

"The Crucifixion"
Parochial and Plain Sermons vol. VII sermon 10
St. John Henry Newman
March 25, 1842

1 "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought
2 as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened
3 not His mouth." Isaiah liii. 7.

4 ST. PETER makes it almost a description of a Christian, that he loves Him whom he
5 has not seen; speaking of Christ, he says, "whom having not seen, ye love; in whom,
6 though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of
7 glory." Again he speaks of "tasting that the Lord is gracious." [1 Pet. i. 8; ii. 3.] Unless
8 we have a true love of Christ, we are not His true disciples; and we cannot love Him
9 unless we have heartfelt gratitude to Him; and we cannot duly feel gratitude, unless we
10 feel keenly what He suffered for us. I say it seems to us impossible, under the
11 circumstances of the case, that any one can have attained to the love of Christ, who
12 feels no distress, no misery, at the thought of His bitter pains, and no self-reproach at
13 having through his own sins had a share in causing them.

14 I know quite well, and wish you, my brethren, never to forget, that feeling is not enough;
15 that it is not enough merely to feel and nothing more; that to feel grief for Christ's
16 sufferings, and yet not to go on to obey him, is not true love, but a mockery. True love
17 both feels right, and acts right; but at the same time as warm feelings without religious
18 conduct are a kind of hypocrisy, so, on the other hand, right conduct, when unattended
19 with deep feelings, is at best a very imperfect sort of religion. And at this time of year
20 [Note 1] especially are we called upon to raise our hearts to Christ, and to have keen
21 feelings and piercing thoughts of sorrow and shame, of compunction and of gratitude, of
22 love and tender affection and horror and anguish, at the review of those awful sufferings
23 whereby our salvation has been purchased.

24 Let us pray God to give us *all* graces; and while, in the first place, we pray that He
25 would make us holy, really holy, let us also pray Him to give us the *beauty* of holiness,
26 which consists in tender and eager affection towards our Lord and Saviour: which is, in
27 the case of the Christian, what beauty of person is to the outward man, so that through
28 God's mercy our souls may have, not strength and health only, but a sort of bloom and
29 comeliness; and that as we grow older in body, we may, year by year, grow more
30 youthful in spirit.

31 You will ask, *how* are we to learn to feel pain and anguish at the thought of Christ's
32 sufferings? I answer, *by* thinking of them, that is, by *dwelling* on the thought. This,
33 through God's mercy, is in the power of every one. No one who will but solemnly think
34 over the history of those sufferings, as drawn out for us in the Gospels, but will gradually
35 gain, through God's grace, a sense of them, will in a measure realize them, will in a
36 measure be as if he saw them, will feel towards them as being not merely a tale written
37 in a book, but as a true history, as a series of events which took place. It is indeed a
38 great mercy that this duty which I speak of, though so high, is notwithstanding so level

39 with the powers of all classes of persons, learned and unlearned, if they wish to perform
40 it. Any one can think of Christ's sufferings, if he will; and knows well what to think about.
41 "It is not in heaven that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it
42 to us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea that thou shouldst say,
43 Who shall go over the sea for us? ... but the word is very nigh unto thee;" very nigh, for
44 it is in the four Gospels, which, at this day at least, are open to all men. All men may
45 read or hear the Gospels, and in knowing them, they will know all that is necessary to
46 be known in order to feel aright; they will know all that any one knows, all that has been
47 told us, all that the greatest saints have ever had to make them full of love and sacred
48 fear.

49 Now, then, let me make one or two reflections by way of stirring up your hearts and
50 making you mourn over Christ's sufferings, as you are called to do at this season.

51 1. First, as to these sufferings you will observe that our Lord is called a lamb in the text;
52 that is, He was as defenceless, and as innocent, as a lamb is. Since then Scripture
53 compares Him to this inoffensive and unprotected animal, we may without presumption
54 or irreverence take the image as a means of conveying to our minds those feelings
55 which our Lord's sufferings should excite in us. I mean, consider how very horrible it is
56 to read the accounts which sometimes meet us of cruelties exercised on brute animals.
57 Does it not sometimes make us shudder to hear tell of them, or to read them in some
58 chance publication which we take up? At one time it is the wanton deed of barbarous
59 and angry owners who ill-treat their cattle, or beasts of burden; and at another, it is the
60 cold-blooded and calculating act of men of science, who make experiments on brute
61 animals, perhaps merely from a sort of curiosity. I do not like to go into particulars, for
62 many reasons; but one of those instances which we read of as happening in this day,
63 and which seems more shocking than the rest, is, when the poor dumb victim is
64 fastened against a wall, pierced, gashed, and so left to linger out its life. Now do you not
65 see that I have a reason for saying this, and am not using these distressing words for
66 nothing? For what was this but the very cruelty inflicted upon our Lord? He was gashed
67 with the scourge, pierced through hands and feet, and so fastened to the Cross, and
68 there left, and that as a spectacle. Now what is it moves our very hearts, and sickens us
69 so much at cruelty shown to poor brutes? I suppose this first, that they have done no
70 harm; next, that they have no power whatever of resistance; it is the cowardice and
71 tyranny of which they are the victims which makes their sufferings so especially
72 touching. For instance, if they were dangerous animals, take the case of wild beasts at
73 large, able not only to defend themselves, but even to attack us; much as we might
74 dislike to hear of their wounds and agony, yet our feelings would be of a very different
75 kind; but there is something so very dreadful, so satanic in tormenting those who never
76 have harmed us, and who cannot defend themselves, who are utterly in our power, who
77 have weapons neither of offence nor defence, that none but very hardened persons can
78 endure the thought of it. Now this was just our Saviour's case: He had laid aside His
79 glory, He had (as it were) disbanded His legions of Angels, He came on earth without
80 arms, except the arms of truth, meekness, and righteousness, and committed Himself to
81 the world in perfect innocence and sinlessness, and in utter helplessness, as the Lamb
82 of God. In the words of St. Peter, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth;

who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." [1 Pet. ii. 22, 23.] Think then, my brethren, of your feelings at cruelty practised upon brute animals, and you will gain one sort of feeling which the history of Christ's Cross and Passion ought to excite within you. And let me add, this is in all cases one good use to which you may turn any accounts you read of wanton and unfeeling acts shown towards the inferior animals; let them remind you, as a picture, of Christ's sufferings. He who is higher than the Angels, deigned to humble Himself even to the state of the brute creation, as the Psalm says, "I am a worm, and no man; a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people." [Ps. xxii. 6.]

2. Take another example, and you will see the same thing still more strikingly. How overpowered should we be, nay not at the sight only, but at the very hearing of cruelties shown to a little child, and why so? for the same two reasons, because it was so innocent, and because it was so unable to defend itself. I do not like to go into the details of such cruelty, they would be so heart-rending. What if wicked men took and crucified a young child? What if they deliberately seized its poor little frame, and stretched out its arms, nailed them to a cross bar of wood, drove a stake through its two feet, and fastened them to a beam, and so left it to die? It is almost too shocking to say; perhaps, you will actually say it *is* too shocking, and ought not to be said. O, my brethren, you feel the horror of this, and yet you can bear to read of Christ's sufferings without horror; for what is that little child's agony to His? and which deserved it more? which is the more innocent? which the holier? was He not gentler, sweeter, meeker, more tender, more loving, than any little child? Why are you shocked at the one, why are you not shocked at the other?

Or take another instance, not so shocking in its circumstances, yet introducing us to another distinction, in which Christ's passion exceeds that of any innocent sufferers, such as I have supposed. When Joseph was sent by his father to his brethren on a message of love, they, when they saw him, said, "Behold, this dreamer cometh; come now, therefore, and let us slay him." [Gen. xxxvii. 19, 20.] They did not kill him, however, but they put him in a pit in spite of the anguish of his soul, and sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelites, and he was taken down into a foreign country, where he had no friends. Now this was most cruel and most cowardly in the sons of Jacob; and what is so especially shocking in it is, that Joseph was not only innocent and defenceless, their younger brother whom they ought to have protected, but besides that, he was so confiding and loving, that he need not have come to them, that he would not at all have been in their power, *except* for his desire to do them service. Now, whom does this history remind us of but of Him concerning whom the Master of the vineyard said, on sending Him to the husbandmen, "They will reverence My Son?" [Matt. xxi. 37-39.] "But when the husbandmen saw the Son, they said among themselves, This is the Heir, come, let us kill Him, and let us seize on His inheritance. And they caught Him, and cast Him out of the vineyard, and slew Him." Here, then, is an additional circumstance of cruelty to affect us in Christ's history, such as is suggested in Joseph's, but which no instance of a brute animal's or of a child's sufferings can have; our Lord was not only guiltless and defenceless, but He had come among His persecutors in love.

127 3. And now, instead of taking the case of the young, innocent, and confiding, let us take
128 another instance which will present to us our Lord's passion under another aspect. Let
129 us suppose that some aged and venerable person whom we have known as long as we
130 could recollect any thing, and loved and revered, suppose such a one, who had
131 often done us kindnesses, who had taught us, who had given us good advice, who had
132 encouraged us, smiled on us, comforted us in trouble, whom we knew to be very good
133 and religious, very holy, full of wisdom, full of heaven, with grey hairs and awful
134 countenance, waiting for Almighty God's summons to leave this world for a better place;
135 suppose, I say, such a one whom we have ourselves known, and whose memory is
136 dear to us, rudely seized by fierce men, stripped naked in public, insulted, driven about
137 here and there, made a laughing-stock, struck, spit on, dressed up in other clothes in
138 ridicule, then severely scourged on the back, then laden with some heavy load till he
139 could carry it no longer, pulled and dragged about, and at last exposed with all his
140 wounds to the gaze of a rude multitude who came and jeered him, what would be our
141 feelings? Let us in our mind think of this person or that, and consider how we should be
142 overwhelmed and pierced through and through by such a hideous occurrence.

143 But what is all this to the suffering of the holy Jesus, which we bear to read of as a
144 matter of course! Only think of Him, when in His wounded state, and without garment
145 on, He had to creep up the ladder, as He could, which led Him up the cross high
146 enough for His murderers to nail Him to it; and consider *who* it was that was in that
147 misery. Or again, view Him dying, hour after hour bleeding to death; and how? in
148 peace? no; with His arms stretched out, and His face exposed to view, and any one
149 who pleased coming and staring at Him, mocking Him, and watching the gradual ebbing
150 of His strength, and the approach of death. These are some of the appalling details
151 which the Gospels contain, and surely they were not recorded for nothing; but that we
152 might dwell on them.

153 Do you think that those who saw these things had much heart for eating or drinking or
154 enjoying themselves? On the contrary, we are told that even "the people who came
155 together to that sight, smote their breasts and returned." [Luke xxiii. 48.] If these were
156 the feelings of the people, what were St. John's feelings, or St. Mary Magdalene's, or St.
157 Mary's, our Lord's blessed mother? Do we desire to be of this company? do we desire,
158 according to His own promise, to be rather blessed than the womb that bare Him, and
159 the paps that He sucked? do we desire to be as His brother, and sister, and mother
160 [Note 2]? Then, surely, ought we to have some portion of that mother's sorrow! When
161 He was on the cross and she stood by, then, according to Simeon's prophecy, "a sword
162 pierced through her soul." [Luke ii. 35.] What is the use of our keeping the memory of
163 His cross and passion, unless we lament and are in sorrow with her? I can understand
164 people who do not keep Good Friday at all; they are indeed very ungrateful, but I know
165 what they mean; I understand them. But I do not understand at all, I do not at all see
166 what men mean who *do* profess to keep it, yet do not sorrow, or at least try to sorrow.
167 Such a spirit of grief and lamentation is expressly mentioned in Scripture as a
168 characteristic of those who turn to Christ. If then we do not sorrow, have we turned to
169 Him? "I will pour upon the house of David," says the merciful Saviour Himself, before He
170 came on earth, speaking of what was to come, "upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the

171 spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have
172 pierced, and they shall *mourn* for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in
173 bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." [Zech. Xii. 10.]

174 One thing I will add:—if there be persons here present who are conscious to themselves
175 that they do not feel the grief which this season should cause them, who feel now as
176 they do at other times, let them consider with themselves whether perhaps this defect
177 does not arise from their having neglected to come to church, whether during this
178 season or at other times, as often as they might. Our feelings are not in our own power;
179 God alone can rule our feelings; God alone can make us sorrow, when we would but
180 cannot sorrow; but *will* He, if we have not diligently sought Him according to our
181 opportunities in this house of grace? I speak of those who might come to prayers more
182 frequently, and do not. I know well that many cannot come. I speak of those who can, if
183 they will. Even if they come as often as they are able, I know well they will not
184 be *satisfied* with their own feelings; they will be conscious even then that they ought to
185 grieve more than they do; of course none of us feels the great event of this day as he
186 ought, and therefore we all *ought* to be dissatisfied with ourselves. However, if this is
187 not our own fault, we need not be out of heart, for God will mercifully lead us forward in
188 His own time; but if it arises from our not coming to prayers here as often as we might,
189 then our coldness and deadness *are* our own fault, and I beg you all to consider that
190 that fault is not a slight one. It is said in the Book of Revelation, "Behold He cometh with
191 clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds
192 of the earth shall wail because of Him." [Rev. i. 7.] We, my, brethren, every one of us,
193 shall one day rise from our graves, and see Jesus Christ; we shall see Him who hung
194 on the cross, we shall see His wounds, we shall see the marks in His hands, and in His
195 feet, and in His side. Do we wish to be of those, then, who wail and lament, or of those
196 who rejoice? If we would not lament at the sight of Him then, we must lament at the
197 thought of Him now. Let us prepare to meet our God; let us come into His Presence
198 whenever we can; let us try to fancy as if we saw the Cross and Him upon it; let us draw
199 near to it; let us beg Him to look on us as He did on the penitent thief, and let us say to
200 Him, "Lord remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom." [Luke xxiii. 42.]

201 Let this be added to the prayer, my brethren, with which you are about to leave this
202 church. After I have given the blessing, you will say to yourselves a short prayer. Well;
203 fancy you see Jesus Christ on the cross, and say to Him with the penitent thief, "Lord,
204 remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom;" that is, "Remember me, Lord, in
205 mercy, remember not my sins, but Thine own cross; remember Thine own sufferings,
206 remember that Thou sufferedst for me, a sinner; remember in the last day that I, during
207 my lifetime, felt Thy sufferings, that I suffered on my cross by Thy side. Remember me
208 then, and make me remember Thee now."

209 Notes

210 1. Passion-tide.

211 2. Matt. xii. 46, &c.