

Blessed Gueric of Igny (c.1080-1157), Cistercian abbot

First sermon for Palm Sunday (copyright Cistercian publications)

"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve"

Man was made to serve his Creator. And what could be more just than that you should serve him by whom you were created, without whom you cannot exist? And what could be more blessed or more sublime than to serve him? To serve him is to reign. "I will not serve," (Jer 2,20) man says to his Creator. "Then I will serve you," his Creator says to man. «You sit down, I will minister, I will wash your feet...

Yes, O Christ, «good and faithful servant,» (Mt 25,21). You have served indeed, you have served with all loyalty and trustworthiness, you have served with all patience and endurance. Not lukewarmly, for you have exulted as a giant to run the course of obedience, (Ps 19[18],6); not fictitiously, for after so many and so great exertions you have gone further and spent your soul too; not complainingly, for you did not open your mouth when, innocent, you were scourged (Is 53,7). It is written and it is justly so: "The servant who knew his master's will and did not act worthily will be beaten with many stripes." (Lk 12,47). But what has this Slave done, I ask, that is not worthy? What is there he ought to have done and has not done? "He has done all things well," those who observed what he did exclaimed, "he has made the deaf hear and the dumb speak," (Mk 7,37). He has done everything that was worthy of himself; how is it then that he has suffered thus everything unworthy! He bared his back to scourging and was flogged with stripes that were neither few nor gentle, as is shown by the streams of blood that flowed from so many parts of his body: Put to the question with insult and torture, he was like a slave or a thief laid under interrogation to extort a confession of his crime. O detestable pride of man who scorns to serve, pride that could not be reduced to humility by any other example than the servitude, and such servitude, of its Lord!...

Indeed you have toiled hard, my Lord, in serving me. It were only just and fair that, at least for the future, you should rest and that your slave, if only because it is his turn, should serve you... You have conquered, Lord, you have conquered the rebel; behold, I surrender to your bonds, I put my neck under your yoke. Only deign to let me serve you, suffer me to toil for you. Accept me as a slave for ever, useless as I am, unless now also your grace always going before and following after be with me and toil with me, (Wis 9,10).