

THE PASSION OF  
CHRIST  
THROUGH THE  
EYES OF MARY



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CHRIST  
THROUGH THE  
EYES OF MARY

SAINT ANSELM OF CANTERBURY  
AND OTHERS



COMPILED AND TRANSLATED BY  
FR. ROBERT NIXON, OSB

TAN Books  
Gastonia, North Carolina

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Translated by Fr. Robert Nixon, OSB

Cover design by Andrew Schmalen

Cover image credit: *Pieta*, 1876 (oil on canvas), Bouguereau, William-Adolphe (1825-1905), © Christie's Images / Bridgeman Images.

ISBN: 978-1-5051-2797-3

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-2798-0

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-2799-7

Published in the United States by

TAN Books

PO Box 269

Gastonia, NC 28053

[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)

Printed in the United States of America



*By the cross her station keeping,  
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
Close to Jesus till the last:  
Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
All His bitter torments bearing,  
Now at length the sword has passed.  
Mother! Holy font of love!  
Touch my spirit from above,  
Make my heart with thine accord:  
Make me feel as thou hast felt;  
Make my soul to burn and melt  
With the love of Christ my Lord.*

From *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*,  
attributed to Jacapone da Todi





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# TRANSLATOR'S NOTE



PRAYERFUL MEDITATION ON the blessed passion of Christ is a wonderfully inspiring and venerable devotional practice, one of the greatest treasures of our Catholic spirituality. In a sense, it is as ancient as Christianity itself, since the Gospels each portray the passion of Christ in vivid and moving ways. But in the High Middle Ages, from about the eleventh century onwards, there was a renewed and intense focus on the sufferings and death of Christ. This renewed focus on the human sufferings of Christ was both reflected in and developed by the passionate writings of saints like Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux. The Blessed Virgin Mary was, of course, central to this highly incarnational spirituality. It was she who stood faithfully by the cross, and it was she who, more than any other, shared the pains of her beloved Son and felt them as if they were her very own.

This volume presents English translations of three extremely significant medieval works, meditating on the passion of Christ through the eyes of His glorious Mother. The first is the *Dialogue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Anselm on the Passion of Our Lord*. This remarkable piece of devotional literature presents a touching colloquy between the Mother of God and Saint Anselm (1033–1109) in which the passion and death of Christ is described with great beauty and poignancy. This work is best appreciated as an example of “devotional creative writing” in which the author uses his imagination to paint a vivid image of the events surrounding Our Lord’s death. Naturally, a synthesis of the narratives of the various Gospel accounts are the basis of the dialogue, but other striking details are added as well to provide a more complete picture. Of course, whether these additional details are understood as elements of private revelation or simply devotional imagination, they should not be interpreted as making any claims to objective historicity. Rather, they serve to assist in prayer and meditation on these most awesome and heartrending events.

The second work is entitled the *Liber de Passione Christi* (*Book of the Passion of Christ*). Like Saint Anselm’s dialogue, it is also presented in the form of a colloquy with Mary on the passion of Jesus, but the interlocutor in this instance is Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). Indeed, the work is traditionally attributed to that great saint. For various

philological and stylistic reasons, this attribution seems unlikely, although it is by no means impossible. Regardless of the authorship, the work was an extremely popular and widely circulated devotional text throughout the second half of the Middle Ages, and many manuscript copies of it survive.

The third text is *Our Lady's Lament*. Unlike the other works included here, this tract was originally composed in Middle English. While the author cannot be determined with certainty, it is considered most likely to have been written by John Lydgate (1370–1451), an English Benedictine monk and poet. The version of it offered here translates the text into comprehensible Modern English, but a few easily understood verbal anachronisms have been deliberately retained for the sake of emulating the tone and character of the original.

Finally, the traditional method of praying the *Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary* is also included in the form of a translation of the booklet entitled *Corona dolorosa, seu modus pie meditando dolores praecipuos B. V. Mariae*,<sup>1</sup> published in 1738. This wonderful and highly efficacious method of praying the Rosary, which is especially associated with the Servite Order, involves meditation upon each of the traditional seven sorrows of Our Lady. It consists of the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sorrowful Crown, or a Method of Piously Meditating on the Principal Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

*Hail Mary* prayed in seven groups of seven, with the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of each group. Short aspirations or intentions are attached to each prayer. This most beautiful and touching form of the Marian Rosary has been officially approved by the Holy See, with Popes Benedict XIII, Clement XII, and Leo XIII each extending particular indulgences to those who pray it. Details of these are also included in the introductory notes to this Rosary.

The works collected here each offer profound and moving perspectives into the sufferings and death of Christ through the eyes of Mary. These sufferings should always be close to the heart of every Christian, as they are the highest and most noble expression of God's infinite love and mercy. In looking at Jesus through the eyes of His glorious Mother, we are looking at our Savior from the perspective of the one who was closer to Him than any other, who shared His pains and joys more intimately than any other, and who loved Him more passionately, more totally, and more faithfully than any other. Let us each strive to love Jesus in that manner, to gaze upon Him through the eyes of Mary, and to love Him with her most Immaculate Heart. *Ad Jesum per Mariam!*

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DIALOGUE OF THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
AND SAINT ANSELM ON  
THE PASSION OF OUR LORD







# INTRODUCTION



SAINT ANSELM HAD for a long time prayed earnestly to the glorious Virgin Mary that she would reveal to him the mysteries of her divine Son's suffering and death. His prayers were accompanied with ardent weeping and prolonged fasting.

At last, the Blessed Virgin appeared before the saint. She spoke to him the following words, "My beloved Son suffered such terrible things that no one could possibly describe them without a profuse outpouring of tears! Nevertheless, because I have now been glorified with all the glory of heaven and rejoice in the Lord's resurrection, I am no longer able to weep; all my former pain and bitter sorrow has been transformed into exultant and inexpressible joy! Therefore I myself shall speak to you of my Son's passion, narrating its events in due order."

Saint Anselm therefore proceeded to address questions to Mary, and she answered each one in turn. [The dialogue which ensued is recorded in the following pages.]

# THE BETRAYAL OF CHRIST AND HIS PRAYER IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE



*Anselm:* TELL ME, MOST beloved Lady, how did the events of the passion of your Son first begin?

*Mary:* When my Son and His disciples had arisen from the table at His last supper, the perfidious traitor Judas Iscariot went forth alone to see the high priests of the temple. He received from them the sum of thirty denarii of silver and, in exchange, promised to betray Christ into their hands.

*Anselm:* What type of denarii was it which he received from the priests?

*Mary:* They were the denarii of the Ishmaelites. In fact, they were the very same coins which the brothers of Joseph had received from the Ishmaelites when they sold him into

slavery<sup>1</sup> some two thousand years previously.<sup>2</sup> Through succession and inheritance, these same thirty silver denarii had passed into the hands of the temple treasury. Each of these silver coins was ten times the size and weight of a usual denarius.<sup>3</sup> Judas was so avaricious and filled with such a greed for earthly wealth that when he saw these coins, he immediately undertook to betray my Son to the temple priests. Indeed, Christ had foreseen this act of betrayal and had often spoken of it, but even this did not serve to deter Judas from his wicked purpose.

*Anselm:* My Lady, were you present at that last supper with your Son and His disciples?

*Mary:* No, I was not present when my Son partook of that last supper at which He washed the feet of His disciples and spoke to them loving words of encouragement. This was the great and holy supper in which He gave to them

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<sup>1</sup> The source of this curious detail is not clear. It perhaps reflects legends in circulation at the time.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin text has “4,000 years” here, but this is almost certainly a simple scribal error. Traditional datings based on Scripture place the selling of Joseph into slavery as occurring about 2,000 years before the time of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> The Latin text reads that each of the denarii “*valuit decem usuales*” (i.e., that each coin was of ten times the value of a usual coin). Yet since the value of coins in those days depended upon the actual amount of metal from which they were formed, the translation has been adjusted to reflect this. The source of this detail may again have been legends in circulation at the time.

His own Body and Blood through the sacramental signs of bread and wine. After this sacred meal, when Judas went to see the high priests to betray Jesus, Christ went on with His disciples to Mount Sion, passing through the gate by the Pool of Siloam. My Son then entered a garden. And while the disciples slept, He went forth to the foot of the Mount of Olives so that He was about a stone's throw from the sleeping disciples. And there, He poured out fervent prayers to His heavenly Father, saying:

“O Lord, hear my cry!

For thou art kind and full of compassion.

According to the abundance of thy mercy, look upon me now.

Turn not thy face from thy Child!

I am gravely afflicted; give ear to my supplications.

Look upon my soul, and free it from the tribulation and peril which surrounds it.

Rescue me, I implore thee, from the snares of my enemies;

Save me from the clutches of all those who seek to destroy my life!”<sup>4</sup>

*Anselm:* Most glorious Virgin, why was it that your Son—who was both Son of God and true God Himself—needed to pray at that time?

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<sup>4</sup> See Psalm 67:17–19.

*Mary:* Although He knew Himself to be the Son of God, still He needed to pray for three reasons: Firstly, He was of a delicate and refined constitution, as the child of an inviolate virgin, and born of royal blood. For it is a fact that those who are more noble suffer more deeply when they are harmed than those who are of coarse and common stock. Secondly, He experienced such an extremity of anguish that His sweat ran forth like great drops of blood. [Thirdly,] because, being God Himself, He knew perfectly in advance everything which He was to suffer and undergo. This included the contemptuous showering of Him with spittle, the blasphemies and insults of the soldiers and the crowds, the bloody scourging, the cruel crucifixion, and all the innumerable other torments He was to endure.

For a common thief may know that he has been sentenced to death, but he does not fully know in advance the exact nature of the pains of death which he shall experience until he is actually hanging from the noose by his neck. But my Son, being true God as well as true Man, knew what the future held so perfectly that He felt everything in advance. Accordingly, He prayed, “Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass me by! But let not my will, but Thine, be done.”<sup>5</sup> And when He had uttered this prayer, an angel appeared before Him and imbued Him with strength and courage, saying, “Be brave, my Lord, for now you are about to redeem the entire human race!”

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 26:39.