

Devotion on Hymns of the Church (Hymn 75 - **O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded**) –  
13 March 2018, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



This hymn was originally written as a Lutheran Hymn by Paul Gerhardt in the 17th century. The Anglican version was translated by Robert Bridges, 1899, to the tune *St. Christopher*.

On the left semi-transept of the cross, as you face the AOC Coat of Arms, is the Crown of Thorns signifying one of the grievous wounds suffered by Christ during His Passion. The Crown of Thorns was woven together into a crown by the Roman soldiers from the long and piercing thorns characteristic of the Mid-Eastern Hedge. The sharper and longer thorns were pointed inward so as to inflict maximum pain and most profuse amounts of blood effusion. The blood would have flowed freely down the face and into the eyes of our Dear Lord. There is a multi-dimensional symbology represented by this act. To the Jewish nation, it symbolized a mockery of the royal descent of Christ, and His claim to, Throne of David. To the Roman soldiers, the intent was to ridicule Christ with a cruel parody of that crown presented by soldiers to the Roman Emperor as a military honorarium demonstrating his claim as “Savior of the World” in saving the lives of Roman citizens. It was imperial regalia worn by every emperor beginning with Augustus. How ironic that, unbeknownst to them, these ruthless men were paying homage to the real Savior of the World in such a cruel fashion. In both Roman and Jewish terms, our Lord Jesus Christ was recognized as King of Kings and Savior of the world. *“They knew not what they did.”*

### **O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded**

O sacred head, sore wounded,  
defiled and put to scorn;  
O kingly head surrounded  
with mocking crown of thorn:  
What sorrow mars thy grandeur?  
Can death thy bloom deflower?  
O countenance whose splendor  
the hosts of heaven adore!

Thy beauty, long-desired,  
hath vanished from our sight;  
thy power is all expired,

and quenched the light of light.  
Ah me! for whom thou diest,  
hide not so far thy grace:  
show me, O Love most highest,  
the brightness of thy face.

I pray thee, Jesus, own me,  
me, Shepherd good, for thine;  
who to thy fold hast won me,  
and fed with truth divine.  
Me guilty, me refuse not,  
incline thy face to me,  
this comfort that I lose not,  
on earth to comfort thee.

In thy most bitter passion  
my heart to share doth cry,  
with thee for my salvation  
upon the cross to die.  
Ah, keep my heart thus moved  
to stand thy cross beneath,  
to mourn thee, well-beloved,  
yet thank thee for thy death.

My days are few, O fail not,  
with thine immortal power,  
to hold me that I quail not  
in death's most fearful hour;  
that I may fight befriended,  
and see in my last strife  
to me thine arms extended  
upon the cross of life.

**"O sacred head, sore wounded, defiled and put to scorn; O kingly head surrounded with mocking crown of thorn: What sorrow mars thy grandeur? Can death thy bloom deflower? O countenance whose splendor the hosts of heaven adore!"** Let us first consider the nature of that Head that was wounded for us. In that Head was contained the Mind of God whose thoughts of Love and forbearance impelled Him to the Cross for us. It was the Mind that had conceived the Creation of the World, and of you and me, in the primitive instant in eternity past when there was nothing apart from God in His Triune perfection. It was the Head that God had promised to be bruised as a result of man's sin. ***"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."*** (Gen 3:15) It was the same Head foreshadowed by the head of the ram caught in the thicket on Mt. Hermon that took the place of Isaac on Abraham's altar. ***"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."*** (Gen 22:13) The Grace of God forbade the death of His faithful, but would offer His own only Begotten Son as Redemption of our sins. The words of Abraham to his beloved son at the base of the Mount of Sacrifice were prophetic and perfect in meaning: ***"My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."*** (Gen 22:8) And so was that prophecy fulfilled in the fullness of time.

Though wracked with pain and fainting soul that Head had you and me in mind as He gazed through His bloody tears across the landscape and mass of people gathered beneath His cross on Golgotha. *"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."* (Isaiah 49:15-16) It was Adam's rejection of the Commandment of God that placed that Crown of Thorns on that most Benevolent Head: *"Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field,"* (Gen 3:18) but not the sins of Adam only, but of all who have been born of woman since Adam.

*"Thy beauty, long-desired, hath vanished from our sight; thy power is all expired, and quenched the light of light. Ah me! for whom thou diest, hide not so far thy grace: show me, O Love most highest, the brightness of thy face."* When hope springs forlorn and lost, it may simply be the abject darkness that precedes the morning sunrise. The event of darkness overshadowing the land during those three hours of the Passion signified the culmination of the full redemptive intent of God for mankind from the Fall of Adam until that moment. It was the moment to which Abraham, in his Christian faith, looked for the promises of God. He was a King who died the death of the vilest criminal. His Royal Procession along the Via Dolorosa began with His anointing as King of Kings at a family residence in Bethany just days earlier. *"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat."* (Matt 26:6-7) This 'woman' was the beloved Mary of Bethany. (see John 12:3) She anointed Him for burial as King into a Tomb that would only need to be borrowed. Up until this day, every tomb would be needed in perpetuity, but now, to those who believe, it would only be a temporary need for the disposition of the flesh. The Light of the World went dark at the zenith of the sun (noonday hour) until the time of the Passover Lamb sacrifice in the Temple at Jerusalem.

*"I pray thee, Jesus, own me, me, Shepherd good, for thine; who to thy fold hast won me, and fed with truth divine. Me guilty, me refuse not, incline thy face to me, this comfort that I lose not, on earth to comfort thee."* The only way that we can 'own' Christ is for us to be first owned by Him. *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."* (John 15:16) *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19) These are great spiritual mysteries that escape the mind of all but the spiritual keen and perceptive. He is our Good Shepherd and not the common hireling that occupies most modern pulpits today. *"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep."* (John 10:11-13) Our faithful living and obedience comforts the Lord in Heaven. We dare not forsake our First Love and crucify the Lord anew by our grievous sins and treachery. Christ receives the repentant sinner, and turns no one away. He will never leave or forsake us, and we are caught sure in His unbreakable net with which He catches from the Sea of the World.

*"In thy most bitter passion my heart to share doth cry, with thee for my salvation upon the cross to die. Ah, keep my heart thus moved to stand thy cross beneath, to mourn thee, well-beloved, yet thank thee for thy death."* That "Old Rugged Cross" was not a shiny ornament made of precious metal, but a crude and rough-hewn timber upon which no relief of pain and humiliation could be had. It demanded ALL of its victims. The cross we are commanded to take up daily is not some sweet scent of

suffering, but the actual suffering of dying daily to self and living for Christ. When we contemplate the suffering of Christ on the Cross at Passion Week, we must consider the hurt and pain of the vicious nails, the bloody scars of the thorns, the burning anguish of the whelps graven into His precious body by the metal tipped throngs of the whip, and the embarrassment and humiliation of such a modest soul being bared naked for all to see. Can you bear it? Of course, you cannot! You might suffer lesser pain for a child, but not for one who has proven by their sins that they hate you. The most courageous of all of the disciples that fateful day at Calvary were the women, and gentle John. Love caused them to clasp unto Christ until the very last. Can we follow that example? Or do we, like Peter, deny Christ as soon as His presence is taken from among us? It should be noted that Peter never again denied His Lord because he was never again without Christ. *"Lo, I am with thee always, even unto the end of the world."*

*"My days are few, O fail not, with thine immortal power, to hold me that I quail not in death's most fearful hour; that I may fight befriended, and see in my last strife to me thine arms extended upon the cross of life."* When I was a young lad, I could not even imagine that there might come a day when I would not be upon the earth – full of life and vigor. As I grow older and older, I am beginning to see the distant sunset growing ever nearer. Indeed, I may count my remaining years on the fingers of my hand if the Lord permits even those remaining years. Life is fleeting. It is the mercy of God that hides the brevity of life to our youthful eyes while our hearts are yet full of hope, but gradually reveals its vaporous nature in our waning years when we have grown in faith to realize the greater hope and life in Christ. What joy do we discover in the words of the great Psalm: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."* (Psalms 23:4) Death becomes the Christian, not as a tomb, but as a mere 'shadow.' As the beautiful and youthful Maid of Orleans (Joan of Arc) desired the cross to be held before her burning eyes, so should we see, in our last moments, that Cross of Christ raised for us, and beyond the open Tomb of the Garden.