The spit of the soldiers on Christ represented the filth in our hearts

Leandro M. Tapay

The Apostle Paul – formerly the gleeful persecutor of Christians known as Saul – said that he regularly omitted to do those things he desired to do, while carrying out without fail all those things he hated doing and which he heartily desired to commit no more (cf. Rom 7:15). Have you ever acted in the same way and felt like saying those words? If you did, you are in good company. King Saul chased young David around with a spear, while Herod ruthlessly murdered children in Bethlehem in order to satisfy his fragile ego. Yet another Herod ordered John the Baptist – the cousin of Jesus Christ – to be beheaded for the sake of two angry women. If the Holy Bible is considered a good library of books, it is not because of the actions of some of the people present in its narratives. Blood and gore run freely through the Bible. Consider what the soldiers made Christ experience before He died on the Cross.

What the soldiers did throughout the sacred Passion of the only-begotten Son of God was abominable. They were literally out for blood hence that day, over two thousand years ago, they scourged Jesus with the legionnaire’s whip. This consisted of leather straps with lead balls on its end and its specific purpose was to beat the accused up almost to the point of death, then stop short. Thirty lashes were usually allowed but seldom needed, whereas a centurion monitored the status of the prisoner. Christ was already close to death when the soldiers finally untied His hands and slammed Him to the ground. But none of the above was sufficient for them.

The first thing the soldiers did that day was to mercilessly beat the Son of God. The third thing they did was to crucify Him. But what they did between the whipping and the Crucifixion was hateful. Although the back of Christ was already fully ribboned with wounds of unparalleled severity, to the extent skin had been ripped off His Body, and the soldiers unhesitatingly loaded the Cross onto His shoulders, to march Him up to Golgotha – the place of the skull – for His execution, the soldiers went one step further. They spit on Him.

In relation to the whipping and Crucifixion, the soldiers were following orders, but the actions they committed in between are hard to comprehend. The assignment of the soldiers was simple: “Take the Nazarene to the hill and kill Him.” But prompted by none other than demoniacal hatred, the soldiers had a different idea. They decided to first have some fun at the expense of the Son of God. The strong, well-rested, fully-armed soldiers encircled the Galilean carpenter and beat Him almost to a pulp. In the meantime, they also spit on Him throughout and publicly mocked Him without mercy. Given that the scourging was commanded and the Crucifixion was ordered, who other than Satan and his minions, acting through their human agents on earth, could have attained pleasure from spitting on a Man Who was already half-dead?
Spitting does not wound the body. It wounds the spirit and the soul; profoundly. What the soldiers implemented that day was an intentional process of exploitation, designed to elevate and congratulate themselves at the expense of a defenseless Other. The soldiers attempted to make themselves feel and look big by making Christ look small.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever spit on someone, figuratively or literally, in order to elevate yourself? I have. Maybe you have not spit on anyone but, instead, you have gossiped. Have you ever slandered or libeled anyone, especially given the great ease with which this can be done today using social media? Have you ever raised your hand in anger or rolled your eyes in arrogance?

That is what the soldiers did to Jesus Christ. When you and I act in the same manner toward others, whether we rationalize our behavior or not, in reality we too do it to Christ and become no different than those soldiers in our hearts and minds: “I assure you, when you did it to the least of these, My brothers and sisters, you were doing to me” (Mt 25:40). How we treat others is how we treat the Son of God – God Himself in His own right.

Have you ever done something, then reflected on it and wondered what got into you? We live in our nature and when we listen to that voice which tempts us to make us fall, our deeds can become ugly indeed. Like Paul, we omit to do that which we may desire to do and regularly do that which we may not originally intend to do. Furthermore, we cannot change either our behavior, or the sentiments in our hearts and minds, solely by the power of our own volition or ability, for only grace can help. So what should we do? We can let that spit of the soldiers represent all the filth we have in our hearts and consent that Jesus Christ carries it all to the Cross, nails it there forever and washes it all away through His Precious Blood.

In accordance with the Father’s divine plan, Christ was offered wine (with gall) for His throat, but He was not given a towel for His face. Veronica had to do that on the way and she was almost stopped. Simeon the Cyrenian helped Jesus unwillingly to carry the Cross; he did not mop His sacred Face. All the angels of heaven were just a prayer away. Could they not have removed all that spit from His Face? They did not do so because Christ never asked them to; He did not want them to do so, and the reason for this was so He could finally crush all the filth in our hearts.

On the Cross, Jesus Christ exchanged places with us. Adam placed himself under the curse of the Almighty Father by sinning and, by extension, so did we as his descendants. But Christ exchanged the place of each one of us with Himself and placed Himself under the curse (Gal 3:13), in order to lift it for the many who would accept His sacrifice. The sinless One took for Himself the face of the most deplorable sinner so we sinners could forever grow into the full likeness of God in Whose image we have been made.