




Meditations
on the
Fourteen Stations


with
A Sketch of Their Origin

By
JOSEPH McSORLEY
of the Paulist Fathers



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MEDITATIONS

on the

FOURTEEN STATIONS

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MEDITATIONS

ON

THE FOURTEEN STATIONS

ORIGIN OF THE STATIONS

THE CATHOLIC AND SUFFERING



READINESS to face the ugly facts of human suffering has ever been encouraged by the Catholic Church. Perhaps we may almost say that an honest unflinching attitude towards the least pleasant, the most depressing of human experiences is the dominant characteristic of Catholic sanctity. The saints not only recognize, but even labor to acquire the habit of remembering what the average man would gladly deny and at least is very willing to forget. The saint remembers that sin is an ever present evil. That suffering is the antidote it would be folly to deny. He wishes never to lose sight of the fact that we have all been saved from death by the Passion of Our Lord and Savior.

The institution of the season of Lent is among the chief means by which the Church attempts to help us to take the correct attitude toward suffering.

LENT

Once the word "Lent"—of Saxon origin and akin to the word "long"—signified the springtime with its lengthening days. In modern minds it is associated with the spring period of fasting, that same season which, in the Latin tongues, takes

its name from some form of the word "forty"—as Quadragesima, Cuaresima, Cuaresma, Carême.

For the origin of the Lenten fast, we go back to the Gospel. The first three Evangelists tell of Our Lord's withdrawal into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days. Imitating Him, His followers, year by year, and generation after generation, have devoted the same period of time to communion with God, to bodily penance, and to at least a measure of solitude.

THE LENTEN FAST

The most prominent characteristic of the season of Lent is, without doubt, the fast. According to old traditions, it was the Apostles who instituted the custom of fasting during the weeks preceding Easter. At any rate, for the past sixteen hundred years, the Catholic Church has observed substantially the Lent which we now observe. Varying to some extent in the matter of date, and also in the rigor with which it was kept, the Lenten fast has thus been a matter of universal observance in every age of Christian history. To the precept of fasting, sometimes was added the prohibition of attendance at amusements and entertainments, and for centuries, hunting also was under the ban during Lent.

LENTEN PRAYER

Lent, however, is not concerned only with externals. Internal practices as well are indispensable to a proper observance of Lent. One must do penance in the Gospel sense of the word—that is to say, one must have contrition for sin. Entering into our own souls we must realize how grievously we have offended God and we must consider carefully the motives impelling us toward deep contrition. This, of course, implies reflection, meditation—in a word, prayer. Lent, therefore, is eminently a season of prayer.

Lent greatly promotes the development of a spirit of prayer, if we make use of its opportunities. For Lent provides us with a good excuse to withdraw ourselves from the world sufficiently to obtain freedom for serious reflection and pious meditation. And solitude is very necessary for the cultivation of prayer. The ordinary companionship of our fellows is largely a distraction. With difficulty we pursue a serious train of thought unless alone. At certain times the presence of others does, indeed, exert a blessed influence. A thrilling song, an eloquent speech, divine music, the sight of heroic deeds—these lift us up to heights where, for an inspiring moment, we perceive heavenly beauty and a sublime ideal; these light a beacon that shows us the path to holiness. But when the vision passes, and the flame dies down, our pulse will slacken; and then the insistent need is calm persistence, tireless courage, the enduring heroism that comes from deep and serious thought. Thought like this is possible, for the most part, only when souls are aloof for a little space from the ordinary ways of men, tranquil and undistracted. Then they wax clear-sighted to perceive principles; they become alert in the working out of solutions and answers. Hence the helpfulness of Lent.

OUR LORD'S PASSION

Among the subjects of thought that come before us for consideration during Lent, a certain preëminence, of course, belongs to the Passion of Our Blessed Lord. Each and every scene of that tragic night, and still more tragic day, deserves to be vividly recalled and minutely pondered by all who profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ. To every saint the Passion has been the subject of life-long devoted study; and so it should be to us all. Lent both reminds us of this obligation and provides us with opportunities for its fulfillment.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Chief among the exercises devised by the ardent students of the Passion of Christ is the devout practice known as The Way of the Cross, or the Stations. In forms that differ as widely as racial characteristics and personal temperaments and yet always include the common essential element suggested by the name, "The Way of the Cross," the practice of making a spiritual pilgrimage in company with the suffering Christ, seems to be almost as old as Lent itself. It was the one substitute available to those many devout souls, less favored than their fortunate fellows, who were unable to come from the end of the earth, traversing land and sea, to visit the Holy Places made sacred by the shedding of Our Savior's Blood.

THE STATIONS 600 YEARS AGO

Henry Suso provides us with a fourteenth century instance of a devotional exercise inspired by the motive of a spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Places:

"He [Blessed Henry] now began every night after matins at his usual place, which was the chapter room, to force himself into a Christlike feeling of sympathy with all that Christ, his Lord and God, had suffered for him. He stood up and moved from corner to corner, in order that all sluggishness might leave him, and that he might have throughout a lively and keen sensitiveness to Our Lord's sufferings. He commenced this exercise with the Last Supper, and he accompanied Christ from place to place, until he brought Him before Pilate. Then he received Him after He had been sentenced at the tribunal and he followed Him along the sorrowful way to Calvary from the courthouse to beneath the gallows. The following was the manner in which he made the 'Way of the Cross': On coming to

the threshold of the chapter house, he kneeled down and kissed the print of the first step which the Lord took, when, on being sentenced, he turned Him around to go forth to death. Then he began the psalm which describes Our Lord's passion, 'Deus, Deus meus, respice in me' (Ps. xxi.), and he went out by the door into the cloister repeating it. Now there were four streets through which he accompanied Him. He went with Him to death along the first street, with the earnest desire and will to go forth from his friends and all perishable goods, and to suffer for Christ's glory misery without consolation and voluntary poverty. In the second street he proposed to himself to cast aside all perishable honor and dignity and voluntarily to despise this present world, considering how the Lord had become a 'worm and the outcast of the people.' At the beginning of the third street he kneeled down again, and, kissing the ground, willingly renounced all needless comfort and all tender treatment of his body in honor of the pains of Christ's tender body; and he set before his eyes what is written in the psalm, how that all Christ's strength was dried up, and His natural vigor brought nigh to death as they drove Him onward thus pitiably; and he thought how fitting it is that every eye should weep and every heart sigh on account of it. When he came to the fourth street, he kneeled down in the middle of the road, as if he were kneeling in front of the road through which the Lord must pass out; and then falling on his face before Him he kissed the ground, and crying out to Him prayed Him not to go to death without his servant but to suffer him to go along with Him. Then he pictured to himself as vividly as he could that the Lord was obliged to pass quite close to him, and when he had said the prayer, 'Ave, rex noster, Fili David'! (Hail, our King, Son of David), he let Him move onwards. After this he knelt down again, still

turned towards the gate, and greeted the cross with the verse, 'O crux ave, spes unica'! (Hail, O Cross, our only hope!), and then let it go past. This done he kneeled down once more before the tender Mother Mary, Heaven's Queen, as she was led past him in unfathomable anguish of heart, and he observed how mournfully she bore herself, and noted her burning tears and sighings and sorrowful demeanor; and he addressed her in the words of the 'Salve Regina' and kissed her footsteps. Then he stood up and hastened after his Lord until he came up with Him.

"And the picture was sometimes so vividly present to his mind that it seemed to him as if he were in body walking at Christ's side, and the thought would come to him how that, when King David was driven from his kingdom, his bravest captains walked around with him and gave him loving succor (2 Kings xv.). At this point he gave up his will to God's will, desiring that God would do with him according to His good pleasure. Last of all he called to mind the epistle which is read in Holy Week from the prophecy of Isaias, beginning 'Quis credidit auditui nostro' (Is. liii.), and which so exactly describes how the Lord was led forth to death, and, meditating upon it, he went in by the door of the choir, and so up the steps into the pulpit until he came beneath the cross in the place where one day the hundred considerations upon the Passion had been made known to him. He kneeled down and looked upon Jesus stripped of His garments at the moment when He was cruelly nailed to the cross. Then, taking a discipline and in a passion of fervor, nailing himself to the cross with his Lord, he prayed that neither life nor death, weal nor woe, might ever separate him from the Crucified."¹

¹Re-quoted from *The Stations of the Cross* by Herbert Thurston, S.J., p. 13 *et seqq.*

THE STATIONS TO-DAY

Derived in all probability from a medieval devotion known as The Seven Falls immortalized in the famous carvings of Adam Krafft, the arrangement of the Stations now in general use comprises fourteen stages of the progress of Our Blessed Lord from the Judgment Hall along the Via Dolorosa to Calvary and finally to the Sepulchre. As an aid to piety, it represents the exercise on which a long established and widespread popular preference has conferred a sort of supremacy among the various devotions commonly practised during Lent. Of course, neither the popularity nor the efficacy of the devotion is dependent upon, nor is it an argument for, the historical accuracy of the fourteen scenes of the Stations. What cannot be denied, however, is that the devotion has been for centuries, and is still, of immense value to stimulate the imagination, to arouse the emotions, and to heighten religious fervor and resolution. For meditation the Stations are more commonly used than any other scenes connected with Our Lord's Passion.

When practised in the prescribed form, the devotion of The Way of the Cross includes meditation on the Passion of Christ as an essential element; and although the meditation need not necessarily be made upon each successive station, yet such is the common custom. Brief meditations on the Stations are easy enough to find in prayer books and manuals of piety, yet it may be that the considerations presented in the following pages will be of service to devout persons who during Lent, or at other times, wish to meditate on the familiar pictures of the Way of the Cross. The writer even ventures to hope that daily use of them will do much to deepen in the soul of the user the true spirit of the Cross.

FIRST STATION

“LET HIM BE CRUCIFIED”

IN the court of the Roman governor Jesus stands, as the words of the death sentence are spoken. They are words without pretense of courtesy or sympathy. Harsh, brutal, unfeeling men, with little or no evidence of common human feeling, demand the sentence, and proceed to execute it. Inspired by envy of the meanest type, and made possible only by utter disregard of the claims of justice, hurled at an innocent man as a sequel to his unjustified arrest, the words thrust Him suddenly to the brink of death. The prisoner who listens to them becomes aware that He is about to be pushed hurriedly into eternity through the portal of an agonizing crucifixion. Yet He remains silent, patient, unafraid.

Colloquy

To Thee, blessed Jesus, majestic in Thy quiet dignity, undisturbed by all the storm of malice and brutality surging around Thee, by curses and insults and blasphemies and blows, to Thee I make appeal that Thou impart to me some little share of the perfect divine tranquillity which is Thine by right, which was never lost. I, so easily stirred, so quick to anger, so anxious to repay insult with insult and blow with blow, need the assistance of this example. To Thee, blessed Jesus, so amiable when encompassed by hatred and ill treatment, I make appeal that Thou impart to me some little share of that gracious benevolence, that tender affection which Thou didst display even towards those who outraged and abused Thee. To Thee, blessed Jesus, threatened with instant death and ready at once to take the awful step into the dark Valley of the Shadow, I make appeal that Thou impart to me the gift which will make me ever prepared to follow when death summons me.

SECOND STATION

“TAKE UP THY CROSS”

SPOKEN or implied, the command to bear the cross was given to Jesus by the Roman soldiers who had been appointed as His executioners. There it lay, rough and unlovely, ominous with its outstretched arms, forbidding in its sinister suggestion of agony and death. Large enough, after being rooted in the ground, to bear the weight of an uplifted man, the cross was far too heavy for the strength of the one now forced to bear it. Jesus comes to the cross, and stoops to lift it up. He will not be able to carry it to Calvary; He will not be able even to stand upright under its oppressive weight. Yet without complaint or murmuring, without even calculating how much the cross exceeds His present strength, He takes it up bravely, as if to say: “This cross is Mine, and carry it I will, until I fall down, helpless to go farther.”

Colloquy

To Thee, blessed Jesus, so obedient in taking up Thy Cross, so indifferent to its weight, so reckless of Thy strength, so little disposed to calculate the probability of being able to finish Thy journey, to Thee I make appeal to impart to me some of that heroic, self-forgetful spirit of Thine. I, so jealous of every burden imposed upon me, so quick to question whether or not it comes by command of lawful authority, so resentful of being given a burden that will strain me, so prone to calculate my physical resources, so hasty to conclude that a cross is beyond the measure of my strength, so solicitous about my health and comfort, I, bowed in shame as I look upon Thee bearing Thy enormous cross, ask Thee to help me to carry all my burdens henceforth in the spirit of perfect resignation.

THIRD STATION

THE FIRST FALL

AS Jesus goes along the rough way, bearing the heavy cross, some unevenness of the ground, a projecting stone, or perhaps merely His swaying under the insupportable burden overbalances Him, and He falls. It means a most cruel shock to His crushed nerves, a renewing of the pain of His numerous wounds, and He lies on the ground for an instant as if unconscious or dead, the cross holding Him down. Yet despite the shock and the pain, the sense of helplessness and the inevitable depression experienced as He lies there, pressed down to the earth by a weight under which He cannot rise, not for a single instant does the will of Jesus change or falter. Even while lying helpless, unable to stir hand or foot, He is as determined as ever to carry the cross to the end of the journey.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, lying helpless on the ground, yet never for an instant wavering in Thy resolution, I make appeal for the grace to learn the many lessons Thou dost provide for my instruction. I who, instead of waiting to be crushed under the weight of my cross, so quickly pray to be rid of it, I who, when borne down by the weight of a burden seemingly beyond my strength to bear, abandon my resolution, complain that God has forgotten me, and decide that I will no longer attempt to obey the Will which can be carried out only at so terrible a cost, I now appeal to Thee to make me henceforward so loyal, brave and persevering that the strength of my soul shall outlast the strength of my body, and even the things that are beyond me physically I still will attempt to do, in imitation of what Thou hast done for me and every other sinner.

FOURTH STATION

JESUS MEETS MARY

THE body of Jesus may well have been almost numb with pain when into His heart there strikes a new sharp pang, as He sees His Mother's eyes resting upon Him and reads in them a sorrow like to no other sorrow. To bear His own pain, grievous as it was, must have been infinitely more easy than to endure the sight of His Mother's utter desolation. That He did not cry out in protest against the bitter suffering He had been called upon to endure, might seem to be a very miracle of bravery; that He could bear to see His Mother's agony is nothing less than a triumph of divine grace. And of His Mother, what can we say but this? That to be able to look upon the bruised body and the haggard, blood-stained face of her First-born, her Well-Beloved, and yet not to cry out in protest or complaint against God's dispensation, means that she believed and trusted and loved God more than normal human nature can even attempt to understand.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, wounded not only in Thy body, but in the tenderest affections of Thy soul, not merely impelled to doubt the goodness of the Father by the instinctive protest of human nature against such suffering as is Thine, but still more urged to rebel against so cruel a blow to Thy Blessed Mother, to Thee I make appeal to help me worship the Holy Will of God, though all the evidence in the world be brought forward to make me doubt His love. Even when holy motives and the useless suffering of the good tempt me to doubt and question, let me, I beseech Thee, have the grace to imitate Thee by following unflinchingly along the path God's Providence has marked out.

FIFTH STATION

THE CYRENIAN HELPS JESUS

A STRANGER in the crowd, poor and friendless, suddenly with alarm finds himself dragged forth by the strong arms of the soldiers to take his place alongside Jesus and help to carry the cross. One may easily imagine the surprise, the dumb anger, the hostility with which, for fear of incurring a worse evil, the helpless Simon consents to do this humiliating service; and one may very easily assume that his strongest desire is to be freed of the unwelcome burden thrust upon him. Also one may readily believe that Simon has not long been assisting Jesus in the carrying of the cross, before a complete change comes over his spirit, and reluctance gives place to joy. The one event in all his life of which he is most proud is the fact that for a brief space of time he is privileged to carry the cross together with his Lord.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, possessed of such wonderful influence over the human heart that a moment's association with Thee will make bitter things sweet and hard things easy and shameful things most glorious, Who in an instant didst convert the Cyrenian from a reluctant companion in suffering to a devoted worshiper and Thy willing slave, to Thee I make appeal that Thou wouldst work a similar miracle in this selfish, sinful heart of mine. I, who am always reluctant to accept the cross; I who, when called to be Thy companion in hardship or humiliation or pain, shrink away in fear and fright and unwillingness, I beg of Thee the grace that will make me realize that to suffer with Thee, to tread in Thy footsteps, to help to carry Thy cross is the most precious privilege, the greatest glory, the most enduring joy that the soul can ever know.

SIXTH STATION

VERONICA AND JESUS

A HELPLESS, blood-stained prisoner, mocked by the crowd and forced brutally along by the executioners, Jesus is calculated to arouse pity and sympathy in a tender heart. Stirred deeply, Veronica makes her way to the side of Jesus and with a towel wipes away the bloody sweat which stains His Face. It is a brave, unselfish act, motivated by pure pity, and reflects the high ideals that Christ Himself had taught. Carried out with a lofty disregard of possible unpleasant consequences, this deed might well serve as a model to all who are conscious of their ability to relieve suffering, even in a slight degree. Veronica's instant and miraculous reward is a pledge that God will never leave a truly noble deed without generous compensation.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, bleeding from Thy wounds, bent under the weight of the cross, publicly shamed, on Thy way to a felon's death, Leader-in-Chief of all who are despised and suffer scorn, of all the helpless and wretched and friendless and poor of the human race, to Thee do I appeal for some little share of this brave woman's spirit. For pity and sympathy and love are born of hearts that resemble Thine. Pity and sympathy and love are dear to Thee, and always will be dear. I, so harsh and unfeeling when the pain of others is in question; I, so deaf to the mute appeal of voiceless suffering; I, who so many times have passed Thee by, in the person of some poor sufferer, without ministering to Thee, I beg that I may resemble Veronica in pity for the unfortunate, in swift readiness to wait upon and comfort all who suffer.

SEVENTH STATION

THE SECOND FALL

A GAIN the uneven ground, the projecting stone, or the swaying of the body, and Jesus drops to the ground to be bruised by the heavy cross as it also falls, to lie prostrate, dazed, stunned, as one without power or life. A harder test of resolution than a fall in these circumstances cannot well be imagined; shock, pain, depression, all are so many arguments and motives to weaken and change the strong will with which one has started forth. Yet, as the body of Jesus lies there, motionless, crushed and broken, without ability to lift itself or move, His will and resolution are in no wise altered. Firm in His determination as when first He placed the cross upon His shoulders and began to bear it, He but waits until these moments of physical helplessness shall have passed away in order to start again on the journey He has undertaken.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, so changeless in Thy purpose, so strong of will, so true and faithful in every test, to Thee I make appeal out of the depths of my weakness and fickleness that Thou impart to me some share of that divine perseverance, that loyal will, that unchangeable purpose which is characteristic of Thee and characteristic of Thy saints. I, so faint-hearted and feeble, so weak-spirited, so fearful, so ready to change my decision, to go back on my word, to be untrue to my resolution, to falsify my promise, I make appeal to Thee to give me some little share of Thy brave spirit, that henceforward, despite all disappointment, discouragement, pain, depression, failure, despite any and every misfortune, any and every test, I may be loyal to the duty which the Heavenly Father has laid upon me.

EIGHTH STATION

JESUS SPEAKS TO THE WOMEN

IN His progress along the streets of Jerusalem, Jesus finds Himself near a group of good-hearted Jewish women, who cannot restrain their tears. These tears are their tribute to the true friend of the people who for His goodness is now being treated as their greatest enemy. But nothing is further from the heart of Jesus than to invite pity for His own distress. Instantly He thinks of others more needy than Himself; and to those others He directs the tears and sympathy offered Him. "Weep not for Me," He says, "but for your children," as if to say, "Think not of Me. Of your children, still more unhappy, still more friendless, still more in need of sympathy and tears, I would have you think."

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, so self-forgetting, so considerate, so generous in the belittling of Thine own needs, so solicitous to relieve the wretchedness of others, to Thee do I make appeal that Thou impart to me some little share of this perfect charity of Thine. I, who make myself the center of the universe, who exaggerate my deeds, my talents, and my sufferings; I, who constantly press upon others my claim to attention, to sympathy, to assistance, who act as if no one ever experienced hardships as great as mine, I beg of Thee to open my eyes and to reveal to me what hitherto I have not seen. To all who weep and suffer and are in want, to all who lack shelter and food and clothing and friends, to all who are bowed down under the weight of misfortune or stained by sin, to all who bear the punishment of ill deeds done by themselves or others—to all these, O Blessed Jesus, teach me to realize I am a debtor.

NINTH STATION

THE THIRD FALL

A GAIN Jesus lies prostrate on the ground; again the pain renewed, the deep sense of helpless, hopeless desolation rule the body and the heart of this stricken Man; and still no change in courage, or spirit, or resolution. It is the last time that the perseverance of Jesus will thus be tested, for He has shown that nothing can prevail against His soul of steel, His adamant will. As well attempt to roll back the ocean tide, or to swing the stars of heaven from their course, as to divert Jesus Christ from the fulfillment of the mission appointed by His Heavenly Father. Moving slowly along, or lying prostrate, acutely sensitive to pain, or half stunned by the shock of a heavy fall, He is ever the same. No alteration in His surroundings or His condition can ever effect a change in His resolution.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, so unlike all others who have ever lived, and in particular so unlike me, the weakest and most changeable of all, I make appeal that Thou impart to me some little share of that constancy which I so sorely need. Time and again, I have started forth upon the path indicated by the pointing finger of God, time and again I have been tried and tested, time and again I have fallen. Never once have I been perfectly loyal, perfectly true. What shall I say to explain my fickleness? How shall I defend this recurring disloyalty, which means that my will is feeble and my love weak, and that in my life selfishness is triumphant. Help me to remember Thee, helpless but unyielding, indomitable though beaten to the ground. Over pain, depression, and the cruel sense of failure, make me, like Thee, inwardly victorious.

TENTH STATION

JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

ARRIVED at the hill of Calvary, the executioners proceed to strip Our Savior of His blood-stained garments. Rough-handed as they are, eager to be through with their task, totally indifferent to the wounds covering the body of their Prisoner, the soldiers tear the garments quickly off, causing fresh blood to flow and inflicting sharp pain on the sensitive flesh, raw from the scourging and swollen with bruises. A further affliction is the shame endured by Our Savior thus rudely exposed to the curious eyes of the unfriendly staring multitude. Needless, as well as undeserved, this coarse exposure, this wanton humiliation, is borne by Jesus in the same spirit of meek silence and gentle patience manifested during every moment of His Passion.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, cruelly hurt by the stripping off of blood-encrusted garments, shamefully humiliated before the public gaze, bearing both insult and injury with total resignation, speaking no word of protest or self-vindication, to Thee, I appeal that Thou impart to me some little share of Thy divinely perfect patience. I, so quick to justify myself, even when at fault, so ready to invent excuses and to vindicate my conduct, so often eager, even at the expense of truth, to shelter myself from the slightest humiliation, I beg of Thee to help me imitate Thy example during the stripping off of Thy garments. Since Thou hast really taken my place, stood my punishment and endured humiliation which should justly have been mine, I can only beg Thee to make me henceforward ready to bear patiently and in silence even those humiliations which seem not to be deserved.

ELEVENTH STATION

JESUS NAILED TO THE CROSS

HERE is the cross, and Jesus is ready for the sacrifice. Never was a life more freely offered, never was a victim less reluctant. He might have had a legion of angels to scatter His persecutors and bear Him swiftly to a place of safety. But freely He had taken up His cross, and now freely He extends Himself upon it, while sharp nails are driven through hands and feet, both to increase His suffering and to render escape impossible. None was ever so well entitled as Jesus to meet death magnificently, in heroic attitude, publishing the greatness of His soul, and the freedom of His sacrifice. Instead, He condescends to die as felons die, held fast by iron nails, as if, coward-like, He might run away.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, relinquishing even that liberty which is above life itself in value, making no claim to die with fitting dignity, or to let the world perceive how splendid is Thy sacrifice, to Thee I make appeal that I may share Thy readiness to be deprived of freedom. The nails that fasten Thee to the cross, eloquently reproach me for my unmeasured love of liberty, as they reproach all Christians who still hesitate, or still refuse, to let themselves be bound. To every willing slave of duty and law; to those who for Thy sake submit to be fastened to the cross of ill-fortune or of persecution, of sickness, of calumny, or of shame; to those who for love of Thee shackle themselves by promises or vows; to every consecrated virgin and wife and husband and priest, fastened to the cross in imitation of Thy example, do Thou, O Jesus, give the grace to be true till death.

TWELFTH STATION

JESUS DYING

HAVING hung upon the cross in agony for nigh three hours, Our Savior is about to die. At this supreme moment, His one thought is the mission which He came upon earth to fulfill in obedience to His Father. Now, at the last instant, reviewing His life from beginning to end, He finds it without spot or blemish, without shortcoming or defect. It has been wholly as the Father wished it. On the first Christmas night in Bethlehem, during the flight into Egypt, in Jerusalem and about the Temple, during the boyhood years at Nazareth, and while on the missionary journeys in Judea, and Samaria, and Galilee, among friends as among enemies, in exaltation and depression, always without shadow of imperfection, He has lived the life prescribed. He can say truly, "It is consummated"—"I have fulfilled My mission." So saying, He bows His head and dies.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, the one perfect Man of all the millions who have lived, wholly obedient to conscience in childhood and youth as in maturer years, true to Thy mission in days of peace and comfort as in days of storm and woe, never putting pleasure before duty, or self-will before the will of Heaven, to Thee I make appeal that I may share the ever-present sense of consecration which was Thine. I, who cannot say of my past years that they have been lived in perfect accordance with the Father's will, may yet hope to spend all of life still left me in wholehearted obedience. Or, if that be too much to expect, at least, with regard to the duty of today, let me hope to be perfect, that this night, for once, I may say of my daily task, "It is consummated."

THIRTEENTH STATION

THE TAKING OF JESUS FROM THE CROSS

BY the reverent hands of His disciples, the dead body of Jesus is taken down from the cross and for a moment laid in the arms of the Mother of Sorrows. To appreciate the depth of Our Lady's grief, at this instant, one should both possess a mother's heart and be a saint. Surely, as she embraces the bruised and lifeless body of her First-born, no one will venture to approach her, least of all those who betrayed, abandoned, and helped to crucify Him. As she looks upon the cruel work which sin has wrought in the broken body of Jesus Christ, will not her mother's heart cry out for justice, demanding the punishment of sinners? To her, thus desolate, mournful, broken-hearted, what sinner dare even speak?

Colloquy

Blessed Jesus, I dare. To her, whose heart is an image of Thine own, to her, the Refuge of Sinners, whose soul is consumed not with the sense of her own suffering, but with a measureless longing for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners, I and all other wretched souls who have betrayed, abandoned and crucified Christ may go with perfect confidence. Mother of Sorrows, broken-hearted in thy desolation, for thy dead Son's sake obtain the pardon of my numberless offences. Seeing thy grief, marking His wounds and bruises, I begin to know what it was I did when I turned my back upon my God and joined the company of sinners. Sorry, ashamed, and truly contrite, I beg forgiveness, and I ask the grace to remember my sin always, so that henceforward I shall never be without a sense of shame and sorrow.

FOURTEENTH STATION

THE BURIED JESUS

WITH but little delay, the body of Jesus is prepared for burial, carried to the sepulchre, and securely enclosed therein. Then the disciples, with the Blessed Mother, all withdraw. In a sense, it is the final parting, for never again will Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, live among men the earthly life He led before. Yet, as the disciples turn away from the sepulchre, leaving the buried Jesus there, the living Jesus goes with them in their hearts; and from that divine and blessed Presence they are to be separated nevermore. Heretofore, He has lived on earth before the eyes of men, to be gazed upon alike by good and bad, but now, He lives only in the hearts of those that love Him and is beheld only by eyes which faith has purified.

Colloquy

To Thee, Blessed Jesus, dead in the sepulchre, but living in the hearts of those who worship Thee, ever present, ever loving, always ready to guide and protect, to comfort and console, my best, my perfect Friend, my Savior and my God, to Thee I make appeal that Thou impart to me the gift of being always mindful of Thy presence. All Thou hast done for me, all Thou art prepared to do, cannot be comprehended by my mind nor pictured by my imagination; but this I know, that Thou art here within me now, never to depart unless by my own choice. So I take Thee for my Friend, now and always. Lord Jesus, come.

