

The Nails which held our Saviour

John 19:16-18

Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away. ¹⁷ And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, ¹⁸ where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center.

On the day that Jesus was crucified, his flesh was pierced many times: By the crown of thorns, by the scourge, but most of all, by the nails. Cross and nails went hand-in-hand to make a crucifixion. The nails created the chief wounds of a crucifixion. The nails caused the loss of blood and much of the pain. The nails violated the flesh of a crucified man. Curiously, not once in any of the accounts of the Crucifixion in Scripture are the nails which pierced Jesus' hands and feet mentioned. Only in John 20, when Thomas is speaking, does the word "nail" appear in the entire New Testament. "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." One hardly need mention the nails, for without them Jesus could not be crucified. Without them, Jesus could not say, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself." The scars of those nails remained in the body of Jesus after He had risen, not by chance, but by choice. In His glory, he could easily wipe them away, yet He retained them so that they would remain an eternal testimony to the day when the nails pierced His flesh, and our sins and His own love fastened Him to the cross.

When our Lord was pierced, the nails were unnatural, and undeserved intruders. It is true, that today, we are used to seeing the human body pierced by various objects, but what is that compared to the intrusion upon the flesh of Jesus? We think of them as nails, but these were not the slender nails which we use in our construction projects. Such would pull right through the flesh of a man. These were large spikes meant to hold the weight of the body in place against the wood. It was an offense to the body to violate it in this way, but that was part of the shame of a crucified man, not only to suffer pain, but to pierce and destroy his flesh in a shameful public display. Such was the punishment deserved for the worst criminals, yet our Lord was guilty of no crime. Before the human justice system, this intrusion into His flesh was entirely undeserved, for the Governor had said of Jesus, "I find no fault in Him at all."

The nails were as our sin, the sin of the whole world. There was an intrusion upon the perfect body and soul of the Son of God indeed. In His own body, and upon His soul, He was pierced through with the collected iniquity of the entire

human race. It was unnatural that such a thing happen to Jesus, who was pure and holy. It was entirely undeserved that of all the creatures under heaven, the Lord would lay upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. Unnatural and undeserved, both the nails in His flesh, and our sins upon His soul.

The world can plainly see the nails which fastened Jesus to the Cross, but that is all they world can see, for their vision is clouded. The soldiers who carried out the crucifixion did not know that in the body of this Man, lay all the glory of God. To them, He was but the latest in a series of criminals who would meet their end on the hill Golgotha. Some who stood nearby had no such excuse. Peter, James, and John had seen that glory upon the mountain, before Jesus was crucified. Did they remember it now, that He was hanging upon a cross? He had only recently spoken with Moses and Elijah. The Father in heaven had declared His pleasure in Jesus with an audible voice. Now, this same Jesus endured the taunts of the crowd, and even of the criminals who were on his right and left: "If you really are the Son of God, come down from that cross." It was reasonable to believe that if Jesus truly was God's Son, then He would not be hanging upon a cross.

No nails could ever hold Him who is the almighty God. He Himself fashioned the element of wood and iron to which He now submitted His flesh. It never entered the minds of the crowd, nor even of Jesus' own disciples, that He would willingly choose such a fate. After His resurrection, when He appeared to the disciples traveling to Emmaus, they even observed, "We were *hoping* that it was He who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Even the reports of His resurrection made no impression upon them. They had seen Him be crucified. They had seen Jesus pierced, bloodied, die, and be buried. How then could He be the Son of God, despite all that had happened?

If the nails did not have the power to hold the Son of God, what then held Him there? First it was our sins, for unless our sins were laid upon Him, this piercing of His flesh, this humiliating display, served no purpose. The nails were the punishment of great sinners, and therefore the nails bore witness to the sin which Jesus bore. All who looked upon Him could see that He was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, but they could not see that He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities.

Even this cannot fully explain what held Jesus there. Could the sins of the world be forced upon the Son of God? Could He be compelled, against His will, dragged kicking and screaming, forced to submit to the nails and the cross, when He had all power in heaven and earth? By no means. Therefore it was not just our sins which held Jesus there, but His own love which nailed Him to the cross.

His love, not love for life itself, not love for the human race in general, but for every individual sinner, for you and for

me, so moved Him to endure the piercing of His body with nails, and of His soul with our sins. There, in His flesh, was the reward which we must bear if He did not. His loved ones, each one of us, must suffer and die as He died. But because we are not the almighty and infinite God, we must suffer for eternity, if the eternal almighty Son of God, does not suffer in our place for a little while. There was no other way but this, that we could be saved. If there is any doubt whatsoever that God loves sinners, there in the pierced hands and feet of Jesus is the proof.

And they are proof of more than this. Those hands and feet still bear the scars of His suffering. Forever, His hands and feet bear witness of the nails, the nails which caused the shedding of that blood so precious that it could cleanse us from all sin. When Jesus was risen, He showed His scarred hands to Thomas. "Look, my hands. Reach forward your fingers and touch them. Be not faithless, but believing." When He appeared upon the shore to the disciples who had spent the night fishing, He showed them His hands and His feet, that they might know, without doubt, that the same Jesus who died for the sins of the world, had finished our Salvation, and had risen from the dead. Those same wounds are still our comfort and consolation.

When we doubt the love of our God, when we feel that He is no longer gracious to us, and that the love which He once demonstrated during His crucifixion has ceased, remember the nails which pierced His hands and feet, and think again upon the wounds of Jesus. He could heal those scars. He could erase forever the memory of that day. He could forget us and never look back upon the race which callously crucified the Son of God. Instead He bears the scars, so that we can continue to hide in His wounds, and know that He never leaves or forsakes those whom He has dearly purchased with His blood.

Isaiah foretold that some day no one will doubt the wounds of Jesus, nor forget their part in His crucifixion, for Jesus will appear before all men, and all who pierced Him will look upon Him, and His wounds will be their dread. All doubt will be wiped away, but it will be replaced with the same certainty that the devils share, that here is the almighty God who is the rightful and just judge of all men. Here is the God whose mercy and grace they spurned and rejected.

Rather, let the wounds of Jesus be our comfort and consolation. Look upon the love of God, graven in the palm of His hands. We see His suffering and death In His Word and know that our sins pierced Him, for He wished them to. He gives us the blood, shed by those nails, in His Sacrament, that we might drink and believe the blood which was given and shed for you and for me. Those nails are His love. Let us ever find peace and rest in the nail-formed wounds of Jesus. Amen.