

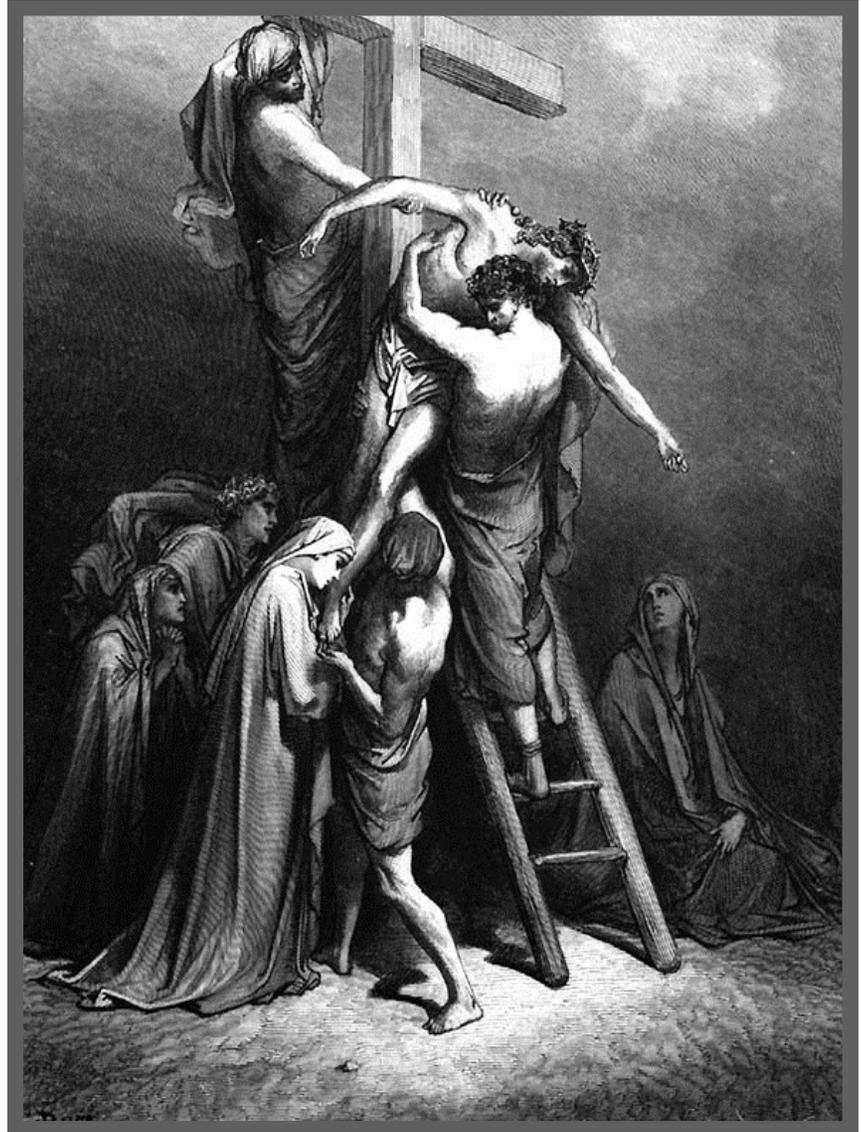
lacerated that it had become one great wound, and the whole of the upper part of the body was full of welts and cuts from the scourges. There was a small wound in the left breast where the point of Cassius's lance had come out, and in the right side was opened that great, wide wound made by the lance, which had pierced His heart through and through. Mary washed and purified all these wounds, while Magdalen, kneeling before her, frequently lent assistance, though for the most part she remained at Jesus' feet, bathing them for the last time, more with her tears than with water, and wiping them with her hair.

The head, the upper part of the body, and the feet of the Lord had now been cleansed from blood. The Sacred Body still lay in Mary's lap, bluish white, glistening like flesh drained of blood, with here and there brown stains of coagulated blood that looked like red moles, and red laces where the skin had been torn off. The Blessed Virgin covered the parts as they were washed, and began to embalm the wounds, commencing with those of the head. The holy women knelt by her in turn, presenting to her a box from which, with the forefinger and thumb of the right hand, she took out something like salve, or precious ointment, with which she filled and anointed all the wounds. She put some upon the hair also, and I saw her taking the hands of Jesus in her own left hand, reverently kissing them, and then filling the wide wounds made by the nails with the ointment, or sweet spices. The ears, nostrils, and wound of Jesus' side, she likewise filled with the same. Magdalen was busied principally with the feet of Jesus. She repeatedly wiped and anointed them, but only to bedew them again with her tears, and she often knelt long with her face pressed upon. ... When the Blessed Virgin had anointed all the wounds, she bound up the sacred head in linen, but the covering for the face, attached to that of the head, she did not as yet draw down. With a gentle pressure, she closed the half-broken eyes of Jesus, and kept her hand upon them for a little while. Then she closed the mouth, embraced the Sacred Body of her Son, and weeping bitter tears, allowed her face to rest upon His. Magdalen's reverence for Jesus did not permit her to approach her face to His.

Joseph and Nicodemus had already been standing awhile at some distance waiting, when John drew near the Blessed Virgin with the request that she would permit them to take the body of Jesus, that they might proceed in their preparations for the burial, as the Sabbath was near.



THE REMOVAL OF THE BODY OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS



THE REMOVAL OF THE BODY OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS

from the visions of Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich

Nicodemus and Joseph placed the ladders behind the cross and mounted, carrying with them a very long strip of linen, to which three broad straps were fastened. They bound the body of Jesus under the arms and knees to the trunk of the cross, and the arms they fastened in the same way at the wrists. Then by striking upon strong pegs fixed against the points of the nails at the back of the cross, they forced out the nails from Jesus' hands, which were not very much shaken by the blows. The nails fell easily out of the wounds, for they had been enlarged by the weight of the body which, supported now by means of the linen band, no longer rested upon them. The lower part of the body, which in death had sunk down on the knees, rested now in a sitting posture upon a linen band that was bound up around the hands on the arms of the cross. While Joseph was striking out the left nail and allowing the left arm to sink down gently on the body, Nicodemus was binding the right arm in the same way to the cross, also the thorn-crowned head which had fallen upon the right shoulder. The right nail was then forced out, and the arm allowed to sink into the band that supported the body. Abenadar the Centurion had meanwhile though with great effort, been driving out the enormous nail from the feet.

Cassius reverently picked up the nails as they fell out, and laid them down together by the Blessed Virgin. Next, removing the ladders to the front of the cross and close to the Sacred Body, they loosened the upper band from the trunk of the cross, and hung it on one of the hooks of the ladder. They did the same to the two other bands, which they hung on two of the lower hooks. Thus with the gently lowered band, the Sacred Body sank by degrees to where the Centurion Abenadar, mounted on portable steps, was waiting to receive it. He clasped the limbs below the knees in his arms and descended slowly, while Nicodemus and Joseph, holding the upper part in their arms, gently and cautiously, as if carrying a beloved and very severely wounded friend, came down the ladders step by step. In this way did that most sacred, that most terribly maltreated body of the Redeemer reach the ground.

This taking down of Jesus from the cross was inexpressibly touching. Everything was done with so much precaution, so much tenderness, as if fearing to cause the Lord pain. Those engaged in it were penetrated with all the love and reverence for the Sacred Body that they had felt for the Holy of Holies during His life. All were looking up with eyes riveted, and accompanying every movement with raising of hands, tears, and gestures of pain and grief. But no word was uttered. When the men engaged in the sacred task gave expression to their reverent emotion it was as if involuntary, as if they were performing some solemn function; and when necessary to communicate directions to one another, they did it in few words and a low tone. When the blows of the hammer by which the nails were driven out resounded, Mary and Magdalen, as well as all that had been present at the Crucifixion, were pierced with fresh grief, for the sound reminded them of that most cruel nailing of Jesus to the cross. They shuddered, as if expecting again to hear His piercing cries, and grieved anew over His death proclaimed by the silence of those

blessed lips. As soon as the Sacred Body was taken down, the men wrapped it in linen from the knees to the waist, and laid it on a sheet in His Mother's arms which, in anguish of heart and ardent longing, were stretched out to receive it.

The Blessed Virgin was seated upon a large cover spread upon the ground, her right knee raised a little, and her back supported by a kind of cushion made, perhaps, of mantles rolled together. There sat the poor Mother, exhausted by grief and fatigue, in the position best suited for rendering love's last, sad duties to the remains of the murdered Son. The men laid the Sacred Body on a sheet spread upon the Mother's lap. The adorable head of Jesus rested upon her slightly raised knee, and His body lay outstretched upon the sheet. Love and grief in equal degrees struggled in the breast of the Blessed Mother. She held in her arms the body of her beloved Son, whose long martyrdom she had been able to soothe by no loving ministrations; and at the same time she beheld the frightful maltreatment exercised upon it, she gazed upon its wounds now close under her eyes. She pressed her lips to His blood-stained cheeks, while Magdalen knelt with her face bowed upon His feet. ... The Blessed Virgin's courage and fortitude, in the midst of her inexpressible anguish, were unshaken. Her sorrow was not such as could cause her to permit the marks of outrage and torture to remain upon the Sacred Body, and so she immediately began earnestly and carefully to wash and purify it from every trace of ill-usage. With great care she opened the crown of thorns in the back and, with the assistance of others, removed it from Jesus' head. Some of the thorns had penetrated deeply, and that the removal of the crowns might not by disturbing them enlarge the wounds, they had first to be cut off. The crown was deposited near the nails. Then with a pair of round, yellow pincers, Mary drew from the wounds the long splinters and sharp thorns still sunken in the Lord's head, and showed them sadly to the compassionate friends standing around. The thorns were laid by the crown, though some of them may have been kept as tokens of remembrance. The face of the Lord was hardly recognizable, so greatly was it disfigured by blood and wounds. The torn hair of the head and beard was clotted with blood. Mary washed the head and face and soaked the dried blood from the hair with sponges. As the washing proceeded, the awful cruelties to which Jesus had been subjected became more apparent, and roused emotions of compassion, sorrow, and tenderness as she went from wound to wound. With a sponge and a little linen over the fingers of her right hand, she washed the blood from the wounds of the head, from the broken eyes, the nostrils, and the ears. With the little piece of linen on the forefinger, she purified the half-opened mouth, the tongue, the teeth, and the lips. She divided into three parts the little that remained of His hair. One part fell on either side of the head, and the third over the back. The front hair, after disengaging and cleansing it, she smoothed behind His ears. When the sacred head had been thoroughly cleansed, the Blessed Virgin kissed the cheeks and covered it. Her care was next directed to the neck, the shoulders, the breast, and the back of the Sacred Body, the arms and the torn hands filled with blood. Ah, then was the terrible condition to which it had been reduced displayed in all its horror! The bones of the breast, as well as all the nerves, were dislocated and strained and thereby become stiff and inflexible. The shoulder upon which Jesus had borne the heavy cross was so