

THE FIVE WOUNDS OF THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST



The Fourth Wound: The Shoulder of Christ.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless You,
because, by Your Holy Cross,
You have redeemed the world.*

**St. Mary, Star of the Sea, Largs
Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Millport**

The shoulder wound of Jesus, often considered as a private revelation in Catholic tradition, is described as a severely painful, unrecognized injury sustained while carrying the cross. According to tradition, Jesus revealed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux that this wound, which tore flesh and exposed bones, was more agonizing than the wounds from the nails.

Key Aspects of the Shoulder Wound Devotion:

- **Significance:** It is believed to be the "hidden" wound caused by the weight of the cross.
- **The Vision:** St. Bernard of Clairvaux asked which was the most painful wound, and Jesus identified the shoulder injury, which was not formally recorded in the Gospels.
- **Devotion:** The devotion involves a specific prayer to honour this suffering, with promises of mercy for the devotee's sins.
- **Scientific Perspective:** Some analysis of the Shroud of Turin suggests a severe shoulder injury, specifically a dislocation of the humerus, which could have been caused by the weight of the cross. Psalm 22 also references it: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint."
- **Historical Figures:** It is noted that Padre Pio suffered from a similar, unexplained pain in his shoulder. According to Stefano Campanella, author of "Il papa e il frate" (The Pope and the Friar), Karol Wojtyła (the future Pope John Paul II), while still a priest, visited Padre Pio and asked the question of

which was his most painful wound – much like the manner Bernard did to Christ. Wojtyła expected that it was Pio's chest wound, but Pio replied: "It is my shoulder wound, which no one knows about and has never been cured or treated"

- The visions of Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, which were a source for Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ", refer to the injury: "There was a frightful wound on the shoulder which had borne the weight of the Cross..."

Biblical References:

- In general terms (Matt 13:55), we know that Jesus was a labourer or craftsman in wood and stone (a "tekton" in Greek). Carrying heavy weights on His shoulder would not have been new to Him.
- Matt 23:4: "They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders without, however, being willing to move a finger to help them." Take this text together with Matt 11:28-29: "Come to me all those who toil and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart." He takes our burdens on His shoulders carrying the Cross.
- Luke 15:5: "And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders": Jesus bears the weight of the lost sheep, i.e., the whole of humanity, on His shoulders.
- John 19:17: "He went out, carrying His own cross, to the place called the Skull; in Hebrew, Golgotha."

Reflection & Prayer

Shoulder the burden. Put your shoulder to the wheel. Straight from the shoulder. Rub shoulders with. Give someone the cold shoulder. Stand shoulder to shoulder. Look over your shoulder. A chip on your shoulder. A shoulder to cry on. Old head on young shoulders. Head and shoulders above. Standing on the shoulders of giants. Etcetera!

The shoulder is a symbol of strength and support. Think of Atlas who is depicted as carrying the world on his shoulders. But the true Atlas, the Greater-than-Atlas, is Jesus. He is no mythical figure, but the true God and Man who bore the sin, guilt and death of the entire cosmos embodied in the Cross. Despite the wound it caused His shoulder, it did not, it could not, crush Him. And He won't let it crush us either. He made it His trophy of victory, one in which we can share if we suffer with Him and surrender our sufferings to Him. We are all called to be St. Christopher and St. Simon of Cyrene.

Continue, suffering Lord, to carry us, Your lost sheep, on Your now gloriously wounded shoulder. Take each day the weight of our sin and guilt, of our sorrow and heaviness of heart, and exchange it for the lightness of Your sweet yoke. Free up our shoulders to be a refuge and support for others who find life's burdens crushing, too heavy to bear. May we never turn our back or give the cold shoulder to whomsoever needs our help. Help us to suffer in a hidden way, as Your wounded shoulder was hidden to view, and to have recourse in our "via crucis" to You and to the Mother of Sorrows who bore Your Cross in Her Immaculate Heart. Amen.