

complaint—does not all this denote a supernatural origin ? ” And so both skeptical and superstitious, Pilate feared. He dared neither pardon nor condemn Jesus. In the former case, he dreaded the vengeance of the Jews ; in the latter, he trembled at the thought of drawing on himself the anger of the gods. His fear, says the Gospel, increased, for more than he feared condemning an innocent man, did he shrink from condemning some formidable divinity.

Under the influence of this impression, Pilate re-entered the prætorium and sent for Jesus. He began at once to ply Him with questions. *Whence art Thou ?* From whom descended ? What is the name of Thy parents ? Art Thou of this earth, or from above ? ” By these questions, Pilate hoped to receive from his Prisoner some clue to His nature and family. He did not succeed, for “ *Jesus gave him no answer.* ” To what purpose ? Of what might He have spoken ? Of His Divine Father. His virginal Mother, His royal ancestors ? He would not Have been believed, and so He was silent.

Pilate, offended at receiving no reply, made a brutal use of his authority. “ Is it to me, the Roman Procurator, that You refuse to speak ? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee ? ” The sight of the cross was not of such a nature as to intimidate the Divine Saviour. He was awaiting impatiently the blessed moment when He might embrace it, stretch Himself upon it to be nailed to it. With what calmness and liberty the Divine Accused now responds to the iniquitous judge : “ *Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin.* ”

No, He is not an ordinary prisoner, this Man who is so agitating the soul of His judge ! “ O greatness,” exclaims Saint Athanasius, “ O glory of the Redeemer ! In the attitude of one accused, He makes His judge tremble and while the Jews are clamoring for His condemnation to death in the name of the law, Pilate dreads that, by virtue of the law, in condemning Jesus, he may be condemning himself. Pilate, you have reason to tremble. The Prisoner before you is really the Son of God ! ”

No. Jesus is not an ordinary prisoner, He who at this critical moment of His life, scrutinizes and judges consciences,