

# Exposition on Psalm 41

by St. Augustine

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*The sermon is an exposition on Psalm 40, highlighting the themes of Christ's Passion, the understanding of the needy and poor One, and God's favour and mercy towards us.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:2-12, Colossians 2:3, Hebrews 12:6

**Topics:** "Christ's Passion", "Church Unity"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches on the Feast of the Martyrs, reflecting on the Psalm that pertains to the Passion of Christ and the unity between Christ as the Head and His Church as the Body. He emphasizes how the enemies of Christ thought His Name would perish upon His death, but instead, His Name spread and multiplied through the Church, even amidst persecutions. St. Augustine encourages believers to understand and trust in the needy and poor Christ, who delivers in the evil day and calls for mercy and healing for sins committed against Him.

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## Transcript

To the people, on the Feast of the Martyrs.

1. The solemn day of the Martyrs has dawned; therefore to the glory of the Passion of Christ, the Captain of Martyrs, who spared not Himself, ordering His soldiers to the fight; but first fought, first conquered, that their fighting He might encourage by His example, and aid with His majesty, and crown with His promise: let us hear somewhat from this Psalm pertaining to His Passion. I commend unto you oftentimes, nor grieve I to repeat, what for you is useful to retain, that our Lord Jesus Christ speaks often of Himself, that is, in His own Person, which is our Head; often in the person of His Body, which are we and His Church; but so that the words sound as from the mouth of one, that we may understand the Head and the Body to consist together in the unity of integrity, and not be separated the one from the other; as in that marriage whereof it is said, They two shall be one flesh. If then we acknowledge two in one flesh, let us acknowledge two in one voice. First, that which responding to the reader we have sung, though it be from the middle of the Psalm, from that I will take the beginning of this Sermon.

Mine enemies speak evil of Me, When He shall die, then shall His Name perish Psalm 40:5. This is the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ: but see if herein are not understood the members also. This was spoken also when our Lord Himself walked in the flesh here on earth....When they saw the people go after Him, they said, When He shall die, then shall His Name perish; that is, when we have slain Him, then shall His Name be no more in the earth, nor shall He seduce any, being dead; but by that very slaying of Him shall

men understand, that He was but a man whom they followed, that there was in Him no hope of salvation, and shall desert His Name, and it shall no more be. He died, and His Name perished not, but His Name was sown as seed: He died, but He was a grain, which dying, the grain immediately sprang up. John 12:24 When glorified then was our Lord Jesus Christ, began they much more, and much more numerously to trust in Him; then began His members to hear what the Head had heard. Now then our Lord Jesus Christ being in heaven set down, and Himself in us labouring on earth, still spoke His enemies, When He shall die, then shall His Name perish. For hence stirred up the devil persecutions in the Church to destroy the Name of Christ. Unless haply ye think, brethren, that those Pagans, when they raged against Christians, said not this among themselves, to blot out the Name of Christ from the earth. That Christ might die again, not in the Head, but in His Body, were slain also the Martyrs. To the multiplying of the Church availed the Holy Blood poured forth, to help Its seminating came also the death of the Martyrs. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints. More and more were the Christians multiplied, nor was it fulfilled which spoke the enemies, When He shall die, then shall His Name perish. Even now also is it spoken. Down sit the Pagans, and compute them the years, they hear their fanatics saying, A time shall come when Christians shall be none, and those idols must be worshipped as before they were worshipped: still say they, When He shall die, then shall His Name perish. Twice conquered, now the third time be wise! Christ died, His Name has not perished: the Martyrs died, multiplied more is the Church, grows through all nations the Name of Christ. He who foretold of His own Death, and of His Resurrection, He who foretold of His Martyrs' death, and of their crown, He Himself foretold of His Church things yet to come, if truth He spoke twice, has He the third time lied? Vain then is what ye believe against Him; better is it that you believe in Him, that you may understand upon the needy and poor One; that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich. 2 Corinthians 8:9 ...

2. Blessed is he that understands upon the needy and poor One: in the evil day shall the Lord deliver him Psalm 40:1. For the evil day will come: will thou, nill thou, come it will: the Day of Judgment will come upon you, an evil day if you understand not the needy and poor. For what now you will not believe, shall be made manifest in the end. But neither shall you escape, when it shall be made manifest, because you believe not, when it is kept secret. Invited are you, what you see not to believe, lest when thou see, thou be put to the blush. Understand then upon the needy and poor One, that is, Christ: understand in Him the hidden riches, whom poor you see, In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:3 For thereby in the evil day shall He deliver you, in that He is God: but in that He is man, and that which in Him is human has raised to life, and changed for the better, He has lifted (you ) to heaven. But He who is God, who would have one person in man and with man, could neither decrease nor increase, neither die nor rise again. He died out of man's infirmity, but God dies not...But as we rightly say, Such a man died, though his soul dies not; so we rightly say, Christ died, though His Divinity dies not. Wherefore died? Because needy and poor. Let not His death offend you, and avert you from beholding His Divinity. Blessed is he that understands upon the needy and poor One. Consider also the poor, the needy, the hungry and thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisoners; understand also upon such poor, for if upon such thou understand, you understand upon Him who said, I was an hungred, I was thirsty, I was a stranger, naked, sick, in prison; Matthew 25:35-36 so in the evil day shall the Lord deliver you....

3. And deliver him not into the hand of his enemy Psalm 40:2. The enemy is the devil. Let none think of a man his enemy, when he hears these words. Haply one thought of his neighbour, of him who had a suit with him in court, of him who would take from him his own possession, of him who would force him to sell to him his house. Think not this; but that enemy think of, of whom said the Lord, an enemy has done this. Matthew 13:28 For He it is who suggests that for things earthly he be worshipped, for overthrow the

Christian Name this enemy cannot. For he has seen himself conquered by the fame and praises of Christ, he has seen, whereas he slew Christ's Martyrs, that they are crowned, he triumphed over. He has begun to be unable to persuade men that Christ is nought; and because by reviling Christ, he now with difficulty deceives, by lauding Christ, he endeavours to deceive. Before this what said he? Whom do you worship? A Jew, dead, crucified, a man of no moment, who could not even from himself drive away death. When after His Name he saw running the whole human race, saw that in the Name of the Crucified temples are thrown down, idols are broken, sacrifices abolished; and that all these things predicted in the Prophets are considered by men, by men with wonder astonished, and closing now their hearts against the reviling of Christ; he clothes himself with praise of Christ, and begins to deter from the faith in another manner. Great is the law of Christ, powerful is that law, divine, ineffable! But who fulfills it? In the name of our Saviour, tread upon the lion and the dragon. By reviling openly roared the lion; by lauding craftily lurks the dragon. Let them come to the faith, who doubted; and not say, Who fulfills it? If on their own strength they presume, they will not fulfil it. Presuming on the grace of God let them believe, presuming (on it) let them come; to be aided come, not to be judged. So live all the faithful in the Name of Christ, each one in his degree fulfilling the commands of Christ, whether married, or celibates and virgins, they live as much as God grants them to live; neither presume they in their own strength, but know that in Him they ought to glory....

4. The Lord help him Psalm 40:3. But when? Haply in heaven, haply in the life eternal, that so it remain to worship the devil for earthly needs, for the necessities of this life. Far be it! You have promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. 1 Timothy 4:8 He came unto you on earth, by Whom were made heaven and earth. Consider then what He says, The Lord help him, on his bed of pain. The bed of pain is the infirmity of the flesh; lest you should say, I cannot hold, and carry, and tie up my flesh; you are aided that you may. The Lord help you on your bed of pain. Your bed did carry you, you carried not your bed, but wast a paralytic inwardly; He comes who says to you, Take up your bed, and go your way into your house. Mark 2:11 The Lord help him on his bed of pain. Then to the Lord Himself He turns, as though it were asked, Why then, since the Lord helps us, suffer we such great ills in this life, such great scandals, such great labours, such disquiet from the flesh and the world? He turns to God, and as though explaining to us the counsel of His healing, He says, You have turned all his bed in his infirmity. By the bed is understood anything earthly. Every soul that is infirm in this life seeks for itself somewhat whereon to rest, because intensity of labour, and of the soul extended toward God, it can hardly endure perpetually, somewhat it seeks on earth whereon to rest, and in a manner with a kind of pausing to recline, as are those things which innocent ones love....The innocent man rests in his house, his family, his wife, his children; in his poverty, his little farm, his orchard planted with his own hand, in some building fabricated with his own study; in these rest the innocent. But yet God willing us not to have love but of life eternal, even with these, though innocent delights, mixes bitterness, that even in these we may suffer tribulation, and so He turns all our bed in our infirmity. You have turned all his bed in his infirmity. Let him not then complain, when in these things which he has innocently, he suffers some tribulations. He is taught to love the better, by the bitterness of the worse; lest going a traveller to his country, he choose the inn instead of his own home.

5. But why this? Because He scourges every son whom He receives. Hebrews 12:6 Why this? Because to men sinning was it said, In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread. Genesis 3:19 Therefore because all these chastisements, in which all our bed is turned in our infirmity, man ought to acknowledge that he suffers for sin; let him turn himself, and say what follows: I said, Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against You Psalm 40:4. O Lord, by tribulations do Thou exercise me; to be scourged You judge every son whom You will receive, who spared not even the Only-Begotten. He indeed without

sin was scourged; but I say, I have sinned against You....

6. Mine enemies speak evil of Me, When He shall die, then shall His Name perish Psalm 40:5. Of this we have already spoken, and from this began.

7. And entered in to see Psalm 40:6. What Christ suffered, that suffers also the Church; what the Head suffered, that suffer also the Members. For the disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. Matthew 10:24 ...

If to Christ's Members you belong, come within, cling to the Head. Endure the tares if you are wheat, endure the chaff if you are grain. Matthew 13:30 Endure the bad fish within the net if you are a good fish. Wherefore before the time of winnowing do you fly away? Wherefore before the time of harvest, do you root up the grain also with yourself? Wherefore before you have come to the shore, have you broken the nets? They go abroad, and tell it.

8. All mine enemies whisper against Me unto the same thing Psalm 40:7. Against Me all unto the same thing. How much better with me unto the same thing, than against me unto the same thing. What is, Against me unto the same thing? With one counsel, with one conspiring. Christ then speaks unto you, You consent against Me, consent ye to Me: why against Me? Wherefore not with Me? That same thing if you had always had, you had not divided you into schisms. For, says the Apostle, I beseech you, brethren, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you. 1 Corinthians 1:10 All mine enemies whisper against Me unto the same thing: against Me do they devise evil to Me. To themselves rather, for they have gathered iniquity to themselves; but therefore to Me, because by their intention they are to be weighed: for not because to do nothing was in their power, to do nothing was in their will. For the devil lusted to extinguish Christ, and Judas would slay Christ; yet Christ slain and rising again, we are made alive, but to the devil and to Judas is rendered the reward of their evil will, not of our salvation....The intention wherewith they spoke, not what they spoke, did He consider, who related that they spoke evil of Him, Against Me they devised evil to Me. And what evil to Christ, to the Martyrs what evil? All has God turned to good.

9. An ungodly word do they set forth against Me Psalm 40:8. What sort of ungodly word? Listen to the Head Itself. Come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours. Mark 12:7 Fools! How shall the inheritance be yours? Because ye killed Him? Lo! You even killed Him; yet shall not the inheritance be yours. Shall not He that sleeps add this also, that He rise again? When ye exulted that you had slain Him, He slept; for He says in another Psalm, I slept. They raged and would slay Me; I slept. If I had not willed, I had not even slept. I slept, because I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again. John 10:18 I laid Me down and slept, and rose up again. Rage then the Jews; be the earth given into the hands of the wicked, Job 9:24 be the flesh left to the hands of persecutors, let them on wood suspend it, with nails transfix it, with a spear pierce it. Shall He that sleeps, not add this, that He rise up again? Wherefore slept He? Because Adam is the figure of Him that was to come. Romans 5:14 And Adam slept, when out of his side was made Eve. Genesis 2:21 Adam in the figure of Christ, Eve in the figure of the Church; whence she was called the mother of all living. Genesis 3:20 When was Eve created? While Adam slept. When out of Christ's side flowed the Sacraments of the Church? While He slept upon the Cross....

10. The man of My peace, in whom I trusted, which did eat of My bread, has enlarged his heel against Me Psalm 40:9: has raised up his foot against Me: would trample upon Me. Who is this man of His peace?

Judas. And in him did Christ trust, that He said, in whom I trusted? Did He not know him from the beginning? Did He not before he was born know that he would be? Had He not said to all His disciples, I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? John 6:70 How then trusted He in him, but that He is in His Members, and that because many faithful trusted in Judas, the Lord transferred this to Himself?...The man of My peace, in whom I trusted, which did eat of My bread. How showed He him in His Passion? By the words of His prophecy: by the sop He marked Him out, that it might appear said of him, Which did eat of My bread. John 13:26 Again, when he came to betray Him, He granted him a kiss, Matthew 26:49 that it might appear said of him, The man of My peace.

11. But You, O Lord, be merciful unto Me Psalm 40:10. This is the person of a servant, this is the person of the needy and poor: for, Blessed is he that understands upon the needy and poor One. See, as it was spoken, Be merciful unto Me, and raise Me up, and I will requite them, so is it done. For the Jews slew Christ, lest they should lose their place. John 11:48 Christ slain, they lost their place. Rooted out of the kingdom were they, dispersed were they. He, raised up, requited them tribulation, He requited them unto admonition, not yet unto condemnation. For the city wherein the people raged, as a ramping and a roaring lion, crying out, Crucify Him, Crucify Him, Luke 23:21 the Jews rooted out therefrom, has now Christians, by not one Jew is inhabited. There is planted the Church of Christ, whence were rooted out the thorns of the synagogue. For truly this fire blazed as the fire of thorns. But the Lord was as a green tree. This said Himself, when certain women mourned Christ as dying....For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry? When can a green tree be consumed by the fire of thorns? For they blazed as fire among thorns. Fire consumes thorns, but whatsoever green tree it is applied to, is not easily kindled....Yet lest ye think that God the Father of Christ could raise up Christ, that is, the Flesh of His Son, and that Christ Himself, though He be the Word equal with the Father, could not raise up His own Flesh; hear out of the Gospel, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. John 2:19 But, said the Evangelist (lest even after this we should doubt), He spoke of the temple of His Body. Raise Me up, and I will requite them.

12. By this I know that You favour Me, that Mine enemies shall not triumph over Me Psalm 40:11 Because the Jews did triumph, when they saw Christ crucified; they thought that they had fulfilled their will to do Him hurt: the fruits of their cruelty they saw in effect, Christ hanging on the Cross: they shook their heads, saying, If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross. Matthew 27:39-40 He came not down, who could; His Potency He showed not, but patience taught. For if, on their saying these things, He had come down from the Cross, He would have seemed as it were to yield to them insulting, and not being able to endure reproach, would have been believed conquered: more firm remained He upon the Cross, than they insulting; fixed was He, they wavering. For therefore shook they their heads, because to the true Head they adhered not. He taught us plainly patience. For mightier is that which He did, who would not do what the Jews challenged. For much mightier is it to rise from the sepulchre, than to come down from the Cross. That Mine enemies shall not triumph over Me. They triumphed then at that time. Christ rose again, Christ was glorified. Now see they in His Name the human race converted: now let them insult, now shake the head: rather now let them fix the head, or if they shake the head, in wonder and admiration let them shake....

13. But as for Me, You uphold Me, because of my innocence Psalm 40:12. Truly innocence; integrity without sin, requiting without debt, scourging without desert. You uphold Me because of Mine innocence, and hast made Me strong in Your sight for ever. You have made Me strong for ever, You made Me weak for a time: You have made Me strong in Your sight, You made Me weak in sight of men. What then? Praise to Him, glory to Him. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. For He is the God of Israel, our God, the

God of Jacob, the God of the younger son, the God of the younger people. Let none say, Of the Jews said He this, I am not Israel; rather the Jews are not Israel. For the elder son, he is the elder people reprobated; the younger, the people beloved. The elder shall serve the younger: Genesis 25:13 now is it fulfilled: now, brethren, the Jews serve us, they are as our satchellers, we studying, they carry our books. Hear wherein the Jews serve us, and not without reason....With them are the Law and the Prophets, in which Law, and in which Prophets, Christ is preached. When we have to do with Pagans, and show this coming to pass in the Church of Christ, which before was predicted of the Name of Christ, of the Head and Body of Christ, lest they think that we have forged these predictions, and from things which have happened, as though they were future, had made them up, we bring forth the books of the Jews. The Jews forsooth are our enemies, from an enemy's books convince we the adversary.. ..If any enemy clamour and say, You for yourselves have forged prophecies; be the books of the Jews brought forth, because the elder shall serve the younger. Therein let them read those predictions, which now we see fulfilled; and let us all say, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, and all the people shall say, So be it, So be it.

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