

THE MESSAGE OF THE ROSARY

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THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES

Whereas in the Joyful Mysteries the sacred writers record at some length the part which Mary played in them, the same writers are silent about her part in the sorrowful mysteries. All that we learn from them is that the Mother of Jesus stood beneath the cross, and that from the cross Jesus recommended her to St. John as his Mother, and St. John to her as her son. But what we know about Mary and her relation to Jesus is sufficient to supply the rest. Mary shared in the sufferings of her Divine Son as no other human person ever did or could have done, and she did it with sentiments of complete submission to the will of God and love for souls.

The Sorrowful Mysteries of the rosary illustrate the sacrificial character of the Christian life. The crosses of life are manifold, but they can all be reduced to the one or other of the sufferings commemorated in these sorrowful mysteries. In particular they are: Fear, anxiety, disgust experienced with regard to the crosses that actually afflict us or that we see approaching: bodily pain, humiliation, the labours and hardships imposed upon us by our vocational duties, bitterness against those whom we consider the cause of our suffering, the urge to throw off the cross when patience gives out.

The general lesson inculcated by these mysteries is patience, the spirit of penance and love of the cross, and that is the object our Lady of Fatima had in view when she asked for meditation on the mysteries of the rosary.

THE AGONY

After the Last Supper, Jesus accompanied by his apostles, went out to Mount Olivet, on the Western slope of which was the Garden of Gethsemani. He left eight apostles at the gate, whilst He with Peter, John and James proceeded farther into the garden. The latter three were the apostles who had witnessed the transfiguration on Mount Tabor; now they were to witness its counterpart.

All of a sudden Jesus began to grow sad, to fear and to tremble, and He said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death. Stay you here and watch with me." Then He withdrew from them as far as a stone's throw and the terrible agony set in. Staggering under the weight of crushing fear He falls to the ground, and with an expression of grief and helplessness in His voice, such as the apostles had never witnessed before. He prayed, "Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass away from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt." Restless and exhausted He rises after some time and returns to the three apostles, seeking consolation, some words of sympathy, or at least the assurance that they were watching with Him in their prayers. Yet He finds them asleep, asleep, they His trusted friends, whilst His betrayer is awake and active. We sense the disappointment of the Saviour's Heart in that gentle reproach: "Could you not watch one hour with Me? Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Without having found the consolation He had sought, Jesus returns to His former place and the agony continues. Abysmal as may be His sorrow and furiously as hell may rage around Him, He never wavers in His attitude towards His Father; not His Will but the Will of the Father is to be done. Again He arises and seeks the company of the apostles; should He not have expected that after the previous warning, they would have kept awake? Yet He finds them asleep the second time, and without waking them He returns to prayer. What the apostles did not give Him is now brought to Him by a messenger of His Heavenly Father, "And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him." What could that consolation of the angel have been? The one thing that Jesus craved above all others, namely, that His Father was pleased with Him and that souls would be saved through His suffering. We may assume that in that moment He also felt the strength and consolation that His Passion would bring to souls of coming ages in their sufferings, the hope of salvation it would give them, the courage that would lead them to victory and heavenly glory.

Thus Jesus was prepared for the last phase of His agony. It was the most fearful, and He prayed the more that, if it were the Father's Will the chalice would pass away from Him. Just as He prayed and saw that this was not the will of the Father, but that He should rather drink the chalice of suffering, the agony became so intense that it pressed the blood out of His pores and like drops of perspiration it trickled down upon the ground. At last the agony came to an

end. Quiet and composure returned to His soul, and He rejoined the apostles. As far as He was concerned they now could sleep and rest, but there was no time left; the traitor was approaching.

What was it that caused this terrible agony of our Blessed Saviour? It was the sight of the sufferings He was to endure, the malice of the sins for which He was to suffer, the ingratitude of men and the uselessness of His Passion for so many. Although Jesus had known these things throughout His life, it had been the Will of the Father that their full impact should be felt only as the terrors of the Passion were to break in upon Him. And so there are before His all-seeing eyes the traitor doing his treacherous work, the injustice of His trials before the Jewish Council and the Roman governor. He beholds Himself heaped with indignity, mocked, spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, hated and rejected by the people He loved so much, His saving blood called down upon them as a curse. The very thought of such sufferings is enough to fill the mind with the utmost horror. But Jesus also suffered as the Head of His Mystical Body, the Church. Into His sufferings enter as bitter ingredients all injustice inflicted upon the Church in the course of centuries, the tortures endured by the martyrs, the sorrows of every description that ever fell to the lot of His followers. He suffers for the sins of the whole world and as God-Man He grasps the whole meanness, hatefulness, contemptibility, the ghastly hideousness of sin. His loving Heart feels the ingratitude of men and the uselessness of His Passion for millions of them. How few there are that think of His sufferings and thank Him for His love; how few that serve Him with the love and loyalty that He deserves. How much half-heartedness, selfishness, haggling and bartering there is in His service, how little is given, how many conditions and reservations attached to even that little. Must not the tempter have pointed mockingly with fiendish glee to an ungrateful world forgetful of Him, "And for such people you are going to endure such terrible suffering?" No wonder He falls to the ground in utter exhaustion, cries to His Heavenly Father that this chalice might pass away from Him, and no wonder that bloody perspiration runs down His body.

Prayerful reflection on this mystery, as requested by our Lady of Fatima, will disclose to us its significance. In His agony Jesus atones for the rebellion of sin. The essential element in sin is its opposition to the Will of God by way of simple rejection or defiant rebellion against it and a substitution in its place of the human will. Rebellion against the Will of God has assumed gigantic proportions. God's very existence is denied, His authority ignored in education, in the home and family, in business and politics.

If such an attitude is found among the enemies of God it must deeply hurt the Heart of Jesus, the great Lover of men, but it hurts more when it is found among those who call themselves His friends and followers. There are Catholics for whom the Will of God means practically nothing. They go their own way in arranging the affairs of their lives, flee from the cross and refuse to carry the yoke of the Lord. If they pray at all, it is not with submission to the Will of God, but with insistence upon their own will. Their will must be done or else they give up their faith, quit the Church. It is for the pride of this rebellion that Jesus atones in His agony, when crushed by the weight of all the world's sins, He prays that not His but His Father's Will be done.

The Christian's reaction to the agony of our Blessed Saviour will be a greater readiness to submit to the Will of God under all circumstances, and to offer up the repugnance which nature may experience, in atonement for all rebellion against the Will of God. By doing this we can in the truest sense of the word, offer consolation to Jesus in His agony; whatever is done now was known to Him and gave Him comfort in that terrible hour of Gethsemani. He sought our consolation as His eyes peered into the future just as He sought the consolation of His apostles. The fact that He found so little of it, is the reason for the touching complaint of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret Mary about the coldness and indifference of so many souls, even such as are consecrated to Him in the priestly and religious state. For the same reason He requested the saint to spend the hour before midnight from Thursday to Friday before the tabernacle to bear Him company, to beg the Father's pardon for sinners, to share in some way the bitterness He experienced in that hour of agony.

This mystery thus brings the agonizing Saviour closer to us. It arouses our compassion, sorrow for our past lack of conformity with the Will of God; it prompts us henceforth to submit to the Will of God. We learn to pray with Him, our Divine Redeemer, even in the bitterest trial, "Not my will but Thine be done." But this is also the most ardent desire of our Blessed Mother of Fatima, whose never changing attitude of will was, "Be it done to me according to Thy word."

THE SCOURGING

Pilate was fully convinced of the innocence of Jesus, but politician and coward that he was, he did not have the courage of his conviction, and so he rather preferred expediency to justice. In order to appease the Jews he had Jesus scourged. Pilate may have believed that after this the Jews would desist from asking for the death penalty. The sacred writers do not enter into the details of the scourging, since these were known to their readers; they simply record the order of Pilate, "that Jesus be scourged." (Matt. 27, 26).

Jesus most probably suffered the Roman scourging. This punishment was administered with a whip which looked much like the British cat-o'-nine-tails and usually little iron balls or hooks were tied into the leather thongs. Moreover, the Roman scourging was not limited to any number of blows; that was left to the judges, or more often to the soldiers who carried out the sentence and as a rule were men of a cruel and inhuman type. So Jesus is stripped of His garments, His wrists are tied to the top of the column of flagellation, so that His feet barely reach the ground, and the terrible scourging begins. We shudder as we think of the Most Holy subjected to the indignities of a public whipping. The blows rain down on His innocent body, bluish streaks appear, the flesh is lifted in horrid welts; soon the skin breaks and shreds of skin and flesh are hurled all around by the swishing lashes; the blood runs down in streams. The victim is writhing in pain and half-suppressed moans escape from His lips. At last the torture is over; the hands of Jesus are loosed and utterly exhausted He drops to the ground and there lies in His own blood. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of old, "I have become even as a worm and no man, the outcast of humanity and the castaway of the people." (Ps. 21, 7). And the prophet Isaias says of Him, "There is no beauty in Him nor comeliness, despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity. Surely, He hath borne our infirmities, and we have thought Him as it were a leper and as one struck by God and afflicted." (Isa. 53, 2-4).

Why did Jesus submit to such a dreadful suffering? "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins." By this terrible scourging He wished to atone above all for the sins of the flesh. As our Blessed Lady of Fatima revealed, more souls are in hell because of impurity than because of any other sin. The same has always been the opinion of spiritual writers. The mystery of the scourging, therefore, has a special message for our times. As in the days of the deluge, when God destroyed the human race because of the sins of the flesh, so now man has become flesh. The sins of the flesh are glorified in the press, on the screen, over the radio, they are represented no longer as sins, but as the lawful gratification of nature, the romance of youth, the zest of adult age. And so the flesh rules the world and ruins souls. But neither the fact that millions of men have become the slaves of this vice, nor the fact that the world glorifies it, can change its sinful, wicked nature. The impure shall not enter into the Kingdom of God.

The sins of the flesh are so grievous because they poison the very fountains of life and desecrate the noble and wonderful faculty given to man for the procreation of the human race, for the establishment of family and home. Men take the pleasures and refuse to pay the price; sins of the flesh are nothing but selfishness and cowardice parading under the mask of love.

In the case of the Christian, who through Baptism has been made a temple of God, these sins moreover constitute a desecration of that temple. St. Paul impresses this idea upon the early Christians; converts from Judaism as well as those from paganism well understood that a temple is a holy place and a desecration of it a terrible sacrilege. To the present day Holy Church reminds the faithful of the same truth when in the ceremonies of Baptism she directs the priest to say to the person to be baptized, "Receive the sign of the cross upon thy forehead and upon thy heart; take unto thee the faith into the heavenly commandments, and be thou such in thy ways that thou mayest be fit henceforth to be a temple of God." More holy than the temple of stone is the living temple of man. The conclusion then drawn by St. Paul is clear, "If any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which you are" (Cor; 3, 17). The believing Catholic is filled with horror when he sees or reads about the desecration of churches, when altars and tabernacles are demolished, the holy vessels broken, the holy Species thrown upon the floor and trampled upon. So do the sins of the flesh desecrate the living temple of God, making it the dwelling place of the devil. How great the sin of impurity must be we can gather from the terrors of the scourging which God suffered in order to atone for it.

Our Lady of Fatima, emphatically insists upon the necessity of penance, that is, doing things that are painful, thus to atone for the unlawful pleasure derived from sin. Holy Church obliges the faithful, particularly during the holy

season of Lent, to the performance of penitential works, especially fasting. However, fasting in the wider sense comprises all works of mortification. There are many works that are painful and cause considerable hardship. To get up early in the morning in order to assist at the Eucharistic Sacrifice of atonement, to continue patiently and faithfully at a monotonous duty, to perform the one or the other work of mercy when this is inconvenient, to bear with patience, sickness, privation, heat, cold, the faults and failings of others are all such penitential works. If performed in the spirit of humility and contrition, God will accept them as reparation for sins committed. At the same time they strengthen the will and merit abundant grace, so that in future we may be stronger in temptation and the more surely keep holy the temple of God in our souls.

It is not only atonement for the sins of impurity that this mystery calls for, but it also reminds the Christian of his positive duty to be pure. If we desire to live up to the ideal of Christian perfection, we must sublimate our thoughts, lift them up to pure and holy things. As the Apostle says, we must mind the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father; we must resist evil thoughts as soon as we become aware of them, for the longer they are allowed to linger on, the stronger they grow. The more we reflect on ourselves as the sacred temples of God, the more the very thought of impurity will horrify us, and the more we shall be inflamed with love for purity. A pure life does not make a man sad and gloomy, but rather fills him with heavenly peace; it gives a foretaste of the bliss of the saints in heaven, who in the temple not made by the hands of men, not only delight in the thought of God as in this life, but see him face to face. And will not love between the married as well as between young people contemplating marriage be immeasurably nobler and more soul-satisfying, if the lover sees in the beloved not only the physical charms of the body, but the spiritual beauty of the soul resplendent with the splendour of God's grace? Such love will be reflected in conduct that carefully keeps from the beloved whatever might be harmful, and that is above all the greatest of all misfortunes, sin.

This is the message of the mystery of the scourging for our times. From the spirit of fornication, deliver us, O Lord. Mother most pure, pray for us..

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

After the scourging Jesus was to be taken to Pilate for the final verdict. But the governor was still busy and the guards in charge of Jesus had to wait. So these cruel men looked for some sport to pass away the time. They now remembered that the Jews had accused Jesus of calling Himself the king of the Jews. That idea suggested some royal sport, the crowning of Jesus as king.

At once the soldiers took Jesus to a broken pillar and seated Him on it. They then tore off his garments again and threw over Him a ragged purple cloak, similar to those worn by Roman generals in a triumph. From the branches of a prickly bush, provided with long and sharp thorns, they plaited a thick wreath; now they had a royal crown. This they put on His head, pressing it down so as to make it fit. With burning pain the thorns penetrate into the scalp, injuring even the bone of the skull. The blood again begins to flow. His hair, already matted by the blood of the scourging, becomes a twisted and disorderly mass; blood is trickling down over His forehead and cheeks, forming around His eyes, nose and lips a dark unsightly crust. At last, to finish their preparation~ they put into His fettered hands a reed as royal sceptre and all is ready for the sport. Calling together the other soldiers of the cohort these cruel men now march around Jesus in derision, genuflect and mockingly salute Him with the words, "Hail, King of the Jews." Then standing before Him, they spit upon Him, take the reed out of His hands and with it strike Him on His thorn-crowned head. And so the sport continues while the all-seeing, outraged majesty of God veils His face and angels weep and tremble.

The crowning of Jesus with thorns is the atonement for the sins of pride; pride, the root from which all other sins have sprung. It is a mystery of iniquity that beings created by God and endowed with intelligence should attempt to be like unto God their Creator. But so did Lucifer in heaven, and so did men on earth. As in the case of Lucifer so in the case of men, their own exaltation and the excellence of the gifts which they had received, blinded them to their own nothingness before God. We have seen in our own days how men arrogate to themselves divine authority, attempting to dethrone God, to abrogate the Ten Commandments and to substitute in their place their own hell-inspired principles.

All heresies and rebellions have their origin in pride. In the former the human mind refuses to accept the truth re-

vealed by God, and in the latter men refuse to render obedience to the authority appointed by God. Pride enters into almost every phase of human life. Disrespect for God's representatives, destructive criticism that undermines authority, defiance and lawlessness are the poisonous fruits growing from the same root of pride. But also contempt of our fellow-man, all haughty and supercilious treatment meted out to him, all disregard of His rights, all pharisaical self-complacency that sees the good in oneself and is blind to the good in others, all this is pride in action which put the crown of thorns upon our Saviour's head. By the pain and humiliation of His crowning with thorns He atoned for it.

We even recognize some particular forms of human pride in the various phases of Our Lord's crowning. In the head crowned with thorns we see atoned the pride and vainglorious thoughts and desires that lead to rebellion against God, to contempt and oppression of fellow-men. The purple cloak may well remind us of the pride and vanity displayed in the fashions of the world, that sinful desire to attract attention, to call forth admiration, to outshine others. The reed in the hands of our thorn-crowned Saviour atones for the lust for power, for tyranny of imposing one's own will upon others and using violence against such as attempt to resist. The mockery of Christ's divine and royal authority through the genuflection of the soldiers, how it atones for the lack of respect for God and holy things, the desecration of churches, the contempt for which the temple of God in our neighbour's soul is treated, those haughty, sarcastic gestures, by which we ridicule and vilify our fellow-men! Jesus is spat and struck in the face; but is it not precisely the face upon which the most careful attention is bestowed so that it may charm, subdue and enslave? So much attention is given to physical beauty and so little interest shown in the beauty of the soul.

There is a painting that represents Our Blessed Saviour crowned with thorns and holding in His fettered hands the reed, behind the tabernacle door. The picture is deeply significant. Jesus, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, still receives from millions of men nothing but contempt, coldness and indifference; even marks of reverence are frequently given to Him in such a way as to create the impression of mockery rather than of faith. So we wish to offer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament all reverence and love, all adoration and glorification due to Him to atone for the unspeakable humiliations and indignities which He endured in the crowning with thorns.

We wish to atone furthermore by reverence and obedience to the representatives of the Divine King in the Church, of whom Jesus Himself has said, "He that heareth you, heareth Me; and he who despiseth you, despiseth Me" (Luke 10, 16). And since there is no authority except from God, every act of obedience rendered because of God is also an act of reparation for the rebellion of pride, that put the crown of thorns upon the head of Jesus. On the other hand, wherever human authority forgets its dependence upon divine authority and in the rebellious spirit of Lucifer, demands things which would be a denial of Christ, the King, there can be but one answer, and that is loyalty to Christ even unto death.

We can, furthermore, atone for the sins of pride by humble reverence and respect for our fellow-men as the images and temples of God and the redeemed of Christ, and that, the more effectively the lowlier they are whom we thus honour. But the most fitting, though the most painful, will be the reparation that is rendered to Jesus by true humility. The humble will not consider themselves better than their fellow-men, will not prefer themselves to them; they will through modesty in dress and speech and manners, suppress the natural inclination to pride and vainglory. Above all, the truly humble are satisfied to be humbled, that is, ignored, put to shame, ridiculed, despised. All possible contempt that we could endure in this life is not too great a reparation for one mortal sin, by which the sinner has deserved the everlasting disgrace of hell. No other reparation will be as pleasing and comforting to our thorn-crowned King.

Precious lessons are learned from this mystery of the crowning of Our Blessed Saviour. Let us seek the strength for their practice in loving union with Jesus humbled and despised. Under a Head crowned with thorns we must not be pampered members.

O Sacred Head surrounded *O Jesus, I adore Thee,*
By crown of piercing thorns, *A humble plea I bring,*
O bleeding Head, so wounded *My guilt I own before Thee*
Reviled, and put to scorn. *O pardon me, my King.*

JESUS CARRIES THE CROSS

Pilate had tried repeatedly to release Jesus without offending the Jews. However, all was in vain; his last efforts were answered by their shouts that they had no king but Caesar, and that anyone that made himself king was not a friend of Caesar. Pilate feared he might be reported to the emperor as favouring rebellious elements among the people, and that would have meant the end of his career. So political expediency decided the case and Jesus was condemned to death.

The official act of condemnation was, according to Roman law, very brief. Sitting upon his official chair, the judge pronounced the sentence upon the accused standing before him in the words "You shall be crucified," and turning to the prisoner's guard he continued, "Soldier, go and get the cross ready." The sentence was carried out immediately. The cross was brought forward and given to the condemned to carry, and the procession to the place of execution began to move. In front of it, on horseback rode the Roman centurion, behind him walked a soldier with a tablet on which was written the crime because of which the condemned suffered the death penalty; then came the condemned carrying the cross, surrounded by four soldiers and followed by a crowd of people, that was swelled by newcomers as the procession moved on through the most frequented streets of the city. Exactly the same procedure was followed in the case of Jesus. The commotion caused by His condemnation and the crowd accompanying Him must have been extraordinarily great, because He had been known throughout the country; moreover, it was Paschaltide, with thousands of pilgrims in the city, and it was a triple execution, since two criminals were to suffer the same penalty. Let us now follow Jesus on His sorrowful way of the cross.

It would have been strenuous work for a very robust man to carry a heavy cross over the streets of Jerusalem, roughly paved, uneven, dusty, first descending for a little while and then rising towards the hill of the crucifixion. The distance was about one mile. But Jesus had been extremely weakened by the terrible events of the preceding night and the early morning. He had suffered the agony in the garden, had been cruelly treated by the soldiery during the hours of the night, had gone through the ordeal or trials before the high priests and Pilate, had been scourged and crowned with thorns. He needed rest and care, but instead He now must carry the heavy cross. What excruciating pain every step must have caused by the cross dragging behind Him on the ground, jerking up and down on the cobble stones, striking against the crown of thorns as He staggered on in a daze of utter exhaustion. His soul is tormented by the disgrace of the penalty. People look at Him in amazement; He, the famous Teacher and Miracle Worker, now exposed as an imposter and brought to His deserved punishment; the Pharisees and doctors of the law are conspicuous in the procession with triumphant mien and bearing, and the presence of the two criminals would suggest that Jesus was one like them. Jesus' way of the cross is the way of unspeakable suffering; His body is racked by pain, His soul steeped in agony.

Yet it is not the endurance of pain as such that brought us salvation but the manner in which Jesus suffered. He had entered the world with the words of the psalmist in His mind, "Behold I come to do thy Will," and this attitude He renewed throughout His life, particularly during His agony in the garden when He prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee. Remove this chalice from Me; but not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mar. 14, 36). It had not been the Father's will to remove this cup of suffering and so He drinks it to its dregs; yet it remains for Him the Father's cup. "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18, 11).

Because it was His Father's Will, Jesus suffered without complaining. It would be unworthy of Him, the Son of God and Redeemer of the world, to show signs of unwillingness, discontent and weakness whilst doing the things willed by the Father and performing the greatest act of His life, in fact, the greatest the world has ever witnessed.

However, suffering resignedly does not mean suffering in a spirit of cynicism or insensibility; that would ill accord with the humble Jesus. No, He suffers like a man that feels the pain of the cross in all its bitterness and gratefully accepts any relief or consolation offered Him. In fact, since He suffers as the Head of the human race, He eagerly desires such manifestations of sympathy and acts of charity, knowing that the members of His Mystical Body must have a share in His sufferings, if they are to have a share in the blessings of the Passion. The sacred writers record the kind acts of Simon of Cyrene and the compassion of the holy women; tradition has added the meeting of Jesus with His Holy Mother and the charitable act of St. Veronica.

There were some pious women in the crowd accompanying Jesus; they were friends of Jesus convinced of His

innocence; all they could do was to give expression to their grief through tears and lamentations. Jesus rewards them by a warning that points to the real cause of His sufferings and the future punishment of the ungrateful city, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, days shall come wherein they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that have not borne, and the paps that have not given suck.' Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23, 28-31).

Simon the Cyrenean was forced to help Jesus carry the cross, because the soldiers feared Jesus might not be strong enough to reach the top of the hill. It is with reluctance that Simon begins this act of charity, but soon this reluctance changes into the realization that he has received the greatest favour of his life. In all probability he received the grace of faith in Jesus, resulting in a holy life and zealous work in the young Christian Church. Most likely also his sons, Rufus and Alexander, became prominent members of the early Church. And what must have been the joy of Simon on Easter day when he heard of the resurrection of Jesus, and throughout his life, as he saw the Church of Christ spreading among Jews and Gentiles. But the climax of his joy will come when, on the day of judgement, he will behold this cross of Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven in resplendent light as the symbol of Christ's final victory.

The fourth station of the way of the cross records the meeting of Jesus with His Mother. Certain it is that Mary followed the procession, for we find her in the end standing beneath the cross. So it is most probable that somewhere on the way to Calvary she managed to get so near to Jesus as to be able to speak to Him. However, words were not needed; their tearful eyes met and they revealed to each other the sentiments of their hearts, unwavering submission to the will of the Father, love unto death, and that is for both the greatest comfort and consolation.

The sixth station of the popular way of the cross recalls the deed of Veronica. Courageously this pious woman pushes through the crowd and the guard of soldiers to offer Jesus a towel to wipe His face. By this act she publicly proclaimed her love for Jesus as well as her disapproval of the way in which He was treated. Jesus showed His appreciation of this kind deed by leaving on the towel the impression of His sacred face. Thus Jesus will always reward even the least manifestation of sympathy and love for Him by impressing upon the soul a deeper understanding of His crucified love.

The life of the Christian has been called a way of the cross and rightly so. As another Christ the Christian must follow in the footsteps of His Divine Master; Jesus Himself has expressly demanded it, making the carrying of the cross the indispensable condition for discipleship, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9, 23).

The Christian's cross consists in the observance of the commandments. The very fact that most of the commandments are given in the negative form, "Thou shalt not," is evidence that human nature in its present state is inclined to do precisely the thing that is forbidden. The further fact that the threat of punishment is added to the transgression and that the promise of reward is added to their observance, points to the difficulty of their observance. The same holds for the duties of each one's state of life. It is this inherent difficulty which makes the Christian life a way of the cross.

Moreover, God may and commonly does add sufferings not necessarily connected with either the commandments or the duties of one's state of life. These are the manifold tribulations that fall to the lot of men, sickness and disease, the death of loved ones, misfortune and poverty, dissensions and enmities, unavoidable yet trying associations, earthquakes, floods, wars, persecutions, things of which our times have seen an overabundance. The Christian cannot keep the cross out of his life. Whether or not it will be a blessing for him depends upon the attitude which he takes towards it.

Jesus is our divine teacher and Model in all things and therefore most emphatically in so important a phase of the Christian life as is suffering. The Christian's attitude must be that of Christ. Hence he must learn from Jesus to carry his cross with full submission to the will of our Heavenly Father and thus without complaining. The Father has prepared for His children the cup of suffering; it will be a chalice of salvation if drunk with the sentiments of the child, that trust in the Father as knowing best what is good for us. Let us carry the cross humbly not presuming on our strength, but seeking strength at the fountains of the Saviour, in His sacred wounds. The greater the tribulations the more insistent must be our prayer, "Passion of Christ, strengthen me." But the most ideal and perfect attitude towards

the cross is that of love. The lover of Christ will unite himself with the divine cross-bearer with the intention of bringing Him relief and rendering to Him services comparable to those of Simon and Veronica; he will make the intentions of Jesus his own and offer up his crosses for the same purposes for which Jesus suffered. Meditation on the sufferings of Christ inflamed the saints with love of the cross; it will do the same for us.

This mystery of the Rosary, then, if understood and practised, will stop the flight from the cross and bring the Christian to an ever-increasing sense of duty and loving submission to the will of God in all circumstances. It will convince us that the cross is the only way to atone for our sins and the sins of the world, to implore the grace of conversion for sinners. The cross is the only way to Christian perfection and heavenly glory. And our sorrowful Mother will rejoice to see her children assume more and more the likeness of her crucified Son.

THE CRUCIFIXION

The mystery of the crucifixion comprises the nailing to the cross, the three hours agony, and the death of Jesus. We are reminded of it by every crucifix, which has been called by saints a book of life, in which the faithful can and must read the way of life. Our Blessed Mother stood beneath the cross of her dying Son, she understands this mystery as no other mortal ever did. Uniting ourselves with her, let us look up to Him whom they have pierced and learn to love Him Who has loved us unto death.

When the sad procession with Jesus carrying the cross had arrived on Calvary, the soldiers at once proceeded to the execution. First, Jesus was offered a cup of wine mixed with some bitter substance. This was usually done by friends of the condemned or other charitable people in order to make the condemned less sensitive to the cruel pains of the crucifixion. But Jesus, having tasted the drink, did not take it; He wished to offer the sacrifice of His life fully conscious without any alleviation. Then Jesus was stripped and ordered to lie down on the cross and now the heavy blows of the hammer drive the nails through his Hands and Feet into the hard wood of the cross. At last the cross was raised and there Jesus was hanging between heaven and earth in indescribable agony.

Crucifixion was considered in ancient times the most painful manner of inflicting the death penalty and modern medical science concurs in this opinion. The wounds in the hands and feet must have burned like fire; then the distention of the joints and dislocation of the bones, the disturbance of the blood circulation, the strain upon the heart and lungs, the feverish condition brought about by the lacerations covering the whole body were such as to make the victim cry out in pain and agony. Frequently these sufferings caused the death of the victim within a few hours, but robust natures, especially if the scourging had not preceded, could live for one or two days or even longer.

To these pains which Jesus suffered in His body must be added the sufferings of His soul. He felt the injustice of the trials that had brought upon Him the condemnation, He was grieved by the hatred and hypocrisy of the Pharisees. How deeply He must have felt hurt by their cruel mockeries, "Vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God and in three days dost rebuild it, save Thy ownself. If Thou be the Son of God, save thyself. He has saved others, Himself He cannot save. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross." And where are the crowds that only a week before had enthusiastically acclaimed Him as the Son of David, the King of Israel? Where are they, who on former occasions had admired the great Miracle Worker, the blind who had received their sight, the deaf who had been made to hear, the mute to whom He restored the use of speech, the paralysed who went away from Him in perfect health, where are they now? Where are those whom He had loved above all others and chosen for His intimate following? Peter who had protested that he would go with Jesus even unto death; Thomas who was ready to die with Him, and all the others, where are they? Not one of them except St. John is present to bear Him company in the most dreadful hours of His life. Yet the climax of His mental agony was the apparent abandonment by His Heavenly Father. God is the helper in every need; to Him the fathers cried and He heard them, but He seems deaf to the prayers of His beloved Son, who had sought nothing but the glory of the Father, had always done the things pleasing to Him. There is no abandonment more bitter than to feel abandoned by God; then it is as if the soul's very substance were torn asunder, then the last stars in the firmament fade out, then night settles on the soul, dark and dreary night. Although God did not actually abandon His Son, He did let Him feel the effects of such an abandonment. This abandonment was the greatest suffering of Our Lord, so great that all anguish and sorrow that men ever experienced on earth, even if put together are like a drop of water compared to the endless ocean; it was that suffering that wrung from the lips of our

dear Saviour the heartrending cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27, 46).

Amid such pain and agony death approaches. Death had entered into the world through the disobedience of the first Adam; it is now to be atoned for by the obedience unto death of the second Adam. With hands and feet nailed to the cross He can no longer work as He did at Nazareth, He can no longer walk about the land announcing the glad tidings of the Gospel; all He can do is to obey. But His life's mission is consummated, the will of the Father accomplished, and so He commends His soul into the hands of the Father, bows His head and dies. And, behold, the earth trembles, the rock of Calvary is split asunder, the veil of the temple is rent in two, the dead arise from their graves, Nature, horror stricken, mourns over the crime committed. Yet out of this death new immortal life has sprung; Jesus died that men might live.

What the great Apostle said of Himself applies to every man throughout the world in the past, present, and future, He "loved me and delivered Himself for me." (Gal. 2, 20). The love of Jesus sends forth its flaming light and warmth in the seven words He spoke on the cross. His enemies and executioners and in them all sinners, great and small, are the first beneficiaries of His love, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23, 34). This is the language of love that knows how to excuse and to find some mitigating circumstances even in the greatest sin. The Jews could and should have known what they were doing, but having closed their eyes to the light of grace they now do not know what they are doing. Yet their sin shall be forgiven, if they accept Jesus as their Saviour and repent. How they and all repenting sinners will be received by Jesus, if they trustfully turn to Him for mercy and forgiveness, is illustrated by the words of mercy He spoke to the repentant thief, "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise." (Luke 23, 43).

There is one treasure left in the possession of Jesus, dearer to Him than anything else on earth, His holy Mother. That she may be men's refuge and hope and that through her we may find the way to Jesus, He leaves her to us: "Woman, behold thy son."* Then He said to the disciple, "Behold thy Mother" (John 19, 27). If men have refused the invitations of His Love, it may be they will be more responsive to the love of a mother. No matter how much men may have offended Him and how unworthy they may be, He has died for all and He thirsts for their salvation, "I thirst" (John 19, 28). His bodily thirst is but the expression of His thirst for souls.

Thus did Jesus love us unto death; thus He atoned for all the hatred among men that has turned this earth into a valley of tears, into a vast battlefield. Thus He atoned for all selfishness, that thinks only of its own interest and forgets about the sufferings of the rest, for that cynical denial of guilt and responsibility that asks with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"; for all love of the world that seeks to drown its sorrow and pain in the vortex of earthly pleasures. Here Jesus paid the penalty for all fickleness and instability that refuses to finish the task assigned to us by God because it is too hard, for that spirit of hatred and revengefulness that cannot bring itself to forgive and to return good for evil. Here Jesus merits the grace of a happy death for all, provided we love Him and through Him commend the souls into the hands of our Heavenly Father.

For St. Paul the practical lesson drawn from the love of Jesus was, "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. 2, 20), and, "To me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1, 21). As Jesus loved us unto death, so must we love Him unto death. Nothing can be too hard to endure for Him who has endured for us the unendurable. Love for Him must be love unto the death of our self-love and, if needs be, death unto the shedding of our blood.

Such love unto death is forgiving love that is extended even to our enemies, benevolent love that seeks the best of our fellow-men, generous love ready to give up what is most dear to us; resigned and patient love in the sufferings of body and soul, faithful and persevering love that is influenced neither by the promises and pleasures of the world, nor by its threats and persecutions. Such love burned in the heart of St. Paul when he wrote, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution or hunger or nakedness, or danger, or the sword?.... . For, I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord" (Rom. 8, 35-39).

Love unto death is the lesson which our Lady of Fatima wants us to learn from this mystery. Shall we be able to resist the appeal of love? "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (John 12, 32). Let us allow ourselves to be drawn to Him by the bonds of love in and through the Immaculate Heart of our Blessed Mother

standing beneath the cross.

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