St. Anthony Mary Claret

THE DOVE

La paloma

From the Spanish of the first edition (Barcelona, 1848)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Translated from *Resumen de los principales documentos que necesitan las almas que aspiran a la perfección, escrito bajo el símbolo de una paloma* (Barcelona: Pla, 1848). The translation is complete; the short morning and night exercise added in the edition of 1859 is not included.

The notes give the references to Claret's sources and the notes he printed himself; the modern editors' commentary and the translator's own remarks are not reproduced.

Explanation of the Dove

The Dove

The soul that aspires to perfection is called several times in Holy Scripture by the name of dove: *Aperi mihi, columba mea*, "Open to me, my dove."[1]

I too shall call her a dove, and by the likeness of this bird I shall explain what the Christian soul that wishes to attain perfection must strive for and do. For better understanding I have put numbers on the figure of the dove, and these I am going to explain.

Number 1: The Eye of God

The triangle with the eye in the centre, which is above, but to one side of and facing the dove, represents God, one and three, who sees everything, and whom the soul desirous of perfection must always keep before her. From this always looking at God she will draw two great benefits. The first, that she will not sin, as holy Job felt when, enlightened by the Lord, he addressed these words to him: *Set me near you, or in your presence, and placed thus, let anyone at all come against me, for I do not fear him*;[2] and so chaste Joseph and chaste Susanna experienced it, who, thinking that God was watching them, did not sin.[3] And the second, that she will make great progress in perfection, as God himself taught the patriarch Abraham when he said to him: *Walk in my presence and be perfect*.[4] Let her, then, strive for this with all earnestness, and to this end let her exercise herself in the following practices.

Practice 1. She will say often to herself, especially when beginning anything: Mind, God is watching you; and though you do not see him, he sees you.

2. To help herself in this so important exercise, she will consider herself within the immensity of God as the bird is within the air or the fish in the water, according to that saying of the Apostle, that in God we live and move and have our being.[5]

3. To be there with more love and joy, she will imagine that she is in God's presence as a lover in the presence of the beloved, or as a soldier in that of his prince, who is watching how manfully he fights.

Number 2: The Heart

In this number is the heart, which is what God most wants and what he asks of us all, saying to us in the book of Proverbs: *My son, give me your heart.*[6]

And although the human heart is wholly God's, because he created and redeemed it, yet he wishes to possess it by our free gift, and to this end he has given us free will, and with it a means of showing him the gratitude and love we owe him. And surely he would incur the ugliest mark of ingratitude who did not hand over to him this so little heart with all its affections, since God is so good that he deigns to ask it of us.

In the heart there are two movements: one called systole and the other diastole. The systole is the one by which it sends the blood through the whole body, and it signifies the activity of the perfect soul. All that she does, says and thinks she directs to the greater glory of God and the good of her neighbours, whom she looks

on and loves as members of one same body whose head is Christ; and she makes them all sharers in her bodily and spiritual alms, or good works, as the heart does with all the members of the body, without leaving out a single one, however small and lowly it may seem, to which it does not impart its influence. The other, called diastole, is the one by which it gathers back the blood that has circulated through the body and all its members. This movement signifies not only the resignation and conformity of the perfect soul with the will of God in contrary things, but also the patience with which she bears the ingratitude, annoyances and persecutions of her neighbours, the members of the mystical Body.

Practice 1. When she begins a work, and sometimes while it lasts, she may say: Lord, I do this for you; I do it for my neighbour, because you so will it.

2. In adverse things she will say: Be it for the love of God. You suffered more for me, my Jesus.

3. To encourage herself the more to suffer with patience, she will cast a glance at hell, and, seeing the torments suffered there, will reflect what a favour God does her in exchanging them for the light and passing ones of this world.[7]

Numbers 3 and 4: The Eyes

In these numbers are the eyes. As the holy Gospel tells us and the commentators explain to us, the right eye signifies right intention; the left, human respect; and the two together, the examination of conscience.

The soul that loves perfection must do as the hunter does, who, on finding the game, aims and fires with only the right eye open and the left one shut; after the shot he looks with both eyes, and if he sees that he has aimed the shot well, he is glad and picks up the game; but if it has gone badly, he is sorry and works out where he went wrong, so as to correct the error. The same must a soul desirous of perfection do. When something to be done presents itself, she goes at it with the right eye open, that is, with an upright intention of doing it for the glory of God and the good of souls, keeping the left eye of human respect firmly shut. As soon as she has acted, she opens both eyes of the soul, examining how that action went. If it went well, she gives thanks to God and rejoices in the Lord for what she has done and merited; and if she finds it went badly, she repents and amends.

Practice 1. Let her try to do everything she does for the glory of God and the good of souls.

2. She will do nothing, and leave nothing undone, out of human respect.

3. After all her works she will make a brief examination, especially at midday and at night.[8]

Number 5: The Wings

The wings signify prayer and silence. Birds cannot fly without wings, and neither can souls fly to perfection and union with God without these two wings of prayer and silence. The longer the wings birds have, the more they fly and the more swiftly they make their way; so too souls: the longer their prayer and silence, the more they will advance in perfection, and the more swiftly they will attain it.

Practices. Prayer will be mental, vocal and by ejaculations, and therefore she will make:

1. Mental prayer, at least one hour every day.

2. Vocal prayer: the rosary of the Most Holy Virgin, the visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament, with the morning offering and the night thanksgiving, and besides that whatever she is bound to pray by obligation.

3. The ejaculations she will make by day and by night, very often.

Number 6: The Left Wing, Silence

In this number is the left wing, and it signifies silence. The soul that loves perfection is like a bottle into which a good liqueur is put; it must be well corked if the liqueur is to keep. For if it is left open, the liqueur evaporates, and flies and gnats fall in and spoil it, so that it can no longer be drunk but rather turns the stomach. So it happens to a devout soul. While silence, like a spiritual cork, closes her interior, the most precious liqueur of perfection is kept without evaporating; but as soon as lack of silence leaves her as it were open, not only does her spirit evaporate, but she also fills with imperfections and faults, which, like flies and gnats fallen into a liqueur, disgust and turn the stomach of God himself, and in the end he would come to vomit her out, as he threatens through St. John in the book of the Apocalypse.[9] Therefore: silence, silence, silence. And let the soul take good note that this silence urged on her is not only of the tongue, but still more the inner silence of the spirit, of the imagination and of the heart.

Practice 1. Never to say evil or idle words; not to lie or speak ill of others.

2. Not to talk of worldly news, nor of business interests, honours, meals, clothes, good looks, etc. If at some time it should be unavoidable, let it be only when duty requires it and as far as it requires it.

3. Not to speak except of God or for God.

Number 7: The Right Foot, Humility

In this number are the feet. The dove soars with her wings and walks with her feet; so must the perfect soul do. With the wings of prayer and silence she must soar to the contemplation of heavenly truths, and with the feet of humility and mortification she must tread and walk on the things of this world without sinning or soiling herself, as the dove does.

The right foot signifies humility. In the dove's foot there are four toes, of which one looks backward and three forward. The four toes signify the four degrees of humility. The toe that looks backward signifies forgetfulness of past things, which can bring on thoughts of vanity and pride; the three that look forward signify that she must humble herself in thought, word and deed, or from the heart.

Practice 1. To put away promptly thoughts of pride and vanity.

2. Never to speak of herself, either in good or in bad; not to listen with pleasure to her own praises, and to refer them to God alone, to whom all honour and glory are due; when, in spite of herself, she has to hear them, to change the conversation if she can; to bear with patience and gladness insults, jokes and mockery; never to complain of anyone, nor of anything that happens to her or that is done to her, however unjust.

3. Never to do anything so that she may be thought good, wise, prudent, brave, etc., but solely for the glory of God and the good of souls.

Number 8: The Left Foot, Mortification

The left foot signifies mortification. The toe that looks backward signifies forgetfulness of the injuries she has received from her neighbour, so that all the evil they have said and done against her she regards as though it had been a dream. The other three toes, which look forward, signify the things that trouble us, and these are divided into three classes. Those of the first are the ones considered to be disposed or permitted by God, such as dryness of spirit, poverty, cold, heat, winds, rains, etc. Those of the second class are the ones that come from men and animals, such as persecutions, slanders, thefts, ill treatment, stings, kicks, etc. And finally, those of the third class are the ones that come from herself, such as illnesses, faults, weaknesses, forgetfulness, distractions, etc.

Another kind of mortification, and no less important, we may find in the same left foot. The toe that looks backward may signify that she must always mortify herself and do penance for past sins and the traces that remain of them; and the three that look forward teach her that she must mortify the bodily senses, the

passions of the soul, chiefly the dominant one, and the powers of the spirit, which are the memory, and with it the imagination, the understanding and the will.

Practice 1. Never to complain of anything at all, in food, drink, clothing, lodging, heat, cold, rains, winds, etc.

2. To take everything with patience and joy, giving thanks to God because he thus deigns to offer her the cup of his sufferings.

3. With the approval of her director, and not without it, to perform some acts of mortification, such as hair shirts, disciplines, fasts, etc.

Number 9: The Tail, the Thought of Death

The tail signifies the thought of death. To turn away from evil and spur oneself to good, the strongest incentive is the thought of death, so much so that this thought has converted a great many, for example St. Margaret of Cortona, and has been of the greatest help toward perfection to countless others, such as St. Bruno, St. Francis Borgia, etc. The thought of death is like the rudder in a ship. By means of the rudder the ship is steered away from the reefs and directed to port; in the same way the thought of death, which is the last thing in a man's life, steers him away from the reefs of sin and the shipwreck of hell, and brings him to the port of salvation.

The tail is to birds what the rudder is to ships. Thus, even if the dove could fly without her tail, it would at least be impossible for her to turn back at the sight of the hawk, and to wheel as she does, so nimbly and gracefully, within sight of her dovecote. The same will the soul experience without this tail of the thought of death: she will not be able to turn back from the devil, the hawk of hell; she will not know how to wheel about, that is, to visit the holy temple by frequenting the holy sacraments; nor will she exercise herself in works of piety and Christian charity. But if she occupies herself with the thought of death, she will exercise herself in works that are pleasing to that supreme Judge to whom she knows she must render a most exact account after her death; and besides, thinking of death, she will be more detached from the things of this world, and consequently more ready to relieve the miseries of her fellow men and quicker to fly to the contemplation of heavenly things.

Practice 1. To think that she must infallibly die: the sentence is already passed, though she does not know the day, the hour or the moment of its execution. Perhaps it will be today!

2. To think that at every instant she is dying, that life is like an hourglass, like a candle burning. To think that our body is already a tomb of the dead, since it eats nothing but dead things, and dead things are what clothe it.

3. On going to bed, to think that sleep is a figure of death, and to say to herself: Who knows whether you are going to fall asleep in time and wake in eternity?

Simple and Easy Method of Particular Examination of Conscience

Note

Another of the best means of correcting one's defects and acquiring the virtues is the particular examination of conscience. It is called particular because its object is to correct one particular vice and to gain the virtue opposed to it.

The said examination is practised in the following way. On rising in the morning, one resolves to refrain until midday from the defect one wishes to correct, by making a certain number of acts of the opposite virtue.

At midday one examines whether one has behaved in keeping with the resolution; and if so, one gives thanks to God and to his most holy Mother, asking them for the grace to continue until night, and praying an Our Father and a Hail Mary.

If one has failed, one will pray a Hail Mary for each fault, resolve to amend, and proceed thereafter in everything with caution.

At nightfall one examines oneself again in the same way as at midday, noting that the acts of virtue are to be increased in proportion as one advances in perfection.

Since humility is the foundation of the other moral virtues, one will begin with it,[1] and proceed acquiring, resolving and overcoming from one point to another.

Points of the Particular Examination on Humility

1. I will say no word that can redound to my own praise.

2. I will not listen with delight to the praises bestowed on me.

I will say inwardly: *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam*, "Not to me, but to you, O Lord, be all glory given."[2]

I will change the conversation, so as to avoid the reef of vanity.

I will humble myself inwardly and reflect within myself on the defects into which I fell in doing such a work: defects which, though I do not notice them, God notices, who is to judge them.

I will think that, if there is anything good in me, it is from God; that I am a donkey loaded with jewels;[3] and that, without God's special grace, I am what eyes are without light and the body without the soul.

I will think my wretchedness so great that, if it may be said, even God's grace is spoiled in me, in the same way as water is spoiled that runs through salt pans, and air is corrupted that passes through filthy places. Ah, if God granted another the graces he has given me, how much better he would behave! How many more works, and better ones, than I would he not do!

When someone praises me, I will pity him, seeing how much he is deceived; and instead of taking pleasure in it, I will be afraid.

If they told me I was a king or a great emperor, or that I was the supreme pontiff, I would not believe it; rather, I would be filled with confusion at seeing titles attributed to me that I neither possess nor deserve. I will do the same with the praises they give me.

3. I will do nothing with the aim of being praised, for I would be a thief of God's glory,[4] as a servant would be a thief of his master if he took for himself the goods the master had entrusted to him.

All that I do will be for the greater glory of God; not as one who serves men, but as one who serves God.

And to do it more perfectly, I will think that I am always in the presence of the supreme King.

4. When they reprove and correct me, I will keep silent and amend as best I know how, giving thanks for the warning.

I will not have recourse to excuses, since excusing oneself before the charges are made is a clear sign of pride.

I will not lay the blame on others, however guilty they may be; and if they lay it on me, I will shoulder it and say nothing.

5. I will put away swiftly thoughts of pride and vanity, just as if they were thoughts of impurity, shaking them off as quickly as if they were sparks of fire.

6. I will regard everyone as my superior; therefore I will always speak to all in a submissive and humble voice, for speaking loudly is a sign of arrogance and pride.

7. I will consider myself more wicked than thieves, murderers, harlots and devils; for although by the divine mercy I am not guilty of the crimes they are, this is not for lack of malice in me, but because God has granted me the help of his holy grace. Ah, if God had left me for a single instant, how much worse than they I would be! And if God had granted them the graces he has given me, how much better than I they would have been!

I will think that, however holy and wise a man may be, he is, in the order of grace, as wretched and weak as, in the order of nature, the cripple who cannot walk without crutches, and the babe at the breast, who neither stands nor walks except in so far as his mother holds him up, but falls to the ground as soon as she lets go of his hand. And so as not to doubt it, I will recall the fall of Lucifer, of Adam, of David, Solomon, St. Peter, Origen, etc.

8. I will accept every opportunity that offers itself for humbling myself, whether in word or deed. I will think that, just as rubbish does not complain of being trodden on and thrown in a filthy place, neither should I complain, being worse than it, since it is free of sin and I am not.

9. I will bear everything that humbles: first, with patience; second, with what joy I can; and third, with desire for things still more humbling.

10. I will not only be ready to accept humbling things, but I will seek them; and therefore, first, I will dress humbly; second, I will eat the poorer dishes, without ever complaining whether they are tasteless, salty, cold or hot, etc.; third, I will choose the last places; fourth, I will exercise myself in the lowest and humblest tasks.

To give greater impulse and increase to this virtue, I will try to know myself, considering to this end:

What am I as to the body?

I am a bilge of filth; the senses are like sewers that cast out nothing but dirt; I am subject to every illness and to death, which I cannot cheat: I shall become fetid and loathsome; I shall be food for worms and shall turn to earth, dust, nothing. How different I am from the trees and plants, which give oil, wine, fragrance, while I give only filth and stench!

What am I as to the soul?

Conceived in sin, ungrateful for God's benefits, unfaithful to my promises, inconstant in virtue, inclined and quick to evil and slothful for good. I do not know whether I am worthy of the Lord's love or hatred.[5] I know that I have sinned, and I do not know whether I am forgiven. I know that I am placed between two eternities, one of glory and the other of pains and torments, and I do not know which of the two will fall to my lot. But I know that God gives grace to the humble and saves them, and that he abandons, confounds and condemns the proud,[6] and consequently that I must humble myself if I wish to be saved.

During the day, by way of a chaplet, some of these ejaculations will be said:

1. You see, Lord, that I am dust and ashes;[7] have mercy on me, therefore.[8]

2. Have pity, Lord, and show mercy to this unhappy sinner.[9]

When an occasion presents itself of doing something humbling or of suffering some abasement, one will say:

1. Jesus and Mary, I keep silent and do this to imitate you in humility.

2. I accept, Lord, this pain and offer it to you in remission of my faults and sins.

Particular Examination on the Love of God

To make it shorter, I will reduce it to three points, which will be: to say, to do and to suffer.

Point 1: To say. I will refrain from those words by which I understand I may offend God and my neighbour.

I will occupy myself in the praises of God, of Most Holy Mary and of the saints, such as prayers and devotions, and I will try to exhort my neighbour to virtue.

I will occupy myself frequently in saying ejaculations, thinking that they are the breaths of the soul that loves God; and as the body dies if it does not breathe, so will it happen to the soul: that is, it will die to the life of love if it does not take care to breathe by ejaculations.

I will say a fixed number of them each day, so many in the morning and so many in the afternoon and night, increasing the number progressively until I am in the habit of saying daily a number without number.

To say them with more fervour I will vary them, and for this purpose I will have some written down, for example:

O Mother of Fair Love, make me love Jesus and you!

Long live Jesus, death to sin! Forever be blessed and praised the divine Heart of Jesus in the Sacrament!

O fire that ever burns and never goes out!

O love that ever boils and never grows lukewarm! Set me on fire, set me all on fire, that I may love you. I love you, most loving Jesus; I love you, infinite goodness; I love you with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my strength, and I would wish to love you more still; I desire that all may love you and none offend you.

O my God, I would wish to love you for myself and for all creatures, even for those that could exist!

O God of my heart, I would wish to love you as much as you deserve to be loved!

Most Holy Virgin, obtain for me the grace that all may be saved and none be lost!

For the edification of my neighbours, I will speak often of the greatness and perfections of God, stirring them to divine love.

Point 2: To do. I will love not only with my lips, but also in deeds and in truth.

I will remember that Spanish saying: *Obras son amores, y no buenas razones.*

I will refrain from what I know to be sin.

I will try to avoid idleness and do all the good I can for God and for my neighbour.

When two things concur, I will do the one that seems better to me and more in keeping with the divine pleasure and will.

All that I do I will carry out as best I know how, promptly and joyfully.

Point 3: To suffer. To love God in truth means to suffer for the beloved. To know whether love is true, it must be tried in the fire of tribulation; not to stand the test is a sign that there is no love.

I will suffer for the love of God everything that causes me pain, whether it comes directly from God or from men, whether it comes from animals, or from inanimate things, or from myself. I will always think that this is a permission of God and a cup that Jesus Christ offers me and holds out to me.

I will never complain of anything, however much pain it gives me. What is more, if I know how to regard such pain as a gift God gives me, why should I complain of gifts that come from the hand of so great a Lord? Rather I owe him thanks, and should be content and glad for it.

I will say: "Blessed be you, Lord; your most holy will be done."

I will think that the pains of this life are nothing in comparison with the glory that is prepared for me,[10] and that I cannot enter heaven without suffering either, and that sufferings are letters of recommendation for being admitted. Jesus suffered, the Most Holy Virgin suffered, the saints suffered, because without the cross of sufferings they could not have followed Jesus Christ. Even Christ had to suffer to enter into his glory.[11]

Meditation on the Sorrows of Most Holy Mary for the Seven Days of the Week

Remembering the wise and devout counsel of Cornelius a Lapide, that whoever wishes to make sure of his eternal salvation should love Mary and strive to grow and perfect himself every day in devotion to her; and since the best means of obtaining this devotion and love is to meditate on her sorrows, I have thought it fitting to distribute them over the seven days of the week, so that by meditating on them every member of the faithful may obtain the eternal salvation I desire for all.

Sunday. First sorrow. The Virgin had it when she presented her Son in the temple.[1]

You will please Most Holy Mary if you keep silence and are devout in church; if through her you make the gift of your heart to God; and if you think of the sufferings of Jesus and the sorrows of his most holy Mother.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows that Christians add to her by sinning in churches, and because, instead of handing over their heart to God as he asks of them,[2] they let the devil possess it. Pray to God for the conversion of these unhappy people, praying for this an Our Father and a Hail Mary.

Monday. Second sorrow. The Virgin had it fleeing from King Herod.[3]

You will please Mary if with patience and without complaining you bear the slanders, persecutions and other evils your neighbour causes you.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows that Christians add to her when they sin by cursing and wishing evil to those who persecute them; and likewise those who give scandal, who by their bad example kill souls, worse than Herod's soldiers killed the innocent children.[4] Pray to God for their conversion, saying an Our Father and a Hail Mary.

Tuesday. Third sorrow. The Virgin had it seeking her Son.[5]

You will please Mary if you try always to be in God's presence and in his holy grace; and if at some time you lose it (which God forbid), you will try to recover it quickly in church by making a good confession.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows that Christians add to her who, after losing her Son by sinning, instead of seeking him, go further from him, increasing their offences and putting off their conversion from day to day. Pray to God for their conversion, etc.

Wednesday. Fourth sorrow. The Virgin had it seeing her Son laden with the cross.[6]

You will please Mary if you take with patience the crosses of this life, such as illnesses, tribulations, losses, etc.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows that Christians add to her who in their trials rage, curse and blaspheme. Pray to God for their conversion, etc.

Thursday. Fifth sorrow. The Virgin had it seeing her Son crucified.[7]

You will please Mary if you try to refrain from sinning and prevent others from sinning, because those who sin are the ones who crucify Jesus Christ anew.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows added to her by sinners who with sins of thought crown her beloved Son with thorns; with sins of word give him gall and vinegar to drink, spit in his face and blaspheme

him worse than Jews; and with sins of deed, such as dances, thefts and indecent things, nail him hand and foot. Pray to God for their conversion, etc.

Friday. Sixth sorrow. The Virgin had it at the foot of the cross, holding her Son in her arms.

You will please Mary if you contemplate the passion and death of Jesus.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows added to her by Christians who with their sins crucify her divine Son and, instead of unnailing him with a good confession, drive his nails in deeper by confessing sacrilegiously, because they conceal their sins and do not amend. Pray to God for their conversion, etc.

Saturday. Seventh sorrow. The Virgin had it when she left the body of her Son in the tomb.[8]

You will please Mary if you try to receive the holy Eucharist worthily and often, keeping Jesus reserved in your heart as in a tabernacle, and to keep company with so deeply afflicted a Mother in her so anguished solitude.

Have compassion on Mary for the sorrows added to her by those who resist divine inspirations, those who receive the body of her divine Son only once a year, and those who receive Communion sacrilegiously. Pray to God for their conversion, etc.

To increase devotion to the sorrows of Most Holy Mary, what this sorrowful Mother said to St. Bridget in one of her revelations is worth pondering: that, as a loving mother, she promised to assist at death those devoted to her sorrows who are contrite and repentant for their faults, so as to receive their souls.

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[9] Song 5,2.

[10] Cf. Job 17,3.

[11] Cf. Gen 39,7–20; Dan 13,1–27.

[12] Gen 17,1.

[13] Acts 17,28. Cf. *El templo y palacio de Dios nuestro Señor* \[LR, Barcelona 1866\] pp. 29–30.

[14] Prov 23,26.

[15] Cf. *Aut.* n.8–15.

[16] Cf. *Aut.* n.637, 646, 801.

[17] Rev 7,14.

[18] Cf. *Aut.* n.341, 351.

[19] Ps 113,1 (Vulgate; Ps 115,1 in the Hebrew numbering).

[20] Cf. *Aut.* n.666–669.

[21] Cf. Jn 10,1.

[22] Cf. Eccl 9,1.

[23] Cf. Jas 4,6.

[24] Cf. Gen 18,27.

[25] Cf. Ps 4,2; 9,14.

[26] Cf. Ps 6,3; 24,16.

[27] Cf. Rom 8,18.

[28] Cf. Lk 24,26.

[1] Cf. Lk 2,22–38.

[2] Cf. Prov 23,26: *Give me, my son, your heart.*

[3] Cf. Mt 2,13–15.

[4] Cf. Mt 2,16–18.

[5] Cf. Lk 2,41–50.

[6] Cf. Mt 27,31; Mk 15,20–22; Lk 23,26–32; Jn 19,16–17.

[7] Cf. Mt 27,35; Mk 15,24–27; Lk 23,33; Jn 19,18.

[8] Cf. Mt 27,57–60; Mk 15,42–46; Lk 23,50–55; Jn 19,38–42.