

Friday in the Second Week: The Holy Winding-sheet

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

In order to conform ourselves to the spirit of the Church, which tomorrow honours the holy winding-sheet, we will consider: first, how just is the devotion of this precious relic; second, how sanctifying it is. We will then make the resolution: first, often to represent to ourselves the holy winding-sheet, bearing the impression of the wounds of Our Saviour and impregnated with His blood; second, to excite ourselves by this souvenir to the love of Jesus crucified, to horror of sin, to zeal for salvation, and to the virtues which lead to it. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of St Peter: "*Christ, therefore having suffered in the flesh, be you also armed with the same thought*" (I Pet. IV:1).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore Jesus Christ descended from the cross and wrapped in the winding-sheet which Joseph of Arimathea had bought; let us venerate His sacred body always united to the person of the Word, and therefore always worthy of the supreme worship of latria. Let us unite ourselves with the adoration which was then rendered to Him by the most Holy Virgin.

HOW JUST IS THE DEVOTION TO THE HOLY WINDING-SHEET

This devotion dates from the very era itself of Christianity. The gospel, in fact, shows us several winding-sheets carefully folded by the angels in the tomb (John xx:5). The chief of these winding-sheets, preserved by Nicodemus, passed from his hands to Gamaliel, from Gamaliel to St James, who transmitted it to St Simeon, and it was kept in the church of Jerusalem until the year 1137. Carried away at that date by Guy de Lusignan to Cyprus, it was taken from thence to France in 1450 by the widow of the last of the Lusignans, who made a present of it to the Duchess of Savoy. Since that time the royal house of Savoy has kept it until the present day, an object of veneration to the people. God has made known, by many miracles, how acceptable to Him is this devotion, and the Holy See, obeying the indication given by Heaven, authorised to receive the precious treasure a church which Paul II elevated to the rank of a collegiate church, to which Sixtus IV gave the title of the Holy Chapel, and where Julius II permitted the office of the holy winding-sheet to be said. Encouraged by such authorities, the devotion to the holy winding-sheet increased on every side. St Charles came to oblate his heart in the presence of this venerable relic. Madame de Boissy, before she brought into the world St Francis de Sales, came there to recommend, with abundant tears, the blessed fruit which she bore in her womb. St Francis de Sales himself came to Turin to venerate the holy relic, and could not restrain his tears at the sight of the wounds of the Saviour impressed upon the winding-sheet. This devotion of the Church and of the saints has nothing in it which ought to astonish us; for, if we honour the cross as a memorial of the Passion of the Saviour, if a crucifix painted by a skilful hand excites our devotion, how much more ought it to be excited by the representation of the wounds and sufferings of the Saviour, made not by the hand of man, but by the contact of the very body itself of Jesus Christ!

HOW SANCTIFYING IS THE DEVOTION TO THE HOLY WINDING-SHEET

Is it possible indeed for us to represent to ourselves what the holy winding-sheet offers to the eyes of him who contemplates it; that body all bloody, that head crowned with thorns, those feet and those hands pierced with nails, that side opened by the lance—in a word, all the wounds which tore the sacred flesh of the Saviour, from the top of His head down to the soles of His feet, without saying to ourselves: Since my Saviour suffered so much in order to save me, I will not lose the fruit of so many sufferings; since my salvation cost Jesus Christ so dear, I will not lose my soul by refusing to do myself violence infinitely less painful? I will be a saint. At the sight of this holy winding-sheet I detest the sins for which my Saviour shed so much blood, and I embrace the penance which expiates it. Could I be effeminate and sensual after looking at the semblance of this wounded body? Could I shut my heart to the cry which comes forth from the wounds impressed upon this winding-sheet: “*God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son*” (John III:16), and not myself cry from the bottom of my heart: “*Let us, therefore, love God, because God first hath loved us*” (I John IV:19). Oh, what a hard heart we must have not to allow ourselves to be touched by so many sufferings endured for love of us (St Augustine).

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.