

## SECTION II.

## THE NATURE OF HER COMPASSION.

Having thus considered the divine purpose of Mary's Compassion, as far as it is in our power to do so, we may now pass to our second question, the nature and characteristics of her Compassion. What do we mean by the word Compassion? All sorrow for our Lord's Passion is compassion with Him. The contemplations of the saints, their painful ecstasies, the stigmata and thorny crowns, the engraving of the emblems of the Passion on the flesh of their hearts, and the miraculous inward sympathies with the Passion in their souls, are all but so many forms of Compassion, in the theological sense of the word. In like manner, the tears and prayers and devout meditations of common Christians, the penances of Holy Week both among seculars and religious, the frequency of making the Stations or joining in other devotions to the Passion, are also Compassion, in the same strict sense. Hence it would appear that all sorrow of which the Passion is the cause, all sorrow which is the echo of the Passion in our hearts, no matter whether this sorrow takes the form of prayer, of penance, or of merciful deeds to others, is what we mean by Compassion. It is a great part, and truly an indispensable part, of the deep inward life of every believer. The more holy the heart in which it exists, the closer is its union with the life-giving Passion of our Lord.

The intimacy and mystical beauty of this union depend on the vigor of the operations of grace, on the intensity of the will in identifying itself with the will of our Saviour, on the absence of all sin and self-seeking to mar the completeness of the union or retard the processes of grace, and finally on the tenderness of heart and the self-oblivion of ecstatic love which accompany it. Now, in all these respects our Lady's Compassion is beyond all comparison with the Compassion of the saints, so far beyond it that we may use the word Compassion of her companionship in the Passion, and use other and commoner words for the union of the saints with the sufferings of our Lord.

But, as in the matter of co-operation, our Lady not only co-operated with Jesus in the same sense as the saints, only in a superlative degree, but also co-operated more intimately with Him in ways the saints could not share, so is it with her Compassion. It was actually contemporaneous with the Passion, and took place in the presence of the Passion. Indeed, it is remarkable that all our Lady's dolours are compressed within the Thirty-Three Years. None fell in the fifteen years before, none fell in the fifteen years after. They came from the presence of Jesus. They were the very contact of His Heart with hers. The actual presence of our Lady's Compassion at the time and place of the Passion gives it a union therewith which no other sorrow for our Lord can share. It was part of the living mystery itself. It was not the gradual result of long meditation. It was not a sorrow felt in the calm seclusion of the undistracted cloister, or a

pious emotion roused by the marvellous ceremonial of a believing Church. It did not come from literature, or ritual, or history, or private revelation, or mysticism, or art, or poetry, but from the sights and sounds of the very Passion, in which it was immersed, and of which it formed an integral portion. It was part of our Blessed Mother's life. It was a series of events which happened to herself, outward sorrows of her own making these inward wounds. She had distinct rights, by which she was entitled to share in the Passion. It needed not to be transferred to her by grace, or love, or participation, or the power of faith. It was hers already as a mother. She suffered it in all the rawness and dishonor of its existing reality. She was in the crowd; she was jostled in it, and derided by it; she was distracted by the tumult; her inward tranquility was assailed by the agitation and horror of the senses. All this is true of her Compassion, and of hers only.

Moreover, her Compassion was part of the Passion in the sense of having actually increased the Passion. With Judas, and Annas, and Caiaphas, with Pilate and Herod, with the Roman soldiers and the Jewish rabble, we must reckon Mary among those who wrung our Saviour's Heart with sorrow. Except the dereliction of His Father, we may well suppose that there was no pain in all His Passion equal to that which the vision of His Mother's broken heart supplied. Thus her Compassion was an integral part of His sufferings. Beautiful as it was, and exceedingly holy, a very worship in itself, and a very growth of heaven, to Him it was simple anguish. Intensely as He loved

each soul of man, and therefore loved all souls collectively with an amount of burning desire which bewilders our conjectures, the single soul of His Mother was with Him an object of amazing love far beyond what He felt for all other creatures together. To see her, therefore, tempest-tossed on a dark ocean of unutterable woe, was, of itself, a fearful torture to Him; but that woe was caused by Himself; it was being poured out of His soul into hers each separate moment, at each separate shame, pain, outrage, and indignity. It was He who was stretching her on the rack,—He who was turning the instruments of her torture perpetually beyond the limits of human endurance,—He who was thickening the inconsolable darkness round about her. It was He only who was doing all this. Without Him she would have had no dolors. It was her embrace of Him that was her agony. He was a fiery, sharp-edged cross to the heart He loved best of all. Then all the incalculable bitterness that He had poured out of Himself into her, He took back into Himself without taking it away from her. It re-entered His Sacred Heart as another separate Passion, another great creation of sorrow by itself, and overwhelmed Him with a very deluge of tempestuous grief. Thus her Compassion came out of the Passion, and went into it again, so that there was rather an identity between the two, than a union of them. Her Compassion was the Passion taking a particular form. Her words to St. Bridget express this: \* “The sorrow of Christ was my sorrow, because His Heart was my heart. For, as Adam and Eve sold the world for

\* Rev., lib. i. c. 35.

one apple, my Son and I redeemed the world with one heart."

From the Compassion of Mary being contemporaneous with the Passion, and indeed an integral part of it, there flowed into it the character of sacrifice and expiation which belonged to the Passion, and this in a degree and after a kind which does not belong to the sorrows of the saints. As the Passion was the sacrifice which Christ made upon the Cross, so the Compassion was the sacrifice of Mary beneath the Cross. It was her offering to the Eternal Father. It was an offering made by a sinless creature for the sins of her fellow-creatures. Their gain was her loss. The lightning of their hearts was the burdening of hers. Her darkness was their light. Their peace was her agony. Her Son was their victim. Their life was her tremendous martyrdom. Her offering rose to heaven together with the offering of Jesus. They were as two grains of incense on the burning coals of one thurible. With various fragrance they rose up to the throne in the same thin circles of blue smoke, perceptibly different, yet utterly inseparable. When the sound of the scourging went up to heaven, the smothered sighs of Mary's bursting heart went up with it. When the "Barabbas" of the multitude rang fiercely in the hollow vaulted sky, the agony of Mary went floating up, sweet music mid the fierce clamor, to the Father's ear. With the dull knockings of the hammer, the beatings of her heart went up and lay down at the foot of the throne, and did not pass unheeded. Her voiceless aspirations flew upward in equal flight with the seven words which Jesus uttered on the Cross.

His loud cry at the end was heard twice in heaven, the second time as it echoed thither out of Mary's heart. Thus, during those hours of the Passion, each oblation was a double one; the offering of Jesus and the offering of Mary were tied in one. They kept pace together; they were made of the same materials; they were perfumed with kindred fragrance; they were lighted with the same fire; they were offered with kindred dispositions. Thus there is a sacrificial and expiatory character in Mary's Compassion which is peculiar to itself. The world was redeemed by the Passion of our Lord. But there never was, in the ordinance of God, such a thing as a Passion of Jesus disjoined from the Compassion of Mary. The two things were one simultaneous oblation, interwoven each moment through the thickly-crowded mysteries of that dread time, unto the Eternal Father, out of two sinless Hearts, that were the Hearts of Son and Mother, for the sins of a guilty world which fell on them contrary to their merits, but according to their own free will. Never was any sanctified sorrow of creatures so confused and commingled with the world-redeeming sorrow of Jesus as was the Compassion of His Mother.

Furthermore, the Compassion of Mary was an example to the whole Church. It is part of the teaching of the four Gospels. It performs a function for all ages of the world. It is a continual source of holiness in the midst of each generation of the faithful. It is a living, grace-diffusing power among the children of God. It actually leads multitudes of souls to Jesus. It breaks the bonds of sin and evil habits. It

melts cold hearts, and stimulates the lukewarm affections of the torpid and the worldly. It pours light and tenderness, and a spirit of prayer, and a love of suffering, and a thirst for penance, into countless souls, between the sunrise and sunset of each day, and in the whole breadth of the world from pole to pole. It models saints; it animates religious orders; it is the type of a special spiritual life to individual souls. It rises up to heaven like an endless angelic song. Everywhere in the Church there is a sound of it. Out of seven deep places it echoes everlastingly. Time and space have nothing to do with it. Simeon still prophesies, and we hear it, and a lifelong sadness runs thenceforth alongside of our perseverance in the ways of grace. Still Mary flies with Jesus into Egypt, and dwells there, and the Nile lapses by, and the shadows in our souls are the substances of grace. Still for three days does the childless Mother wander with darkened spirit, seeking for her Child, and finding Him, at last, in the temple. Still is she meeting Him, again and again, with the heavy Cross upon His shoulders, and we the while meeting Him in her. Still is she at the foot of the Cross, alluring all her children to her. Still is she at the Deposition from the Cross, and at the Burial, acting over, again and again, those pathetic mysteries in the new hearts which the children of each generation give her. Thus, her compassion is not merely her own. It authoritatively and authentically represented the whole Church on Calvary. She was present at the Passion, as it were officially, and in a double capacity, as co-operating with the Redeemer, and as representing the redeemed.

The Compassion of our Lady may also be regarded in a twofold point of view, according as we consider our Lord as God or as Man. As God, His Divine Nature was fearfully outraged by the Passion. Not all the sins of the world put together so dreadfully and sacrilegiously violated the glory of God as that particular sin out of which He worked the redemption of the world. Never did the disloyalty of a rebellious creation make so deep an impression upon the Divine honor, or seem so inexpressibly to endanger the sovereignty of God. This is a view of the Passion which we must never lose sight of. It needed another Passion to expiate itself. It needed a second Passion to make reparation to God for the first. Mary's Compassion occupies this place. The sin produced a double Passion, one in Jesus and one in Mary; but it produced it without double sin. So that her Compassion needed no expiation, though, had it done so, there was expiation enough in the Passion to satisfy for itself and for her Compassion. But she stood at the foot of the Cross as the minister of God's glory. Her sorrows, even while they are fresh sorrows to Him, were also the nearest approach to a perfect reparation which creatures could make. We have seen in the preceding chapters that reparation is an essential element in all holiness. Now, if the collective sanctity of all the apostles, martyrs, confessors, and virgins through all time had dedicated itself on the earth, until the day of judgment to the sole work of making reparation for His Passion,—and, rightly considered, the whole action of His Church is, in effect, reparation for the Passion,—it could not by the end of the

world have produced a reparation any thing like so complete as the Compassion of Mary. It exceeded in efficacious holiness all other reparation. It was offered to our Lord's Divine Nature instantaneously, indeed simultaneously with the outrage, and almost coextensively with its excess. It came from His own Mother, which added to it an incomparable acceptableness. It fitted His Passion in kind, fashion, method, and degree as nothing else could fit it. Lastly, it drew its efficacy not merely or so much from its own intrinsic worth as from its real and vital union with its Passion. Mary's Compassion was the reparation she made to her Son as God.

If Mary at the foot of the Cross was the minister of our Lord's glory as God, she was no less the minister of His Sacred Humanity. In a merely human point of view, we might be surprised at Mary's presence upon Calvary. It was not the fitting place for a mother, the scaffold of her Son; and her Son we might have expected would have spared her the agony. But she was the minister of the Incarnation. She was His sole human parent. She represented in herself the human obedience under which the Incarnate Word had lived, and which was, as the Apostle has remarked, to characterize His death as perfectly as it had modelled His life. He had waited for her consent before He took flesh of her. When He had inflicted her worst sorrow on her by leaving her at the age of twelve, He also in the same mystery especially showed forth His obedience to her in returning to Nazareth for eighteen years. He began His miracles at her suggestion. He had her permission for His

public ministry. He had vouchsafed to ask Her leave and blessing for His Passion. Perhaps His Heart may have silently asked her heart leave to die. From the first, Jesus and Mary had never been separated. It seems to have been a sort of law of the Incarnation that they should be together. Her Assumption, Coronation, and Mediatorial Throne would be but the final instances of the operation of this law. Now that God has let us see the Thirty-Three Years in their perfection as a whole, we perceive that the absence of Mary from Calvary would have offended our Christian instincts as much as her absence from Bethlehem or Nazareth. She was the minister of the Incarnation: it all lies in that. She had no more right to come down from Calvary than a priest would have to leave the altar in the midst of the Sacrifice of the Mass. There would have been an incongruity in it. On one twenty-fifth of March she had given Him His Precious Blood; on another twenty-fifth of March she must minister at the shedding of it. She must swathe the Man as she had swathed the Child. She must lay Him in the tomb who had already laid Him in the manger. She must preside at the end as she had presided at the beginning. There must be an overshadowing of the Holy Ghost at the last, as there had been one at the first. As she had waited fifteen years for His coming, she must wait fifteen years after His departure. Her priesthood consisted in this continuity of ministry to Him. Her Maternity was not to Him a mere means, occasion, instrument, or access, but an enduring ministry under which His obedience was consummated. Mary's Maternity was her Com-

passion at Bethlehem; Mary's Compassion was her Maternity at Calvary.

### SECTION III.

#### THE ACTUAL EFFECTS OF HER COMPASSION.

We are now in a condition to inquire, thirdly, into the actual effects of Mary's Compassion. These may be classed under three heads, inasmuch as her Compassion was itself part of the Passion, as it fitted her for her office in the Church, and as it regarded her co-operation in the work of redemption. Yet, although these three things may be conceived of as separate, they are, in reality, so intertwined that, in classifying them apart, we run the risk of falling into some repetition,—a risk, however, which, for the sake of clearness, it is worth while to incur.

As it was a part of our Lord's Passion, Mary's Compassion has a share in the effects which the Passion produced, in the same sense, though, of course, in a far lower degree, in which His dereliction by the Father assisted in producing the results of the Passion. This is but a material co-operation; yet, as it is a fact, it serves to show the reality of the Compassion, and the existence of a purpose in it as part of the divine plan. Its effects upon our Blessed Lord were so terrible, that it seems probable the agony it caused Him would have put an end to His life if His Divinity had not miraculously sustained Him, in order that He might suffer more. Our Lady revealed to St. Bridget that, when Jesus saw the bitterness of her

grief, He was so affected by it, Himself, that He became comparatively insensible to the pain of all His wounds, because of the much greater pain which the sight of her sorrow caused Him.\* St. Bernard calls His vision of her grief "an inexplicable woe, an ineffable reciprocation of holy love." Thus her Compassion was not only an intrinsic part of the Passion, but among its chief and most efficacious elements. Moreover, her dolours alone approached, after the Father's abandonment, to satisfy that thirst of suffering which the immense love of Jesus still felt, even while He was hanging on the Cross, and this was in itself one of their most remarkable functions. All this is very obvious. Nevertheless, we hardly do our Lady's dolours justice, as divine mysteries, from our habit of regarding them too exclusively as her sorrows, and not as His sorrows also, and perhaps more His than hers. We have already expressed a doubt whether we can, without peril of inaccuracy and misapprehension, divide our Lady's mysteries from our Lord's. For the whole spirit of the Gospel narrative, as well as the action of what is apparently a great law of the Incarnation, seems to bring Jesus and Mary together and make them inseparable. Now, if we detach her mysteries from His, or look at her for a moment as apart from Him, and possessing any thing independently of Him, we run one of two risks: either we shrink from the language and views of the great saints and doctors of the Church, because we have already, in our own minds, made Mary into some kind of gigantic saint, instead of the Divine

\*Rev. l. i. c. vi.