

## *Wounded for Our Transgressions: His Head*

### **In Nomine Iesu**

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#### **St. John 19:1-6a**

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged Him. And the soldiers twisted together 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. Pilate went out again and said to them, “See, I am bringing Him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the Man!” When the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” (ESV)

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O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession and, though innocent, were mocked, crowned with thorns, and sentenced to die for our sakes, we humbly ask You, enable us in true faith to appropriate to ourselves Your holy merit, to endure enmity and reproach with a meek and gracious spirit, to confess Your holy name before all people, and to find both here and hereafter rest and peace in You, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 109)

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In Christ Jesus, whose sacred head was wounded and crowned with thorns, so we would receive healing and the crown of life, dear fellow redeemed:

The night before He was brought to Pontius Pilate, Jesus prayed by Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was in agony. He knew what was coming—suffering for the sins of the whole world. He prayed so earnestly that beads of sweat appeared on his face. The evangelist Luke tells us this sweat was mingled with blood after blood vessels under His skin burst because of His intense anguish (22:44). This would have caused the skin on His face to be swollen and more sensitive to pain.

Shortly after this, Judas Iscariot and a small army arrived in the Garden. Judas went over to Jesus and kissed Him, the sign of his betrayal. Then Jesus was taken to the high priest where He was accused and found guilty in a sham trial conducted in the middle of the night. Once Jesus had been condemned, the temple guards began to spit in His face, punch Him, and slap Him. They put a blindfold over His eyes and said, “*Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?*” (Mat. 26:68).

By the time Jesus came before Pilate early Friday morning, His face was bruised and bloody. Perhaps He could barely see through swollen eye sockets. He looked pitiful. Pilate believed Jesus was innocent, but he never asked why an innocent man had been beaten. As the pressure intensified to have Jesus killed, Pilate thought that he might be able to garner sympathy for Jesus by having Him scourged.

This caused severe wounds on Jesus' back, but the Roman soldiers did not stop there. As we heard in our text, they weaved together a crown of thorns and pressed it into His skull. Then they also spit on Him and struck Him on the head, driving the thorns deeper.

All of this was very painful for Jesus, but none of it was a surprise. Jesus told His disciples beforehand that all these things would take place: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem,"* He said, *"and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him"* (Mar. 10:33-34).

The evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke all report that Jesus was spit upon. The author of the book we are reading for our Monday Book Study says he asks the members of his Bible Classes *"if they would prefer to be punched in the face or spit upon by an enemy"* (*Has American Christianity Failed?* p. 86). Being punched is physical suffering. Being spit upon is to suffer shame. Jesus suffered in both of these ways at the hands of the Jews and the Romans.

But the shame Jesus suffered was not for anything He had done. He had no reason to hang His thorn-encircled, blood-stained head. He suffered for the sins of Adam and for the sins of Adam's descendants. When Adam fell into sin, the LORD said to him, *"cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you"* (Gen. 3:17-18). Now those thorns that Adam's sin brought forth were used by his descendants to torture Jesus. Adam and his heirs—including you and me—committed the sins, but Jesus took the punishment.

Jesus did not deserve any of this. In the hymn we will sing in a few minutes, *"O Sacred Head, Now Wounded,"* the hymnwriter says, *"What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered / Was all for sinners' gain: / Mine, mine was the transgression, / But Thine the deadly pain: / Lo, here I fall, my Savior! / 'Tis I deserve Thy place; / Look on me with Thy favor, / Vouchsafe to me Thy grace"* (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #335, v. 4).

And Jesus does look on you with favor. Even those swollen eyes on Good Friday were full of compassion for you. He endured the spitting, the slapping, and the striking for you. He endured all of that to save you from an eternity of this kind of suffering in hell. You and I deserved to feel that pain and shame for our sins. Our head is the source of many of our sins—using our eyesight for evil, listening to gossip, speaking harmful words, thinking wicked thoughts. Jesus willingly absorbed the punishment for those sins, so that we would be freed of all of them, forgiven of every wrong.

The Lord predicted this exact suffering in our place through the prophet Isaiah. *"I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near"* (Isa. 50:6-8). Jesus knew the suffering and anguish that He would have to endure for sinners. But He also saw through to its conclusion. He knew He would rise again in victory after His suffering and death.

So He *"set His face like a flint,"* toward the cross, and no devilish blow was able to turn Him away. He went *"uncomplaining forth"* (ELH #331), the Lamb of God silently suffering for the

sins of the world. The apostle Peter wrote that *“He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly”* (1Pe. 2:22-23).

Jesus truly was *“the King of the Jews.”* He was the King of the whole world! The thorns were not a fitting crown for Him. But He wore them willingly, so that we, one day, would receive the blessed crown of eternal life. Thanks be to God. *Amen.*

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