

MARCH-APRIL-MAY

LENT TO PENTECOST

MARCH 1

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*The Season of Lent*



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“And he was in the desert forty days and forty nights” (Mk. 1:13).

Following the example of our Savior’s forty days’ fast in the desert, the Church has appointed a fixed period in the year for the special practice of prayer and penance.

O Jesus, grant me ardor and perseverance in the works of penance.

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Our Savior goes before us on the holy path of Lenten penance. He bore all its fatigues and hardships, so that when we would be called upon to tread that narrow way, we might silence the excuses and repugnances of self-love by remembering His example. The lesson He has set before us is too plain to be misunderstood; penance for sin is a law, and we cannot plead ignorance of it, nor excuse ourselves from it. The work of penance consists essentially in contrition of the soul and mortification of the body. Our soul has willed sin, and the body has frequently co-operated in its commission. There cannot be earnest penitence nor a thoroughly Christian life, where body and soul, but especially the latter, do not take up together the work of expiation.

There are three eminently good works which are at the same time works of penance. These are prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds. The Church herself redoubles her prayers of supplication during this season; it is for us she offers them. Should we not, then, during this time of special grace, cast off the spiritual indolence and languor which so often

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envelop our souls? The dispositions which should accompany our fasting are described for us in the Lesson read in the Mass on Friday of Quinquagesima Week. God Himself tells us through the prophet Isaias that fasting from material food is useless in His eyes, unless it is accompanied by abstention also from sin. Corporal sacrifice is required, but it is unacceptable without sacrifice of the soul, that is, amendment of life. As for the third of the great penitential works, almsgiving, the Church places before us in the Gospel of Quinquagesima Friday the instructions of our Savior regarding it. He imposes upon us the duty of loving all our fellow men, whether friends or enemies, for His sake. When we perform acts of kindness or mercy toward our brethren in Christ, we offer to God a most acceptable homage. These acts are works of penance, because they often involve certain privations; and they force us to overcome our natural repugnances when they include all persons, without exception.

Forty days of penance are surely little enough to atone for our many negligences in the service of God. But our courage would not last even for this length of time unless we had Jesus with us. He prays with us, fasts with us, and does our works of mercy with us. Let us keep our eyes fixed upon Him; and when we grow tired, let us go to Him like the sick of whom St. Mark says that they *entreated him to let them touch but the tassel of his cloak; and as many as touched him were saved.* As we come into contact with the infinite sanctity of Jesus each morning in Holy Communion, let us ask Him to invigorate us by His grace and perfect His reign in our souls. Moreover, we should look beyond ourselves and the little world that surrounds us and include the whole Church in our offering of

the next forty days to the offended majesty of God. Let us ask Mary, the Refuge of sinners, to offer to the divine Majesty this year's atonement and to obtain repentance and pardon for all sinners.

"It behooves us, O most holy Virgin, to offer thee on the altar of our hearts the sacrifice of our prayers. For whereas the sacrifice of our prayers has no merit of its own, it may be made acceptable through thee to thy Son. Present to Him who was sacrificed for sin the sacrifice of sinners' prayers" (from a German Sequence of the fourteenth century).

## MARCH 2

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### *Spiritual Service*



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"I exhort you, therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God—your spiritual service. And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed in the newness of your mind, that you may discern what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1, 2).

In the twelfth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul develops the theme of the Christian life as a sacrifice offered to God, giving us a rule for Christian living and a program of spiritual perfection.

O Jesus, help me to see the obstacles that I am placing in the way of Your will for my spiritual progress.

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If we are children of God and brethren of Christ, we must endeavor to banish from our souls all the character-

istics of the "old man" and to become as if "newborn." Herein lies the sacrifice of which St. Paul speaks. Our body becomes a sacrifice by renunciation of the world; our soul, by humility. Their union in sacrifice constitutes the perfect holocaust. The sacrifice offered by a member of Christ's Mystical Body, must obviously be *living*, for there can be no dead members in Christ's living Body. Further, that which is incorporated into Christ and united to Him must necessarily be *holy* and *pleasing to God*. It is holy also because it is altogether surrendered to God and pleasing because it is the best we can give Him.

Our members, our senses, submissive to the spirit and subjected to the law of mortification under the action of grace, will become as a living host, constantly emitting the fragrance of works of penance and salvation. To the sanctification of our senses and members, we should add the immolation of all the powers of our intelligence, of our heart and of our affections. The disciple of Jesus Christ will not be conformed to this world; that is, he will not place his happiness in riches, honors, and pleasure and his unhappiness in suffering and privation. Dead to the "old man" and having renounced the spirit of the world in Baptism, he constantly studies in the school of the Gospel how to be purified and transformed in newness of mind, how to go from that which is good to that which is better, and finally to the highest perfection.

This living, holy sacrifice, pleasing to God, St. Paul calls a *spiritual service* because it derives its value from the dispositions of soul which accompany it. The sacrifice of the spirit is made when we overcome pride, anger, impatience, when we avoid willful distractions during prayer. Like David we should have a contrite and humble heart to present to

the Lord. This is a pleasing sacrifice in His sight and one He will never despise. And when St. Paul recommends the performance of a *spiritual service* in order that we may *discern what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God*, he is indicating that progress in the spiritual life which consists in the perfect fulfillment of the will of God, in the crown and completion of the sacrifice of body and soul which St. Paul so earnestly exhorts us to offer. May his desires for us not be left unfulfilled, that God may be glorified in us all!

“Lord, all things are Yours that are in heaven and upon earth. I desire to offer up myself to You as a voluntary oblation, and to remain forever Yours. Lord, in the simplicity of my heart I offer myself to You this day, as Your servant forevermore, for Your homage and for a sacrifice of perpetual praise” (*Imitation of Christ*).

MARCH 3

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### *Religious Perfection*



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“You, however, are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people; that you may proclaim the perfections of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, 10).

These words of St. Peter are addressed to all the members of Christ's Mystical Body, but they may be particularly applied to religious.

Divine Savior, grant that my observance of the Rule may be a source of strength to others and of blessing to my community.

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We have been received into our community as children into the embrace of their mother. She has shown us the way to heaven, she has inspired in us the desire for virtue and holiness, she has protected us from evil and elevated us to a sublime apostolate. Do not such benefits deserve our gratitude? Do they not, at least, merit that we do nothing to tarnish the glory or mar the beauty of our community? Her fate is in our hands. Our conduct can determine whether she will decline or prosper. Our personal good example will do more for community discipline, which is the basis of her prosperity, than all the discourses and advice vigilant superiors may give. How blessed and happy should we be, if our exactitude in observing all the points of rule and our persevering fervor were to gain for Christ a soul destined to save the souls of others! If our divine Master rewards a cup of cold water given in His name, how magnificent will be the recompense of the religious who by her good example saves souls!

In addition, the very existence of community happiness, which is to be found in peace with God and the union of hearts, is dependent upon our exactness in observing the various points of the Rule. This happiness can never be experienced in a place where order is continually disturbed. Oh, how blind and unworthy are those religious who place obstacles in the way of the general harmony! The scandal thus given is particularly great where the bad influence comes from those who by their age and rank are under a special obligation to foster union and give good example. To these religious I would say, "You are old in religion? Then you are more accustomed to the Rule and so its yoke should now seem sweet and light to you. You are old? You have, then, more sins to expiate and a greater

degree of holiness to acquire; therefore, you should observe the Rule better than others, for the Rule can be a sure and easy means of sanctification. You are old? Then you have received more favors from God and so you are under the obligation of showing Him your gratitude by obeying His will in the least things. You are old? You should be, then, a model to others of humility, mortification, recollection, punctuality.”

I conjure you, in the name of the founder of your community, who underwent many cares and difficulties, if you believe that you owe him some gratitude for opening to you this sacred refuge, be exact in observing the Rule he gave you and thus bring his blessing with you to your final judgment.

O Lord, perfect the work of Your wisdom by maintaining throughout our community the order You Yourself established therein. Deign to grant its members the grace of constant fidelity to the Rule that is its foundation and base. Then will our community be for all a place of happiness of which we may truly say, *Behold how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one!* . . . *It is a dew like that of Hermon, which comes down upon the mountains of Sion; for there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, life forever.*

MARCH 4

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*Salt and Light*



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“You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world” (Mt. 5:13, 14).

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After proclaiming the eight beatitudes, our Savior turned to the Apostles and disciples to whom especially He had addressed them. Under the symbols of salt and light He indicated the nature of their apostolate and their obligation of faithfully fulfilling its duties; for the ideal proposed in the beatitudes was not to remain sterile theory; it was to be woven into the very texture of their lives.

Divine Savior, fill me with an awareness of the responsibilities that the religious state places upon me.

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The Christian, especially the religious engaged in apostolic work, serves spiritually as the salt of Jesus Christ; that is, the element in the world which is to preserve it from corruption and to enrich it. The Christian, the priest or religious, may possess qualities which make him attractive or useful in the eyes of the world; he may be an artist, a man of letters, or a scientist; but if he is not the salt of the earth, he is seriously deficient, a failure. Of him is expected above all and inexorably that supernatural virtue which, like salt, makes his works palatable to God and man—a true sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. By his teaching and the example of his life he should preserve souls from corruption. But this is only possible if through self-immolation he has made his own the virtue and sacrifice of the Savior, and has thus become the salt of Christ. When he ceases to perform this essential function, he is good for nothing and must be cast aside. Of what use is salt that has lost its savor! This comes to pass when an admixture of the spirit of the world has altered the doctrine of the Gospel, when the supernatural element in the teaching of Christ is no longer foremost in the words and the example of the apostolic follower of Christ. It is also the unhappy consequence of a loss of earnestness

in the struggle against self and in the quest for sanctity.

*"You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."* Jesus is certainly not telling His disciples here to do good in order to be seen; He will later recommend that they try not to attract notice. But in this instruction He is noting the fact that edification should be the effect of the entire life of a man, especially of His intimate follower. To what purpose has one received the light of faith, the grace of the sacraments, the grace of a religious vocation, if by one's life one contradicts that which these high privileges imply? Much is expected of a religious; if by word or deed he shows himself false to the promises he made to God, scandal is given. Our lives are meant to glorify the Savior, to be a living exemplification of our faith. Then, seeing our good works, men will give glory to God and will feel themselves moved to imitate our good example. Our actions will have proved that the teachings of the Gospel are not impossible to observe and our happiness will show that the pursuit of holiness is far from being a source of gloom or sadness. We have been put on a lampstand to give light to all who are in the house of the human family, a divine light and also a divine warmth, which we ourselves must draw from the hearth fire that is Jesus.

"O God, unchangeable power and light eternal, mercifully regard the wonderful mystery of Thy whole Church, and peacefully effect by Thy eternal decree the salvation of mankind, that all the world may experience and see that which was fallen raised up, that which was old made new, and all things restored through Him from whom they received their beginning, even our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son" (Roman Missal).

## *Abuse of the Tongue*



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“And if anyone thinks himself to be religious, not restraining his tongue but deceiving his own heart, that man’s religion is vain” (James 1:26).

St. James includes the governing of the tongue among the good works required for justification and eternal salvation.

Most Holy Trinity, grant that my observance of silence may lead me to a closer union with You, dwelling within me.

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What is the ordinary source of our faults? Is it not abuse of the tongue, that *very world of iniquity*, as St. James terms it, whence proceed pride, flattery, deceit, false judgments, harmful gossip—in a word, almost all the sins that one can commit? The tongue can serve as the able interpreter, so to speak, of all human passions. If a religious who does not hesitate to speak at forbidden times would make her evening examination of conscience sincerely, she would probably discover that even if she has not committed faults against fraternal charity, she has, at all events, sinned in various ways against the virtue of prudence. Even if her conversations held in times of silence were themselves free from fault—unlikely as this is—it is certain that time spent in idle talking is lost to whatever duty obedience has assigned; and, in any case, such infractions of rule are always displeasing to our Lord, even when they do not offend Him formally. If we are to render an account to our Judge for

every idle word, what will be the accounting demanded for conversations that are opposed to His good pleasure and even to His holy will?

Again, we are obliged by our religious profession to seek perfection and, therefore, to practice virtue and so to make ourselves worthy of the divine favor. Herein lies one of the chief advantages of the practice of silence, for it induces and preserves interior calm, tranquillity of soul, and the recollection so necessary for prayer. In observing silence we practice humility, mortification, patience, obedience, self-renunciation, and conformity to the divine will. What a difference there is between the religious who carefully observes silence and one who does not scruple to violate this rule at any time! The former advances toward perfection, for she is able to control her passions and so vanquish the enemies of her salvation; the latter lives in continual distraction and, perhaps, finds only boredom in her exercises of piety. She falls back instead of progressing in the way of perfection. One spiritual writer cited by Bossuet goes so far as to say that habitual infraction of silence could lead a soul by degrees to reprobation, while fidelity to it in a Christian spirit is sufficient to assure salvation.

Finally, is it not through the observance of silence that we can best prepare ourselves for the duties of our apostolate? Moses prepared for his high mission in the Madian desert where he contemplated the future sufferings of Christ. As a child St. John the Baptist went into solitude and remained there until the appointed day of his manifestation to Israel. And let us remember above all the long silence of Jesus in Nazareth and also the prayerful silence of the Apostles in the Cenacle as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion is inescapable that without the practice of

silence: according to the Rule we cannot become worthy of the vocation to which we have been called.

O Jesus, I adore Your mysterious silence in the hidden life. Make me also silent among men that I may converse more intimately and even uninterruptedly with You. Through the intercession of Mary and Joseph, I implore You to teach me how to keep silence and how to speak. Manifest to me, good Jesus, more and more Your adorable perfection and lead me by the practice of recollected silence to perfect self-contempt and perfect union with You.

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MARCH 6

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### *Religious Silence*



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"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19). This recommendation of the Apostle St. James is one of the various practical exhortations on the Christian life contained in his Epistle.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, help me to grow in the spirit of silence and recollection.

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St. James exhorts us to avoid intemperance of the tongue by a wise and circumspect slowness to speak. Nothing is more common among us than the readiness to express our ideas as soon as we have conceived them; yet nothing is more opposed to the spirit of the *Gospel*. In the judgment again of St. James, *if anyone thinks himself to be religious, not restraining his tongue . . . that man's religion is vain*. It is to curb this universal and disorderly tendency toward

immoderation in talking that all founders of religious orders have prescribed certain periods of silence during which any unnecessary conversation is formally prohibited. What more effective measure against idle words could there be than these hours of recollection when we are permitted to speak only with God dwelling within us!

In the language of early monasticism, silence is the "soul of peace" and the "union of hearts," the "pillar which supports the edifice," the essential means, in short of preserving order and discipline. Where each member of a religious community is pledged to do her share in maintaining regularity, itself one of the greatest boons of community life, any who take liberties opposed to this good order destroy insofar as they can the beautiful harmony that is so pleasing to God and to men who are according to God's own heart. The disturbance of harmony is precisely the evil result that is inevitably produced by infractions of the rule on silence, since we cannot violate this rule without involving at the same time another person. When the Rule enjoins silence, any violation harms both the offender and her neighbor. No one has the right to take from another soul unnecessarily even a moment of recollection. And if the bad example influences several others, the entire house gradually loses the spirit of quietness and peace. Other evils, too, quickly appear, such as complaints and murmuring, calumny and dissension.

If, on the other hand, silence is carefully observed and all the members of a religious household pass in holy recollection from one duty to another, is it not evident that harmony, regularity, and a union of hearts will prevail therein? Furthermore, our own experience will tell us that if we allow ourselves relaxation in the matter of silence, fervor cools and undue distraction and levity enter into even our spiritual

exercises. In short, without the practice of silence, both interior and exterior, there is no spiritual advancement. Let us resolve, then, to be careful not to speak when the Rule forbids it; otherwise, in addition to thwarting the designs of Providence for the Congregation and for each of us individually, we shall weaken discipline, disfigure the beauty of our religious institute, and expose ourselves to the many evils that result from an intemperate use of the tongue.

O my God, let not Your merciful designs for my spiritual progress or that of my community be impeded by my careless violations of the Rule on silence. Help me to keep my resolution of speaking only when the Rule allows, so that I may both grow in Your divine friendship and expiate my past intemperance in the use of my tongue.

MARCH 7

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*The Third Dolor of Our Lady*



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“Behold, thy father and I have been seeking thee sorrowing”  
(Lk. 2:48).

The deprivation for three days of the presence of Jesus was one of the greatest and most painful of our Lady's sorrows for Jesus seemed to have voluntarily dissociated Himself from the two persons who loved Him most.

O Mother of fair love, teach me how to love.

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Mary realized that there were claims upon her Son far more exalted and demanding than hers and Joseph's and that He who was her Child was also her God. But Mary

was only gradually learning the full meaning and extent of the mysterious demands of her great role as Mother of the Savior. Her loving complaint, "*Son, why hast thou done so to us?*" was the cry of a bewildered heart. Jesus had never before behaved so to her. It must have seemed to Mary, although she was absolutely sinless, that she had in some way proved unworthy of her mission and so was being rejected by her Son. The immeasurable agony of this feeling must have been for Mary as a foretaste of the desolation which her Son was to know in His last hour, on the cross.

The first two sorrows had been as a preparation for the third, which began the severing of the earthly and visible ties that united Jesus and Mary. But Mary, having entered into the mystery of this third dolor, also willed it. She willed it in the same spirit of submission with which Jesus accepted the chalice of His passion, which He prayed would pass from Him. In the illumination of her third sorrow, Mary saw clearly the special road she was to travel. It is one thing, however, to see the road and another to walk upon it; and so our Lady came to know only through experience the bitterness of the grief caused by bodily separation from her Son. It was through the desolation and abandonment that were part of the work of redemption that she was to accomplish more fully her mission as Co-Redemptrix. Jesus also, Son of God though He was, *learned obedience from the things that he suffered*, St. Paul tells us.

As the second dolor of Mary taught us the lesson of detachment from places and things, so now we are brought to think of our attitude toward persons, which can be as selfish and possessive as our love for material objects. Let us ask our Lady to give us a share in her wisdom. She will make us understand that we shall never love all men

as she does who is the Mother of us all, unless we love God more than all other beings; that is to say, unless we love His will more than the claims of any creature. Then, as Mary and Joseph's sorrowful three days were followed by the joyful reunion and the happy years at Nazareth, so, when we have learned our lesson in how to love, we too shall be given the full measure of union and companionship with Jesus. If our Lord withdraws His felt presence from the soul that loves Him, He does not thereby leave the heart. Often He conceals Himself from the soul that it may seek Him with more ardent desire and greater love. But whoever wishes to find Jesus must seek Him, like Joseph and Mary, *sorrowing*, that is, in the cross and mortification; for their search was not in vain. After they had sought Him *sorrowing* they found Him and *he went down with them and came to Nazareth.*

I grieve with you, O Mary, most sorrowful Mother, in the anguish you suffered during the three days' loss of Jesus; yet He who *feedeth among the lilies* had never left your immaculate heart. Your thoughts and affections, so humble, pure, and holy, were as lilies among which your Beloved delighted to dwell. Mother most amiable, I know that Jesus is found by those who seek Him. Teach me how to seek Him as I ought; that is, teach me to seek Him through you.

## *The Life of Faith*



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“He who is just lives by faith” (Rom. 1:17).

These words constitute one of the key themes of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.

Lord Jesus, increase in me the spirit of faith...

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In what does the life of faith consist? There are within us two motivating principles, either of which may determine our conduct. One is the human spirit, which rules the children of this world, or, in St. Paul’s phrase, *the sensual man*; the other is the spirit of God, which rules the just, or the sons of God. This spirit is based on faith: *He who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder to those who seek him*. Faith sustains the just man in all his acts, as their cause and motivation; and the soul is capable of receiving greater supernatural life according as it increases in faith. A religious entirely ruled by the spirit of faith is, by reason of this faith, on fire with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. She would even be willing to become a victim for her brethren in the spirit of St. Paul, who said, *“But even if I am made the libation for the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you.”*

More strictly considered, the spirit of faith means that we form our judgments according to the principles of the Gospel and direct all our actions by these principles. It is not a question only of theological or speculative faith by which we give a firm assent to all the Church believes and teaches,

but our convictions must reach the heart; *for with the heart a man believes unto justice*. When we have faith like this, we are wholly penetrated by the great truths of our religion; one truth only of which, perfectly grasped, would preserve us from ever committing deliberate sin. Such faith makes us consent with heart and mind and will to those teachings of Jesus that are most opposed to our natural tendencies; for example, that we must renounce self, be stripped of our own will; suffer affronts and humiliations patiently, and receive with resignation afflictions of all kinds. Whoever lives this life of faith believes and practices the "hard sayings" of Jesus as unreservedly and zealously as he believes in the divinity of Him who uttered them.

This spirit of faith must not only guide the intellect and reign over the heart; it must also establish its power over the will so as to govern all our actions. It should give efficacy to our prayer: *But if any of you is wanting in wisdom, let him ask it of God . . . and it will be given to him. But let him ask with faith, without hesitation*. It should be our strength in trials and contradictions, that *through the patience and the consolation afforded by the Scriptures we may have hope*. In short, faith should consecrate and sanctify every detail of our lives: *Whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus*. The spirit of faith gives one all power over the heart of God and of men. Have this spirit of faith and you will triumph over all the obstacles to your salvation. You will be raised to the perfection to which you have been called, even to the rich crown reserved for final perseverance.

O God, grant me that living confidence in prayer, that firmness in trial, that purity of intention and habit of recollection which characterizes the life of faith. When I think of the

past I become painfully aware that in the matter of practical faith I have an inexhaustible subject for humiliation and regret. Enable me at last to say truly with Your Apostle St. James, *I from my works will show thee my faith.*

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### *Faith and Works*



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“I from my works will show thee my faith” (James 2:18).

These words of St. James recall to our minds the admonition of his divine Master: *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”*

The perfect Christian follows Christ in the external practice of good works and also by growing in interior holiness and purity.

O Jesus, help me to live continually in Your holy presence and to act only for Your greater glory.

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When our faith manifests itself in both our thoughts and our conduct to the point of full practical acceptance of the teachings of the Gospel, then we possess perfect faith. But the identification with Jesus in thoughts, desires, words, and actions, which perfect faith implies, presupposes that certain principles are already active in our daily lives. The first and primary necessity is that of purifying the heart. Faith lives in direct proportion to purity of heart; for there exists between the mind and the heart such a close relation of light and illusion, of good and evil, that one who becomes the servant of his passions is no longer moved by the truths of

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faith. He may still accept them, but they now seem to him dreamlike and unreal.

The connection between purity of heart and illumination of the mind is repeatedly suggested in Scripture. "*Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God;*" are the words of our Savior Himself; and David wrote, *The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the command of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eye.* The light of faith, if we keep our hearts free from sin, goes on increasing until we can say with the Apostle of the Gentiles, *But we all, with faces unveiled, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory, as through the Spirit of the Lord.*

Another aid toward the life of faith is meditation on the truths of faith. This holy exercise causes us to relish these truths, it stamps them upon our hearts, it makes them pass, as it were, into the very substance of our souls. A third means is fervent and frequent prayer. We should often think of our Savior's words to the man in the Gospel who asked the cure of his son: "*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believes*"; and we should say to our Lord with this anxious father, "*I do believe; help my unbelief.*" With what fervor we should repeat this prayer if we were really convinced that, besides the consideration of our own spiritual progress, the salvation of the souls entrusted to us might depend upon the degree to which we live the life of faith!

O my God, enable me to live habitually in Your presence and to meditate profitably upon the truths most useful to my soul. Inspire me to have recourse to You in prayer whenever I am in doubt or anxiety of mind. Rid me of all mean and selfish views and let not impatience, aversion, or vanity spoil

my works. Grant me, in Your goodness and mercy, a living active faith that will sanctify all my actions, especially in my relations with others.

MARCH 10

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### *The Anointing at Bethany*



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“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster jar of precious ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table” (Mt. 26:6, 7).

Six days before the Pasch, Jesus, before entering the Holy City, stopped at Bethany where He had raised Lazarus from the dead, and attended a feast in His honor at the house of Simon the leper.

O Jesus, grant that my own anxieties and suffering may never cause me to fail in charity toward others.

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In the course of this repast at the house of Simon, at which Martha served and the risen Lazarus was among the guests, Mary, the sister of Martha, entered the hall, carrying an alabaster jar of perfume. Breaking the wax seal, she poured the contents of the jar upon our Savior's head and then on His feet. Finally, she bent down over the sacred feet and wiped them with her hair, a supreme gesture of homage. Her action did not arouse great surprise, for the anointing of the head was an ordinary courtesy to a distinguished guest. The anointing of the feet, also, would not seem too great an honor for One who had raised Lazarus from the

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dead. But what must have caused astonishment was that all the precious perfume was poured out at once, since the jar contained enough for several anointings. And when the sweet fragrance of the spikenard had pervaded the house, everyone present appreciated the value of Mary's sacrifice; they knew the high cost of pure liquid nard.

But this generosity of Mary's found its critics, and in a quarter where it should least have encountered them, namely, among our Savior's own disciples. "*Why,*" said Judas, "*was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?*" Jesus came immediately to Mary's defense: "*Let her be. Why do you trouble her? She has done me a good turn. For the poor you have always with you, and whenever you want you can do good to them; but you do not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body in preparation for burial.*" As for Mary, could she have known in advance the mystery contained in her anointing of Jesus? Perhaps it was an interior knowledge that prompted her generous act. In any case, her loving heart obeyed a prophetic inspiration. Because of the great importance which was attached in antiquity to decent burial and the proper anointing of the body, this anticipated anointing of our Savior has profound significance. On the night of Jesus' death, time would not permit that His body should be so tenderly cared for. Mary's recompense for her loving and generous act was immediately revealed by our Savior Himself. The memory of her good work would be forever perpetuated in the Church. And so it has happened. Down the ages the Church has been filled with the fragrance of Mary's ointment.

Divine Savior, what a sad and mysterious contrast is presented to us in this mystery! You were criticized by an Apostle and

served and consoled by one of the simple faithful. Judas had lost his faith. Oh, never allow me to be false to my vocation and its special graces. And help me also, good Jesus, to imitate Your calm and moderation in Your defense of Mary and Your mildness in reproving Judas. Your cross and tomb were vividly before Your mind at the supper in Simon's house, yet with what sweetness and generosity You continued to instruct and admonish!

MARCH 11

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*This "Little While"*



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"A little while and you shall see me no longer; and again a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father" (Jn. 16:16).

In spirit join the Apostles as they listen to the words of Jesus in His last discourse before His passion and death.

Divine Savior, teach me to appreciate the great privilege that is mine of serving You in the darkness of faith.

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The utterances of the Incarnate Son of God are, as He tells us Himself, *spirit and life*. Very often they are also full of mystery and to be understood only through the light gained in prayer. The text proposed for our meditation today is among these especially mysterious utterances, mysterious to the disciples as well, for they said, "*What is this 'little while' of which he speaks? We do not know what he is saying.*" It would seem that our Savior referred in His first use of the phrase, *a little while*, to the interval that would elapse between His speaking these words and His reappear-

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ance after the Resurrection. St. Augustine, however, sees in our Savior's words a reference to the whole age of the world between His ascension and His second coming at the last judgment. Compared with eternity, all of time is indeed *a little while*, although to us it may seem very long. The *little while* has become nearly twenty centuries and still we do not see Him, but we know that He is with us in His Mystical Body, the Church. By His power the Church speaks and acts. Through her sacraments, instituted by Him, the life of Jesus flows into us for our sanctification. But when, at last, we shall really see Him, how our hearts will rejoice! And this joy, as Jesus told His disciples, no one shall take away.

Meanwhile, the disciples and all Christians after them were to *weep and lament*, while the world rejoiced; for the happiness of the world, which is achieved at the cost of so much effort and so briefly, does not consist in union with Jesus. The true and perfect Christian, however, passes through this life as a stranger and a pilgrim, always seeking and desiring his true country and its King, who is his sole and perfect joy. Our Lady said to St. Bernadette, "I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next." This Jesus also says to His own. Not that the life of a Christian is a bitter thing; on the contrary, even here below it is a source of joy. Properly lived, however, it is a struggle and sometimes a severe one, which the divine will often complicates further by purifying trials.

The Apostles, too, had to struggle, to suffer, and to die. Jesus did not conceal from them their earthly destiny, but He promised that their sadness would be turned into joy and this prospect supported them in all their trials. How illogical, then, for a Christian to be cast down and dis-

couraged by difficulties and temptations! When sorrow and disappointment come, we should say to ourselves, "Here is the fulfillment of our Lord's words; and so, likewise, will His promise be fulfilled. I know that my sorrow will be changed into joy and that my happiness will be the greater as my sorrows borne in Jesus' name and for His sake will have been the more intense."

O Jesus, You are infallible Truth and You have promised that one day I shall see You face to face and know You as You are; no longer in the shadows of faith, but in the full splendor of eternal light. Help me to pass the *little while* of this life, strong in faith, suffering and doing all for Your sake and in union with You. If, sometimes, like the Apostles, I fail to understand the words You speak to me through my Superiors or through my trials and temptations, let the words of Your Apostle St. Peter bring me light and encouragement: *In him, though you do not see him, yet believing, you exult with a joy unspeakable and triumphant; receiving, as the final issue of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

MARCH 12

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### *The Reward of Suffering*



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"For our present light affliction, which is for the moment, prepares for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all measure" (2 Cor. 4:17).

St. Paul here reminds the Corinthians of the great recompense they are to receive, in order to strengthen their courage in bearing the trials of this life.

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O Jesus, grant me the grace of bearing my trials in the spirit of faith.

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We cannot reach heaven by any other road than that followed by Jesus our Model. He said to the disciples of Emmaus after His resurrection, "*Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?*" Again, to the sons of Zebedee who asked for a place of honor in His kingdom He replied, "*Can you drink of the cup of which I am about to drink?*" These utterances of our Savior contain the secret of the love the saints have for suffering. They wish to become like Jesus by imitating Him in His life of privation, labor, and pain. Moreover, by the patient endurance of suffering, we can expiate our sins. What more fitting reparation is there for sensuality than sickness and infirmity? How could we more effectively counteract our pride and vanity than by accepting without complaint humiliations, contempt, insult, and calumny? How might we better atone for inordinate ambition than by the practice of self-abnegation and poverty, even to the point of depriving ourselves of ordinary and permitted comforts and conveniences?

Again, suffering borne in a Christian spirit of faith and meekness contributes to the salvation of souls not only under the aspect of penance done for our sins and those of others, but as a means of edification. In order to be saved, the world must come to understand the meaning and necessity of self-renunciation and of carrying the cross after Jesus. These truths will be brought home to others only if we add our example to the instruction we give. This is why our divine Model voluntarily submitted to every form of suffering, why the Apostles rejoiced in their tribulations, and why so many of the saints speak of their happiness under affliction.

All the anxieties, humiliations, and annoyances that may be ours in life come from the hand of our Father, who knows what is best for us. He knows by what winding paths He will bring us to everlasting happiness, and what pattern of earthly existence will accord with the eternal destiny He wills for us. We must not fear, then, the pain, humiliation, temptation, and aridity that may come to us. Our Father is the husbandman who prunes the vine that it may bring forth more fruit. He wishes to enlarge our capacities, to make us aware of the depths of our weakness and helplessness, that we may really experience the truth of our Savior's warning: "*Without me you can do nothing.*" He would empty us of ourselves that He may fill us with His fullness and so bring us finally to that complete and endless union with Him which is the portion of the elect in heaven. Let us examine our attitude toward the cross in our lives and resolve to draw from our trials all the merits that Jesus wishes us to gain from them, as a means of advancing in His grace and in the life of union with Him.

O Jesus, forgive me for having profited so little in the past from the trials You have permitted me to undergo. Assist me by Your grace to suffer henceforth with resignation and even to rejoice in bearing all hardship for Your sake, my Savior, and in imitation of You.

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## *The Washing of the Disciples' Feet*

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"Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples and to dry them with the towel with which he was girded" (Jn. 13:5).

The washing of His Apostles' feet by our Savior was a most extraordinary act. This was a task ordinarily performed by non-Jews, by slaves for their masters, wives for their husbands, or children for their fathers.

O Jesus, help me to serve my neighbor in union with Your dispositions.

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In the course of the repast following the observance of the Paschal rite, Jesus rose from the table and girded Himself with a towel. Then, filling with water the basin placed at hand for the usual purifications, He began to wash the feet of His disciples and dry them with the towel. The customary ceremonial required the washing of the hands only, but Jesus added the washing of the feet. All were astounded at His action. Never had the Master shown them so great a mark of deference. St. John records every detail of this incident, as if he were still enthralled by the wonder with which he then viewed the Master serving His servants. We can well understand Peter's protest; this *really* was beneath the dignity of his Master and his God. But now was the hour of special tenderness. It was at the Last Supper also that Jesus addressed His disciples for the first and only time in the Gospel with the caressing and tender diminutive, "*My little children.*"

The great lesson which our Savior teaches us in washing the feet of His disciples is a double one of humility and charity, humility doing a service of charity. It is necessary to unite these two virtues. Humility without charity is still a shining virtue, but it is cold; and charity without humility is like burning straw. The lesson was very much needed, as we can see from the conduct of the Apostles who, even amid the grave circumstances and the solemnity of the Last Supper, still disputed over *which of them was reputed to be the greatest*. Jesus seems to have had it very much at heart to make His teaching on humility penetrate the souls of the Apostles.

Never had He demonstrated that virtue in a more striking and solemn manner than on this occasion, during the last hours of His life, as if it were to be His testament to them. St. John's text expressly affirms that it was in full consciousness of His divinity and of His excellence as the God-Man that He performed this action: *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come forth from God and was going to God, rose from the supper and laid aside his garments, and taking a towel girded himself*. A little later, Jesus claimed for Himself the titles of *Master and Lord* with regard to the Apostles. He added that the servant was not greater than the master, nor the Apostles greater than He who sent them. Yet He abased Himself to perform for them, His Apostles and servants, in charity and humility, a service reserved for slaves. What, then, ought we not be ready to do when there is question of serving our fellow men? How dare we speak of our dignity!

O Jesus, help me to destroy once and for all the germs of ambition and egoism that I carry within me. You said to

Your Apostles after Your great act of humility and charity, "If you know these things, blessed shall you be if you do them." Grant me to merit that blessing which is to have part with You in eternity, where the last shall be first and the first last.

MARCH 14

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### *The Fourth Dolor of Our Lady*



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"And bearing the cross for himself, he went forth to the place called the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha" (Jn. 19:17).

The meeting with Jesus on the way to Calvary was a further step in the external separation of the Mother and the Son, for there passed between them only a momentary glance of unutterable anguish.

Most sorrowful Mother Mary, help me to find holiness in bearing the cross.

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As Jesus was bearing His cross painfully through the streets of Jerusalem, He stopped to speak to some women who were weeping in love and grief for Him. His most afflicted Mother was also in the throng who were witnessing the first Way of the Cross and she too was weeping in unutterable sorrow; but for Mary Jesus had no word. Only their eyes met, briefly, in a private glance that only intensified their pain. Mary's heart was torn by two conflicting agonies; on the one hand, there was her longing to save Jesus from His intolerable suffering; on the other, was her knowledge that she must help Him finish His work, the work of our

redemption. Mary knew now the immensity of the task Jesus had taken upon Himself. She understood now the enormity of the world's sin and also the infinite value, as well as the bitterness, of the sorrow that was the price of its expiation. And she, the Virgin Mother, had to give Jesus to us on the cross as she had given Him to us in the stable. "*Daughters of Jerusalem,*" says the spouse in the Cantic of Canticles, "*come forth and look upon King Solomon in the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his marriage.*" This coronation was a figure of Mary's offering of her divine Son to the Father in union with her own willed co-redemptive suffering.

We should reflect deeply upon the silent strength of our Lady in this dolor and upon her offering of herself in union with Christ's offering. Surely the loving union of her will with His must have been a comforting help to Jesus, while for her it could only have been agony. He had need of her silence and her strength then; and in this same sorrowful journey Jesus showed that He has need of us too. St. John Chrysostom asks why our Savior willed to endure His other sufferings alone, but in carrying the cross accepted the assistance of the Cyrenean. He replies that it was to make us understand that the cross of Christ is not sufficient without our cross. It may be that we are not often asked to bear very heavy crosses; the small ones that do come to us fill us, perhaps, with self-pity and the desire to be comforted by the sympathy of others. At such times, let us think of Mary in her fourth dolor and find in her example the strength to make our trials not occasions for self-pity, but for self-offering as a part of Christ's offering. Thus to share our small crosses with Jesus is to give them a new meaning and sublimity; just as Mary's task and her tears became

sublime because she suffered and wept not for herself, but for the sins of men and for the world's salvation.

○ Mary most sorrowful, by that grief which you felt when you saw your beloved Son led to His death, obtain for me the grace to bear with patience and fortitude the crosses which God sends me. Then, O good Mother, I may hope to know something also of that other, later meeting between you and Jesus, when the night had passed and, in the dawn of the first Easter, you and Jesus shared the perfect joy of your love as you had shared your sorrow. O Mary, help me to love, serve, and follow your Son in company with you until death.

MARCH 15

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### *The Scandal of the Cross*



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“You will all be scandalized this night because of me” (Mt. 26:31).

Our Savior meant by these words that when the disciples would witness His humiliations and the sufferings of His passion, their faith would be severely tried and they would begin to doubt that He was the Messiah.

○ Jesus, grant me the grace to bear humiliations meritoriously.

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On the way to the Garden of Gethsemani after the Last Supper, Jesus gave His final admonitions to His disciples and predicted that on that very night they would be scandalized in His regard. They would stumble, that is, on the path of fidelity to Him and scatter like frightened sheep. This abandonment and flight of Christ's little flock had been

foretold by the prophet Zacharias and Jesus now repeated his prophecy: *"for it is written, 'I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"* On more than one occasion Jesus had expressed His concern that His sufferings might not be an object of scandal to His own. He knew how incredible it would seem to them that the Envoy of God, the Messiah, should be delivered to the Gentiles, spit upon, scourged, and finally crucified. And so, again and again, He prepared His flock for this terrible eventuality by allusion, direct prophecy, and admonition. But His words were always, for them, hidden words; they did not understand. Nor do we ourselves comprehend any better the necessity for our own Calvaries, private or public. After His resurrection, Jesus will say to the disciples of Emmaus, *"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?"* Sometimes God employs our whole life to produce in us the understanding of this sorrowful necessity; but achieve it we must if we are to be saved.

Knowing that He would descend into such depths of ignominy, Jesus wished His disciples not to forget who He was, whence He had come, and with whom He was to reign forever. He would become so repulsive to men's eyes that they would turn away their faces from Him in revulsion and pity; but they should not forget that this Man of Sorrows, who had become *a worm and no man* was God Incarnate. *"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again I leave the world and go to the Father."* These words Jesus had spoken in His discourse after the Last Supper and the disciples had replied, *"Behold, now thou speakest plainly, and utterest no parable. . . . For this reason we believe that thou camest forth from God."* Jesus replied, *"Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming,*

*and has already come for you to be scattered, each one to his own house, and to leave me alone."* At the moment when His divinity was about to be utterly eclipsed, our Savior affirmed it directly. Before lowering His head to the sufferings of the passion, He raised it, so to speak, to show that it could wear a crown. Jesus desires that we, also, upon beholding Him in His profound abasement, should repeat often to ourselves, "Behold your King!"

Jesus, my Redeemer, it is frightening to human weakness to think that sometimes we shall have to suffer discredit and contempt even from our own in order to model our life and death more closely upon Yours. Make me less sensitive to wounds inflicted upon my self-love, and mercifully pardon my pride in the past. What claim to renown ever equaled Yours, who could say to Your enemies without fear of contradiction, "*Which of you can convict me of sin?*" Help me, O my Savior, to bear with resignation all dishonor that may come to me, whether through my fault or not.

MARCH 16

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### *The Agony of Our Savior*



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"Then Jesus came with them to a country place called Gethsemani, and he said to his disciples. 'Sit down here, while I go over yonder and pray'" (Mt. 26:36).

The traditional site of the garden of the Agony is at the foot of Mount Olivet. From here Jesus would ascend into heaven to take His place on the throne of His glory; and in the nearby Valley of Josaphat, He will one day judge mankind.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of willing the trials You send me.

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According to His custom (well known to Judas) Jesus came with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemani, going thus of His own accord into the snare which He knew had been laid for Him. *"Sit down here, while I go over yonder and pray,"* He said to the disciples. *And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and he began to be saddened and exceedingly troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is sad, even unto death. Wait here and watch with me."* The whole soul of Jesus was overwhelmed with anguish and dread. The immediate cause of His mortal sadness was the imminence of His passion and crucifixion. In imagination He viewed all the scenes of His passion in their finest details: the torments and shame, the malice of His enemies, and the unfaithfulness of His own. He was also conscious in their fullness of the ingratitude of men and the burden of sin which He had to expiate by His sacrifice.

It is in accordance with human nature to fear and abhor suffering and death, and at His Incarnation Jesus had assumed a real human nature. He had a human will as well as a divine will. His agony in Gethsemani, materially expressed by the bloody sweat, was the effect of the struggle between the instinctive and the deliberate movements of this human will. Instinctively, our Savior shrank from the ordeal of His passion and death considered in themselves. What depths of the human heart are not fear and dread able to reach! How penetrating, then, must have been the dark waters of affliction that Jesus allowed to enter even into His soul in the prevision of His sufferings! But the

deliberate will of the Savior was wholly turned to the Father and, in a meritorious act of obedience, He voluntarily submitted to the plan decreed by the Father for man's redemption. He knew that it was impossible to pay the debt of the human race except by the shedding of every drop of His blood; it could not be alleged that His sufferings were to be excessive or unjust; they were necessary.

Yet all was possible to the Father; He could will something else. *And going forward a little, he fell on the ground, and began to pray that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him; and he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me."* Three times the same petition! If the prayer of Jesus had been absolute, it would have been granted, but it was contingent upon the divine good pleasure: "*Yet, not what I will, but what thou wilt.*" It was God's will that He undergo His bitter passion and death. Since the Father did not wish to change His will, Jesus asked for strength to accomplish it. *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him.* The essential prayer is that which asks the strength to do the will of God; but we are inclined to prefer the prayer that God conform His will to ours and remove from us the chalice that is too bitter.

My divine Redeemer, I am ashamed and humbled as I contemplate You in agony for my sake. You so well deserve that I should serve You wholeheartedly and with disinterested zeal; yet how easily I grow tired in Your service. How I measure my efforts and count the cost! How quickly I judge that I have done enough and that the cost of fidelity to You is too great! You saw my indolence and lack of generosity and yet You shed Your blood for my salvation. Help me at last to make amends and to serve You from now on with

the faithfulness, love, and generosity to which You have full right.

MARCH 17

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### *The Angel of the Agony*



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“And there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him” (Lk. 22:43).

Contemplate Jesus receiving the ministrations of the angel sent from heaven to strengthen Him.

O Jesus, help me to endure interior trials in such a manner as to deserve Your special assistance.

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The manner in which our Savior endured His agony is as astonishing to our human minds as the excessiveness of the agony itself. One writer on the Passion says of it: “That the God-Man allows every kind of insult and violence to come upon Him from without is something before unheard of; but, after all, it is the logical consequence of the bloody Redemption decreed by His Father and accepted by Him. That He lets loose the storm in His own soul, that He abandons His own sensibilities to natural weakness such as ours, that He allows Himself to fall below the ideal of calm, and, as it were, invincible strength after which we love to model our heroes; this is something more astonishing for our human feelings, something that scandalizes our pride. Nevertheless, it is so. O marvel of condescension, priceless lesson and consolation!” He, the Strong One, the Master, went to seek support from His Apostles. Perhaps His un-

speaking sadness would have been lacking in a choice and intimate pain, if He had not been obliged to ask for help from a source exterior to Himself. But He found the Apostles sleeping; and when He saw that human support was denied Him, He returned to knock again at the Heart of God by the word which had always been so efficacious. "*Father, if thou art willing.*" "Father!" What sweet humility in the word!

But the Father was silent. The time had passed when the voice from on high said, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" In this hour, the Son is, so to speak, no longer Son, but *for our sakes he made him to be sin who knew nothing of sin, so that in him we might become the justice of God.* An angel, however, was sent to Him. The Gospel tells us nothing of his identity. Was it Michael or Gabriel? Surely no less than the highest of the celestial spirits would be sent to assist the Son of God! And He who willed to make Himself *a little lower than the angels* now deigned to accept their ministrations. We do not know in what the "strengthening" consisted. Probably the angel showed our Savior, under sensible images, all the excellence and sublimity of His passion, all that would result from it for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. What honor and happiness for us if the angel showed us to Him as among those who through gratitude and reverence for His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemani would wage a victorious combat with interior trials!

O Jesus, never let temptations to fear or dejection or weariness of mind make me less generous in Your service. In all interior anxiety and suffering, help me to find new strength in the remembrance of Your cruel trial and abandonment in the Garden of Gethsemani; for in You *we have not a high priest*

*who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tried as we are in all things except sin.*

MARCH 18

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## *The Kiss of Judas*



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"Then he came to his disciples, and said to them, 'Sleep on now, and take your rest! Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand'" (Mt. 26:45, 46).

Represent to yourself Jesus going to meet His enemies and receiving the kiss of Judas.

O Jesus, preserve me from the least acts of hypocrisy in my service of You.

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Not only did Jesus accept the fortifying counsels of the angel with infinite condescension and humility, but He immediately acted upon them. For the third time He went to Peter, James, and John, and again He found them sleeping. "*Sleep on now, and take your rest,*" He said sadly. Then, with a decisiveness which contrasted sharply with the despondency and weakness He had shown in His agony, He aroused the sleeping Apostles, saying, "*Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand.*" The garden and the path which crossed it were suddenly invaded by armed men. Jesus did not will to be taken by surprise. In order to show that He would suffer and die

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freely, by the act of His own will, He went to meet His enemies. On their side, all was uncertainty, haste, and agitation. But the attitude of Jesus in their presence was one of confident strength and calm.

Judas left the band of soldiers and, approaching Jesus, he said, "*Rabbi!*" and kissed Him. We are astounded and horrified by this abominable act. Such base hypocrisy and treachery are scarcely credible. The ordinary sign of friendship and deference from a disciple to his master was perverted by Judas into a signal of betrayal, into a ruse, whereby Jesus would be delivered over to a most terrible martyrdom. He had not been moved by the warning of Jesus at the Last Supper, nor is he affected now by His powerful and loving glance, nor by the name of *friend*, nor by the kiss which our Savior does not refuse him. Such is the human heart when it has been abandoned by grace. How we should fear to abuse the gifts of God and how deep should be our distrust of ourselves!

Jesus accepted the kiss of Judas and said to him, as one more delicate appeal of His love, "*Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?*" Then, to show him that He had heard the conversation between Judas and the soldiers on the way to the garden, Jesus added, "*Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*" Every crime was to be represented in the passion. When our Savior felt the kiss of Judas He recognized in it all the betrayals; secret and public, of those down the ages who would owe Him the most love and fidelity — His priests and religious. Judas was meant to be both. We should often kiss the feet of Jesus on our crucifix with love, in reparation for this base betrayal and for all those that have followed it, including our own lesser infidelities. Jesus also hoped by His act of ineffable sweetness

and charity in accepting Judas' caress to touch his heart. Thus far is our Savior willing to go in His love for sinners and His longing for their conversion.

"O Fountain of everlasting love, what shall I say of You? . . . Beyond all hope have You shown mercy to Your servant; and beyond all desert have You manifested Your grace and friendship. What return shall I make to You? . . . Is it much that I should serve You, whom the whole creation is bound to serve? It ought not to seem much to me to serve You; but this rather appears great and wonderful to me, that You condescend to receive one so wretched and unworthy for Your servant" (*Imitation of Christ*).

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MARCH 19

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*St. Joseph, Spouse of Our Lady, Patron of the  
Universal Church*

(See *Festivals and Saints*; p. 801)

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MARCH 20

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*Jesus Bound*

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"Now having seized him, they led him away" (Lk. 22:54). Contemplate Jesus allowing Himself to be deprived of His liberty, Divine Savior, grant that the bond between us may become a true and indissoluble union of hearts.

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In permitting His enemies to lay hold of Him, Jesus, strictly speaking, accomplished the sacrifice of His liberty, His honor, and His life. From then on He was the helpless Victim of the cruelty of His enemies; for in extending His hands and allowing them to be bound, He surrendered all power over Himself. When He would be struck He would be unable to wipe away the spittle. This sacrifice Jesus made voluntarily and with infinite patience, charity, and humility. He checked the disciples who wished to defend Him and cured the servant of the high priest whose ear Peter had cut off.

If, then, we see Jesus bound and in the power of His foes, it is not that their bonds prevent Him from escaping. It is the will of His Father which has, in reality, deprived Him of His liberty. The whole fatal progress of the passion tended toward the further restriction of our Savior's freedom. Each privation brought a new suffering, until the last step in the work of divine Justice succeeded in immobilizing Him in pain. On the cross the slightest movement only intensified His agony. The sick turn painfully in their beds; they need this movement which, at least, provides a change of suffering. They rest from one pain by enduring another, but on the cross there was no rest to hope for except in death; and death came slowly.

This aspect of our Savior's passion was necessary because man had sinned by abusing his liberty, and the chastisement should correspond to the fault. Jesus says to us, as it were, from the cross: "I suffer that nothing may be lacking to the satisfaction that is owing to the Father for your sins. By the pain of My hands nailed to the cross, I expiate all the sins of which your hands have been the instruments. By My pierced feet I atone for all the steps you take in

pursuit of your own will as opposed to Mine; and by the wound in My side, I make satisfaction for all the inordinate affections of your heart." Pointing to each of His wounds, our Savior cries out to us, "See how I have loved you; how I have suffered for you! Ungrateful hearts, how can I reach you and draw you to Myself, if My wounds and My flowing blood do not win your gratitude and love?"

O Jesus, bound for my sake and crucified for love of me, I unite with Yours the sacrifice of my liberty which I made in taking the vow of obedience. Let me never regret this sacrifice and never look back, but persevere as You persevered, although Your suffering became more and more intense. The chains that I wear for You, O Jesus, are most beautiful and precious. They represent neither servitude nor slavery, but a bond of love between two hearts. Grant me the grace of desiring to be bound and of being willing to appear so, for love of You.

MARCH 21

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### *The Fifth Dolor of Our Lady*



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"Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother" (Jn. 19:25).

In these words St. John summarizes Mary's martyrdom. The fifth dolor breaks the last of the natural, external links between the Virgin and her Son.

Dear Mother of Sorrows, teach me how to weep with you.

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Mary stood close to the cross, but in these last hours of the life of Jesus she was to remain more than ever separated

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from Him exteriorly. It was not Mary but the soldiers, the enemies of Jesus, who gave Him to drink, just as it was not Mary but the Cyrenean who had helped Him to carry His cross; and as it was not Mary's veil but Veronica's that had wiped away the blood from the Holy Face. It would seem that Mary had now given all, that there was not more to be stripped from her; but Jesus required one last sacrifice, the most difficult sacrifice of all. It was His will to die bereft of every earthly possession, even of His Mother. The words of Jesus from the cross: "*Woman, behold thy son,*" brought unspeakable happiness to St. John, but what was their import for the Virgin Mother? The Beloved Disciple of Jesus was, of course, beloved of Mary, but how these words must have pierced her heart!

Yet, at this final moment, when Mary was left without prop or help or comfort, when she had lost her Son even before He was dead, at this moment Mary's motherhood enlarged to a world-wide, universal vocation which was to last throughout all ages. Her sorrow would be turned into joy, because now she would be the mother of the whole Christ in becoming the mother of His Mystical Body, which is an extension, in a mystical sense, of the Incarnation. Mary was to find Jesus again in John, another Christ in the Christian, for John at this supreme moment represented each one of us. "Jesus did not say, 'Behold in the person of John another son different from me,'" comments Origen, "but simply, *thy son*, as if He meant, 'you have only one Son and I am He in this one. Through the mystery that I am going to accomplish John is incorporated with Me; he is in Me and I will live in him. . . . And all those who will have the same title as John become from this moment in Me and with Me your only Son.'"

There is an important lesson for us in this fifth dolor of our beloved Mother. When we seem to ourselves helpless and bereft, our prayer, hopeless, our attempts to love God futile, it may be that at this very moment our prayer and our love are on the point of becoming most fruitful. As out of Mary's hour of desolation at the foot of the cross came her greatness and glory as Mother of all mankind, so out of our small sufferings can come a share in her sublime mission. When our hearts have been liberated from selfishness and egoism, we shall be able to care for the persons and things God gives us to cherish, as Mary cares for us. Let us beg of God, through our Lady's intercession, to accomplish His work in us despite our frailties and failures and, as in the vision of Ezechiel, to send His spirit into the *dry bones* that they may live.

O Mary most sorrowful, no sorrow could be more cruel than yours, because no Son could ever be dearer than yours. Your pain was the bitterest of all, because your love was most sweet. By the pain of your immeasurable grief, O Mother of Sorrows, I commend to your special protection all who are afflicted in soul or body everywhere in the world. May your intercession obtain for them the grace to turn all their sufferings to eternal profit. And, O Mary, I beg you to offer to your crucified Son all my own pains of mind or body, that my tiny crosses may become fruitful through being united with His tremendous cross and your own most bitter sorrow.

*Peter's Denials*



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"But Peter was following him at a distance" (Mt. 26:58).

Peter and probably John followed Jesus to the house of Caiphas. Divine Master, teach me a prudent distrust of myself.

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Peter seems to have repented of deserting His Master, and so he followed Him, but from afar, in company with *another disciple known to the high priest*, who seems to have been John. Observing that Peter remained outside the palace of Caiphas, the other disciple spoke for him to the portress, and he was permitted to enter. In this environment Peter was out of place. He was putting himself in the way of a fall, unfortified by prayer and unmindful of the fact that, only a short time since, he had been afraid like the others. Peter considered himself very strong. He did not suspect that sleeping in his heart beside his protests of love for the Master were words of horrible blasphemy and shameful denial. A coal fire had been lighted in the court and the servants and attendants were standing about it, warming themselves, for the night was cold. Peter joined them. One of the maidservants, looking closely at him, said, "*Art thou also one of this man's disciples?*" Peter answered, "*I am not.*"

Uneasy and alarmed, Peter made his way toward the gate, too agitated to notice the crowing of a cock. At the entrance another servant said, "*This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth.*" This time Peter denied with an oath that he so much as knew Jesus. Perhaps his first lie had escaped him

because of his confusion and natural impulsiveness; but now the second followed. The die had been cast. Finally, after some time had elapsed, one of the servants of the high priest, a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden said, "*Did I not see thee in the garden with him?*" "You are a Galilean, your accent betrays you," "Surely you are one of this man's followers," said others. And now Peter *began to curse and to swear that he did not know the man.*

In reality, it was himself whom Peter did not know. He was unaware of his own weakness. But who of us is not? It is because God knows this that He sends us certain trials and permits certain falls. He intends that they should open our eyes to ourselves. Jesus had great things in mind for Peter and He wished Peter to love only Him and His Church. For this reason He permitted this deplorable fall, which would strip away the veil from the heart of Peter, take away all self-esteem, and disgust him forever with egoism and human respect. Thus, Peter would be able to say one day sincerely and three times, "*Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*"

Lord Jesus, if Peter had prayed in the garden instead of sleeping, he would not have trusted so unwisely in himself. If he had followed You closely instead of *at a distance*, he would not have fallen into the hands of Your enemies. But if I judge Peter's sin by my own conscience, the sentence I would pass upon him dies away on my lips. Such is my ignorance of myself that I not only make excuses in order to do wrong, but I excuse myself for the wrong I have done; and even after I recognize my fault I still defend myself. Lord, help me to know myself and to know You.

*The Repentance of Peter*

“And at that moment, while he was yet speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘Before a cock crows, thou wilt deny me thrice.’ And Peter went out and wept bitterly” (Lk. 22:61, 62).

At the moment when Peter denied his Master for the third time, Jesus, surrounded by soldiers and by the servants of the high priest, crossed the courtyard where Peter was standing. The grace of His merciful glance revealed to Peter the enormity of his sin and filled him with remorse.

Great St. Peter, obtain for me the grace of sincere contrition for my sins.

The depth of Peter's fall appears still greater when we think of the new sorrow and humiliation it caused our Savior. One Apostle had sold and betrayed Him, all had abandoned Him, and now the leader of the Twelve had denied with curses and oaths that he ever knew Him. Could desertion be more complete? Yet, the look that Jesus cast upon Peter was not a glance of anger or sternness. There was in it, no doubt, reproach and deep sorrow, but there was also infinite mercy and an appeal for trust. It was a life-giving glance, full of precious and powerful grace. It was the gaze of divine mercy, which in an instant can transform sinners into saints and make apostles of renegades and persecutors.

In the light of this glance of Jesus Peter saw the frightful

abyss into which he had fallen, but he saw at the same moment the Hand stretched out to him. And as before, on the Lake of Galilee, he grasped that Hand and it drew him out of the abyss. Then, together with the awakened consciousness of his fault, came remorse. He had denied the Master to whom so often he had protested his fidelity. He had offended Jesus who was his Friend, his God, and his All. *And Peter went out and wept bitterly.* He immediately left the place of his fall, he wept, and he would never cease weeping. The words of Jesus had failed to penetrate the heart of Judas, "*Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?*" "*Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*" But one look from Him melted and nearly broke the heart of Peter.

Let us think of Peter fleeing into the night, not knowing where he was going, his eyes streaming with tears; and let us also contemplate the Savior, enduring meanwhile the mockery and the blows of His guards: "*I do not know this man you are talking about*" — these words occupy the thoughts of both Jesus and Peter. Peter will think of them all the rest of his life, and Jesus will remember them until His death. The lance of the centurion did not pierce only a dead heart; it had already been opened — by Peter, and especially by Judas.

O St. Peter, you never forgot the glance of Jesus that was so full of grace for you; nor did you ever forget your fault. Your love for Jesus was humble ever after, and so martyrdom found you faithful. Good St. Peter, pray for me, that the remembrance of my sins and of the many graces God has given me may keep me distrustful of myself and filled with confidence in Him.

## *The Scourging*



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“Pilate, then, took Jesus and had him scourged” (Jn. 19:1).

The scourging is one of the principal mysteries of the passion of our Savior. Ordinarily, He referred to it explicitly whenever He spoke of His passion.

O Jesus, grant me the grace of using the members and powers of my body only in Your service.

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Scourging was a frightful and most cruel punishment, first, because of the dishonor and shame it inflicted. It was a penalty reserved for men of low condition: criminals, slaves, and assassins. Whoever had only once passed under the whip was forever branded with this disgrace. There was also the further shame of being stripped of one's garments. The punishment of scourging might take place secretly or in public. In our Savior's case it would seem that this shameful indignity was inflicted publicly. The column of the flagellation was about half the height of a man. The victim bent over it and presented his back to those who wielded the whips. Not infrequently it happened that the condemned man succumbed during this torture. The instrument used was made of hardened leather thongs weighted at the ends with small leaden balls.

Isaias drew in prophecy a poignant and realistic picture of our Savior's bitter passion, the details of which seem to suit only too well the punishment of the scourging: *there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness; and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous*

*of him. Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity; and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows; and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted.* David also said in prophecy, *Upon my back the plowers plowed; long did they make their furrows.*

But the violence of the torture did not prevent our Savior from practicing the most sublime interior virtues. He suffered the flagellation with divine patience and with His heart raised to God. He endured it with unspeakable love for all men, including His executioners, Pilate, and the Jews. His intention in submitting to this dreadful torment is not difficult to conjecture. Scourging causes acute physical and sensible suffering; it is a pain of the sense of touch. Surely our Savior wished to make satisfaction by it for all sins of the flesh and to take upon Himself their chastisement. According to the Law, the penalty for such offenses was scourging. No one, therefore, who has fallen into this kind of sin need ever despair or lose courage; for in Jesus scourged at the pillar there is superabundant satisfaction, grace of conversion, and the most ardent love.

O Jesus, scourged at the pillar, if I could understand the terrible mystery of human depravity and its perversion of the flesh which was created to be the radiant covering of a pure soul, perhaps I could comprehend better the mystery of Your divine expiation. Yet, Sodom and Gomorrha, burning like sinister torches, and the deluge which covered the whole corrupted world are memorable instances of divine vengeance for the sins of the flesh. This same corruption exists in the world today. What would long since have been our fate, O Jesus, if the

streams of Your precious blood had not flowed for us with so much love in Your scourging? In return, let me at least sacrifice in Your service all my bodily powers, my health and strength, in union with the immolation of Your most pure, most holy, most beautiful body.

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*The Annunciation to Our Lady*

(See *Festivals and Saints*, p. 805)

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MARCH 26

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*The Crowning With Thorns*

“And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet cloak; and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed into his right hand” (Mt. 27:28, 29).

After the scourging the soldiers led Jesus into the court of the praetorium where He was to be kept under guard until the final verdict of condemnation. Through malice, or with the permission of Pilate—perhaps even at his instigation—they employed the time in outraging Jesus.

Divine Savior, grant me the grace of meditating upon Your sufferings with deeper understanding and love.

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Jesus had made several affirmations in the course of His trial. Two were so clearly formulated as to leave no room

for doubt. To the high priest who challenged Him to declare that He was the Son of God, the expected Messiah, He had said, "I am." To Pilate who, visibly disturbed, had demanded, "Thou art then a king?" Jesus had replied, "Thou sayest it; I am a king." He was God and He was King; it was for these two truths that He would die. The sense of our Savior's double affirmation had been so well grasped that it was precisely this double character of God and King that was the object of all the derision and mockery throughout His passion. What could have suggested to the Roman soldiers the cruel irony of the scepter and mantle and the crowning of thorns, if it were not this double claim which was agitating all Israel?

In the course of the passion the divinity of our Savior was derided in two of its highest prerogatives: knowledge of the future and immunity from death. In the court of Caiphas they struck His face with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophecy to us, O Christ! who is it that struck thee?" As He hung upon the cross, the passers-by called up to Him, "If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross!" and the priests said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save!" The kingship of Jesus was held up to derision in the cry, "If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him"; again, in the inscription placed upon the cross and also in the mockery of the crowning with thorns.

Tearing the garment from our Savior's bleeding shoulders, His Roman guards threw a tattered mantle about Him. Then, thrusting a reed into His hands, they forced Him to sit upon His "throne," perhaps the stump of a pillar. The crown of thorns, fashioned, probably, not in the shape of a band, but forming a sort of cap, was pressed down into His head.

The intensity of this pain pervaded His whole body; it penetrated even to the soul. The least movement drove the thorns deeper into His head; *and they spat on him, and took the reed and kept striking him on the head.* What suffering and ignominy! Yet He who endured this inhuman torment was the living God, who even at that moment was extending His scepter over the bright array of the angelic hosts. He was the Messiah, the Expected One of His people. And our Savior, crowned with thorns, was also the Victim who expiated by His pain the sins of pride and ambition which afflict the children of Adam. He atoned thus for all the outrages that are committed in the name of glory and power, all injuries to the reputation and honor of others, all impatience in suffering mockery and derision, all revolts against legitimate authority, especially the authority of the Church.

I accuse the insolent soldiery of a most cruel and blasphemous treatment of You, my Jesus; but is it not myself rather that I should accuse? For the thorns which pierced Your adorable head were not as painful as my sins. The reed with which You were struck wounded Your heart less keenly than my inconstancy. The mockery of the scarlet cloak did not offend Your majesty as grievously as the disorders into which I have fallen because of my sins. Forgive me, O divine King, and make me worthy to receive one day from Your hands the crown, the scepter, and the mantle of glory reserved for the elect.

## *The Sentence of Pilate*



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“Then he handed him over to them to be crucified” (Jn. 19:16). Pilate’s reluctance to pronounce the death sentence upon Jesus ended when he heard the threat of the Jews, *“If thou release this man, thou art no friend of Caesar; for everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.”*

O Jesus, grant me the grace to endure with patience unjust treatment in this world, but let me receive a merciful judgment from You in eternity.

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There was never a more iniquitous judgment than the decree of Pilate condemning Jesus to death. Several times he had solemnly declared His innocence; still, in the end, he pronounced the death sentence. Pilate had resorted to several expedients and, finally, as a last palliative to his uneasy conscience, he had said, *“I am innocent of the blood of this just man.”* He thought so, perhaps, but until the end of time the words will be repeated, *passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus*. The verdict of Pilate was also a most infamous and degrading one, for the Romans reserved the cross for slaves and common malefactors. Among the Jews the bodies of criminals who had been put to death for some especially heinous offense were exposed on a gibbet as a salutary warning. And so, it was written in the Law: *He is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree*. This ignominious chastisement our Savior was to bear in all its horror.

Yet we may find in the sentence of Pilate the marks of divine Providence. Cruel and shameful as the punishment

was, it was more fitting for the Savior than any of the penalties customary among the Jews. On the cross and by the cross He could still accomplish His final decrees and make His final legacy; and He could there reveal His holiness in all its sublimity. On the cross Jesus could die with the majesty of the God-Man, who expires at the moment freely chosen by Him. The cross could become His altar, it would be a most fitting standard of His kingdom. No other kind of death would have taught better the lesson Jesus wished to teach in thus sacrificing His life. What more striking emblem of the justice of God in the punishment of sin, could be placed before the eyes of a guilty world than Jesus crucified? For the horror of the punishment corresponds to the enormity of the offense.

Our Savior, Himself undoubtedly felt most keenly the iniquity, the cruelty, and the shame of His sentence, since He more than anyone else comprehended His own infinite sanctity. Yet He submitted to Pilate's judgment without bitterness; more than this, He accepted it with the most tender love for God and for us all, including Pilate and the Jews who condemned Him. If He made any appeal, it was to invoke the mercy of His Father for all men, particularly in view of this unjust condemnation. Let us prostrate ourselves in spirit at the very place where for love of us Jesus submitted to so unjust and shameful a sentence. From the bottom of our hearts let us thank Him for voluntarily taking this cruel punishment upon Himself; for it is we upon whom the sentence should have been passed.

"We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, for by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world."

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### The Sixth Dolor of Our Lady

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“O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow” (Lam. 1:12).

These words of the prophet Jeremias are applied by the Church to the Mother of Sorrows. On Calvary, especially when she held the dead body of her Son in her arms, Mary made the greatest act of faith that was ever elicited on earth. She never wavered in her belief that out of the complete immolation and ignominy of the passion and death of Jesus would come His most glorious triumph.

Mary, dearest Mother, by your heart transfixed with sorrow, obtain for me the virtue of fraternal charity.

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In her sixth dolor Mary could at last embrace her Son and in the embrace renew all the lovely memories of His childhood; but her pain became thereby only the sharper. Jesus had drunk alone and unaided the bitter chalice of His passion and death. Now He was beyond the reach of her consolation; and even though she held His sacred body in her arms with unspeakable reverence, she could not heal the wounds that covered it—*from the sole of the foot unto the top of the head . . . wounds and bruises and swelling sores.* First, she adored that sacred body which, although separated from His soul, remained immediately united to the very Person of the Word. She contemplated the cruel ravages of the Passion and with measureless sorrow reviewed its entire course by following upon the body of Jesus the dreadful traces it had left. Now she could see all and at close range, but

even this poor contact was to be hers for only a brief time.

What, we may reverently ask, was in the mind of the Mother of Sorrows at this moment? Doubtless her thoughts went back to the happy days in Bethlehem and Nazareth, when He lay in her arms as powerless as now, but then able to be comforted by her maternal care. She recalled, no doubt, the nobility and majesty of the sacred humanity of the Savior, the glorious hour of the Last Supper. And in Mary's heart? What should we find there but the sword of sorrow foretold by Simeon?

This was grief ineffable and it was also ineffable love—for Jesus and for us. Mary is our Mother, not our judge. She had given us her Son, the most beautiful and lovely of the children of men; we restored Him to her a corpse, covered with the wounds inflicted by our sins, by us to whom He had come to bring salvation and life. But Mary is our loving Mother; she desires only that the passion and death of Jesus may bear its fruit in our souls; that in His visible wounds, as St. Bernard says, we may see the invisible wound of His love. Surely we can never look upon the cross without seeing also the desolate figure of the divine Mother holding the dead body of Jesus and without thanking God for Mary, through whom our Enemy was vanquished. Our Lady at the foot of the cross with Jesus dead in her arms is pre-eminently the Comforter of the afflicted. From the foot of the cross where she suffered so much, inexhaustible blessings and consolations have flowed out upon the world.

O holy Mother, who could ever comprehend the extent and intensity of your compassion! You are truly the Queen of Martyrs and the Mother of Sorrows. Well may you exclaim in your anguish, "*All ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow*"! Grant, O my dear Mother,

that I may be always mindful of your sorrows; that I may weep with you and receive the fruit of the passion of Jesus, my Savior.

MARCH 29

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### *Simon of Cyrene*



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“And as they led him away, they laid hold of a certain Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and upon him they laid the cross to bear it after Jesus” (Lk. 23:26).

By right of military authority, the Roman centurion in charge of carrying out our Savior's death sentence requisitioned the services of one, Simon, a peasant of Cyrene.

Divine Redeemer, grant me the grace to recognize and venerate Your holy cross in my daily trials.

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Seeing that Jesus was at the end of His strength, the centurion realized that it was urgent to give Him relief without delay. But to bear the cross of a condemned man was a great dishonor; the soldiers had not been hired for this and the crowd would have refused. *I looked about and there was none to help*, Isaias had prophesied of the passion; *I sought and there was none to give aid*. It was at this crucial moment that a Cyrenean peasant named Simon was encountered at the gate of the city, as he was coming from the fields. According to their right, the soldiers *forced* Simon — the word is used by both St. Matthew and St. Mark — to carry the cross behind our Lord. There was need of force because Simon was unwilling; he had his own work to do. Jesus saw and heard all; perhaps, He even had to watch the soldiers bargaining with Simon for his assistance. Then, they

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removed the cross from His shoulders and Jesus walked, probably in front of Simon.

In Simon's heart there was, doubtless, bitter resentment at first. It was a great shame to be obliged to carry the cross of such a criminal. But little by little his resentment was changed to compassion, induced, surely, by the example of patience and heavenly sweetness that he observed in the Man who walked before him. His new dispositions won for him, in turn, precious graces which led finally to faith and love. Simon of Cyrene has an assured place in the history of the passion. He is there by name, and the names of his two children are added—because he carried the cross of Jesus, even under constraint, for a very brief time. If our Savior gave such renown and the assurance of salvation to one who carried the cross perforce and with reluctance, what will He not do for those who embrace the daily cross that is offered them!

This Cyrenian of our Savior's time still exists—in us. Do we not often carry, or rather drag, under constraint, the cross that is given us by Jesus Christ? Perhaps, it is only by force of circumstances or the fear of a greater evil that we continue to bear it at all. Yet Jesus walks before us also and says to us, "*He who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple.*" The cross, then, is necessary, especially the one that is repugnant to us and that humiliates us in the eyes of others. The cross of the martyrs is a privileged one, from which God in His goodness removes the shame. "O blessed cross," cried the ecstatic St. Andrew, "cherished cross, long-desired, and ever sought!" But God may give us the cross of Simon of Cyrene, the humiliating cross which we drag and of which we are tempted to complain.

Divine Savior, help me to recognize Your cross in my life and to see it especially in the trials I must bear almost alone. Make me understand that the cross I should cherish is the one I most dread, that the cross without humiliation is incomplete. And for Your own holy and saving cross, O Jesus, be adored, blessed, and thanked eternally!

MARCH 30

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### *The First Word of Jesus Crucified*



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"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"  
(Lk. 23:34).

The first word uttered aloud by Jesus on the cross was a prayer for the pardon of all who had been instrumental in causing His death. And like the seventh and last cry of Jesus crucified this first one begins with the word, *Father*.

Divine Savior, help me to learn from You how to forgive all injuries.

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The terrible crucifixion had been completed; the cross had been raised upright, and our Savior's whole body, suspended by the wounds in His hands and feet, was suffering the most excruciating torment. All about Him was disorder, confusion, cries of blasphemy and hatred. But then it was that He uttered His first cry from the cross: "*Father, forgive them!*" It was an act of humility as well as a prayer; for could not the Son Himself, in all truth, have granted this pardon? It was also an expression of divine sweetness, which excuses and mitigates, and looks for something to justify pardon:

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*"they do not know what they are doing."* How would they, these executioners, who were habituated to their cruel employment? It was not their first crucifixion, nor would it be their last. As for the others who were responsible for the death of our Savior, St. Paul says of them, *had they known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.* But the ignorance of the Jews was certainly culpable ignorance, as our Savior Himself declared: *"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin."* The efficacy of this divine prayer for pardon was soon revealed in the conversion of the centurion and his men, who were the first to exclaim after the death of Jesus, *"Truly he was the Son of God."* It was to bear additional fruit in the Jews that were converted on the first Pentecost and afterward, and in the others who were to be converted until the end of time.

Pardon! Few words are more consoling to the human heart, but few actions are as difficult for us to perform. In the eyes of the world, one who pardons easily is thought of as lacking in firmness of character. The commanding of fear and respect by means of relentless vengeance was a formula of pagan power: "Let them hate, provided they fear." Jesus knew this well, and for this reason His first word on the cross was a prayer for pardon. We find it difficult to pardon easily, because we do not seek to motivate our forgiveness of others. It is necessary to look for the extenuating circumstance and to believe that it is there. Jesus discovered it even in those who crucified Him. It is the divine work of fraternal charity to remember that man is better than he sometimes appears; there are few souls who do not have good hidden within them. It is to these hidden depths that charity must descend.

But in order to accomplish this difficult work it is also

necessary for us first to look up, as Jesus did, and say *Father*. Then we shall be able to lower our gaze and say, "my brother." Then we shall see the obstacles to union dwindle and what appeared to us as mountains will gradually be leveled with the plain. Who, as he nears the end of life, does not perceive that he has exaggerated his antipathies as well as his loves? It is through meditation on this first word of Jesus on the cross that the saints have felt their souls melt with indulgence for others. By imitation of the divine prerogative of the forgiveness of injuries is the creature especially conformed to the image of his Creator. And only they are saved in whom are found a resemblance to Jesus Christ.

O Jesus, at the moment when Your life was ebbing away, when You felt everything giving way around You, Your goodness shone forth as a ray of the sun upon ruins, and its first ray was unreserved pardon. How consoling it is for us to look up to Your cross and see the radiance of Your indulgent goodness forming the last expression on Your divine face! Happy shall I be, if I can truly say in my turn, "As I have pardoned others, O my God, deign Thou to pardon me."

MARCH 31

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*The Conversion of the Good Thief*



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"And Jesus said to him, 'Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise'" (Lk. 23:43).

Jesus silently permitted the insults and mockery of the crowd as He hung upon the cross; but to the poor thief hanging beside

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Him, who spoke once in His defense, He immediately opened the kingdom of heaven. Divine Savior, perfect in me, the virtue of hope.

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The episode of the good thief is one of the most wonderful and, for us, one of the most consoling events of the passion. The astonishing feature in it is the rapidity with which it takes place. Some words are exchanged, a brief dialogue between the two thieves, whose interchanges cross each other before the figure of the divine Victim. Then there is a prayer to Jesus, His response; and all is over. But all is also changed. One of the thieves has become a saint, so purified and authentic a member of the elect that he merits *this day* to become the companion of Christ in paradise: "*Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" God does not need a long time to enter into a soul and transform it completely once the soul has surrendered to Him.

The good thief heard all the blasphemies which were being hurled up toward the cross. But he had also listened to the sweet prayer in the first words that Jesus spoke on the cross, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" He had observed the silence of Christ, as He was being hailed in derision as *Messias, King of the Jews, Son of God*. He appears to have sensed the monstrous injustice which had nailed to the cross the gentle, beneficent Christ in company with him and his companion, two admitted malefactors. An instinct of justice seems then to have convinced him that sooner or later God would avenge this fearful deed. "*Dost thou not even fear God,*" he cried to his companion, "*seeing that thou art under the same sentence? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what our deeds deserved; but this man has done nothing wrong.*"

And then, one would say, the light entered his soul and he acknowledged the divinity of Christ in asking for a remembrance in His kingdom. "O wondrous conversion!" exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "He sees one crucified and proclaims him the King of glory!" "He sees the gaping wounds and the flowing blood," says St. Ambrose, "and far from believing Him a criminal, he recognizes Him as God." After his prayer the thief was silent and Jesus said nothing more, but their eyes regarded each other and their two hearts spoke. "*In hoc enim totius forma salutis,*" says St. Ambrose of the good thief's conversion: "Here is the pattern of all salvation."

O Jesus, You show me in this incident the frightening power that You have given to men of either accepting or refusing Your favors. Your graces of repentance solicited the hearts of both thieves. One accepted them and passed from the cross to eternal happiness; the other resisted You. To think of yielding to despair in the very presence of the Mother of Sorrows, by whose intercession, surely, the good thief was saved! Divine Savior, grant me to remember in all temptations against the virtue of hope and to help others to remember the power of Your cross and Your infinite compassion.

APRIL 1

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### *The Thirst of Jesus Crucified*



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"Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, 'I thirst'" (Jn. 19:28).

Thirst is perhaps one of the most agonizing torments of death by crucifixion. A raging fever is produced by the inflammation of

the open wounds and the prolonged tension of nerves and muscles.

O Jesus, fill me with the desire of winning souls for You.

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The intensity of the agony of thirst suffered by Jesus on the cross can be judged from the fact that He spoke of it. As cruel as His other sufferings were, He did not complain. He did not speak of the thorns, nor of the scourging, nor of the nails that pierced His hands and feet. But His thirst drew from our Savior a request for its relief. During the sufferings of the passion no cooling drink had moistened His lips. His blood had flowed in streams during the scourging, the crowning with thorns, and the crucifixion; His whole body burned with fever. Yet even now He uttered His complaint with great reserve. He did not make a direct request and it was late, very late, when He revealed His suffering. Moreover, His chief purpose in making it known was to show that He willed to experience this torment also, and that not a drop in the bitter chalice of the crucifixion had been refused by Him.

Jesus also intended to proclaim the literal fulfillment of David's prophecy: *My throat is dried up like baked clay, my tongue cleaves to my jaws; to the dust of death you have brought me down.* He wished to remind us, too, of another thirst that tormented Him, of which His physical thirst was only a faint image. He thirsted for the salvation and redemption of all men, all without exception. He saw before Him in spirit all the members of the human race and He burned with desire for their salvation. For, besides the glory of the Father, what other purpose had His suffering and His death except the redemption of men whom He loves so much?

Hearing our Savior's cry, one of the soldiers compassionately