

## The Love of Jesus the Bridegroom

### Introduction

1. P. Francis: “*The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received*”
2. What do you see when you look at a Crucifix?
3. Do you see the *love of Jesus* which you have received?
4. In this talk, I’ll invite you to see the Crucifixion the way the apostle Paul saw it: as the consummation of the *wedding* between the Bridegroom God of Israel and his Bride
5. See both the *history* and the *mystery* of the Cross of Christ

### 1. The Divine Love Story

#### The Wedding at Mount Sinai

[Thus says the LORD:] “Therefore, behold, *I will allure her [Israel], and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her...* And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.” (Hosea 2:14, 15)

When I passed by you again and looked up on you; behold, you were at the age for love; and I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: *I pledged myself to you and entered into a covenant with you*, says the LORD God, and *you became mine*. (Ezekiel 16:8)

#### The Mystery of Israel’s Spiritual Adultery

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: “Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the LORD.” So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived bore him a son. (Hosea 1:2–3)

“Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, So have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel,” says the LORD.” (Jeremiah 3:20)

#### The New Covenant and the Forgiven Bride

“And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. *And I will make for you a covenant on that day... And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.*” (Hosea 2:15–20)

*For Your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name...* For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. (Isaiah 54:5–8)

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, *though I was their husband*, says the LORD... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31–32, 34)

## 2. What Was Roman Crucifixion Like?

### The Cruelty of Crucifixion

Jewish Historian Josephus: “the most wretched of deaths” (*War* 7.203).

Roman Jurist Paulus: “the most severe punishment” possible (*Sententiae* 5.21.3).

Many of the peaceful citizens were arrested and brought before Flaccus [the Roman consul], who had them *first scourged and then crucified*. (Josephus, *War* 2:306)

[He] had them scourged until their entrails were visible... The men [were then] dismissed, all covered in blood, a spectacle that struck such terror into his menacing foes that they dropped their arms and fled. (Josephus, *War* 2:612)

Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can *any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree*, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly weals on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? *He would have many excuses for dying before mounting the cross*. (Seneca, *Epistle* 101 to Lucilius)

### The Shame of Crucifixion

Cicero: refers the Roman cross as “the tree of shame” (Cicero, *Pro Rabiro* 16).

I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some *have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet*. (Seneca, *Dialogue* 6.20.3)

A Roman citizen of no obscure station, having ordered one of his slaves to be put to death, delivered him to his fellow-slaves to be led away, and *in order that his punishment might be witnessed by all*, directed them to drag him through the Forum and every other conspicuous part of the city as they whipped him... *The men ordered to lead the slave to his punishment, having stretched out both his arms and fastened them to a piece of wood which extended across his breast and shoulders as far as his wrists, followed him, tearing his naked body with whips*. (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities* 7.69.2)

### The Mass Crucifixion of Jews

When they [the Jewish fighters] were going to be taken (by the Romans), they were forced to defend themselves, and after they had fought they thought it too late to make any supplications for mercy: so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died and were then crucified before the wall of the city. Titus felt pity for them, but as their number—given as up to *five hundred a day*—was too great for him to risk either letting them go or putting them under guard, he allowed his soldiers to have their way, especially as he hoped that the gruesome sight of the countless crosses might have moved the besieged to surrender. ‘*So the soldiers, out of the rage and hatred they bore the prisoners, nailed those they caught in different postures to the crosses, by way of jest, and their number was so great that there was not enough room for the crosses and not enough crosses for the bodies.*’ (Josephus, *War* 5:449-51)

### 3. The Passion the Bridegroom

#### **The Riddle of John the Baptist**

[John answered:] “You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Messiah (Gk *Christos*), but I have been sent before him. *He who has the bride is the bridegroom....*” (John 3:28–30)

#### **Jesus’ Death is His Wedding Day**

People came and said to him, “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” And Jesus said to them, “*Can the sons of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.*” (Mark 2:18–20).

#### **The Last Supper is Jesus’ Wedding Banquet**

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is *my blood of the [new] covenant*, which is poured out for many *for the forgiveness of sins.*” (Matthew 26:27-28)

#### **The Crowning with Thorns**

Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. *And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple robe;* they came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. (John 19:1-2)

#### **The Jewish Bridegroom is Wears a Crown on His Wedding Day**

Behold King Solomon, with *the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding*, on the day of the gladness of his heart. (Song of Solomon 3:11)

During the war of Vespasian [before A.D. 70], they forbade *the crowns of the bridegrooms* and the [wedding] drum. (Mishnah, Sotah 9:14)

#### **The Seamless Garment of Jesus**

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. *But the tunic (Greek chiton) was without seam, woven from top to bottom;* so they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.” (John 19:23-24; cf. Exod 28:31-32; Lev 16:4; 21:10; Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.161)

#### **The Jewish Bridegroom is Dressed Like a Priest**

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD... for he has clothed me in the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as *a bridegroom decks himself as a priest* (Hebrew *kohen*)... (Dead Sea Scroll 1QIsaiah<sup>a</sup> 61:10)

Jerusalem said, I will greatly rejoice in the Word of the LORD... for he has clothed me with garments of salvation, he has wrapped me with a robe of virtue, *as the bridegroom who prospers in his bride-chamber, and as the high priest who is prepared in his garments...* (Targum Isaiah 61:10)

### **The Piercing of the Side of Jesus**

Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst." A bowl full of common wine stood there; so they put a sponge full of the wine on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "*It is finished*"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit... [I]n order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath... the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away... When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. *But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.* He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe. (John 19:25-35)

### **The Creation of Eve from the Side of Adam**

*So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs ("sides," Hebrew *tzela*) and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib ("side", Hebrew *tzela*) which the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.* Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

### **The Apostle Paul and the "Great Mystery" of Christ and His Bride**

Husbands, love your wives, *as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...* "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is *a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.* (Ephesians 5:25, 31-32)

## **4. Conclusion**

### **Pope John Paul II and the Eucharist of the Bridegroom**

The very heart of the Paschal Mystery, which completely reveals the spousal love of God. Christ is the Bridegroom because "he has given himself": his body has been "given", his blood has been "poured out"... *The "sincere gift" contained in the Sacrifice of the Cross gives definitive prominence to the spousal meaning of God's love.* As the Redeemer of the world, Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of our Redemption. *It is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.* (John Paul II, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, no. 26)

### **Pope Francis on the Love of Christ as the Motive of Evangelization**

*The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him.* What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence... How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! ...What then happens is that "we speak of what we have seen and heard" (1 Jn 1:3). *The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love...* If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium*, no 264)