this means He has perfectly sanctified us. There was no need for the Son of God to suffer often;² for since He had this power in Him to wipe out all our iniquities once for all, we may boldly take refuge in His death and passion, and never doubt that it always possesses the power to reconcile us to God. Now the life that our Lord Jesus has entered into is truly heavenly; for it is a state of perfection, in which there is nothing wrong; and when St. Paul says that *He liveth unto God*, it is because He is now freed from all our miseries and from the state He once assumed to be a mortal man. So Jesus Christ has stripped off all that, and is now separated from all human weaknesses; and therefore we may hope for the same in ourselves who are His members. Thus, let us note in the first place, that here the Prophet has declared that our Lord Jesus was not raised that He should be always liable to die again, but He has gained an unending life. And in the second place, that this was not only for Himself, but for all His church—just as when it is said in the Psalm³ that God has gone up on high and has taken the spoil from His enemies, it is to show that when our Lord Jesus was exalted after His death, it has all redounded to the common profit and salvation of the Church. He has conquered Satan and sin so that we might be delivered from them and enjoy the fruit of such a victory and triumph in it. This, in brief, is what we have to remember from this passage.

¹ Rom. 6, 10.

² Heb. 7, 27.

³ Ps. 68, 18.