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THE SEVEN LAST WORDS  
FROM THE CROSS



*A Course of*  
SEVEN LENTEN SERMONS

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*by*

REV. H. G. HUGHES

*New York:*

JOSEPH F. WAGNER, Inc.



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FROM THE CROSS

A COURSE OF  
SEVEN LENTEN SERMONS

BY  
REV. H. G. HUGHES

NEW YORK  
JOSEPH F. WAGNER

**Nihil Obstat**

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JOHN CARDINAL FARLEY

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# THE SEVEN LAST WORDS FROM THE CROSS

## THE FIRST WORD

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."—St. Luke xxiii, 34

*SYNOPSIS.*—The seven words spoken from the pulpit of the Cross—the most illustrious from which any teacher of religion has ever spoken. They sum up the lessons of the life of Jesus. In this Lenten Course we are to consider them; taking into view the surroundings in which they were spoken, looking especially at our divine Lord who spoke them.

The scenes and circumstances of the First Word. The scenes of the Passion up to the Crucifixion. The meeting with His Mother; the desolation and abandonment by His friends. Add the accumulation of pains, and the sensitiveness of the sacred Humanity, Body and Soul; endurance of past, present, future by memory, present infliction and anticipation. And all this He endured from the creatures whom He was saving by that very suffering. Not only their sins but ours, the sins of Catholics. Hence our attitude in these meditations must be that of contrite and humble acknowledgment of our guilt.

The scene of the Crucifixion. Think of the contrast here between human wickedness and divine goodness. The crowd watching and listening for the last acts and words of the condemned man.

How does Jesus behave? What does He say? The Gospel words, St. Luke xxiii, 33, 34. He "keep saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

Exhortation to the unforgetting—listen and learn. Jesus might justly have punished them in righteous anger. He thinks not of Himself. He pleads for their pardon; He makes excuses for them. Not only for them, but for us. We are in the same case. We have sinned against light and knowledge. We must not forget our responsibility.

Hence the lesson of the First Word is most needful for us. It is the lesson of forgiveness. It could not have been more forcibly urged. Shall we not forgive our enemies? Another motive, viz., reparation. It is difficult and humiliating, but can we refuse Him? Personal appeal to those present who may be unforgetting; consolation to the Heart of Jesus.

Of all the pulpits, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, from which, throughout the world's history, a teacher of religion has ever spoken; whether from some lofty hill, or from the rostrum of a public meeting-place, or in the intimate circle of a few chosen disciples, who should themselves afterwards teach to others what they had heard, never was such a pulpit as that from which our divine Lord and Master spoke His seven last words—the pulpit of the Cross. He Himself had preached in the synagogues, in the fields, on the mountains, from Peter's boat, and in the circle of His chosen apostles and disciples—but the pulpit of the Cross was the most illustrious of all from which even He, whose words wherever spoken

were always words of life and light, had ever taught. For the Cross itself was an eloquent sermon to the world; all the circumstances that surrounded the utterance from the Cross of those seven words or sayings of the divine Teacher add their force to what He said, and preach eloquently the lesson, summed up in these final utterances of that wonderful life of the humiliation of the Son of God of which the Cross was the culmination.

In this Lenten Course we are to meditate upon those seven last words; and, in doing so, for the reasons I have just given, we must take into our view the surroundings under which they were spoken, fixing an attentive and loving gaze upon the last scenes of the Passion of Jesus, and especially upon Him, the Central Figure of it all.

The unjust trial was over; the iniquitous condemnation of the Innocent One—His innocence admitted by the chief judge himself, the representative of that imperial power which prided itself upon its equal justice meted out to all—had been passed. The awful punishment of the scourging had been inflicted; the Victim had been loaded with the heavy Cross that was to be the instrument of His death; He had slowly, painfully, laboriously dragged Himself along the streets of Jerusalem beneath its overpowering weight, stumbling and falling again and again, preceded and followed and surrounded by a jeering mob full of hatred for the supposed enemy of their national traditions, or angry at the failure of the Prophet's promises, as they thought, of a restoration of the temporal glory of their country; some of them led by that morbid curiosity, so dishonorable to humanity, which urges men and women to gloat over scenes of violence and cruelty and death. There, too, were the priests, who had compassed, as they imagined, the fall of Him who had invaded their privileges; Pharisees, whose hypocrisy He had exposed; Sadducees, whose scepticism and unbelief He had reproved; Scribes, whose pride and formalism He had scourged; the Roman soldiery, brutal, unfeeling, despising the angry feelings of the Jewish crowd, wondering, perhaps, why they should make so much ado about an obscure Galilean; yet themselves adding to His agonies by their hard-hearted execution of their office; their cynical enjoyment of, or brutal indifference to, His sufferings; their satisfaction of what was to them, most likely, a welcome excitement somewhat out of the ordinary—something to talk about afterward and laugh over amongst themselves. Such were among the



elements that added to the agonies of the Way of the Cross. To these we must add that meeting—Oh, how sad? How full of poignant agony! Hearts that loved with a love unspeakable, love that was a keen sword of piercing pain stabbing the Hearts of the Son and Mother as they met and looked each upon the other's extremity of distress. We must add, too, the sorrow of desolation, the abandonment by His apostles, the denial of Peter, the accumulating agonies, bodily and mental, that grew and multiplied from the time that He gave Himself into the hands of His enemies until the moment when He bowed His head and rendered up His spirit to His heavenly Father.

Ah, my brethren, one only of the pains suffered by Jesus, a single shock of the heart-sorrow that He felt—what agony it would have been to any of us, could we have felt it; how would its bare remembrance afterward send a shuddering thrill of horror through our being as long as we should live! How does a man who has been in prison live over again his dreadful hours of solitude, of penal labor and disgrace, so that all life is clouded for him. For us mercifully some dulness of perception comes, nerves and mind after a time do not respond so acutely to the stimulus of pain or grief. But with Jesus it was not thus. At every moment of His Passion both mind and body were most keenly alive to the torture of each moment. His human soul, raised up by its union with the Divinity to a vast capacity of feeling and of sustaining untold tragedies of anguish; His sacred Body, likewise supported by the Divinity in unrelenting, unmitigated sensitiveness to every pang, bore to the uttermost, in the fullest degree, the immense weight of sorrow and the extremest sharpness of physical pain. One upon the other came these pains of body, continuous was the agony of soul. Knowledge of the past, vivid consciousness of the present, foresight of the future—all these gave to the sufferings of God-made man a character of intensity, of overwhelming oppressiveness and acuteness which no other son of man could experience. So, in a manner, our divine Lord endured past and present and future pains all at once, by memory and clear anticipation, as well as by instant present infliction. And all this He endured from His own creatures whom He had come to save; from the very ones for whose sake those sufferings were being undergone. It was their sins, their blind folly, their self-destroying wickedness, their obstinacy in sin, the future final impenitence and eternal ruin of many of them that pierced His

sacred Heart to the quick. And, brethren, not only the sins, the ingratitude, the blindness of those who actually condemned Him, who actually nailed Him to the Cross; who at the time of His Sacred Passion jeered Him, scorned Him, despised Him; but still more the sins foreseen of those who afterwards, knowing who He was and what He had done, and why He did it,—knowing too the dreadful consequences of sin, yet should sin in spite of their knowledge, should go on in sin, believing in their hearts, yet practically denying Him and rejecting Him in their lives. Oh, my brethren, true it is that Jesus grieved in His passion over unbelievers, over those who should refuse the message of salvation but do you not think that the keenest agony of all must have come from His knowledge of the sins of Catholics, children of His Church, special favorites of His Heart—of those who, sinning against the light, sin more than others, whose base ingratitude is worse, far worse, than the ignorant jeers of the Jewish mob, or the cold brutality of the heathen soldiery, or the cowardly injustice of Pilate? So, my brethren, we must not leave ourselves out of the company of those who made Jesus to suffer and nailed Him to His Cross. Only by humble, contrite acknowledgment of *our* part in this tragedy of suffering love can we make some reparation to His Sacred Heart; only in this attitude of mind, the right attitude and the just attitude, can we learn aright the lesson of the seven last words, preached from the pulpit of the Cross by Jesus, Saviour and Teacher of men.

The sad procession to Calvary is over. A halt is called. The Cross is laid upon the ground. Jesus is stripped of His garments. All the wounds of the scourging burst forth afresh as the clotted blood comes away with the vestments that are roughly torn from His Body. He is laid upon the rough wood. Hands and feet are stretched out. The great nails are put in position and crash through bone and tendon with a sickening sound under the heavy blows of the hammer. The Victim is fastened thus to the Altar of Sacrifice. Brethren, my Catholic, Christian brethren, think of it! What a contrast of human cruelty with divine compassion; of man's depravity with the sinlessness of the Son of God; of human vindictiveness with divine forgiveness; of pride with humility; of selfishness with self-sacrifice. Every evil passion of the human heart is raging in that crowd which surges about the Cross, every perfect virtue is showing in the soul of Him who is being put to

this cruelest of deaths. The mocking, curious crowd watch to see how the condemned criminal—for, merciful God pity them! that is all He is to them—will behave. They are all agog to catch His last words. The last confession of a condemned man, a murderer or such like, will always command a sale, and be read with unhealthy interest. How does Jesus behave: what does He say? These people are used to struggle, to curses, to impotent ravings or abject supplications when poor wretches are being nailed to the cross to suffer their slaves' death. What of Jesus, the discredited Prophet?

Listen to the Gospel record. "And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, they crucified Him there, and the robbers, one on the right hand and the other on the left. And Jesus kept saying, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'" (St. Luke xxiii, 33-34).

Listen to those words that came from Jesus on His Cross: while the nails go in, while they raise Him up, while they consummate their cruel injustice upon Him, He keeps saying (for that, my brethren, is the literal translation of the Greek written by St. Luke)—Jesus keeps saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Hard, proud hearts of men: you who find it so hard to forgive; you whose pride is so easily wounded, so hardly healed; you whose resentment is so quickly roused, so long before it dies away; you who cherish enmities for long years, who will not be reconciled, who keep up disagreements, who will not take the first step to the restoration of friendship; who will not humble yourselves in the least degree, who will not condescend to explain a misunderstanding,—listen and learn! If ever there was one whose righteous anger would have been justified, it was Jesus as they nailed Him to the Cross. He had done them nothing but good; He had spent Himself in their service; He was suffering innocently, and He was suffering for men.

He might have called down fire from heaven to destroy His murderers; He might have bidden to His side a legion of angels; He might, by His own power, have scattered them with a look or a word, nay, by one act of His will. Yet, in supreme agony, He suffers meekly; under crying injustice He has no resentment. With all the weight of His physical and mental torture He thinks not of Himself, meekly, pleadingly He says, "Father, forgive them,

for they know not what they do." He intercedes; He makes excuses; He asks that they may not be punished; He would fain save them from the consequences of their sin. Do I say He forgives *them*, intercede for *them*, makes excuses for *them*,—not only is it for them, but for *us*, for you and me, my brother and sister. For we, by our many sins, are in the same case as the murderers of Jesus and those who stood by and approved. The guilt of that death is upon our heads; we are blood-guilty of the Blood of Christ. Oh, what shall we do? Where shall we hide our heads for very shame? For when *we* sinned, we knew what we were doing. The words of Jesus cannot be applied to us so fully as to those who actually nailed Him to the Cross. They were very ignorant. It is true that when we sin we are for the moment blinded, by passion or covetousness, or pride, or lust—but there is less excuse for us than there was for them. Yet our dear Lord says of us, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He knows the power of temptation to obscure our minds, of passion to blind us. Yet we can counteract this power of blinding if we will. We have the light of faith, the aid of grace; we need not be blind; our sin is imputable to us; it is our own fault. We know that by it we crucify the Lord of Life, we know the consequences of our action. Yet He makes excuse and pleads for us; He makes all the excuse He can! He takes into account to the full all our natural human weakness. But we must not forget our responsibility, for responsibility, grave responsibility we have, when, knowing what we know, believing what we believe, we yet sin against our God, against Jesus our dear Saviour, of whose sufferings and bitter death our sins are the true cause.

And, as this is so, since by our sins we have crucified the Lord of Life, the great lesson that He teaches in this first word from the Cross is surely most needful for us. It is the lesson of forgiveness; or, full and free forgiveness of enemies, of all who have done us wrong. It would not have been possible for this lesson to be more strongly, more persuasively urged than it is by our divine Lord speaking under those circumstances, in those surroundings which I have already recalled to your minds. Innocent, He forgives His unjust accusers; all harmless, nay, their greatest benefactor, He pleads for those who are overwhelming Him with injuries, giving them true life, He forgives them His death

By word and example He teaches us to forgive: by words whose

force, spoken when they were spoken, must surely be irresistible. by an example of forgiveness without example in the world's history. Saints have imitated that example. Oh, that we too may imitate it. Since He has thus forgiven us—for, remember always, it was for us too that He prayed—since He has thus forgiven us who owe Him ten thousand talents, shall we not forgive our fellow-servant who owes us perhaps less than a hundred pence? There is another motive. Since we by sin have so grievously injured Him, our sovereign Lord and God, do we not owe Him reparation. He has told us what reparation we can make; what reparation is most pleasing to Him. And in this, again, He shows forth His divine unselfishness and charity. "If you would please Me," He says, "do good to others." "Inasmuch as you do it to the least of these, my brethren, you do it unto Me." And especially to show us how pleasing to Him is forgiveness, "Judge not" He tells us, "and you shall not be judged." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." "If you will forgive men their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offenses." "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Bless those that curse you, and pray for those that calumniate you." Such is the teaching of Jesus, summed up in His own sublime example, when He cried out again and again, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

This is difficult, indeed, for human nature; hard for our pride, humiliating to our self-esteem. But who can resist the word and the example of Jesus that we have thought upon to-day? Who, with that before his eyes, can harden his heart, and say, "No, my Lord and Master, notwithstanding Thy own blessed example, I cannot and will not bring myself to foster it. I will *not* forgive; I will not lay aside my anger and resentment. I was unjustly treated, that person had no right to behave in such a way, I did not deserve it; it is too much; I cannot be reconciled, I will not make friends. I know that Thy injuries, Thy sufferings, the injustice Thou didst endure were far greater than anything that has fallen to my lot; I know, too, that I, myself, inflicted these things upon Thee—and Thou art ready and willing to forgive me—but I will not forgive; it is too difficult."

Brethren, there may be many among you who have something to forgive which you have not forgiven, someone to be reconciled with whom still you are holding at a distance. If that is so, *you*

are really saying those things to Jesus; you are refusing Him what He asks, in spite of all He has done for you, in spite of the example we have been looking upon together. Will you refuse Him still? Will you go on in pride and hardness of heart? Will you go on saying from day to day, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"? If you do act thus, can you hope that the loving prayer of Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" will avail for you. Oh, my brethren, be not so foolish; be not so hard-hearted; be not so ungrateful to that dear Saviour who suffered for you, and in the midst of His sufferings uttered that prayer for you. What would the cold indifference of those Roman soldiers be compared with your cold hard-hearted indifference to Jesus if you refuse to others the forgiveness which Jesus asks you to give them?

Let it not be, my brethren. Give to the Sacred Heart of our dear Lord the consolation of knowing that His supreme example of unselfish forgiveness has not been in vain for you, but that now, without delay, in grateful acknowledgment of His goodness to you, you will forgive, even as you have been forgiven, unhesitatingly, freely, and without reserve.

## THE SECOND WORD

"Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."—St. Luke xxiii, 43.

*SYNOPSIS.*—*Christ hanging on the Cross: the Cross henceforth to be the glory of Christians. First visible fruit of the Crucifixion was the conversion and salvation of a sinner. Contemplate the scene. Jesus and the two thieves. The parting of the garments: the behavior of the soldiers, the crowd, the priests and scribes. Their blasphemies, taunts and jeers. One of the robbers joins with them in reviling Jesus. What a scene of suffering and cruelty. We should have pitied Jesus had He been only an ordinary man unjustly punished. What when it is God-made-Man who suffers, and suffers for us? One was there upon whom it dawned that Jesus was more than an ordinary man. Who was it? One of the two condemned criminals. His speech to his fellow robber; what it involved for him; the process in his mind; his courage in speaking out what he felt. His new-found virtues—faith, hope and charity; circumstances all against the exercise of these three virtues. His confession of faith: "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom." His reward—the second word from the Cross.*

*The lesson for us: no sinner hopeless; holiness to be gained by all. Exhortation to sinners to turn to Jesus. Exhortation to all to realize that the reward of the good thief is open to us. If we turn to Him, then some day it will be said to us: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."*

Our divine Saviour has been nailed to the Cross; the Cross itself has been lifted up and set firmly in its place, a sign of salvation henceforth to all the world; from that moment, instead of being an object of horror, the mark, like the gallows, of indelible disgrace, the Cross of Jesus is to be the most glorious of all standards, the sign of all that is most lovely and desirable, the emblem of an eternal hope, the strength of martyrs, the stimulus of courage in suffering, the effective motive of patience, giving fortitude in life and sure confidence in death, perseverance to saints and repentance to sinners.

Repentance to sinners! Ah, my dear brethren in Christ, what a consolation it is to us to know that the very first visible fruit of the raising up of Jesus on the Cross was the conversion and salvation of a sinner! We will contemplate now together this great wonder of divine compassion and mercy, this ever-memorable proof of the power of divine grace and of the love of Jesus for men over sinful human hearts. Thank God, though so wonderful, the conversion that we shall meditate upon to-day does not stand

alone; it is typical—the first of a series that shall never end whilst the world lasts; a service of mighty works of grace done by Jesus and by the power of His holy Cross in the souls of men, in that invisible world of spiritual happenings—the minds and hearts and wills of human beings.

Jesus hangs there. Beside Him are two robbers, crucified with Him; condemned, doubtless, for deeds of violence and brigandage. To watch the condemned men four soldiers of the Roman guard are left, according to the customary regulations. The Roman law allowed the soldiers employed in superintending executions such spoils as they could secure from the persons of the condemned. These men, therefore, proceeded to divide amongst them our blessed Lord's garments of which He had been stripped,—His tunic and mantle. The mantle, being made in several pieces, was easily divided; not so the tunic. This was woven in one piece, and rather than spoil the material of which it was made, by rending it, the soldiers cast lots for its possession. Thus was fulfilled, in the most exact way, the ancient prophecy of the Psalmist, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots" (Ps. xxi, 19).

In the meantime, the crowd waited to gaze curiously upon the dying agonies of Jesus and the two malefactors. Many were there from mere curiosity. But it was the hour of seeming triumph for the enemies of the Christ; and these, too, crowded about the Cross, and loaded their most innocent victim with all kinds of cruel taunts, vile jeers and abuse. "They that passed by," St. Mark tells us (xv, 29 seq.), "blasphemed Him, wagging their heads, and saying: 'Ah thou that destroyest (as thou didst boast) the temple of God and in three days buildest it up again, save thyself, coming down from the cross.'" And the chief priests and scribes, collected together in delighted triumph over their long put-off success, gloat over their now defeated opponent, saying to one another, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save"; and, with bitter scorn and irony "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe" (xv, 31-32). A pretty Christ! Indeed, a famous king of Israel He makes, hanging there with His fit associates—for brethren, nothing less than this was the awful blasphemy which scarcely we dare transcribe thus in its naked hideous meaning, that they conceived in their wicked hearts and uttered with their lips. Worse than this, they



even dare to challenge God Himself to come to the deliverance of Jesus, blaspheming the love of the Father for His only-begotten Son: "He put His trust in God; if God loves Him, let Him deliver Him, for He said 'I am the Son of God'"—such, dear brethren, is the literal translation of the words of St. Matthew who records this terrible blasphemy. At first the general mass of curious sight-seers standing about seems to have been neutral or indifferent, but the mad exulting derision of the priests and scribes infected them also, and they began to join in the jeers and taunts that these were casting at our blessed Lord. One of the soldiers mockingly holds up towards the divine Sufferer a cup of wine mixed with water with which the guards were regaling themselves, crying out at the same time: "If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself" (St. Luke xxiii, 37). And the crowds begin to call out also, as we have seen St. Mark tells us, "come down from the cross! save thyself!" And even one of the robbers, despite his own misery and pain, is infected with the general feeling and blasphemes Him, saying: "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us" (St. Luke xxiii, 39).

My brethren, what a scene is here of undeserved suffering, of human cruelty, of despicable triumph over a seeming fallen foe! Often the worst of men will refrain from taunting a vanquished and discomfited enemy. It is not so with the enemies of Jesus. He shall taste his punishment to the very dregs; no bitterness of stinging reproach shall be spared Him; no ambition of His (as *they* conceive it) that has broken down, no rash boast (as *they* count it) that He has ever uttered, no former deed of power and mercy that He has done—all to enhance His influence, as *they* would have it, all to make Himself a name, all to further His presumptuous projects as a religious Teacher, as a Ruler, as the pretended Deliverer of His nation—not one of these things, but, with deliberately cruel intent and malice aforethought, shall he cast up at Him now that He is apparently at their mercy. We should have pitied Him, dear brethren, had He been but an ordinary man, the history of whose goodness and undeserved sufferings had come down to us; we should have reflected upon the extremities of cruelty to which envy and injured pride and lust of power, and the triumphant opposition of vested interests to any reform that touches them, could degrade men in the persons of those priests and scribes. But when it is God-made-Man, the All-Perfect, the

Sinless, the Innocent, when it is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Lover and Saviour of men who *for men, for us*, is suffering these things at the hands of His own creatures—then, oh my brethren—what life is long enough to fathom the wonder of these things, the sufferings of our God in human flesh, the anguish of that supremely tender Heart, the piercing agony of the strokes which the blind ingratitude of those He had benefited and was still benefiting dealt upon His most sensitive human soul?

Brethren, there was one there upon whom it dawned, as he looked and listened, that this was more than a Man who was suffering thus. Who was it? One of the priests who was pious and more compassionate than the rest? One of the scribes, who, perchance, began to see in the events that passed before him the evident fulfilment of prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures that were his proper study? One of the crowd gathered there, enlightened by some secret sympathy and gifted with more than common insight by reason of a just and tender heart? None of these. God the Son is recognized, is saluted, is adored by one brought lower than the lowest riffraff that has gathered there to gloat upon dying agonies and bleeding flesh and poor rent human frames: He is recognized by one of the poor wretches who have been crucified with Him; and for all time the dying thief is to be a picture, too tender, too full of the pathos of love and suffering and repentance ever to be adequately imaged in thought or words of man. For it is no mere human emotion that has seized him, but the transforming power and efficacy of God's holy grace; grace won by the divine Sufferer who hangs besides him, grace red with the Blood that flows from the Cross of Jesus and bedews not alone the hard ground beneath, but the soul of that poor sinful man.

His companion in misery had begun, as we have seen, to revile our blessed Lord with the others: "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us"—such was the bitter taunt that fell from his dying lips. "But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying: Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation? And we indeed, justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done no evil" (St. Luke xxiii, 40-41).

We will pause a little over these words, significative of a great change that had taken place in the soul of Dismas, the good thief. Grace had touched his soul. He had been thinking, as he hung there. The first word of Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they

know not what they do," had sunk into his heart; he had watched Jesus, and had been struck by the meekness and patience and forgivingness of the divine Sufferer. The thought came back to him of the God whom he had forsaken, of whom he had learned in childhood, whom he had been taught to serve. He repented: he was ready now to bear witness to that God, and to the innocence of Him who hung by his side. He knew well that a perfect storm of jeers and taunts would arise from those who should hear him—him, a condemned thief, "he to set up now as a just man, to presume to rebuke his fellow criminal! He was as bad as the other, how could he dare to rebuke him? And now he is defending the false Nazarene; much good may that do him!" But Dismas is not deterred; he has found a new kind of courage, not the courage of a brigand, but the courage of a Christian, the courage that in the martyrs was to astonish the world. So, courageously he speaks: "Do you not fear God, my brother, seeing that you are under the same sentence? Yet for us, this is what we deserve, it is the just reward of our deeds; but this man here hath done nothing that is even unseemly." This poor criminal was vouchsafed a wonderful insight into the character of Jesus; for the words that are translated in our version, "this man has done no evil," mean in the Greek, not merely this man hath done no evil, but this man hath done nothing *out of place*," nothing in any way worthy even of slight blame. What a testimony, dear brethren, to the influence of the sinlessness of Jesus; what a testimony is the whole occurrence to the power of His grace and the efficacy of His Sacred Passion? But there is more: the dying thief has acquired a new virtue—it is faith. He believes in Jesus, he accepts His Messiahship, he acknowledges Him as a King! How marvelous was the faith that made him do this under such circumstances! Did anyone ever look less like a King, a Saviour, a Messiah sent by God, than this poor discredited Prophet from Nazareth whose schemes of reform and of deliverance have to all appearances ended in this complete failure? But Dismas believes in Jesus; and not only that, he *hopes* in Jesus. What a time for hope! Did anything look more hopeless than the position in which both he and Jesus found themselves? And his whole bearing shows that he has begun also to *love* Jesus: he loves Him enough to bear for His sake all the taunts and jeers that are levelled at him for his brave witness to what he knows now is the truth—to the sinlessness, the divine mission, the power,

the kingship of Jesus of Nazareth. And, dying as he is, he turns to the Christ dying also beside him, and he speaks those wonderful words, "Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom" (St. Luke xxiii, 42).

This confession of faith drew from our divine Lord the Second Word from the Cross. "Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43). Oh, glorious words, sealing at once his pardon and his perseverance! How many of God's saints even have been thus assured of their salvation? Oh, reward unspeakably great! He asks that some day he may find a place in the kingdom of Jesus; Jesus promises him heaven that very day itself. Before the sun shall have set upon that Day of Days, Dismas will be with Him in Heaven, pardoned, ransomed, clothed in the bright whiteness of the vesture of eternal glory. Such is the generosity of God in rewarding; such is the marvelous power of true repentance. What a change: from wickedness to sanctity, from disgrace to unutterable glory, from misery to eternal peace, from shame and reproach to everlasting praise and reward! And it is all the work of grace and of repentance; of the first grace used and co-operated with, of repentance brought about by that first grace and winning other graces, till in so brief a time the condemned criminal is changed into a saint of God.

Brethren, who dare say now of any sinner that there is no hope for him? Who dare say now that holiness and perfection are out of reach or impossible? This Second Word of Jesus from the Cross forbids such thoughts to us. Only trust Him, only set about to do something for Him, only use the graces He gives you now, and you may hope for anything: for pardon, for more and more grace, for holiness, for eternal glory. Say not that it is too late for you to begin to think of holiness. It was not too late, even at that eleventh hour, for Jesus to save and to sanctify the dying thief. God's arm is not shortened, the streams of His grace are not dried up. He will do the same for you as He did for Dismas if you, too, will turn with all your hearts and souls to Him. Rouse up then your faith and hope and love. Bear witness bravely by your fearless profession of our holy religion to the faith you have in Jesus whose religion it is. And you poor sinners, if any there be here, loved of the Sacred Heart, do not that Sacred Heart the injustice of despairing of His mercy, or of being discouraged.

He will forgive you, He will save you. Come to Him! He will ask you to do something for Him, to make necessary effort—but see what the dying thief was willing to do; see what was his reward exceeding great. Brethren, all of you, try to realize that the same heaven where Dismas is with Jesus is still offered to you, is still open to you. Jesus has won it for you; it is your inheritance and your right. He will give you all the grace you need to get there. Come to Him then, with faith and hope and love. Faith is easier for you than it was for the good thief: you are not called upon to hope even against hope as he did: and you know more of Jesus, of His goodness, His mercy and His power than Dismas did when he met his Lord on Calvary. Will *you* not love that dear Saviour who died for you? Come to Him with true repentance in your hearts, and say to Him, every day, “Lord, remember me,” and one day, when you are about to meet Him, cleansed by His Blood, absolved from your sins, purified by repentance, strengthened for your last journey by the Holy Viaticum of His Body and Blood, anointed with the Holy Oil, your temporal punishment cancelled by holy indulgences and by your patient suffering upon your sick-bed, which will be *your* cross, you, too, if you *will* and if you strive *now*, even before the sun has set upon *your* last earthly day, may have heard from the lips of Jesus those most gracious words, “Amen, I say unto thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

## THE THIRD WORD

"When Jesus, therefore, had seen His mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His mother: 'Woman, behold thy son!' After that He said to the disciple: 'Behold thy mother!'"—St. John xix, 26, 27.

*SYNOPSIS.*—*The third word from the Cross. Short recapitulation of last Sunday's discourse. The darkness. Mary and the others approach the Cross. The mutual sufferings of Jesus and Mary; Mary queen and chief of martyrs. Jesus speaks the third word. The tradition of the Church as to the meaning of this third word. Its wider application. "Mary our Mother." This a fundamental truth of the Christian religion. Mary's motherhood of us based on and following from her motherhood of Jesus. Jesus our brother. Our higher sonship of God through Him; the sonship of adoption. This involves a real new relationship to God—the communication of a divine life from God to us. Jesus is our life, and this life comes to us through Mary who cooperates with God in bringing the new life into the world. Hence, she truly brings us forth to God spiritually; is our spiritual mother. Can it be that she has not a mother's love for us? No. She cooperated in our redemption: she does so still by her intercession. Love her, venerate her, take her to your hearts as St. John "took her into his own."*

We are to meditate to-day, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, upon the Third Word or saying of our blessed Lord uttered by Him from His Cross. It is a word for which we should thank God every day of our lives; a word spoken by Jesus, our dear Saviour, for *us*, as well as for those who first heard it; a word which He spoke with us in mind.

It was about the sixth hour of the day, that is about noon, probably a little before noon, that our blessed Saviour was raised up on that Cross from which, as He had said, He was to draw all men unto Him. We contemplated last Sunday the earlier events of that long agony of three hours which ensued upon the crucifixion. We listened to the jeers and taunts of the priests and scribes; we saw how they roused the crowd of persons who stood about in idle curiosity or indifference, stirring up hostility towards the divine Sufferer; how this hostility affected the mind even of one of our divine Lord's fellow-sufferers, who, in spite of, or rather in desperation at his own pains, joined in the torrent of abuse that was being hurled at Jesus. We witnessed in spirit the marvelous conversion of Dismas; we heard his cry of faith and hope and love, and the wonderful word of Jesus promising him a reward unspeakable, "This day thou shalt be with

Me in Paradise." And now an extraordinary and terrifying event takes place. From the sixth hour onward strange shadows began to gather about the earth, a preternatural darkness, rising up about Calvary as if to hide from the face of day the shameful deed that was there being done, spreading over the whole face of the land. As this darkness came on the crowd about the Cross began to thin, terrified at this unwonted happening. Thus a clear space was left around the Cross of Jesus, and a little company of persons drew near to Him. They were the Mother of Jesus, that blessed Virgin Mother, now indeed the Queen of Martyrs, suffering in her pure and loving soul every agonizing pang that her well-beloved Son was feeling: there was her sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas; there was St. Mary Magdalene and John, the Disciple whom Jesus loved. Jesus looks down upon them. Unutterable anguish and suffering still awaits Him in those hours of thick darkness—a deep mystery of pain such as never man suffered before nor since; pain of body, anguish of soul. And not the least of His agonies is in the knowledge of His own dear Mother's unutterable grief at seeing Him there upon the Cross. Now, indeed, the sword is piercing His Mother's heart; now, indeed, her heart and the Heart of Jesus, united in suffering, each knowing and feeling the suffering of the other, are a very ocean of sorrow, their mutual love, as it is greater beyond compare than any that we can know, sharpening inexpressibly the anguish that they feel. We do know and we contemplate sometimes, perhaps, with terror, the almost illimitable capacity of the human heart for suffering. What must have been the suffering of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary then! Saints in their meditations can go a little way into that mystery of anguish: Holy Church strives, in her hymns and offices to tell us somewhat of that deep and awful grief. Especially in that beautiful sequence, the *Stabat Mater*, does she strive to depict the sorrows of Mary.

"Quis est homo qui non fletet  
 Christi matrem si videret  
 In tanto supplicio?  
 Quis non posset contristari  
 Piam Matrem contemplari  
 Dolentem cum Filio?"

If even our cold hearts are moved when we meditate upon the sufferings of Jesus; if even we can compassionate the sorrows of

Mary standing beneath the Cross of her dying Son, oh, what must have been the keen agony that pierced the Sacred Heart of Jesus as He looked upon her enduring such pangs of grief as we cannot imagine; what must have been her grief who could enter into, and did willingly enter into, with entire sympathy and fellow-feeling—the sympathy and fellow-feeling of one who shared in it all to the full—every sorrow that then oppressed the Heart of Jesus, every pang and agony that He was enduring?

She is His own Mother: she stands there and sees Him suffering, outraged, forsaken, slowly dying of pain and thirst and grief. He will not, it is true, give up His spirit *till* He wills; but He endures all the pangs of that slow, agonizing, cruelly deliberate on-coming of death which crucifixion meant. Mary, His Mother, watches this. She is enlightened by her wonderful love to enter into it all; she is enlightened by that love, and by the Holy Spirit, to know and to understand and to feel all His dreadful mental anguish—and above all that anguish which He then felt at the weight of the whole world's sins laid upon His shoulders—that terrible mountain of loathsome sin, so loathsome to His all-pure soul that He had cried out in the Garden for *that* chalice at least to pass from Him—she understands it all, she knows how His soul is shrinking from that contact. He has offered Himself willingly for men to His Father to hear willingly all the sufferings laid upon Him by God in atonement for the sins of the world—but worst of all is the close presence of sin, that mystery of sin and evil in contact with the All-Holy, sinless Himself, yet borne down by the sins of all men, past and present and yet to come. In all this Mary shares, so that, as a spiritual writer has said, “three times over is she crucified with Jesus—crucified by being present; crucified by her mother's love; crucified by her holiness and horror of sin.” For, just as she is herself holy and sinless is she able more than any other to understand the agony of the soul of Jesus at the presence of our iniquities that God has laid upon Him.

And as she stands there, Jesus looks down upon her. And from her He looks to the beloved disciple who is by her side. He looks sorrowfully, lovingly, from one to the other. He foresees those years that His Mother must live upon earth after He has ascended to His Father. He would provide her with a guardian. He says to her, indicating the beloved Apostle Saint John, “Woman, behold thy son”; and then, looking upon His faithful



Apostle He says, "Son, behold thy Mother." "And from that hour," St. John himself tells us, "the disciple took her to his own" (St. John xix, 27), that is, to his own abode, to dwell with him.

Brethren, not without a deep meaning did our divine Lord utter this third word from the Cross. The constant tradition of the Church and of holy writers has put upon these expressions of Jesus to His blessed Mother and the beloved Disciple an interpretation which makes them mean more than they would appear to mean on the surface, and gives to them an application far wider than the application immediately visible at the time our blessed Saviour gave utterance to them. The Holy Church of God, taught by the same Holy Spirit who inspired St. John to record this saying in his Gospel, knows that it had, in the mind of Jesus when He uttered it, and in the intention of the Holy Spirit when He moved the Evangelist to write it, this deeper meaning and wider application. Thus she has ever held that St. John represented at the moment all the redeemed of Christ for whom He shed His Blood; that she who is the Mother of God is also the Mother of men, our dear Mother, having her place and part in the redemption worked by her divine Son.

So, then, He truly was saying to her—"Woman, behold thy son, and behold all thy children whom I give to thee henceforth"; and He was saying to us, "My children, for whom I die, behold your Mother whom I give to you." Brethren, even if our divine Lord had never said these words, we still should have known, we should have been able to gather from Catholic doctrine that Mary is our true spiritual mother. It is a truth of Christianity that the blessed Mother of Jesus is our Mother also. Those who have refused to recognize the maternal office of Mary towards men have shorn the Christian religion of one of its most glorious, most helpful and most consoling doctrines—not a doctrine invented in later times, not a doctrine added to the faith delivered to the saints, but a doctrine that runs through and is a part and parcel of the whole scheme of redemption as it was in the mind of God from all eternity, and as it has been carried out by Him in time.

The motherhood of Mary in relation to the redeemed of her Son, the fact that she is truly our spiritual mother, is rooted and grounded in the fact that she is the Mother of Jesus, God-made-Man, our divine Redeemer. He is the Son of God from all eternity, the only begotten of the Father. By taking flesh He became our

Brother, one of our race. We also were already sons of God in a sense, by creation. But our divine Lord, by becoming Man, has made possible for us a higher sonship, by which we are sons of God in a higher way. For He is the Son of God, not by creation, but because He possesses the same Divine Nature as His Father, which is communicated to Him from all eternity; and by His divine sanctifying grace He gives to us a higher sonship than that which we have by our creation, a sonship of adoption, by which we are adopted into the divine family, and made no longer servants only, but adopted sons of our heavenly Father. And, dear brethren, this adoption into the family of God involves more than the mere legal notion that is contained in the idea of human adoption. Human adoption does not make any real kinship, any real relationship, between him who adopts and him who is adopted: but the adoption of grace *does*: it sets up a real relationship with God; a new and higher relationship. Grace gives us a new divine life that is communicated to us by God; a life that the Apostle St. Peter goes so far as to call "a participation of the divine nature." And this is through Jesus Christ, through His Incarnation, Birth, Passion and Death.

"Grace to you and peace be accomplished," writes St. Peter, "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord—by whom He hath given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made participators of the divine nature" (II. Pet. i, 2 and 4). Jesus, God-made-Man, by His grace becomes the life of our souls, we are new creatures in Him.—"Put on the new man," says the holy Apostle St. Paul, "who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. iv, 24).

And who was it, I ask you, my dear brethren, who brought to us, who introduced into the world Jesus, our new life, the very life of our souls? It was none other than Mary, the ever-blessed Mother of God. So then, just as a mother co-operates in giving physical and natural life to her children, so did Mary co-operate with God in giving to us Jesus who is the supernatural life of our souls. Truly, then, and in actual fact, by reason of her true motherhood of Jesus, she is our dear mother also; and as by divine grace the Father of Jesus becomes our Father also, so too His Mother, has become our Mother, the second Eve, mother of all the living, of all those to whom is given the spiritual life of which she was the chosen channel to bring it to men. "She has brought us to our second

and spiritual birth, she was made the source of our life, and became our Mother in becoming the Mother of Jesus Christ" (Bishop Bellord: "Meditations on Christian Dogma," Vol. II, p. 353).

So, then, Mary has for us all a mother's love. Could it be otherwise? If the mother who gives bodily life to her children is bound to them by that fact in a relationship of undying love, shall it not be so with her who by her willing co-operation brought to us Jesus, our Life, and so was the chosen instrument used by God for our spiritual re-birth. We know that it is so: we know that she is still our Mother. When she stood beneath the Cross and willingly offered up her Son for our salvation, willingly endured her awful martyrdom of sorrow, she had in mind the redeemed of Jesus. When she heard that word "Woman, behold thy son," she accepted not only the beloved disciple but us also to be her children. Then she took upon her the office of Mother of the Church, Mother of the Mystical Body of her Son to whose Body of flesh she had given life. Thus, as the first Eve co-operated in our fall, she, the second Eve, co-operated in our redemption. This is her place in the scheme of salvation. It was God's holy will and divine Wisdom to overcome the evil one by the same weapons with which he had gained his passing victory over our first parents. As we were ruined with the co-operation of the woman, who tempted Adam the head of our race to that sin by which we fell in him, so God would and did restore us with the co-operation of another woman, acting with the second Adam, the Head of our race restored. As we fell in Adam, yet not without the sad concurrence and co-operation of Eve, so, indeed, by Jesus are we redeemed, and not by Mary, yet not without her willing and active co-operation.

And, dear brethren, are we to suppose that now,—now that she reigns gloriously in heaven with her Son, she has ceased to take interest in her spiritual children; has ceased to co-operate with Him in the work of our salvation. By no means! Still she loves us; still she aids in the work of our salvation; still she spiritually brings forth Jesus in us, and brings us forth to God. And this she does by virtue of her position and office given to her in those words, "Woman, behold thy son," belonging to her as I have shown you, by the very fact that she is the Mother of Jesus. And her work for us now is done by intercession. "I have read"—in Holy Scripture—"says a modern writer, "that Christ can no more suffer

or die; but I have never read that He has laid aside His filial love for His Mother. I have read that death has lost its empire over Him; but I have never read that His Mother has resigned her empire of love over Him. He indeed is her King, but she is the King's Mother, and while she is His subject—the first subject of His kingdom, she is also His best-beloved, and He gives to her freely the sweet empire of love over His Heart" (Paraphrased from Mgr. Gay, apud V. D. Artaud, *La Vraie Piété*, Paris, 1911).

Go to her then, my brethren, with the fullest confidence. Open your hearts to her sweet and powerful influence. As the beloved disciple "took her unto his own," so do you take her to your hearts. Love her always, venerate her, invoke her, and she will be to you a mother, she will bring you forth to God, she will form Jesus within your souls through the Holy Spirit whose choicest gifts and graces she will obtain for you by her prayers to Jesus her Son.

## THE FOURTH WORD

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: ' . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me.'"—St. Matt. xxvii, 46.

*SYNOPSIS.*—*The darkness on Calvary; the agonies of Jesus during the three hours—the sad history of man's fall, and of men's sins till the end of time passes before His mind; the sins of Catholics, too. The lifting of the physical darkness is followed by the descent of the darkness of the dereliction upon the soul of Jesus. Look on Him as the daylight returns! Who would know Him as the Son of God and Son of Mary? The fourth word: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" What does it mean? It is a mystery; yet saints and doctors of the Church can lead us a little way into the understanding of this mystery.*

*Extract from a modern writer (the Abbé Fouard) explaining the meaning of Christ's dereliction:*

*"We must remember that Jesus actually bore the load of our crimes; He 'became sin' for our sakes. In that hour God abandoned Him to the distress of this contact with sin. His vision of the multitude of the damned, for whom He knew that He was dying in vain. The mystery of the Dereliction part of the deep mystery of the Incarnation. Both in the Incarnation and the Dereliction the divinity remained inviolable."*

*One thing all through is clear—it was our sins that caused this terrible abandonment.*

*"Him who knew no sin" God "hath made sin for us, that we might be made the justice of God in Him."*

*Exhortation.*—*At the time of temptation to remember this dereliction of Jesus, and to spare Him the added weight of a new sin, consoling His sacred Heart by our faithfulness.*

The holy Gospel tells us that from the sixth hour, soon after our blessed Lord was lifted up on His Cross, until the ninth hour, shortly before His death, a terrible and appalling darkness covered the land, and shut out from view the hill of Calvary and the tragedy that was being enacted thereon. Who can tell what Jesus suffered during the hours of that darkness? Even had the bright light of the sun shone upon the scene, only the outward part of that tragedy would have been visible: the most terrible element thereof, the secret unnameable agonies of the soul of Jesus would still have been hidden: what they were we never can completely know. Helped by the word of Scripture and by the enlightened meditations of saints, to whom God has revealed these things in prayer or ecstasy, we can know something of the mental sufferings of our divine Lord during this time. Then the whole sad history of man's fall and man's sin passed through His mind. He saw the original loving intentions of God, in creating man to serve

Him, love Him, glorify Him and be forever blessed by the possession of Him. He saw the temptation and most unhappy fall of our first parents. He saw the whole flood of sin and misery and unhappiness, of evil and disease and death that was let loose upon the world by that first miserable act of disobedience. He heard the cries of the murdered, the wailings of infants born in poverty and degradation; the foolish mirth of the profligate, the wretched merry-making of drunkards. He contemplated the scenes of war and rapine, heard the groans and cries of the wounded and the dying. He saw the ravages of plagues and sickness, the "thousand ills that flesh is heir to." Worse still, He saw and knew in all its sad deformity the corruption of souls in sin, the defacement of God's image and likeness in which they had been created, the wilful rejection of grace, the conscious rebellion of sinners against God's most holy and most righteous law, the selling of their precious birthright as sons of God. And He saw these things not only in souls who knew Him not as their Redeemer, to whom His great love had not been revealed, but saw this rejection of grace, this wilful plunging into sin on the part of Christians and Catholics, to whom treasures of His grace and mercy have been made known.

Brethren, He saw the evil of wilful sin in *us*: He saw how *we*, in spite of all that He was then suffering, should oft and again prefer the vain degrading pleasures of mortal sin to His love and His sweet service.

As the ninth hour approached, the darkness that had covered the land slowly lifted, and once more the rays of the sun lit up the mount of Calvary and the three crosses that on its summit stood out against the sky. Oh what a sight it was! Look, brethren, look upon the sight of Jesus hanging there. Who would know Him for the Son of God? Truly, as the Prophet foretold "there is" now "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" (Isaias liii, 2-4). Yes, brethren, who, I ask, would have known Him then, so wounded, so smitten, brought down so low, for the

fair Son of God and Son of Mary? Where is the beauty of that countenance, the sweetness of that light of love divine which shone from His eyes, which in a moment made the Magdelene a saint and drew the tears of loving penitence from the eyes of Peter? Where is the grace of that form, of that Sacred Body so perfectly moulded as the dwelling-place of the Word? Ah! how changed, how disfigured, how defiled! That head all bowed down in agony, pierced with the hard thorns of the crown they had put upon Him: those eyes closed up with blood, His body all one great wound from head to foot, strained and stretched and racked upon the rough wood of His Cross, hands and feet torn and mangled by the huge nails driven through them. Ah, my friends and fellow sinners, what a sight was unveiled when that curtain of merciful darkness was drawn aside! But these bodily sufferings, this agonizing torture and rigorous punishment of the Body of Jesus were little compared with the agonies of His most loving, most sensitive soul. Upon that blessed Soul of His there descends now a mysterious and awful darkness of spirit. He, the All-Holy Son of the Father, in some dread and scrutible way feels Himself forsaken by God; and in the abandonment of extremest desolation He cries out with a loud voice "*Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani,*" "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

"This lament," says a modern writer (The Abbé Fouard, "The Christ the Son of God," Eng. Trans., Vol. II, p. 336) "is the opening of the Psalm wherein the Messiah's passion is all predicted,—(Psalm xxi) His strength ebbing away in streams of blood, His burning wounds and that parching thirst of whose fierceness the dying man alone has any knowledge."

But what does it mean? How can the eternal Son, who is one with His Father, be forsaken by that Father? This is indeed an unfathomable mystery. Yet holy writers and doctors of the Church, enlightened by the Spirit of God, have penetrated a little way into the awful mystery of God the Son abandoned on the Cross, and uttering that exceeding bitter cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" The writer whom I have just quoted sums up the teaching of these holy writers in a passage which I cannot do better than quote to you at length, since I think it throws light upon this subject which, although a mystery, yet, like all the sacred mysteries of our holy religion abundantly repays our study and what understanding of it our human minds with God's help can attain—

repays with rich spiritual fruit that study and the understanding which we may have by prayful, humble and devout contemplation under the guidance of the saints.

“Never did any dying soul,” says the writer to whom I allude, “feel as Jesus felt when now forsaken by God, because none but He alone has ever lived with God and in God. Hanging there, reviled by earth and rejected by heaven, He lingered in lonely conflict with another agony like that which passed over Him in Gethsemane, yet this time He drained the cup to the very dregs. To gather any idea of the wretchedness which seized Him in His present abandonment, we must remember that despite His own innocence, Jesus, when upon the Cross, bore the actual load of our crimes—that He actually had taken upon Himself the wickedness of the world. And now that God had transferred to Him all sins committed from the beginning to the end of time, these all stood forth distinctly before His dying eyes together with their very least circumstances. Every treacherous and revengeful deed, the lewd and adulterous works of shame, blasphemies, slanders and lying—all together surged their foul floods into His soul, and every other sense was swallowed up under these torrents of iniquity. And it was in this same hour wherein the Christ was, as it were, overwhelmed in that first wild onslaught, that God saw fit to withdraw His Presence from Him, as if to crush Him beneath the weight of His vengeance. Jesus, ‘having become sin for our sake,’ being made ‘a curse and an execration’ (Gal. iii, 13) (according to St. Paul’s expression). Jesus suffered at the hand of God such unutterable horror as no human tongue can declare. In that hour heaven drew away from Him into the darkness; hell alone remained before the Saviour’s sight,—wherein was disclosed that never-ending despair, eternal, infinite, even as is the God whose penalty it is.

“One lowermost depth of sorrow had still to be reached. . . . The multitude of the damned were all marshaled before His eyes; however unworthy, they were the members of His mystical Body, so closely united to Him that they could not be separated from Him without violence. And as He saw this dearly loved portion of Himself about to be wrested from Him, Jesus felt as if He, indeed, like them, were left destitute and reprobate forever. He mourned, ‘that the fruit of His struggles should be torn from Him; He cried aloud that His sweat, His toils and His death were thus



bereft of their reward; since those for whom He had suffered so much were abandoned to everlasting perdition.' This, then, was what wrung from Him that mournful cry: 'My God! My God! dost Thou abandon Me?' But how can we make this moment of apparent despair to which Jesus yielded harmonize with the blessedness essential to His divine personality? Herein again there is involved an unfathomable mystery, the Mystery of the Incarnation. To comprehend how God the Son could speak of Himself as forsaken by His Father, we should first need to explain how the Infinite Being could take upon Himself a finite nature; for between these two humiliations there is only a difference of degree—the abandonment of Jesus on the Cross only continued what was first accomplished in the Incarnation, and in these two mysteries the Godhead remains equally inviolable. With Christ in His anguish it was even as with those mountain chains whose white crests pierce the clouds. Often the tempests do havoc with their rugged sides, strewing them with the wreckage of the storm; yet naught can trouble the snowy peaks, which, far, far above the whirlwind's reach, stand evermore serene and crowned with light" (*Ibid.* pp. 336-338).

Although, now, dear brethren, this terrible dereliction of Jesus is a mystery included in that deep Mystery of the Incarnation by which, being true God and true Man, the word incarnate possesses and exercises both divine and human operations, could suffer and die; though, too, it is beyond us fully to comprehend how His soul, though ever beautiful by the direct vision of God, could yet feel most truly and really the sense of utter forsakenness and abandonment by His Eternal Father which caused that bitter lament to come forth from His overburdened and anguished Heart, yet this is clear, and this is what concerns us most and concerns us personally—that it was our sins, of thought, word, deed and of omission, that caused His awful dereliction and desolation of soul in that moment of supreme agony. The contact, the real contact with that mountain of vileness represented by the sins of the whole world, a heap of sin in which every sin, yours and mine, and every single sin of yours and mine, stood out distinctly with all its own particular vileness and ingratitude—this contact, from which His all-holy soul shudderingly shrank, yet might not escape, was the cause of His horror; while to the Father, at that moment what was He? He was changed as it were into sin, changed, as bearing

our sins in His own Body, into that which God hates and must hate with eternal unrelenting hatred wherever it exists—for, as St. Paul writes, “Him, who knew no sin,” God “hath made sin for us, that we might be made the justice of God in Him” (II. Cor. v, 21).

Ah, brethren! when you are tempted to forsake Jesus by sin, think how He was forsaken, given up to the hideous clutches of vile sin for you. Pause before you add another to that great innumerable multitude of sins that oppressed Him. For, though now He can suffer no more, yet in that moment, knowing all the future, He knew whether in the moment of trial you would stand firm and be faithful, or whether with cruel ingratitude you would wound His Sacred Heart again, refusing Him any comfort, adding to His bitter desolation. And, though His actual suffering for your every act of sin is in the past, yet truly in that past, at that bitter hour of His Passion, it was your free act and wilful determination of sinning *now*, clearly foreseen *then*, that desolated His most loving soul. Stay then your hand; do not that murderous act of sin! Rather give joy to the Sacred Heart of Him who loves you by your faithfulness, and so lift at least something from the weight of sin that bore Him down. He will not forget you: He will number you amongst His friends; He will thank you one day that you spared Him this act of sin to which the devil has tempted you. Think thus and act thus in every temptation, and thus the Apostle’s words will come true to you, and through Him who was “made sin” for us you will be “made the justice”—the righteousness, the holiness of God.

## THE FIFTH WORD

"I thirst."—St. John xix, 28.

*SYNOPSIS.*—The sufferings of Jesus surpassed all other sufferings known on earth. Before we consider the "fifth word" we will review the sufferings of His Passion in general. How they surpassed all others. We do not speak of the pains of hell nor of purgatory, but of earth. We do not mean that Crucifixion, in itself, is the most painful of deaths possible. But our blessed Lord suffered both in body and mind: (a) His Body was so formed that physical suffering was specially painful to Him. (b) His intellect had a capacity beyond all others to enter into suffering. Let us devoutly explore the sufferings of Jesus.

I. He suffered from all classes of men. Jews, Gentiles, the rich and powerful, the mob, from women as well as men, priests and lay people, friends and enemies.

II. Every class of sin was committed against Him: "the concupiscence of the flesh; the concupiscence of the eyes, the pride of life." These exemplified in His three Judges, Caiaphas (Pride of Life), Herod (Concupiscence of the Flesh), Pilate (Concupiscence of the Eyes). These classes of sin are constantly repeated in our own times. Examples. Remember that Jesus knew and felt all these sins on His Passion; our sins.

III. There was no species of suffering that He did not endure, both in body and soul, in all His senses.

IV. He suffered to extremity because He willed to, in order to satisfy and prove His love. His thirst. Its physical characteristics: a type of His thirst for souls. Development of this thought. Exhortation not to deny our Lord that return of love, that recognition for which He thirsted.

There is no doubt, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, that the sufferings of our divine Lord in His Sacred Passion surpassed in intensity all other sufferings known on earth before or since; and before we contemplate that special bitter suffering which He Himself has revealed to us in this short word from the Cross, *sitio*, "I thirst," it will be well for us to contemplate for a while in general those sufferings which He willed to endure for our salvation.

I have said that no earthly suffering ever has surpassed or will surpass the sufferings of Jesus. I do not speak of any but suffering endured on earth. We are not considering the sufferings of the lost, nor those of the souls in Purgatory. And when we say that our blessed Lord's sufferings surpass all other suffering upon earth, we do not mean that the form of death inflicted upon Him—namely, crucifixion—is absolutely the most painful kind of death a man can suffer. Crucifixion is indeed one of the most lingering and painful of deaths that the ingenuity of human cruelty ever has devised: the racking of every limb, the terrible exhaustion, the

impossibility of finding the least ease or respite, the insupportable weariness of the victim's drooping head—all this intensified in our blessed Lord's case by His previous ill-treatment and suffering—made crucifixion a most dreadful infliction. But there are tortures physically more painful.

Yet it is true, nevertheless, that no one has ever suffered or even could suffer like Jesus did. We will see why this was so. We must remember that our blessed Lord suffered not only in body but in mind. We must remember that His *physical* sufferings were more terrible and poignant to Him than they would have been to any other. Never was there a body so delicately sensible, by reason of its very perfection, to every physical feeling as the Body of Jesus. Moreover, physical suffering is intensified by alertness and perfection of intellect and the capacity to enter into it and feel it, and drain the bitter cup to the full with an unmitigated taste of its contents. Never was there an intellect so capable of penetrating to its depths the suffering He endured, of surrendering itself to every pang, missing nothing, escaping nothing, as the intellect of the Word-made-Flesh. None like He, whose Sacred Heart is the very Fount of divine Charity, could so feel and so shrink from the evil of sin which was all about Him, which He had taken upon Himself; none could appreciate as He could the sufferings of the lost which He saw before Him and which oppressed Him with unutterable wo.

Let us, then, devoutly explore the sufferings of our dear Master and Saviour as far as we can, lovingly, reverently, with sorrow and with compassion. And first, the sufferings of Jesus surpass all others upon earth in this, that He suffered at the hands of all classes of men: all classes either took an active part in His death or added to His sufferings. His own people, the Jews, Gentiles also; the rich and powerful as well as the ignorant mob; persons of both sexes alike, priests and lay people, His own friends, apostles and disciples, those who, having sat at His feast and at one time believed in Him but afterwards forsook Him, as those did, who could not accept His teaching concerning the holy Eucharist, or who fled from Him at the time of His passion, in the hour of His most dreadful extremity. To Him, indeed, forsaken and betrayed by those nearest and dearest to Him, belongs that pathetic and prophetic outcry of King David betrayed by his friend Achitophel, "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne

with it, and if he that hated me had spoken great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him: but thou, a man of one mind, my guide and my familiar" (Ps. liv, 13-14).

Moreover, every class of sin was committed against the divine Sufferer. Spiritual writers have classified sins under three headings, following the Apostle St. John, who says "all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life" (II. St. John, 16). And this universality of character in the sins committed against Jesus is especially shown in the three tribunals before which He was brought. Thus in the conduct of Caiphias and the priests we see exemplified the pride of life—they feared to lose their place and influence through the successful preaching and miracles of Jesus. "The chief priests, therefore," St. John tells us, "and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, what do we, for this man doth many miracles? If we let him alone so, all will believe in him" (St. John xi, 47-48). And again the same Evangelist records how the Pharisees "said among themselves: Do you see that we prevail nothing? Behold the whole world is gone after him" (*Ibid.* xii, 19).

And so, to save themselves, to secure their vested interests, they pronounced Him worthy of death. In Herod, another of our blessed Lord's judges, we see the concupiscence of the flesh. He it was who had taken to himself his brother Philip's wife, and had murdered St. John the Baptist for his courageous denunciation of this incestuous crime. He, when the Christ was brought before him, rejoiced, thinking that his worldly curiosity might be gratified by the working of some miracle. Disappointed, he made a mock of Jesus, causing Him to be clothed, with the refinement of cruel irony, in the white robe worn amongst the Romans by approved competitors for a public office. Lastly, in Pilate we see the concupiscence of the eyes, the sin, that is, of human respect, the fear of offending those upon whose favor he depended for his position and prestige. He knew that Jesus was innocent, but he was afraid to act up to this conviction by ordering His discharge. He was conquered by the subtle threat of the Jews. "If thou release this man, thou art not Caesar's friend" (St. John xix, 12).

Ah, my dear brethren, do we not now see these sins repeatedly committed against our blessed Lord in our own days? Does not the pride of life, the exaltation of human reason and pride against all that is of God wage relentless war against Christ and His holy

Church, striving to set up the kingdom of this world, of "reason" and of "nature," against the kingdom of heaven? Are not sins of impurity and luxuriousness, of prodigal extravagance in the pursuit of pleasure and excitement and new sensations a characteristic of our time? Need we go further than our own country to see these things which are the concupiscence of the flesh carried out to a monstrous degree; so that, alas, a certain class of rich people amongst us are a bye-word in other countries for the bizarre extravagances of their social entertainments, of their pastimes and sinful pleasures? And are there not many, like Pilate, who would like to be good Catholics and profess their religion and practise their religion? They know they ought: they would willingly do so—but it does not pay; it is unfashionable; they would be laughed at; they would not retain the favor of the powers that be; they would lose money, place and consideration. So, like Pilate, they let Jesus go to the wall. Remember always, dear brethren, when you are meditating, as we are now, upon the passion of our divine Saviour, that the sins committed against Him at the actual time of His suffering were not the only ones that pierced His Sacred Heart with grief; but that He felt then every sin that ever had been and that ever will be done against Him. Those that actually accompanied the passion are typical only, the visible part of that huge volume of sin that then weighed Him down. Remember also—never forget,—that our personal sins, yours, brethren, and mine, added to that volume each its separate, distinct and individual part that smote upon the tender soul of the Incarnate One.

Again, there was no *species* of suffering that Jesus did not endure. The betrayal of faithless, ungrateful friends, of those whom He had greatly benefited; the loss of His good name and honor. Scorn, insults and contempt. The loss of all He possessed, down to the very clothes He wore. He suffered in body, in every part of His Body, and in all His senses; from grievous wounds and soreness, from the extension of His sacred limbs, from unutterable physical weariness and loss of sleep, from the sights about Him, from witnessing His mother's grief, from the hearing of blasphemies, from the taste of the gall and vinegar, from the hard wood of the cross, from the feeling of blows and stripes, from hunger and thirst and the faintness of very death itself, death which He would not allow to free Him till He had endured to the bitter

end all that He had set Himself to suffer. He suffered unspeakably, with unimagined and untold pain, in His most blessed soul. Sadness, sickening weariness of spirit, fear and shrinking, shuddering terror and bitterest desolation—all these came upon Him, so that the Psalmist's words again apply most truly of all to Jesus: "The waters are come in, even to my soul; I stick fast in the mire of the deep, and there is no sure standing. I am come into the depth of the sea; and a tempest hath overwhelmed me" (Ps. lxviii, 1-3).

There is one more reason, my dear brethren, besides those I have already given you, why the sufferings of Jesus our Saviour surpassed any other earthly suffering. Being God, His human will was completely under the control of His divine will, one with the will of His Father. His human will, moreover, had complete command over all His feelings. He could let Himself suffer as much or as little as He willed. He could open His soul wide to the onrush of the flood of pain and grief that came towards Him, or He could close it, and admit only so much as He pleased. In truth, being God, the least suffering of His would have sufficed to redeem the world. But this was not the measure by which He measured His sufferings. He willed to make them, as far as finite sufferings could be, *commensurate with His love for us*. Hence He put no bound to His sufferings; He allowed no mitigation.

He permitted that great cataract of suffering to fall upon Him in all its vastness and with all its force. He did so because He loves us so greatly, and that He might prove His love to the most sceptical, to the most hard-hearted, and to those timidly incredulous souls who find it hard to realize His love.

There is no doubt, then, that the sufferings of Jesus were greater than anything that any other has suffered or could suffer upon earth. Rightly did the Prophet, looking forward with inspired vision, cry out that He is the "Man of sorrows" (Is. liii, 3).

NOTE.—This sermon, so far, is based on the treatment of the sufferings of Christ by Cardinal Billot, S.J. *De Verbo Incarnato*; Thesis xlvii.

Through all this agony of piled up sufferings, only once did our divine Lord give expression to the feelings of physical distress. It was when He spoke that mournful word, "*I thirst.*"

Who can conceive the terrible pain which wrung this cry from

His sacred lips? It is well known that a raging burning thirst is one of the worst pains of crucifixion. We read of a young Turk, crucified at Damascus in 1247, that the "worst of all his sufferings were the pangs of thirst." "I heard this," says the writer who records it, "from an eye-witness, who told me that he turned his eyes hither and thither, beseeching that someone would give him a mouthful of water" (See Fouard, "The Christ the Son of God," Vol. II, pp. 338, 339, Eng. Trans.). Holy writers say that our divine Lord told us of this special suffering because, while His other physical sufferings are apparent, this was hidden, and we might not have realized it. Certainly also it brings out into relief the truth of the humanity of God-made-Man. This thirst of Jesus has been the inspiration for many a victory over the enslaving vice of intemperance; for many an act of courageous mortification. Brethren, does it not appeal to you? To think of Jesus thus thirsting and longing for a drop of water. To think of Him seeing the heartless soldiers drinking their wine beneath the Cross, and He thirsting, unable to obtain the least alleviation of His pain. And when He moans out that sad cry "I thirst," they give Him vinegar, upon a sponge. This "vinegar" was in reality some of the bitter and highly spiced wine that the guard around the cross were drinking. One of them was moved with pity, and gave to the divine Sufferer a few drops. They were not enough, not nearly enough, to produce any real alleviation, and this act of mercy only added to the bitterness of the passion, for at once there went up a shout of remonstrance, "Let be! Let be! And see if Elias will come and save him."

But this physical thirst was a type of that divine thirst and longing which filled the Heart of our blessed Saviour—the thirst and longing for souls; that loving thirst for their salvation, for the salvation of all—of those who ultimately by their own wilful fault would be lost as well as of those who should be saved; that thirst for men's salvation that made Him eagerly run to drink in suffering like a river. For your soul and mine, dear brethren, He thirsted then; that His love might be satisfied, that He might have us with Him for eternity, and might for all eternity lavish His love upon us—and we will not! Often we have refused, often we have risked our souls, have snatched them from Him by sin. All this He knew, and thirsted for some return of love, if only a little vinegar upon a sponge—*some* recognition, *some* gratitude, *some* small effort to



be better, *some* compassion with His sufferings for us, *some* remembrance of Him as we walk along the road of life.

Oh, brethren, be not any more even harder-hearted than the poor ignorant soldier who gave Him a little bitter drink upon a sponge. Repent of your hard refusal of love and of remembrance: give to our dear thirsting Lord the love He longs for; be no longer, never be again, the cause of His heart-burning thirst for some return of love. When you are tempted to sin, think of His sad word "I thirst"; I thirst for your faithful love, now, my child, in the hour of trial which will show whether you are faithful and true to Me. If you are leading a bad or an indifferent life, think, O my brother, think, O my sister, of the heart-thirst of Jesus for your amendment, for your happiness, for your salvation. Let His most bitter thirst nerve you and strengthen you to root out evil from your hearts and lives and give Him the consolation of knowing that for you His thirst was not in vain, but that, having suffered for you, His undying love shall have the joy and satisfaction of embracing you as one of those precious souls saved by Him, one of the fruits of His passion, one who has given Him to drink the draughts of pure love here on earth, and shall be filled with the wine of His eternal love in heaven.

## THE SIXTH WORD

"It is consummated."—St. John xix, 30.

*SYNOPSIS*—We are to contemplate the death-bed of God-made-Man: His sufferings are nearly over; there remains but the crowning act—the willing acceptance of death.

Jesus cries out: "It is consummated."

His sufferings and death a means to an end: the means of accomplishing the work He came to do—the work of our salvation.

We will go over this work and what it involves, and will ask three questions:

I. How has the Death on the Cross saved us?

II. What was it about the death of Jesus that caused our salvation?

III. How are the benefits of Christ's death to be brought across the centuries to each individual soul?

I. How did the death of the Son of God-made-Man save us?

To answer this question we ask another, viz.:—How did the human race stand in relation to God after sin? Man found himself confronted by an offended and insulted God; adequate recompense for the insult was impossible. We were all in this position. Who could make reparation? Only God-made-Man could do it.

Christ has saved us, firstly, by making adequate satisfaction; secondly, by meriting redemption; thirdly, by meriting the restoration of the gifts of grace and perseverance.

II. What was it about the Passion and Death of Christ that made it the cause of our salvation?

First, the willing OBEDIENCE of His death; but we must remember that this was the obedience of GOD. Importance of not losing sight of the true doctrine of the Incarnation.

III. How are the benefits of the Passion brought to us? By the Church which Christ "purchased with His Own Blood."

Conclusion. Well might Jesus say, "It is consummated"—the work of Salvation; the payment of the price of Redemption; satisfaction to God; the winning back of Grace; provision for all future souls.

Exhortation to devout thankfulness and perseverance.

We are to watch in spirit to-day, my dear brethren in Jesus Christ, the most solemn and the most impressive death-bed scene that was ever enacted upon earth. It is the death-bed of God-made-Man; of Him who is the Lord and Giver of Life, who chooses, for us men and for our salvation, to subject Himself in His human nature to the universal law of mortality that lies upon His creatures. It is the death of Jesus that we are to witness. The long agony is nearly over; those lengthened and awful sufferings that He willed to go through, drinking to the dregs the bitter cup He had set Himself to drain, have nearly come to their conclusion. They have been enough to have killed Him before this, but death may not lay its cold hand upon Him till He wills it. And He wills it not till He

has suffered all, till He has endured to the very utmost, till He has drunk even to surfeiting the chalice of pain—so that He might prove His love, so that no man might have any excuse for doubting that immense love which expressed itself and proved itself in that way in which love most convincingly and most unanswerably expresses and proves itself—by willing suffering on behalf of the beloved.

And now that suffering is to have its crown put upon it; it is to go on even unto death. Jesus Himself had said to the disciples, "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (St. John, xv, 13). Now He is about to give this grand, crowning, and final proof of love for us: for us He is about to die. The crowning act of death is to set the seal upon the sufferings that have gone before. They were the painful road by which He went to death; death is to be their completion. It is the supreme consummation of all His sufferings by death that, by the appointment of God, is to save the world. And the death of Jesus is to be an act of obedience to this appointment of God: for "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii, 8).

And the moment has come. All else is finished. There remains but this final act. And so, as St. John tells us, "Jesus . . . said: It is consummated. And bowing His head, He gave up the ghost" (St. John xix, 30). We learn from the other Evangelists that our Divine Lord's last breath was sent forth in one great cry, which is the last word from the Cross, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." But both this last word and the sixth word which we are meditating upon to-day, followed quickly one upon another, so that these two words, the sixth and the seventh, belong to the last earthly moments of our Blessed Saviour.

"It is finished," or "It is consummated." It was certainly a cry of satisfaction. "I have a baptism," Jesus had said, "wherewith I am to be baptised: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" (St. Luke xii, 50). He had longed for its accomplishment, the accomplishment of His baptism of blood and suffering; now it was over, all had been rigorously inflicted, not one pang had been missed, not one stroke of agony withheld; truly He could say, "It is finished," as He bowed His head in death.

But all these sufferings were but a means to an end, as His death itself was a means to an end. They were the means of accomplish-

ing a work, the work that the Word came from His throne in high Heaven to do. And in His dying moment, Jesus could truly say of His appointed work, "It is finished," "it is consummated," that is, it is complete.

To-day, as we stand by the Cross and watch for one last breath of our dear Master, we will in our mind go over that work which now He has finished; for, my dear brethren, it concerns each single one of us most nearly, more nearly than anything else that ever has been done to us, or for us, or regarding us by anyone in this world.

What, then, is the work that was accomplished by the Passion and death of Jesus? It may be summed up in one word: it is the work of our salvation. But when we have said that, we have not said all. For we ask how the Death on the Cross has saved us: we may ask what was it about the death of Jesus that made it the cause of our salvation: we may ask also how the benefit of the Passion and Death of Christ is to be brought across the centuries that intervene, from Calvary to each individual soul.

First then, how did the death of the Son of God-made-Man save us?

To answer this question we will first ask another, and it is this: How did the human race stand in relation to God after sin? And we must remember, as we inquire into this, that but for the salvation wrought by Christ upon the Cross, we should every one of us be in the position in which sin placed the whole human race.

First, then, after sin man found himself confronted by an offended and insulted God. Man, by sin, commits an act in itself and so far as the sinner's own powers go, irreparable. Offense, injury, and insult are the greater according to the dignity and rank of the one who is offended. By sin man, a worm of earth, has insulted the infinite Majesty of the Almighty God. There is the measure of sin! Again, if we have offended anyone, recompense is due, and that recompense or satisfaction must be adequate. This means that the offender must be in a position to offer something that will please the offended person at least as much as the offence displeased him. Now such a satisfaction man could never offer to God. It is impossible for a man, or all men together, to do anything that will please God as much as sin displeases Him. The extreme hatred of God for sin, which is the pole of absolute opposition, of utter contrast with and difference from the Divine Sanctity,

is immeasurable by human thought, and inexpressible in human words. Not even the eternal fire of hell can adequately portray the just displeasure that God, by His very nature, must have for sin. And we have all sinned; we have all done this dread thing, and come under the Divine wrath and anger. Who could make adequate atonement? Who could satisfy for the offence? None but God-made-Man. By the Cross He has done it, making satisfaction for us, and, as St. Paul says, "blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the Cross" (Coloss. ii, 14).

If, then, we ask how the sufferings and death of Jesus have saved us, the answer is, by making adequate satisfaction to the offended Majesty of God for the offence of sin. The willing obedience of Jesus in His Passion, His willing suffering, the shedding of His Precious Blood, His oblation of Himself, His acceptance of death in the spirit of obedience, constituted an act of *religion*, of worship of God, of *sacrifice*, that was more pleasing to the Divine Majesty, on account of the infinite dignity of the Person who performed it, than sin was displeasing to that same Majesty of God.

Again, the sufferings and death of Jesus *merited* our Redemption. By a just ordinance of God, man by yielding to the devil was brought into servitude and slavery to the evil one. By His suffering and death Christ our Lord paid the price of our ransom from this slavery—a dreadful slavery that put us under the devil's power in this world, and condemned us to be his for eternity. This price Jesus has paid, not indeed to Satan, who has no strict rights over us, but to God, by whose just decree sinners are abandoned to the greatest enemy of God and men. By the shedding of the Precious Blood of Christ, we are restored to the glorious liberty as the sons of God, to the heirship of Heaven, to the sonship of our Heavenly Father.

Lastly, by His Passion our Divine Lord *merited* for us the restoration of all those gifts of Divine grace by which we are first placed upon the way of salvation by being raised to the supernatural state of grace and charity, and secondly, kept in that state and enabled to persevere to the end and to be saved. It is because of the merit of His most precious death that Jesus is of right the supreme source of grace to use: it is because of that same merit that there flows from Him, as from a fountain,

that grace which He applies to our souls through the agency of His Church, His ministers, His Sacraments and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

We will ask now our second question, what was it about the death of Jesus that made it the effective cause of our salvation? This question has already in part been answered by what I have said. It was the willing *obedience* with which Christ suffered that constituted the great value of His satisfaction and merit in God's sight. It was through His obedience that our disobedience was atoned for, the insult of that disobedience made up for, the offended Majesty of God appeased. And the obedient death of Christ was sufficient to do this because it was the act, the obedience, the death, not merely of a man, but of a Divine Person. It is of the greatest importance that we should never lose sight of this great Catholic truth, that He who died for us upon the Cross was true God, a Divine Person, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. To forget this, to become unsound, as so many outside the Catholic Church are unsound in these days, upon the great truth of the Incarnation, the fact that Jesus Christ, having two natures, the nature of God and the nature of man, is yet one Person only, and that Person the Person of God the Son Himself—to lose sight of this, or to say otherwise, is to take away the value of the Passion. If He who died for us upon the Cross had not been God; if His every act had not been the act of a Divine Person, using His human nature as an instrument of His Divinity in which and by which to suffer and to die, we should not have been saved, the price of Redemption would not have been paid, the infinite value of every act of Jesus would not have existed.

Finally, my dear brethren, we will answer the question "how are the benefits of the Passion and Death of Christ to be brought across the centuries to every soul to the end of time?" St. Paul answered this question when he said to the clergy of Ephesus: "Take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock, wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you bishops, to rule *the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own Blood*" (Acts xx, 28). This was the completion of Christ's work of suffering—the birth, as it were from His own wounded side—even as Eve our first mother came from the side of Adam—of our true mother the Holy Catholic Church, the bride of Jesus. In that Holy Church, called also by St. Paul again and again the Body of Christ, Our Blessed Saviour lives

and moves and walks still by His own indwelling Spirit and by His sacramental Presence. She is red with His Precious Blood, Her robe of glory: Her Sacraments are holy vessels by which that Blood is applied to our souls, and its merits given for our salvation. Well might Jesus say "it is finished," "it is consummated," "all is completed." The work of salvation was accomplished, the price was paid, satisfaction was made to God, the graces needed by all men were won, nothing was left undone that should be necessary to carry on the work of salvation even to the end of the world.

How should we devoutly thank God every day for this great accomplishment summed up in those words of hope for every one of us, "it is consummated"! For then Jesus spoke of you and me, of your salvation and mine. "The salvation of this one and that is accomplished—of this one and that one whom I love as if there were no other to love, for whom I have done all this as truly as if there were no other to do it for." "He loved *me*," says St. Paul, "and delivered Himself for *me*" (Gal. ii, 20), and every one of us can truly say the same.

May our most merciful and loving Jesus grant, and may the prayers of His dear Mother Mary obtain, that when we come to die we too may be able to say "it is consummated," the work of my salvation is accomplished, I have co-operated with what Christ my Saviour has done for me, I have not lost the fruits of His great salvation by my own fault. I have persevered by His merciful help and grace, and I know that He will give to me the crown of everlasting glory!

## THE SEVENTH WORD

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."—St. Luke xxiii, 46.

*SYNOPSIS.*—From the pulpit of the Cross our Lord will say one more word, a word that will teach us how to die. St. Luke tells us that "crying with a loud voice," He said: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." St. Matthew and St. Mark mention only the loud cry; St. John alone mentions the bowing of His head. Explanation of this.

The loud cry of Jesus was one of the miracles of His death. The opinion of St. Thomas. Certainly this last word is proof that His giving up the ghost—the act of dying—was, like all His sufferings, a voluntary act. So, too, with the bowing of His head. *Isaias. Words from Bishop Bellord.*

The marvellous change in the way of meeting death introduced amongst men by this word and example of Jesus. Hitherto death almost universally was met with horror and dismay: not only with physical shrinking, but with mental rebellion; when not with brutalized indifference. There was no idea of meeting death with a tranquil mind, much less with joy. The death of the Christian following the example of the death of Christ. Pray that your death may be tranquil and happy, and that you may be able trustfully to commend your soul to God. Remember that this needs forming the habit in life and so living that trust may not be presumption.

Another effect of the death of Christ has been the WILLING sacrifice of life, for the faith, or for others.

We can learn also from this last word a lesson of Faith. Jesus seemed a failure; it seemed as if He were abandoned by God and man. Yet He says confidently and loudly "Father!" With His last breath He proclaims once more His Divine Sonship. Conversion by this of the Centurion and others. Oh, blessed death of Jesus! Oh, blessed Word of Jesus! Praise and thank Him. May His example convert our hearts.

One more lesson. According to the Fathers Christ, in this last Word, commended the Church and the members of the Church to His Father. A consoling thought for the hour of death.

We have gone together over the Seven Words. Pray that the remembrance of their lessons may abide with us in life and death.

We are to meditate to-day, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, upon the last word of Our Divine Saviour spoken from the Cross. He has uttered that saying of pregnant meaning that we considered in my last discourse. It is consummated, but from the pulpit of the Cross upon which He is lifted up to draw all men unto Himself. He will yet say one more Word for our instruction and for our consolation, a word that will teach us how to die, even as His whole life and the other words He spoke both from the Cross and in all His preaching teach us how to live.

"And Jesus," writes the Evangelist St. Luke, "crying with a



loud voice, said: Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit—and saying this, He gave up the ghost.” (St. Luke xxiii, 46.) St. Matthew and St. Mark mention only the “great cry” which our Blessed Lord gave forth. “And Jesus,” writes St. Matthew, “again crying with a loud voice, gave up the ghost” (St. Matt. xxvii, 15). And St. Mark also says: “Jesus, having cried out with a loud voice, gave up the ghost” (St. Mark xv, 37). St. John, the beloved disciple, adds another precious detail to the inspired record of this last scene, for he tells us that Jesus “bowing His head, gave up the ghost” (St. John xix, 30). Most of the disciples, at the moment of the death of Jesus, were standing afar off. St. Luke, who himself tells us in the introduction to his Gospel that he had made diligent inquiries from eyewitnesses of the life of our Divine Lord, and “diligently attained to all things from the beginning” (St. Luke i, 3), doubtless obtained his information concerning the last utterance of the Saviour from one who stood close at hand, probably from the lips of the Blessed Virgin herself. St. John, too, was close to the Cross, and saw that Jesus had bowed His head and was dead. The others heard only the loud cry, but not the words uttered. Nevertheless, the Holy Ghost willed not that they should be lost to us, so precious are they, and so full of teaching to help to console and strengthen us in that hour when we too shall have to render our souls to God Who gave them.

This loud cry of Jesus was in itself a miracle. It was proof that Jesus yielded up His soul when He willed, and not before. His Divinity, acting upon His sacred Humanity, either preserved His bodily strength to the end in spite of all the sufferings He had endured—not indeed lessening those sufferings, nor diminishing the agonizing feeling of oncoming death, but rather giving to Jesus a fuller capacity of suffering; or else, granting as some think to be the case, that He was reduced to the last extremity of bodily exhaustion, the Divinity gave Him a momentary access of strength in that last moment. “In order to show,” says St. Thomas, “that His soul was not wrested from Him by the violence of His Passion, Christ preserved His bodily nature in its full strength, so that in the last extremity He might cry out with a loud voice: a fact that must be reckoned among the miracles of His death.” Which-ever of these opinions may be the truth, this last loud cry of Jesus at the very instant of death is proof that, as St. Augustine says, He gave up His soul, not, as others, unwillingly, but “because He

willed, when He willed, and how He willed." The same truth is taught by the words of the Evangelists who say "He *gave up* the ghost." To the very end all was voluntary, even the act of dying itself was a voluntary act of obedience. Even, according to the fathers of the Church, the act of bowing His sacred Head was a voluntary act; His Head did not fall because He was dead, but, as St. John says, "bowing His Head, He gave up the ghost." Thus St. Chrysostom writes, "He did now bow His Head because He was dead, but when He had bowed His Head, then He died, by all which the Evangelist signifies that Christ was the Lord of all."

"He was offered," wrote Isaias in prophecy, "because it was His own will (Isaias liii, 7). He Himself had said, "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it away from me; but I lay it down of myself: and I have power to take it up again" (St. John x, 17, 18).

Hence, as says a modern writer (the late Bishop Bellord, "Meditations on Christian Dogma," Vol. I, Medit. 45) it is to be concluded that the separation of Christ's soul from His body "was not the result of the physical violence He endured, but of His own direct volition. This view accords with Christ's supremacy as Lord of life and death, His power as God, and the fulness of deliberate choice with which He died for us. . . . He did not die till He had Himself pronounced the decree "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Then he allowed His bodily and mental sufferings to take effect; He suspended the divine influx which made Him immortal; He allowed death to approach, as He had allowed the temple-guards to seize Him in the garden."

We will stay now a few moments, my dear brethren, to consider the marvellous change in the way of meeting death which this example of our Lord's voluntary yielding up of His spirit has introduced into the world. Before Jesus died upon the Cross death was almost universally looked upon with horror and dismay. When a man came to die, as a general rule, he met death not only with a physical shrinking, but with unwillingness and mental rebellion against the common lot. Some, indeed, either because their profession familiarized them with death, or because life was a misery, met its approach with a brutalized dumb indifference. But the idea of willing death, of a peaceful and happy death, of meeting death with a tranquil and willing mind was a thing scarce heard of; while to meet death with joy and eagerness was a thing to wonder at.

The death of Jesus taught His followers to meet death in this way, and from that time forward millions of Christian death-beds have exemplified the lesson of the Master. Death, to the true Christian, is the gate of life. With the great Apostle he can cry out triumphantly, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (I. Cor. xv, 55.) Death to him is the trustful relinquishing of his soul into the hands of a good and loving Father, and thousands upon thousands have died with the words of Jesus upon their lips, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Dear brethren, pray now to God that your death may be happy, tranquil, peaceful; that from your heart you may be able, at that dread moment, to commend your souls lovingly and trustfully into the hands of God. But remember that if you would do that when you come to die, you must form the habit now of contemplating that last scene of your earthly life, and of trusting God now and of so living in His holy sight that your trust may not be a presumption. He who wishes to die well must strive to live well. The man who passes his life in indifference, in forgetfulness of God and in sin cannot expect to be able to die in peace with Christ's words upon his lips.

Miracles of grace, death-bed conversions do, indeed, happen sometimes; but we have no right to presume upon them. It is highly dangerous to do so; and, moreover, it is the height of meanness towards our good God to put off our repentance and amendment to the last, offering the shreds and tatters of a wasted life to Him who gave all His life, all His toils and sufferings for us, and for us endured the pangs of death.

Another effect in the world of the great example of Christ's death has been the willing sacrifice of their lives by thousands of Christians who have died either as martyrs for the faith or as martyrs of charity, giving their lives for their brethren. Think of all the martyrs, think of heroic missionaries, think of priests and nuns who have gone fearlessly into the midst of plague and pestilence and lost their lives in consequence; think of those holy men and women in every age who have worn themselves out for the love of Jesus and of the souls for whom Jesus died. They drew their strength in meeting death from the loving contemplation of the death of Jesus on the Cross.

But let us now go back to the thought of our dear Saviour uttering that loud last cry. There is another lesson that we can learn—

a lesson of faith. It seemed at that moment as if the life of Jesus was ending in utter failure. He seemed abandoned by God and man alike. He Himself had cried out with exceeding bitterness in mysterious and awful desolation, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But now, with a grand unconquerable confidence, He turns to His Eternal Father and cries, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." He was using, and purposely using, words from the Old Testament, words of the sweet singer of Israel from the 30th Psalm. He would show to those around that, in spite of all appearance, He truly was the Son of God, the Son of that God who had chosen the Jewish people out of the nations of the earth to be the depositaries of His revelation and the nation in which the Redeemer should be born. So He proclaims Himself with His very last breath to be what He had always claimed to be, the true Son of the living God. And this cry of triumphant confidence, this proclamation of the truth of His Divine Sonship at once converted the centurion who was in command of the Roman guard around the Cross. "Now the centurion," writes St. Luke, "seeing what was done, glorified God, saying: Indeed this was a just man" (St. Luke xxiii, 47). Others, too, were brought to believe in Him; for, says St. Matthew, "the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus . . . were sore afraid, saying: Indeed this was the Son of God" (St. Matt. xxvii, 54); and St. Luke tells us how all the multitude of them that were come together to that sight and saw the things that were done, returned striking their breasts.

Oh most blessed death of Jesus, that has taken away death's sting for us and robbed the grave of its grim victory! Oh blessed death that has opened the way to eternal life, has thrown the effulgence of heavenly light around the dying bed. Oh blessed word of Jesus, that strengthens our hearts and fills them with serene and joyful confidence even at the terrible moment of death. Praise Jesus, my dearest brethren, that He has left us this grand word of hope and strength and surest trust to gladden our departing from this world. Oh may this word deepen our faith in Him, in His Divinity, His Eternal Sonship: may it convert our hearts from worldliness and carelessness and sin, as it converted the centurion and those with him.

Oh Jesus, Eternal Son of God, true God of true God, grant that this Thy dying word may be upon our dying lips and bring us to Thyself

One more lesson, my dear brethren, from this last word from the Cross. The Fathers tell us that when Jesus commended His spirit to the Father, He was also commending to God His whole Church, and the souls of all who should be one with Him in the unity of His mystical Body. St. Athanasius writes: "When He says, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit, by that word He commits to the keeping of His Father all men who through Him and in Him are to be brought to the life of grace; for we are members of Him according to the words of the Apostle "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii, 28). So then, when we come to die, this word of Jesus, uttered on our behalf as well as His own, will plead for us with God, and will present us before the Throne of our Maker with a recommendation to mercy, so strong a recommendation that nothing but our own pertinacious refusal of grace up to the last can make that recommendation fail.

We have gone now together, my dear brethren, over the seven words of Jesus from the Cross. May God grant, and may His own Blessed Mother, who suffered so great a martyrdom at the foot of that Cross, pray for us, that the remembrance of these words and of their holy lessons may never depart from our minds. May they be with us in life, on our lips and in our hearts; may we practice faithfully what we have learnt from them, and so shall a pious and happy death crown our labors and our souls shall be received into our eternal heavenly home to be with God for ever, to praise eternally Him who suffered such things for us, to thank Him endlessly with inexhaustible love for that great love which He has shown to us, that love by which, "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God," through which also "where sin abounded, grace did more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, so also grace might reign by justice unto life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. v, 10, 20, 21.)





