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The Way of the Cross

By

Rev. Doctor Fulton J. Sheen



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The Way of the Cross

By

Reverend Doctor Fulton J. Sheen,
Agrégé en Philosophie, University
of Louvain, Belgium;
Catholic University
of America.

(Meditations delivered March 20, 1932,
in the Catholic Hour, sponsored
by the National Council of
Catholic Men.)

F I F T H P R I N T I N G



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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The author of these Meditations on the Way of the Cross has a two-fold purpose in offering them in printed form. The first is that they may enkindle in souls a flaming love for the Crucified Saviour Who through His Passion and Death revealed to us that it is only through the Cross that we are ever ushered into glory and eternal life.

The second purpose is that those who meditate on the great love of Our Lord for sinners will be kind enough to say a prayer for the author that increase of years may bring increase of intimacy with the Love which is God.

Fulton J. Sheen.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Meditations by

Reverend Doctor Fulton J. Sheen, Agrégé
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(Delivered March 20, 1932, in the Catholic
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Dedicated to the

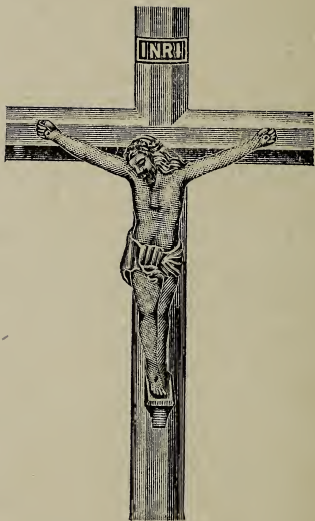
Cherished Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus,
Holy Gateway through which God came to
men,

In Prayerful supplication and petition that
Loving souls seeking Love may find thee:
the

Door through which men pass back again
to God.

Prayer Before the Way of the Cross

The curtain is now about to go up on the awful and abiding drama of Thy Redemptive Love. And as I hear Thy words, "Take up thy Cross daily and follow Me," I stand affrighted, lest its burden be too great and its shame too bitter. If I could but see that Thy command to follow Thee to Calvary was not just an iron law of cruel fate, but a condition of everlasting happiness, perhaps I could better make the journey, but I fear, dear Jesus, lest having Thee I must have naught else beside. Let this fear be dispelled in seeing death as the condition of life, for through Thy apostle, Paul, Thou hast told us it is the joy at the end of the journey that makes us endure the Cross, and even Thou, in loving kindness, hast asked all who labor and are burdened to come unto Thee, where they will find rest for their souls. Then I shall take up the Cross, Jesus! Why must we love Thee so!



First Station

Jesus is Condemned to Death.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee,

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Pilate, the time-serving politician, stepped forward on his sunlit portico. On his right stood Christ, the Just One who came to give His life for the redemption of many; on his left stood Barabbas, the wicked one, who had incited a revolt and taken a life. Pilate asked the mob to choose between the two: "Whether you will that I release unto you, Christ, or Barabbas"?

How would I have answered that question, had I been in the courtyard that Good Friday morning? I cannot escape answering by saying that the question belongs only to the past, for it is as actual now as ever. My conscience is the tribunal of Pilate. Daily, hourly, and every minute of the day, Christ comes before that tribunal, as virtue, honesty and purity. Barabbas comes as vice, dishonesty and uncleanness. As often as I choose to speak the uncharitable word, do the dishonest action, or consent to the

evil thought, I say in so many words, "Release unto me, Barabbas," and to choose Barabbas means to crucify Christ.

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

O Jesus, many times in my life I have preferred Barabbas to Thee. There is no way that I can undo that choice, but to make my way to Thy feet, and beg Thy forgiveness. But that is so humiliating, for Thou wearest the garment of a fool, and Thou bearest in Thy hand the reed sceptre of a mock king. It is so hard to do penance and admit that I am guilty! It is so hard to be seen with Thee, who art wearing Thy crown of thorns.

It is hard! But let me see, Jesus, that it is harder to wear the crown of thorns!

Second Station

Jesus Carries His Cross.

*We adore Thee, O Christ, and we
praise Thee,*

*Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou
hast redeemed the world.*

Our Blessed Lord had been a visitor to our earth but forty days when Simeon, with prophetic vision, declared He would become a sign of contradiction. That day had now come, for "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." As a symbol of the world's contradiction of His life-giving message, they gave Him a Cross, in which one bar is at variance or contradiction with another.

But by a Divine Act, He made the sign of contradiction the sign of Redemption. The circle is the symbol of selfishness, for it is continually circumscribed by self, never able to break out of the limits, but the cross is the symbol of redemption, for its arms are outstretched, even unto infinity, to embrace all humanity within its grasp.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

I know, dear Lord, how crosses are made. Thy will is the vertical bar: my will is the horizontal bar. When I place my will against Thy will, I make a cross. Up

to this point, dear Jesus, I have done nothing but fashion crosses by disobeying Thy holy law, and asserting my own selfish desire. Grant that I may make Thee no more crosses, but henceforth may place the bar of my will along side the bar of Thy will, and make a yoke that will always be sweet and a burden that will always be light.

Third Station

Jesus Falls the First Time.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee,

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Three times Our Saviour was tempted on the mountain, and three times He fell on the way to the mountain of Calvary. Thus did He atone for our three falls to the temptations of the flesh, the world, and the devil.

After fasting forty days in the desert, Our Blessed Lord was hungry. Satan tempted Him first on the part of the flesh, by asking Him to do the natural thing when hungry, namely, to use His power and command that the stones be turned into bread. But

the Master retorted that the food which satisfies the longings of our heart comes not from the flesh, but from the Spirit of God.

Many times I, too, have been tempted to give way to the demands of my lower nature when the spirit should have been served. But, unlike my Master, I fell by consenting to the promptings of the flesh instead of the urges of Grace, and by doing that which is natural when I should have done that which is supernatural. And alas! I have found it always true that giving away to lower impulses has made hungry where most it satisfies, and that with the bread of lower desires, no man can live.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

When my frame rocks beneath the power of Satan, and my flesh is buffeted by the tempter, seal my senses and keep me mindful that my body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and that only the clean of heart shall see Thee, O God! Grant henceforth, that by the merits of this fall under the Cross, I may be saved from falls of the flesh not by bread

made from stones, but by Flesh made from the Bread of Life and by Blood made from the Wine that germinates Virgins.

Fourth Station

Jesus Meets His Blessed Mother.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee,

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

At the marriage feast of Cana, when Mary first noted the embarrassment of the hosts, and asked Her Divine Son to work His first miracle, He answered: "My hour is not yet come." But at her solicitation He anticipated it, and changed the water into wine.

"His hour," He said, "was not yet come". But *His* hour was *her* hour too, and now it had come! At Cana, He changed water into wine. On the road to Calvary, the wine is changed into blood. It is the solemn hour of consecration by which she unites herself with the sufferings of her Beloved Son, to save the world from the terrible embarrassment of sin, and the want of God's redemptive wine of

love. It was the hour of reversal of the world's estimate of love, for a Son is summoning His mother to suffer. Love, then, does not mean to have: it means to be had: it is the giving of oneself for another. No one ever loved Jesus like Mary; therefore, no one ever suffered for Jesus like Mary.

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

Mary, dear Mother, in this thy hour of sorrow, thou art paying dearly for the privilege of thy Immaculate Conception! Thou art doing even more! For thy present sorrows are the pains of childbirth by which thou dost become the Mother of Mankind, as in Bethlehem thou didst become the Mother of Jesus, thy First Born. Thou art, then, really my Mother, not by the title of courtesy, but by the pains of birth. Teach me, Mother, to see that Jesus calls to suffering those whom He loves, and grant that just as Jesus keeps the best wine of His love for the hour when we need it most, so too He may keep thee near us when we need thee most—in all trials and temptations, and in particular at the hour of our death.

Fifth Station

Simon the Cyrenean Helps Jesus to Carry
His Cross.

*We adore Thee, O Christ, and we
praise Thee,*

*Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou
hast redeemed the world.*

It was not merely death sinful men wished Our Blessed Saviour; it was a particular kind of death upon the sign of contradiction. Lest exhaustion and weakness should rob them of unfurling Him as a banner of salvation upon the Cross of Calvary, they forced Simon of Cyrene to help Him with His task. Simon saw in the cross only the burden of wood, but not the burden of the world's sins, and hence became at first an unwilling aid and a constrained helper. A few minutes, however, in the sweet company of Jesus changed his outlook, slavery became freedom, constraint became love, and reluctance a sweet abandon.

I, too, am like Simon in his first moments: I know about Jesus, but I do not know Jesus. I have feared to be a sharer of His Cross, and hence have loved but little, because I have known only a little. I have too often insisted

on beginning with pleasure, when it is with pleasure that I should have ended.

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

Give me, O Jesus, an understanding of this great mystery—that it is only at a distance that the Cross frightens—that its shadow is really more terrible than its reality—that its splinters are more terrifying than its beams—that the whole of it is more easy to carry than a part. Thou hast told us, dear Saviour, that we must take up our Cross daily and follow Thee. Grant, then, that when a Cross comes between Thee and me, as it did between Thee and Simon, that I may be quite content just to see Thy footsteps and follow them as Simon did, until at last I shall be forever more an uncaught captive in the hands of Thy Sweet Love.

Sixth Station

Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus.

*We adore Thee, O Christ, and we
praise Thee,*

*Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou
hast redeemed the world.*

Simon, the Cyrenean, helped Jesus with His burden as a reminder that man is called to the sublime vocation of carrying a Cross. But woman, too, has her role to play, and on that dread day Veronica, with a woman's own peculiar vision, looked out on a countenance bruised and stained with dust and blood, and saw in it the very Face of Divinity.

Braving human respect, she touched a towel to His visage, and as if to remind us that the likeness between Christ and us is most perfect in suffering and sorrow, the Divine Saviour, on His way not to Tabor but to Calvary, left the impression of His Divinely sorrowful face.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

The day, O Lord, I was born anew of water and the Holy Ghost, the image of Thy Cross was stamped on my soul, and the inscription of Thy sorrow graven on my heart. On this day Thou asketh me: "Whose inscription is written thereon?" If it be Thine, then let me render to God the things that are God's. Grant that like Veronica, I may brave

all human respect to carry Thy image about with me, not on a veil but on the fleshy tablet of my heart. Bestow, too, the Grace to be so much like Thee that as I move among men, they may see something of Thee in me, as the maid-servant saw something of Thee in Peter and if it be not the marks of Thy Passion, then let it be the sparks of Thy Love!

Seventh Station

Jesus Falls the Second Time.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

In the second temptation on the mount, the devil asked Our Blessed Lord to abandon Himself wholly to God and to take no care or thought of Himself, saying: "Cast Thyself down, for the angels will bear Thee up." But the Saviour answered: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord, Thy God," reminding Satan that God never saves us against our will, but only when we cooperate with His grace.

This temptation came not from the

flesh, but from the world, which so many times has said to me: "Cast thyself down on the rocks of sin; abandon thyself to God; God is Merciful; He will bear thee up; there is plenty of time for repentance—God will take care of you." And many times I, unlike the Master, have succumbed to such whisperings and sinned by presumption, then made a half-hearted resolution to amend, and fell again.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

Dear Saviour, by this, Thy second fall, Thou didst atone for my excessive love of the world, and the many times I abused Thy mercy and goodness as an excuse for sinning again. By lifting Thyself up again, Thou hast merited the grace of lifting me up once more and continuing the journey with Thee to Calvary. Free me from the spirit of the world. Let me see that it profiteth me nothing to gain the whole world and lose my immortal soul. Thou hast told me that the world will always hate me if I love Thee, and so when it is bitterest in its scorns, I ask that I

may be consoled by the memory that it hath hated Thee before me.

Eighth Station

Jesus Comforts the Women of Jerusalem.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Of all things on earth, that which we know least is our own self. We know the sins and defects of others a thousand times better than our own, and see forever the mote in our brother's eye, but not the beam in our own. That great truth, it seems, was unheeded on the journey to Calvary. The pious women of Jerusalem, though quite unafraid to declare their loyalty before impious men, yet saw only the suffering Christ whom they loved; they did not see the loving Christ who suffered for them. They sympathized with the pain, but did not see themselves as the cause of that pain. It was their own sins and mine as well, which He took upon Himself, and as if to bring that truth home to us all there welled up from the depths of the Sacred Heart the

plaintive words: "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves."

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

O Jesus, let me see the personal equation between my sins and Calvary. Let me weep not for Thee apart from me, but for Thee on account of me. Let me see that if I had been less proud, the crown of thorns would have been less piercing; that if I had been less self-willed, the Cross would have been less heavy; that if I had been less sinful, the road would have been much shorter. Give me the grace to weep for my sins, and since sorrow and joy share the same source, which is the fountain of tears, give me also to understand that my sorrows may one day, through Thy Love, be changed into everlasting joy.

Ninth Station

Jesus Falls the Third Time.

*We adore Thee, O Christ, and we
praise Thee*

*Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou
hast redeemed the world.*

The third temptation on the mount was the temptation, not of the flesh or the world, but of the devil himself, asking Our Blessed Lord to fall down and adore him, promising He would be given all the kingdoms of the earth. But Jesus said to him: "Begone, Satan, for it is written: 'The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

There have been countless occasions in my life when I exchanged the priceless treasure of Thy grace for the toy of some passing pleasure. Unlike Christ, I have believed the devil's lies, and bartered eternity for time, peace for remorse, and the freedom of the children of God for the terrible slavery of sin. And each time I have learned that whereas Satan promises the pleasure of his kingdom, he actually gives only his barren desert of unhappiness and pain.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

Many times, dear Jesus, I promised Thee, after having fallen by the flesh and the world, I would never fall again. This, Thy third fall,

dear Jesus, is a witness that I have fallen by the snares of the devil, but by rising again Thou hast given me another pledge of hope. Thou hast taught me now that there are two classes of people in the world: those who fall and stay down, and those who fall and get up again. By this third fall, Thou hast purchased for me the grace of rising again. Never let me fall again. The devil would give the world to have my soul; Thou art giving Thy very life to have it. Therefore, dear Jesus, it must be worth saving! O help me save it.

Tenth Station

Jesus is Stripped of His Garments.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

God's dealing with man has been a continuous process of overflowing goodness. The first overflowing was giving things existence, and that was creation; the second was the overflowing of the secrets of His love, and that was revelation. Finally, love, which knows no limits, exhaust-

ed itself in the Incarnation, for here in the language of Paul, "He emptied Himself," cast His glory into the background, and took upon Himself the form and habit of man.

Now on the hill of Calvary, Jesus wills not only to empty Himself of His Divine glory, but even the least of His earthly possessions. The Heavenly Vagabond, who had nowhere to lay His head, is now stripped of His garments, so that in death He might have nothing but give all, and thus be utterly empty.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

But, Jesus, love is reciprocal, and every emptying implies a filling. If Thou hast emptied Thyself by giving us divine life, was it not because I should be filled by it? Grant, then, dear Jesus, that I may be emptied of selfishness, and filled with Thy charity; emptied of sins, and filled with Thy grace; emptied of earthliness, and filled with heavenliness. Strip me of the garments which are worldly, and clothe me with the white robe of baptism, so that

through the poverty of earthly things, I may become rich. Strengthen me to repay Thy life of emptying by my love of sacrifice, and by filling up in my body the sufferings which are wanting to Thy Passion, O Christ!

Eleventh Station

Jesus is Nailed to the Cross.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Our Blessed Lord mounts His pulpit for the last time. This time it is not Peter's bark, nor Galilean hills, but the pulpit of the Cross which, like the words He shall utter, will itself be eloquent even when time shall be no more. The *Preacher* is the Word of God; the *congregation* is made up of *soldiers* who shake dice for His garments; of *unbelievers*, whose mouths are craters of hate and volcanoes of blasphemy; and of the *faithful* ones—Mary, Magdalen, and John—innocence, penitence and priesthood—the three types of souls for ever to be found beneath the pulpit

of the Cross. The *sermon* is the Seven Last Words—words of love and forgiveness—first to enemies: “Forgive them, for they know not what they do;” then to sinners: “This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise;” then to saints: “Mother, behold thy son.”

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, as I listen to Thy sermon, which reveals Thy tremendous thirst for love, I begin to discover what love really is, and how many times I have crucified it: Thy hands, so often raised to bless me, I have nailed fast; Thy feet, which so often sought me in devious ways of sin, I dug with steel; Thy lips, which have so often summoned me from paths of wickedness, I blistered with dust. And now I hear Thy word of love which pardons and forgives, and I begin to understand that when I pierced Thy heart, it was my own I slew. To Thy Cross I now return as the chalice of all common miseries and the hope of forlorn sinners. Ever beneath it, let me learn the lesson

that it does not require much time to make me a saint, but only much love; and that, if I had never sinned, O Jesus, I never could call Thee "Saviour."

Twelfth Station

Jesus Dies Upon the Cross.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

The great funeral pyre of suffering gradually burns itself out, and the blood of the God-Man dries on the Cross in testimony of His passing. His garments are bequeathed to His executioners, His blood to the earth, His body to the grave, His Mother to John, and His soul to His Heavenly Father. Finishing the last word of His testament, He bows His head and dies. His spirit descends into Limbo, and His escort is a thief. All is finished now. God has had His revenge. Three things cooperated in our fall: the disobedient man: Adam; the proud woman: Eve; and the tree. Our Redeemer uses the same three to lift

us back to divine life; the obedient Man: Christ; the humble new Eve: Mary; and the tree which is the tree of the Cross. But the triumph is not yet apparent, for from the group around the Cross there comes a cry of their now momentary victory; "Others He saved, Himself He cannot save."

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

O Jesus, of course you cannot! No man can save himself, if he is to save another. Thy weakness is not that of impotency, but obedience to a law which is the law of sacrifice. The leaves can not save themselves, if they are to bud the greenery, nor the acorn save itself if it is to spring forth the oak. Nor canst Thou, O Jesus, save Thyself if Thou art really saving us from sin. Grant me an everlasting and abiding love for Thy Redemption, and while on earth, let me see, that there is no such thing as walking around the Cross—the outstretched arms will not let me do that. Grant that like Thee, I may lose my life for time, and thus

by the strangest of strange paradoxes, save it for eternity.

Thirteenth Station

Jesus is Taken Down From the Cross and
Laid in Mary's Arms.

*We adore Thee, O Christ, and we
praise Thee*

*Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou
hast redeemed the world.*

The Prodigal Son has returned, for is not Jesus the prodigal? Thirty-three years ago He left His Father's heavenly home and went off into the foreign country of this world, spending Himself and being spent, teaching mankind, opening blind eyes to the light of God's sunshine, and unstopping deaf ears to the music of the human voice. And now, the heavenly Spendthrift has wasted the substance of His body and blood amongst sinners, and quite spent and exhausted, is laid in the arms of His Blessed Mother, who for the moment thinks that Bethlehem has come back again.

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God

*That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

Oh, no, Mary! Bethlehem has not come back! Those hands that once clutched at Magi gifts are carpentered with nails; that baby brow on which majesty once made its throne is now wearing a crown of thorns; the baby feet that once could not walk because they could not bear the weight of Divine Omnipotence, now can not walk because pierced with nails. Someone, Mary, has intervened between Bethlehem and this hour. It is not Bethlehem returning! It is Calvary! and that which intervened is my sins! O, Mary, intercede for me to Thy Son. Let me draw from thy heart thy seven swords. Mother of God, let me be thy prodigal!

Fourteenth Station

Jesus is Laid in the Tomb.

We adore Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee

Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Generally, the world is willing to concede at least a twofold hospitality: a place in which to be born, and a place in which to die. But both of

these it denied Him who is the Master of life and death. For birth, He was given a cave under the floor of the world; for death, He was given the bed of the Cross, for a pillow, a crown of thorns, and, lest hands and feet should slip out, they tucked them in with nails. And thus the glory of His birth was hidden in the least of the cities of Israel, and the ignominy of His death in the greatest of them all. Born in a stranger's cave, buried in a stranger's grave, Christ declares to the world that human birth and human death were equally foreign to Him; but to whom can earthly birth and earthly death be strange, except to God?

*Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of
the promises of Christ.*

PRAYER

Sweet Jesus, now I understand, as Thou art placed in the sepulchre, that the law of life is the law of death, that nothing is born but that something dies, and nothing dies but that something lives. Thy life has taught me that unless there is a Cross there will never be an empty tomb; unless there is a crown of thorns there will never be a halo of

light; and unless there is a scourged body there will never be a glorified body. Having the joy of Thy resurrection set before me, give me strength to endure the Cross and share in the fellowship of Thy sufferings until that other resurrection day, when in the heavenly Jerusalem, tears shall be wiped away, and Thy love which is God shall reign forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer After the Way of the Cross

Offered for the Intention of the Holy Father, Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Dear Jesus, Thou art the Word of God, and the Word of God, Thou hast told us, is a seed which bringeth forth life only on condition that it falleth to the ground. As the seed of everlasting life, Thou didst fall to the earth by Thy death on Good Friday, but Thou didst gloriously rise to Thy new life on Easter Sunday. Thus Thou hast taught us that Christian living means dying to the world in a Calvary of time, as a prelude to an eternity-long Easter in heaven. Grant that on that day when Thou wilt come in the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead, bearing Thy Cross as a sign of triumph and Thy scars as pledges of love, that I may show Thee my cross and my scars, and in return be privileged to hear from Thy own lips: "Come, ye blessed of My Father into the Kingdom prepared for you from all eternity." Amen.

