

SADDUCEE PASCH

Quentin Lister, O.P.

"It simply couldn't have been better done,
As I was saying. How they managed it!
Clean sweep, my dear, an utter masterpiece
Of subtlety and delicate evasion . . .
No . . . higher, Miriam, around the temples
Needs more massaging. Ah, much better there . . .
Today has been so taxing. Quite too much
For me . . . But, oh those Pharisees! They did
Not pull a single thread in all their cramped
And legalistic tapestry—sly ones!
They wove it tight with slender fingers from
Their ritual craft and casuistic art.
What cunning, positively serpentine . . .
And not so much, mind you, as their bands' fringe
Allowed to rustle in the fouling gusts
Of Gentile courts. Defilement seemed to be
The fierce concern of their macabre game . . .
Oh tell me, did the servants test the wine?
It was not of the best, as you recall,
A year ago; nor were the paschal breads
As brittle—thus!—You know how much upset
I am whenever all is not done well.
Where was I? Oh—and Pilate too, poor simp . . .
He tried an *abolitio* to free
The man. But *Jus Romanum* to that crowd
Was not so threatening an instrument
They could not dodge it by Barabbas' name.
They played upon his fear of what would come,
If word of weakness reached Tiberius.

Imagine Pilate's marching him away
For Herod Antipas to judge the case.
(For Herod rules for Rome in Galilee—
Whence this man comes—but just now with his "court"
Visits in painted pomp Jerusalem
To masquerade as "prince" and "Jew" and "spouse.")
But Herod marched him back. That feeble brain,
Glutted with every pleasure, old and stale,
Had wit only for entertainment's sake.
Toying a while with his new captive "king,"
Diverting his courtiers, he soon had his fill.
Oh, incidentally, my Miriam,
Those porphyry vases and the little jades
You so admired in Levi's shop one day . . .
You'll have them after all. He promised me.
I had to dicker somewhat, but they're yours.
Well now—It ended out on Golgotha.
I didn't stay for long. My stomach's far
Too delicate to stand that sort of thing.
It's rather messy towards the end. Then too,
His mother, so they say it was, appeared.
Would you believe—she came with women there
To watch beside the cross! It was too much.
I left at once, though others stayed to taunt
And bait the wretch—poor fallen visionary!
Well . . . Temple and Law . . . respectability
Must be protected . . . else . . . but come now, wife,
Isn't it time to light the candles yet?
This darkness—what a strange phenomenon
For such an hour. It came so suddenly
Upon us. Did you notice it, my dear?
Early Siroccos are as black . . . and yet,
No silence quite so sinister as this
Broods upon their coming. Pity, though,
To spoil so nice a day. But light the lamps!
And bring a torch, that I may lead the chants. . . ."