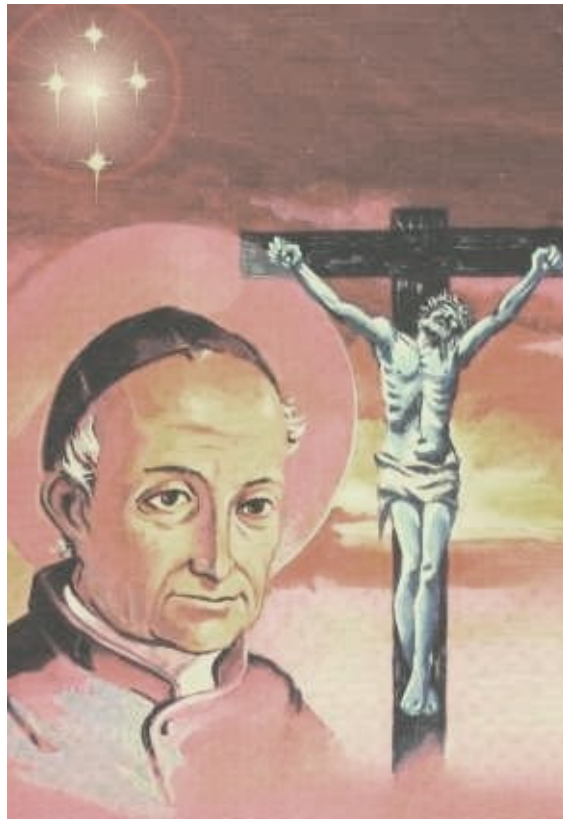


EASTER REFLECTIONS:

THE SACRED STIGMATA



**A MYSTERY TO BE BELIEVED –
A FEAST TO BE CELEBRATED –
A DEVOTION TO BE LIVED**

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On the Feast of the Sacred Stigmata, 2009

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A DEVOTION TO BE LIVED**

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

[Jesus] said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit.

Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” [Jn 20:19-23].

Presentation:

In one of his early Encyclicals, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI presents the Eucharist as a Mystery of Faith, a Liturgy to be celebrated and a life to be lived. By an ‘analogy of faith’, an application might be made of this formulation to the Devotion to the Five Wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. As one of the blood-ancestors of Jesus Christ in Joshua, Rahab hung out her window a prophetic scarlet sign for her future redemption:

When we come into the land, tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you are letting us down; and gather your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house [Josh. 2:18].

Because Rahab the harlot had hidden the messengers whom Joshua had sent to reconnoiter Jericho, Joshua spared her with her family and all her kin, who continue in the midst of Israel to this day [Josh. 6:25].

Thus, in the fullness of time, the scarlet streams of Precious Blood of Jesus Christ flowing from the open side of Christ are immortalized within the Church by the retention of the Stigmata in His Risen Body:

With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation ...[Is. 12:3].

On that day there shall be open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a fountain to purify from sin and uncleanness.[Zech. 13:1].

1. St. Gaspar Bertoni's Contemplation of the Sacred Heart¹:

1768: *This devotion shows a bodily wound, and a spiritual wound.*

The prudent and most holy Spouse of Christ, the Church, which has become ingenious by her love, most ardently yearns to see her Spouse Jesus adored and loved. So, she still studies for the most sweet and universal means, and the easiest and most efficacious incentives in order to bring this about. And since men and women, made up of reason and senses, are not moved much by purely spiritual realities. In order for them to fall in love with such sublime and invisible benefits, much use is made of visible realities. Examples of these would be: the Infant Christ in the Crib; Christ dying on the Cross; but also His Blood, His Wounds, the Crib, the thorns, the spear; and the Cross are most effective ...

1770: What more fortuitous symbol could be found for love? The relationships beyond number that the heart has with love in all human beings have already brought about a universal sense. Through which all the nations, both the unlearned as well as the learned men and women of the world, poets, painters, sacred and profane writers, have come to recognize in the heart, and almost attribute love to it, and often they exchange one for the other.

¹ St. Gaspar Bertoni, Notes on the Sacred Heart. MssB II, ## 1768; -

1768 Carnale vulnus, vulnus spirituale ostendit.

La prudente e sapientissima sposa di Cristo, la Chiesa, dal suo amore fatta ingegnosa, brama ardentissimamente di vedere adorato ed amato il suo Sposo Gesù (e) studia ancora i mezzo più soavi e universali e gl'incentivi più facili ed efficaci. E poichè gli uomini composti di ragione e di sensi non si muovono molto dalle cose puramente spirituali, per innamorarli di queste cose sublimi ed invisibili si vale delle visibili cose: (quali) il Bambino nel presepio, (Cristo) moribondo sulla croce; ma (anche) il solo sangue, il nome, le piaghe, (il) presepio), (le) spine, (la) lancia, (la) croce...

1770 Poteva trovar simbolo più felice dell'amore? Le innumerevoli relazioni che ha il cuore coll'amore in tutti gli uomini hanno già prodotto un senso universale, per cui tutte le nazioni, secolari rozzi e dotti, poeti, pittori, scrittori sacri e profani, nel cuore riconoscono e quasi a lui attribuiscon l'amore, e spesso l'uno scambian per l'altro.

1771 Molto meglio è simboleggiato l'amore di Gesù dal suo Cuore divino. È la sorgente di quel sangue sparso per nostro amore, arrivato da un'anima santissima, deificato dall'ipostatica unione del Verbo. Ciò ch'è (a lui) tutto proprio è l'essere sempre stato strumento perfettissimo in cui si rendono e si resero sensibili gli effetti invisibili e ineffabili della sua carità.

Il costato aperto dopo la morte sol per mostrarci quel cuore, il cuor medesimo dalla lancia ferito, la ferita serbata nel corpo glorioso, lo rendono un simbolo così soave, evidente, divino, che è impossibile venerare il cuor ferito senza ricordare e venerare l'immenso amore suo.

1771: Jesus' love is much better symbolized by His Divine Heart. It is the source of that blood poured out for love of us, coming forth from a most holy soul and is deified, by the Hypostatic Union of the Word. That which is completely proper to Him has always been the most perfect symbol in which the invisible and ineffable effects of His charity are rendered and have been made visible.

His side, opened after His death is solely to show to us that same heart, wounded by the lance. This wound has been retained in His glorious body and the stigmata render this heart such a gentle, evident and divine symbol that it is impossible to venerate the wounded heart without being reminded and venerating His immense love.

2. St. Gaspar Bertoni's² Contemplation of the Life of St. Veronica Giuliani³

² This would have been St. Gaspar Bertoni's final public address - he took ill at this time and remained so until his death - June 12, 1853 - an invalid and for the most part confined to his room. [NB: cf. recent studies on this Capuchin Mystic: Aa. Vv. *Testimonianza e messaggio di Santa Veronica Giuliani. Atti del Congresso Internazionale di studi su santa Veronica Giuliani*. Roma, Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum, 27-31 ottobre, 1982. Roma: Ed. Laurentianum - G.R.A. Km 68.800. 1983. 2 Volumes]. [The level of self-inflicted mortification as described would be considered excessive, in the minds of many, due to the advances made in the Church in the modern theology of saints and the body].

³ St. Gaspar Bertoni, Panegyric in honor of St. Veronica Giuliani, on the Occasion of her Solemn Canonization, delivered in the Church of the Reverend Capuchin Fathers, in Verona, on December 29, 1839. [cf. MssB II, ## 2129; 2136-2139]:

2129 La madre moribonda raccomanda le cinque figlie superstiti alle cinque piaghe del Crocifisso: a Veronica assegnò il costato. Carità verso i poveri, e premj miracolosi; brama di patire, per le parole prodigiose di Gesù bambino, pag. 16, di tre anni: Sposa mia, la croce ti aspetta; che intese poi a sentir leggere dalla Madre le vite de' martiri; carità verso i poverelli, premiata con un prodigio; mani nel fuoco; disciplina; mano schiacciata; ferita nel piede. I difetti medesimi puerili per errore o per ignoranza manifestano le virtù sue.

Ed ella non se ne gloriava, anzi diceva ch'era molto cattiva di quella età. Quis putas puer iste erit? Nam et manus Domini erat cum illo, *Luc. 1,66*.

Se il domandate a tutto il mondo, vi risponderà: una gran santa. Domandatelo a Veronica: una cattivella, una ingrata. Ma che dirà quando ai presagi succederanno i doni, e si vedranno i segni che adempiuta è in lei la divina predizione?

2136 Sposalizio divino, [che è una] certa unione più stretta tra l'anima e Dio, per una carità più perfetta. Questo, con certe anime grandi, si compiacque il Signore di farlo ad esse manifesto con segni sensibili, e con certe formalità che si praticano negli sposalizi umani, come a S. Caterina di Siena e a qualch'altra Santa di prima sfera. Per disporla meglio a tanto onore [Dio le elargì] molte grazie e visioni: di Gesù Cristo che la confortava e stipulava quasi il patto nuziale; di Maria Vergine, apparsale in magnifico trono, con S. Caterina e S. Rosa, assicurandola delle vicine sue nozze, e mostrandole l'anello sposalizio, e ammaestrandola delle più sublimi virtù; il Sabato Santo le apparve pur Gesù Cristo, avvisandola delle nozze per il dì seguente, e mostrandole esso pure il prezioso anello: e le dié nuova regola della vita, degna

2129: The dying Mother recommended her five surviving daughters to **the Five Wounds of the Crucified: to Veronica, she assigned the Wound of the Sacred Side.** She was motivated by charity toward the poor, and miraculous gifts: she yearned to suffer, after hearing these prodigious words from the Infant Christ, when she herself was just three years old: 'My Spouse, the Cross awaits you!' She came to understand these much better in hearing her Mother read the lives of the Martyrs. Her charity toward the poor was rewarded with a prodigy. She would place her hands in the fire as a discipline. Her hand was severely injured - and she experienced a wound in her feet. These defects of her youth, received by mistake, or through ignorance, do indicate her serious commitment to virtue.

She never gloried in the marvelous experiences she knew, but rather would always speak of her wrongful state for her age. *What a one do you think this child will be? For the hand of God was with him.* Lk 1:66. If you would ask the whole world, they might respond that she would be a great saint. But if you ask Veronica, she would say that she was not good, that she was an ingrate. But what can be said when to these special graces there would then follow unique gifts, and one would notice signs accomplished in her as indications of divine predilection in her regard? ...

d'una sua sposa; stando tutta la seguente notte orando, le apparve Gesù Cristo più volte, a purificarle il suo spirito, a onorarlo de' ricchi addobbi de' suoi meriti, quasi in dote concessi.

2137 Venuto il tempo della Comunione, nella quale si eseguì [lo spozalizio, le fu dato di] sentir cantare dagli Angeli con soave melodia: Veni sponsa Christi; indi rapita vide due troni magnifici, uno per Gesù, l'altro per Maria. Corte celeste immensa: si fecero innanzi le due Sante, quasi pronube (S. Caterina le insegnava il rito di quella augusta funzione) la conducevano al trono, e ricopriano di varie vesti preziose sopra l'abito religioso: l'ultima fu una veste bianca con bel ricamo. Gesù Cristo cominciò: Veni sponsa Christi; la beata Vergine proseguì: Accipe coronam etc., e in quella S. Caterina cominciò a spogliarla dell'altre vesti, e lasciolla in abito religioso: e le fu mostrata l'eccellenza dello stato regolare.

2138 Indi accennò alla sua Madre che la facesse vestir dell'abito nuziale: [ed era un] manto ricchissimo ricoperto di gemme. Maria il dié a S. Caterina che ne rivestì Veronica. Gesù Cristo trasse l'anello dal suo costato: l'anello era d'oro lucentissimo, colla gemma in cui era il nome di Gesù; Gesù Cristo con la sua Madre glielo posero in dito: poi il benedì. Armonia celeste; nuove regole di vita più perfetta: tra l'altre che il suo vivere fosse tutto crocifisso. Fecela padrona di tutti i suoi tesori, de' meriti delle sue azioni e pene.

2139 - Ferita nel cuore, nel Natale da Gesù Bambino, con una specie di dardo, sgorgandone vivo sangue, e riconosciuta più volte dalle monache.

- Stimate, e rinnovazione di esse più volte, e odore prodigioso che tramandavano per tutto il monastero. Le suore conosceano da ciò quando erano rinnovate; e le fasce che ricoprivanle, in bucato odoravano gli altri pannolini.

- Partecipazione degli altri dolori della Passione.

Her Divine Espousals of the Eucharist and the Stigmata of Easter]

2136: - The Divine Espousals: which is a certain, most intimate union between the soul and God, by the most perfect charity. It has been pleasing to the Lord to initiate this with certain great souls and to manifest it with sensible signs, and with certain formalities which are customary in human marriages, as with St. Catherine of Siena and with some other Saints of the highest level. To dispose her the better for such an honor, God generously bestowed on her many graces and visions: those of Jesus Christ Who comforted her and stipulated the **Marriage Pact:** visions of the Virgin Mary. Who appeared to her on a magnificent throne, with St. Catherine and St. Rose, assuring her of her approaching **nuptials**, and showing her the **wedding ring**, and teaching her about the most sublime virtues. On Holy Saturday Jesus Christ also appeared to her, telling her of her **Nuptials on the following day [Easter]**, and showing her also the precious **ring**. He gave her a new rule of life, worthy of **His Spouse**. She spent the intervening night in prayer, and Jesus Christ appeared to her many times, in order to purify her spirit, and to endow her with rich endowments of His merits, given to her as a kind of **dowry**.

2137: When the moment came for **Holy Communion**, in which **the Espousals** were to be celebrated, she was given the grace of hearing the Angels singing a very sweet melody: '**Come, o Spouse of Christ!** In her rapture, she saw two magnificent thrones, one for Jesus, and one for Mary. She saw the immense Heavenly Court: the two Saints were standing at the fore, as maids of honor. St. Catherine and taught her the ritual of that august function. These two saints led her to the throne and vested her in precious garments over her religious habit: the final outer garment was a white dress richly embroidered. Jesus Christ then began: **Come, o Spouse of Christ!** The Blessed Virgin then picked up with the following: 'Accept the crown...,' etc. and with these words, St. Catherine began to remove the other garments, and left her in her religious habit. And there was shown to her the excellence of the regular life.

[3. The Wedding Ring from the Glorious Sacred Side]

2138: Then He indicated to His Mother that she should be vested in the wedding garment: and this was a most rich mantle covered with gems. Mary handed this to St. Catherine, and she vested Veronica in it. Jesus Christ then **drew the Wedding Ring from His Side:** the ring, with a gem on which was the Name of Jesus: Jesus Christ with His Mother then slipped it on her finger: then He blessed it. There ensued the celestial harmony. There was imposed the new rules of a more perfect life. Among its stipulations was that from now on her life would be totally crucified. He made her the mistress of all His treasures, the merits of His actions and sufferings.

2139: - Wounded in her heart, on Christmas, by the Baby Jesus, with a kind of arrow, the blood issued forth, and this was noted various times by the other nuns.

- **The Stigmata**, and the renovation of these at different times, and a prodigious odor which permeated throughout the entire monastery. The Sisters would know from this when the **Stigmata** were being renewed, and the bandages which covered these, gave this sweet odor to the garments in the laundry.

- A Participation in the other sufferings of the Passion.

3. Reflections of Theology: theologians contemplate that single trait in Jesus Christ that expresses His unique Divine Filiation: for some it is loving obedience, for others it is the constant reference to Jesus' loving obedience to His Father. As 'love' is a vague word in modern parlance, it must be spelled out clearly for all to understand. 'Actions speak louder than words', so a number of thinkers believe that among the reasons why it is the divine will that the Sacred Stigmata is retained in the risen Body of Christ is because God has willed that this personal form of His infinite love and Mercy is to be made manifest forever in the Sacred Stigmata of His Son: St. Thomas takes up the question specifically:

III, q. 54: OF THE QUALITY OF CHRIST RISING AGAIN

a. 4: Whether Christ's body ought to have risen with its scars?

OBJ 1: It would seem that Christ's body ought not to have risen with its scars. For it is written (1 Corinthians 15:52): "The dead shall rise incorrupt." But scars and wounds imply corruption and defect. Therefore it was not fitting for Christ, the author of the resurrection, to rise again with scars.

OBJ 2: Further, Christ's body rose entire, as stated above (A3). But open scars are opposed to bodily integrity, since they interfere with the continuity of the tissue. It does not therefore seem fitting for the open wounds to remain in Christ's body; although the traces of the wounds might remain, which would satisfy the beholder; thus it was that Thomas believed, to whom it was said: "Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed" (John 20:29).

OBJ 3: Further, Damascene says (De Fide Orthodoxa iv) that "some things are truly said of Christ after the Resurrection, which He did not have from nature but from special dispensation, such as the scars, in order **to make it sure that it was the body which had suffered that rose again**." Now when the cause ceases, the effect ceases. Therefore it seems that when the disciples were assured of the Resurrection, He bore the scars no longer. But it ill became the unchangeableness of His glory that He should assume anything which was not

to remain in Him for ever. Consequently, it seems that He ought not at His Resurrection to have resumed a body with scars.

On the contrary, Our Lord said to Thomas (John 20:27): "**Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands; and bring hither thy hand, and put it into My side, and be not faithless but believing.**"

I answer that, It was fitting for Christ's soul at His Resurrection to resume the body with its scars.

In the first place, for Christ's own glory. For Bede says on Luke 24:40 that He kept His scars not from inability to heal them, "**but to wear them as an everlasting trophy of His victory.**" Hence Augustine says (De Civitate Dei xxii): "Perhaps in that kingdom we shall see on the bodies of the Martyrs the traces of the wounds which they bore for Christ's name: because it will not be a deformity, but a dignity in them; and a certain kind of beauty will shine in them, in the body, though not of the body."

Secondly, to confirm the hearts of the disciples as to "the faith in His Resurrection" (Bede, on Luke 24:40).

Thirdly, "**that when He pleads for us with the Father, He may always show the manner of death He endured for us**" (Bede, on Luke 24:40).

Fourthly, "**that He may convince those redeemed in His blood, how mercifully they have been helped, as He exposes before them the traces of the same death**" (Bede, on Luke 24:40).

Lastly, "**that in the Judgment-day He may upbraid them with their just condemnation**" (Bede, on Luke 24:40). Hence, as Augustine says (De Symbolo ii): "Christ knew why He kept the scars in His body. For, as He showed them to Thomas who would not believe except he handled and saw them, so will He show His wounds to His enemies, so that He who is the Truth may convict them, saying: Behold the man whom you crucified; see the wounds you inflicted; **recognize the side you pierced, since it was opened by you and for you, yet you would not enter.**"

Reply OBJ 1: The scars that remained in Christ's body belong neither to corruption nor defect, **but to the greater increase of glory, inasmuch as they are the trophies of His power; and a special comeliness will appear in the places scarred by the wounds.**

Reply OBJ 2: Although those openings of the wounds break the continuity of the tissue, still the greater beauty of glory compensates for all this, so that **the body is not less entire, but more perfected**. Thomas, however, not only saw, but handled the wounds, because as Pope Leo (App. Opp. August., Sermone 152) says: "**It sufficed for his personal faith for him to have seen what he saw; but it was on our behalf that he touched what he beheld.**"

Reply OBJ 3: Christ willed the scars of His wounds to remain on His body, not only to confirm the faith of His disciples, but for other reasons also. From these it seems that those scars will always remain on His body; because, as Augustine says (Ad Consent., De Resurrectione Carn.): "**I believe our Lord's body to be in heaven, such as it was when He ascended into heaven.**" And Gregory (Moralium xiv) says that "if aught could be changed in Christ's body after His Resurrection, contrary to Paul's truthful teaching, then the Lord after His Resurrection returned to death; and what fool would dare to say this, save he that denies the true resurrection of the flesh?" Accordingly, **it is evident that the scars which Christ showed on His body after His Resurrection, have never since been removed from His body.**

The fact that the loving oblation of the Immolated Lamb goes on for all eternity has been considered as **THE COVENANT OF MERCY: The CHIEF-SHEPHERD IS THE GREAT and ETERNAL HIGH PRIEST**⁴: **The Pierced Body of the Lamb and the Church** has been contemplated through the ages.

a. In the Glorious Body of Christ dwells the fullness of the Divinity [cf. Col 2:9] - the Place of the Eternal Covenant, as **He is the Eternal Pasch**. Through His Sacred Stigmata, this Body is completely opened and does not exist for itself - it is totally for God and for the Church with which it is identified. The Body of Christ is not something apart, along-side the Church which is His Body - the Lord God Creator Spirit has joined them in one flesh, and no one can separate what God has joined. Christ adheres to His fallen Spouse and they have become one flesh - it was for her, that He became incarnate. And He has brought her with Him into His Resurrection. **The Sacred Stigmata of the Glorified Spouse attests to this indissoluble union with His Spouse**, all dressed in the good deeds of the saints. Even in Glory, in **His Glorious Stigmata**, **He remains always Incarnate even in death**. In our lives and deaths, He remains one with His Spouse, whose life in Him will always mean death to self, for a life ever renewed in the Holy Spirit. In His pierced Body, He has been glorified - and

⁴ cf. Germain Lablond, "Tu sei sacerdote in eterno", in: *L'Agnello della Pasqua eterna*. Bologna: EDB 1990, pp. 55-71

thus accomplishes the New Covenant ever anew, ever young, always in act, from which bubbles forth the **New Creation**, the Church.

b. A series of corollaries flows from these truths:

- in the Body of the Glorified Christ, the Church dies to this world, destined for death - and to sin, and rises up to a new life of the Spirit;

- in the Body of the Immolated Lamb, the Church receives the fruit of His sacrifice, the Holy Communion between herself and God, in the Spirit of Divine Communion;

- in the Body of the Glorified Christ, i.e., in this body which shares fully in the Divine Filiation, the Church and in her, all human beings, is called to participate in His Divine Filiation in eschatological glory;

- in the Glorified Body of the Risen Christ, which has become a 'spiritual' body, all transfigured by the Holy Spirit and Font of the Spirit for all of humanity, the Church is continuously baptized in this same Spirit, since she is that same Body of Christ which is continuously inflamed by the Fire of the Holy Spirit of the Resurrection;

- in the Body of the glorified Christ, the **New Adam**, Head of the **New Humanity**, the Church, His Spouse, is called continuously to the **New Nuptials** with the Lamb in the bond of the Holy Spirit;

- in the Body of the glorified Christ, the New People of God does not cease coming to birth anew in the eternal Pasch, by this Pass Over that is always at work in human life and death. This becomes flesh indwelt by the Spirit, and passes over from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the Children of God.

c. All these spiritual riches which were the object of the Promise, come to the Church through **the Immolated Lamb, the Pierced Shepherd**. The Church is born through the Sacred Stigmata [cf. **LG 3; SC 5**], from the rib of the sleeping Adam - this is always the "Place" where the Church is born, the Source from which it is baptized continually in the Holy Spirit.

d. The Spouse is baptized permanently in His own Holy Spirit. The Spirit inflames Him in **the fire of the transfiguring Resurrection** and precisely **His Sacred Stigmata then become the Source from which the Blood and Water flow, the Perennial Springs of the Holy Spirit**. The Church, His Spouse, is one with Him, and she

receives the Living Water in Him, as it flows perennially from this inexhaustible Source. The Body of the Pierced Shepherd has become a vivifying Spirit, spiritual body, radiating the Holy Spirit in an eternal Transfiguration. He has the power of submitting to Himself the entire universe for the Father.

e. He possesses all this because, in the Divine Plan, **His Sacred Heart**, whose secrets of love and mercy would be eternally opened, is as a Tabernacle of the Most High, through the Sacred Stigmata preserved in His risen Body. **His mortal wounds now become the eternal source of life in the Heavenly Nuptials, to which all are invited.** Through the openings of the Sacred Stigmata, in the Risen Body of the Lord, heaven comes to earth, and earth rises up to heaven, through the **Holy Door** provided by the open wounds of Christ. Through the Glorious Stigmata heaven penetrates this earth, and the Holy Spirit transfigures all invited to pass through those portals to eternal bliss.

f. These openings provided by the Sacred Stigmata in the New Adam, are the Door to His Nuptial Chamber in which are celebrated the **New Espousals** between heaven and earth. The open side, the culmination of Jesus' *kenosis*, becomes the Place where the land of the deceased has become the repose of the living. Our death, our sins, have been overcome, swallowed up in His Victory. Those who persevere in faith, hope and love until the end, are the truly "**faithful**" [in their obedience of faith, and in the perseverance in their oblation], much beloved of God, by a love and mercy that remains always actual, the love transmitted from the Glorified Christ. Our world is refreshed, invigorated by the streams of salvation, flowing eternally from the Sacred Stigmata.

4. A Core reflection of Fr. Bertoni's Heart: In his own mysticism of helplessness associated with the wounds of life, Fr. Bertoni's hope never wavered in **the special grace** of the vocation - one that is not based on human resources, but ***is to be carried out with the grace of the Holy Spirit, for 'He Who has begun a good work in you will bring it to perfection'*** [Ph 1:6] [cf. CF # 185].

The deep trials that St. Gaspar experienced with his health and mission were not an interruption in his life of prayer – but, rather a means that brought to an ever greater sharing in Christ's death and resurrection. In all his times of darkness, St. Gaspar went on searching, seeking for the Lord in all things: ***seek God alone, for to see God in all things, this is a making of oneself superior to all human happenings***⁵ - ***reading today about the internal presence of God, i.e., that since God is within us, it***

⁵ cf. MP, July 30, 1808

***is not necessary to go outside to look for Him*⁶ - *God alone is to be sought, and nothing else: not consolations or satisfactions*⁷. This is the marked contrast: *...in the depths of one's own nothingness, God is found. Experiencing very sublime realities concerning God, there was a profound recognition of myself.*⁸**

In the mystical style of Fr. Gaspar, he often expresses himself in terms taken from his reflections on the Stigmata, and on God the Spouse of the soul, or, Christ the Spouse of the Church⁹:

4991: Regarding prayer, she feeds him having him meditate on the mysteries of His humanity; she feeds him making him meditate on His Passion; she brings him to the temple, making him meditate on the mysteries of the resurrection and the divinity, so that he can then preach with unction, etc.¹⁰

We should correspond also in action, progressing from virtue to virtue, [Ps 83:8], from the moral virtues to the religious, to the divine; and in prayer seeking to profit from the life of Christ, to His Passion and to His Resurrection. Accomplishing all this methodically, and not by fits and starts. All is based on the divine Scriptures, from which one derives precepts for action, and knowledge for prayer. All prayer, all scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.... [2 Tm 3:16, f.].

The mystical 'Night' assumes many forms – a kind of absence of the 'Omnipresent'; or silence of the Eternal Word; the 'darkness' of Christ's descent; the Psalmist's 'desert thirst' for the streams of Salvation [cf. Pss 22; 42; 63 – Is 12:1, ff.], for God; the biblical descriptions of Gethsemane or the Paschal Mystery in general. For St. Gaspar, his long and painful monotony of sacrifice led him ever more deeply into the mystery of the spirit of Holy Abandonment. The mystery of the Stigmata is

⁶ cf. MP, Oct. 13, 1808

⁷ cf. MP, Dec. 23, 1808.

⁸ cf. MP, Aug. 24, 1808.

⁹ Cf. Meditation 6

¹⁰ Translator's Note: St. Gaspar notes here the need to meditate on the Resurrection, in order to preach with more unction. In Fr. Bertoni's retreat for young priests [September 13-22, 1801], Fr. Bertoni developed both aspects of the Stigmata: *Imagine that you see Him with the scars of his wounds... inviting you, too, to heaven...Christ has entered new life with the scars of His wounds...* [cf. MssB ## 2632; 2635-2647, passim.] [cf. also the website: www.st-bertoni.com, under "Life & Spirituality", *STIMMATE INTEGRÉ*].

not only loved – and learned about – but needs to be experienced in the School of God. In describing his healing process as *wounded, but not dead*, Fr. Bertoni wrote to Mother Naudet:

... I am getting better rather slowly! Please pray, Reverend Mother, out of your charity, that I may derive some fruit from the school in which He has deigned to teach me, so that I might be disposed to serve Him...¹¹

Years later, St. Gaspar saw his own long ‘dark night’ as the privileged time in which to learn in **the School of God**:

... The works of God have their own trials, with which God shows his own hand in directing them and leading them to His purposes. He does this with the difficulties which He allows, by taking our cooperation away, that we might give space to His Providence. From this the way can be seen clearly that all depends on His conservation and granting success. When, therefore, it is night for us, it is the day-time for Him. He is the One Who knows what is to be done. And we ought to raise our hands toward heaven, when we do not know how to apply them, and thus it is better that we ask the outcome of God. ‘In the nights lift up your hands to the holly laces, and bless the Lord.’ [cf. Ps 133:2]. This is the Latin that God teaches to anyone who is in His School. ‘And the night shall be light as the day.’ [Ps 138:12] And this is a further Latin principle that our good Father has explained to us from the very beginning, drawing the light out of the darkness, and that He would like, out of His goodness, to clarify subsequently, as the darkness returns. It is in this that He leaves our works, for the admirable splendor of His glory. ‘Trust in the Lord’, therefore, ‘and do good!’ [Ps 36:3].¹²

Like so many mystics through the centuries, St. Gaspar was also fascinated by the wound in Christ’s side:

490: So dies the Just Man. In a most tormenting torture, condemned by a most unjust sentence, by the most perfidious betrayal. Thus, Jesus’ suffering ends. Here His enemies have ceased tormenting Him, but their cruelties have not yet terminated. **They insult Him even in death, they lash out against His dead body. With a lance, they open in His dead body a large wound on His right side.** The cruel iron penetrates right through to His

¹¹ cf. Letter 45, June 1, 1814, in *Epistolario*, p. 109.

¹² cf. Letter 157, May 22, 1929, in *Epistolario*, pp. 256, f.

heart, and the point comes out the other side. What cruelty! What barbarity! O supreme injury! Even worse than the torture itself! O, our love, Jesus! O, who would give to us that dead and bloody body, that we might make reparation with the just obsequies of our tears for the most atrocious injuries of those cruel men!

1308: This is the counsel of our apostle, and he proceeds: ... *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection...* [Rm 6:5]. With this word *planting*, there is implied also the eventual fruit that is expected in us and from us. Just as the Body of Christ buried in the ground, had for its fruit the salvation of the world - so we, too, planted anew in Penance, we have borne the fruit of justice, of adoption, of sanctification, and of numberless gifts. We will bear also later on the gift of the resurrection.

1312: To cite still another example, CORNELIUS a LAPIDE ^{13 i} relates the story of the Holy Count, Eleazar (Nu 26:63), immobile in his mountainous solitude, lived there a celibate life with his virgin wife, Delphina. She sent him letters to find out how he was getting along. He responded: I am healthy of body and safe. **If you wish to see me, look for me in the wound of the side of Christ. For it is here ⁱⁱ that I dwell; and here it will be easy to find me. You will search in vain in any other place.**

Do you see, my hearers, **the just idea of a person risen with Christ?** Could such a person even yearn for the lowly realities of this life? Could such a one seek for anything else in this life, other than the supernatural and heavenly goods, among which he will live eternally?

The long Spiritual Winter of sin gives way to the **New Spring-time** of grace.

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¹³ Col 3:3.

END NOTES:

ⁱ **Cornelius a Lapide** was an outstanding exegete of the 17th century. He was known for his wonderful ability of synthesizing the spiritual sense of the biblical passages, relying heavily on the early Fathers of the Church. He died in the year 1637.

ⁱⁱ When I translated this word from the Italian Fr. Bertoni's writings into English, I had a choice to make, and I chose to translate this word for **here** (instead of "there") with the understanding that St. Gaspar, spiritually, was already in the wound of Christ's side, near to His heart. I could translate this word for there – but, to me, that would mean that the wound in the side is still far from himself – and the persons to whom he was speaking. I think Fr. Bertoni meant 'here' – that he was already spiritually **in** the Sacred Stigmata of the Lord.

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