



MAKE THIS YOUR BEST LENT EVER!

THE PASSIONTIDE “TO DO” LIST

- Pray and meditate on at least one of the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary each day.
- Read, meditate and discuss with family and friends one of Stations of the Cross per day—there are 14 days to Easter, which allows for one a day.
- Read from a book on the Passion of Our Lord throughout this fourteen day period. The whole book need not be finished, but draw as much as possible out of the sections you do read.
- Have a longer way and a shorter way of making the fourteen Stations of the Cross. Try do at least the shorter one daily. It could be as simple as announcing the Station, spending a minute reflecting on the event and ending with an Our Father, Hail Mary and a Glory Be.
- Cut-out the fun in all its forms. TV, the internet, videos, movies, radio, music, idle cell phone talk, social media. Place all these and other such things aside for this solemn and somber period.
- Eat in silence at family meals, with someone reading at table from a book on the Passion, while others eat.

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LESSONS FROM THE CHARACTERS OF THE PASSION: BARABBAS & THE TWO THIEVES

BARABBAS AND THE THIEVES: A LESSON ON TRUE FREEDOM

We live in an era of revolutions, but the problem is which kind of revolution shall we espouse. Like all eras, ours has its catchwords and foremost among them is the word “freedom.”

It may well be that as people talk most about their health when they are sick, so too they talk most about freedom when they are most in danger of losing it. When is a person free? When he is without law or restraint or when he attains the purpose for which he was made? For an answer to these questions we turn to the Eternal Drama of the Cross.

A prison can house the innocent as well as the guilty. During the rule of an invader it is possible that more innocent than guilty will be imprisoned behind bars. But without passing on the morality of the prisoners, the low, dark prison under Pilate’s fortress held many a captive soul.

Among them there were three who attract our attention. The name of one we know—Barabbas. The names of the two others we do not know. According to tradition they are Dismas and Gestas.

When the sun arose this particular morning each of them looked with hope for release, for it was customary on the day of the Passover for the governor to release a prisoner to the people. Thus the redemption of Israel from Egypt was commemorated by a captive receiving his freedom.

Pilate knew he would be called upon to pick someone for release. The urgency became acute when Herod returned Our Lord to Pilate, who in turn called together the chief priests, magistrates, and the people and said to them: *“You have presented unto me this Man as one who perverted the people, and behold I, having examined Him before you, find no cause in this Man, in those things wherein you accuse Him. No! Nor Herod either. For I sent you to him and behold nothing worthy of death is done unto Him.”*

Pilate had Christ on his hands. The problem was how to get rid of Him. His imagination leaped to the prison. He had a great idea politically! Morally

THE HOLY WEEK

“TO DO” LIST

- Make a Calendar for the week.** Use either a large sheet of paper (11x17), or 7 Letter Size (8½x11) sheets of paper for the days Palm Sunday to the Paschal Vigil (Saturday).
- Write-out a Schedule** for each day of Holy Week—listing the activities and times for them. Then post it in highly visible and highly frequented place for all family members to see. If you commit yourself to putting in writing and everyone sees it daily, then there is a greater chance that you will follow the schedule, rather than it just being “word of mouth”. You can also set an alarm clock to sound five minutes before each activity starts.
- Make some General Rules** that will send a clear a message to everyone that this really is going to be a Holy Week. The rules can/should cover prayer times; quantity of prayer (which would lengthen the usual prayer time); perhaps a family reading of the Passion of Christ, giving a it 15 minutes or more per day; making conversation at table spiritual and not worldly; curtailing all “fun” and “leisure” activities, etc. These are just the tip of the iceberg of potential rules that can be introduced for Holy Week.
- Perhaps set aside a day for the whole family to go and make a Holy Hour** at the church in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.
- Set aside a time for a serious examination of conscience for all family members.** Use an printed version of an examination of conscience from a good book. This website also has a thorough examination of conscience at <http://www.devotiontoourlady.com/confession-of-sins.html>
- Impose some extra family penances for this final week of Lent.** It could be related to food and drink; the room temperatures; the time going to bed at night; the time of rising in the morning; etc.

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it was weak, and even rotten. He would allow the people to vote on the prisoner who would be released. Pilate probably was anxious to insure the release of Christ and, in order to do so, chose from among those three men one who was called Barabbas.

Barabbas was well known or “notable,” and very likely, as his name indicates, the son of a Rabbi (Matthew 27:16). Saint John tells us he was a robber (John 18:40). Later he was arrested for sedition and for a murder committed on that occasion (Luke 23:19).

He was, in our language, a “revolutionist.” When it is recalled that Israel was under the Romans, the term “revolutionist” is to be understood as a “patriot” or a member of Israel’s underground. He was interested in throwing off the yoke of political tyranny. The whole nation had been palpitating for a deliverer from the Roman yoke. Hence they asked of Christ: “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*” (Matthew 11:3). For two centuries Israel had no Judaeus Macchabeus to lead a revolt against Caesar. Barabbas stepped in to fill this role, and in his enthusiasm for the freedom of his people he had committed a murder; and, what was more serious to Pilate, he was a seditionist.

Pilate sought to confuse the issue by choosing a prisoner who was guilty of exactly the same charge as Christ, namely, sedition against Caesar. In a few minutes, two figures stand before the multitude on the pretentious white marble floor of the Praetorium. Pilate sits on a raised platform, surrounded by the imperial guard. Barabbas, on one side, blinks in the sunlight. He had not seen it in months. On the other side stands Christ.

Here are two men accused of revolution. Barabbas appealed to national grievances; Christ to conscience. Barabbas would release fetters and ignore sin. Our Lord would release man from sin and fetters would cease to be. The trumpets sound. Order is restored. Pilate steps forward and addresses the mob: “*Which one do you want me to release to you, Barabbas or Jesus called Messias?*” (Matthew 27:17).

The question of Pilate had all the air of democracy and free election but it was only its cheap facsimile. Ponder his question. Consider first the people to whom it was addressed, then the question itself. The people themselves were not inclined to put Our Lord to death (Matthew 27:20).

For that reason some demagogues stirred among the people and persuaded them that they should ask for Barabbas. There is always a ragtag, bobtail group, careless and thoughtless, who are ready to be at the mercy of that kind of oratory which has been called “*the harlot of the arts.*” The people can be misled by false leaders; the very ones who shout “*Hosanna!*” on Sunday, can shout “*Crucify!*” on Friday.

Herein is revealed the grave danger to democracy, for what happened to those people happens again and again in history: the danger of the people degenerating into masses.

What is the difference? By the people we mean persons who make their own decisions, who are governed by their consciences, who are self-determined by moral purpose, and who uphold the right even in the face of demagogy. By the masses we mean the people who have ceased to be governed interiorly by their consciences, who are determined in their thinking by a few irresponsible leaders on the outside, who are susceptible to the mental contagion of propaganda, and who have therefore a psychological readiness for slavery.

What happened on that Good Friday morning was that through propagandists the people became the masses. A democracy with a conscience

DESPISING THE WORLD

The following is taken from *The Imitation of Christ*.

Now again I will speak, Lord, and will not be silent. I will speak to the hearing of my God, my Lord, and my King Who is in Heaven. How great, O Lord, is the multitude of Your mercies which You have stored up for those who love You. But what are You to those who love You? What are You to those who serve You with their whole heart?

Truly beyond the power of words is the sweetness of contemplation You give to those who love You. To me You have shown the sweetness of Your charity, especially in having made me when I did not exist, in having brought me back to serve You when I had gone far astray from You, in having commanded me to love You.

O Fountain of unceasing love, what shall I say of You? How can I forget You, Who have been pleased to remember me even after I had wasted away and perished? You have shown mercy to Your servant beyond all hope, and have exhibited grace and friendship beyond his deserving.

What return shall I make to You for this grace? For it is not given every man to forsake all things, to renounce the world, and undertake the religious life.

Is it anything great that I should serve You Whom every creature is bound to serve? It should not seem much to me; instead it should appear great and wonderful that You condescend to receive into Your service one who is so poor and unworthy.

Behold, all things are Yours, even those which I have and by which I serve You. Behold, Heaven and earth which You created for the service of man, stand ready, and each day they do whatever You command.

But even this is little, for You have appointed angels also to minister to man — yea more than all this — You Yourself have condescended to serve man and have promised to give him Yourself.

What return shall I make for all these thousands of benefits? Would that I could serve You all the days of my life! Would that for but one day I could serve You worthily! Truly You are worthy of all service, all honor, and everlasting praise.

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became a mobocracy with power. When a democracy loses its moral sense, it can vote itself right out of democracy.

When Pilate asked: *“Which one do you want me to release to you?”* (Matthew 27:17), he was not holding a fair democratic election. He was assuming that a vote means the right to choose between Innocence and Guilt, Evil and Goodness, Right and Wrong.

This is wrong. True democracy never votes on Innocence and Guilt, for both Pilate’s court and Herod’s court declared Our Lord innocent. Every democracy is rooted in a theological absolute and political and economic relativities.

One of the reasons why European democracies disintegrated is because they did not have the common fund of absolutes. The rugged rationalism of Voltaire, the sentimental humanism of Rousseau, though strong enough to foment mass upheaval, were not strong enough to create a Faith.

In answer to Pilate’s question, the masses thundered back: *“Release to us Barabbas!”* Pilate could hardly believe his ears. Barabbas could hardly believe his ears, either! Was he about to be a free man? For the first time he became aware that he might now carry on his revolt. He turned his swollen burning face toward the Nazarene. He meant to measure his rival from head to foot, but his glance no longer dared to rise. There was something about His eyes which read his soul, as if that Nazarene was really sorry for him because he was free.

“But the whole multitude together cried out, saying, ‘Away with this Man! Release Barabbas to us!’” (Luke 23:18). *“Pilate again said to them in reply, ‘Then what do you want me to do with the Man you call the King of the Jews?’”* (Mark 15:12) *“still wishing to release Jesus”* (Luke 23:20). *“But they continued their shouting, saying: ‘Crucify Him! Crucify Him!’”* (Luke 23:21).

“And he said to them the third time: ‘Why, what evil has this Man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime. Therefore I shall have Him flogged and then release Him!’ With loud shouts, however, they persisted in calling for His crucifixion, and their voices prevailed” (Luke 23:22,23). *“The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted. So he released the man who had been imprisoned for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked, and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished”* (Luke 23:24-25).

The majority is not always right. Majority is right in the field of the relative, but not in the absolute. Majority is a legitimate test, so long as voting is based on conscience and not on propaganda. Truth does not win when numbers qua numbers become decisive. Numbers alone can decide a beauty queen but not justice. Beauty is a matter of taste, but justice is tasteless. Right is still right if nobody is right, and wrong is still wrong if everybody is wrong. The first poll in the history of Christianity was wrong!

Barabbas was amazed at a favor beyond his fondest hopes. He had fought for political liberty. He had procured the names of a few quislings, had sabotaged Roman works, had organized a few patriotic followers, had gained some prestige by being arrested, for arrest heightens the prestige of revolutionists. But all that was nothing compared to the deafening shouts for him as their leader, their hero. He was no longer an outlaw, but a free man. It meant death for Christ-but that was nothing!

Barabbas was free! He had four freedoms:

1. Freedom from fear-no more Roman prisons.
2. Freedom from want-no more coarse bread and water.

DESPISING THE WORLD

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Truly You are my Lord, and I am Your poor servant, bound to serve You with all my powers, praising You without ever becoming weary. I wish to do this — this is my desire. Do You supply whatever is wanting in me.

It is a great honor, a great glory to serve You and to despise all things for Your sake. They who give themselves gladly to Your most holy service will possess great grace.

They who cast aside all carnal delights for Your love will find the most sweet consolation of the Holy Ghost. They who enter upon the narrow way for Your name and cast aside all worldly care will attain great freedom of mind.

O sweet and joyful service of God, which makes man truly free and holy! O sacred state of religious bondage which makes man equal to the angels, pleasing to God, terrible to the demons, and worthy of the commendation of all the faithful! O service to be embraced and always desired, in which the highest good is offered and joy is won which shall remain forever!

THE VOICE OF CHRIST

My child, you are right, yet My wish is not that you seek that peace which is free from temptations or meets with no opposition, but rather that you consider yourself as having found peace when you have been tormented with many tribulations and tried with many adversities.

If you say that you cannot suffer much, how will you endure the fire of Purgatory? Of two evils, the lesser is always to be chosen. Therefore, in order that you may escape the everlasting punishments to come, try to bear present evils patiently for the sake of God.

Do you think that men of the world have no suffering, or perhaps but little? Ask even those who enjoy the most delights and you will learn otherwise. *“But,”* you will say, *“they enjoy many pleasures and follow their own wishes; therefore they do not feel their troubles very much.”*

Granted that they do have whatever they wish, how long do you think it will last? Behold, they who prosper in the world shall perish as smoke, and there shall be no memory of their past joys. Even in this

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3. Freedom of speech—he could once more talk revolution.
4. Freedom of religion—he could talk against religion if he wanted to.

Freedom for him meant freedom from something. And it was an empty freedom. It was as colorless as water when he thought it would be red like wine. He noticed that after the voting no one followed him. It was the queerest election in the history of the world; no torchlight procession for the victor, no one hoisted him on shoulders, no mob followed the victor with cheers. But everyone followed the defeated candidate. To have the mob with him he had to follow the mob that followed Christ. With them, unnoticed, he moved down to the basement of Pilate’s fortress where he watched the scourging of the defeated candidate.

When the scourging was done, Barabbas followed the defeated candidate up the hill of Calvary—it was still the only way Barabbas could have a following. Barabbas noticed that his two fellow prisoners were also there. They were not so fortunate as to have been nominated for election. They were to be crucified on either side of Our Lord, Dismas on His right, and Gestas on His left.

When finally all the three crosses were unfurled against the dark sky, Barabbas heard Gestas on His left curse, swear, and ask to be taken down. But he also heard Dismas on His right ask to be taken up: *“Remember me when You come into Your kingdom”* (Luke 23:42). To which plea came back the divine promise: *“This day you shall be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43).

What kind of freedom was this with which Dismas was satisfied? Can one be nailed to a cross and still be free? Can He Who is pinned to that central tree be the giver of freedom, the guardian and savior of liberty? Then Barabbas saw that the freedom for which he was seeking was not the freedom to be free from something, but that the only true freedom is to be free for something. Now he sees freedom as not an end, but a means. Freedom is for the sake of doing something worth doing.

1. What good is freedom from fear unless there is someone to love?
2. What good is freedom from want unless there is a justice to be served?
3. What good is freedom of speech unless there is a Truth to defend?
4. What good is freedom of religion unless there is a God to worship?

Barabbas now would have given anything to have been Dismas. Dismas was free! He was not. Only nailed love is free; unnailed love can compel and therefore destroy freedom. Hearken, revolutionists!

Follow not Barabbas, the revolutionist who would remake society to remake man; but rather Christ, the Revolutionist Who would remake man in order to remake society.

Believe in violence, yes, but not the violence that draws a sword against a neighbor, a class or race or color, but rather draws it against self, to cut out lust, envy, greed, and hate. Attend ye, believers in violence! Be violent not against fellowman but against selfishness, for *“the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force”* (Matthew 11:12).

Learn, all who prattle about freedom in a land of freedom, that the only true freedom in the world is the freedom to be a saint!

DESPISING THE WORLD

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life they do not find rest in these pleasures without bitterness, weariness, and fear. For they often receive the penalty of sorrow from the very thing whence they believe their happiness comes. And it is just. Since they seek and follow after pleasures without reason, they should not enjoy them without shame and bitterness.

How brief, how false, how unreasonable and shameful all these pleasures are! Yet in their drunken blindness men do not understand this, but like brute beasts incur death of soul for the miserly enjoyment of a corruptible life.

Therefore, My child, do not pursue your lusts, but turn away from your own will. *“Seek thy pleasure in the Lord and He will give thee thy heart’s desires.”*

If you wish to be truly delighted and more abundantly comforted by Me, behold, in contempt of all worldly things and in the cutting off of all base pleasures shall your blessing be, and great consolation shall be given you.

Further, the more you withdraw yourself from any solace of creatures, the sweeter and stronger comfort will you find in Me.

At first you will not gain these blessings without sadness and toil and conflict. Habit already formed will resist you, but it shall be overcome by a better habit.

The flesh will murmur against you, but it will be bridled by fervor of spirit. The old serpent will sting and trouble you, but prayer will put him to flight and by steadfast, useful toil the way will be closed to him.

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BACK TO THE TOMB

(from *The Liturgical Year* by Dom Gueranger)

A night has passed over the tomb, wherein lies buried the Body of the Man-God. Death is triumphant in that silent cave, and holds captive Him that gives life to every creature: but his triumph will soon be at an end. The soldiers may watch, as best they will, over that grave: they cannot hold Jesus prisoner, as soon as the moment fixed for His Resurrection comes. The holy angels are there, profoundly adoring the lifeless Body of Him, whose Blood is to reconcile all things, both on Earth and in Heaven.

Let us also return to the sepulcher, and adore the Body of our buried Lord and Savior, Jesus. Now, at last, we understand what sin has done: by sin, death entered into the world; and it passed upon all men. Though Jesus knew no sin, yet has He permitted death to have dominion over Him, in order that He might make it less bitter to us, and by His Resurrection restore unto us that eternal life, of which we had been deprived by sin.

How gratefully we should appreciate this death of our Jesus! By becoming Incarnate, He became a servant; His death was a still deeper humiliation. The sight of this tomb, wherein His Body lies lifeless and cold, teaches us something far more important than the power of death: it reveals to us the immense, the incomprehensible love of God for man.

He knew that we were to gain by His humiliations; the greater His humiliations, the greater our exaltation: this was His principle, and it led Him to what seems like an excess! Let us, then, love this sacred sepulcher, which is to give us life. We have thanked Him for having died for us upon the cross; let us thank Him, but most feelingly, for having humbled Himself, for our sake, even to the tomb!

And now let us visit the holy Mother, who has passed the night in Jerusalem, going over, in saddest memory, the scenes she has witnessed. Her Jesus has been a victim to every possible insult and cruelty; He has been crucified; His precious Blood has flowed in torrents from those five Wounds; He is dead, and now lies buried in yonder tomb, as though He were but a mere man, yea the most abject of men. How many tears have fallen, during these long hours, from the eyes of the daughter of David! And yet, her Son has not come back to her!

Near her is Magdalene; heart-broken by yesterday’s events, she has no words to tell her grief, for Jesus is gone, and, as she thinks, for ever. The other women, less loved by Jesus than Magdalene, yet most dear to Him, stand around the disconsolate Mother. They have braved every insult and danger in order to remain on Calvary till all was over, and they intend returning there with Magdalene, as soon as the Sabbath is over, to honor the tomb and the Body of Jesus.

John, the adopted son of Mary, and the beloved disciple of Jesus, is oppressed with sorrow. Others, also, of the Apostles and disciples visit the house of mourning. Peter, penitent and humble, fears not to appear before the Mother of mercy. Among the disciples are Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

We may easily imagine the conversation—it is on the sufferings and death of Jesus, and on the ingratitude of the Jews. Iniquity has had its way. He was silent as a lamb under his shearer, and He opened not His mouth. He was taken away from distress and judgment: but His memory shall be in peace.

Thus speak the men; the women are thinking of their morrow’s visit to the sepulchre. The saintliness of Jesus, His goodness, His power, His sufferings, His death—everything is remembered, except His Resurrection, which they had often heard Him say should certainly and speedily take place.

Mary alone lives in expectation of His triumph. In her was verified that expression of the Holy Ghost, where, speaking of the valiant woman, He says: *“Her lamp shall not be put out in the night.”* Her courage fails not, because she knows that the sepulcher must yield up its dead, and her Jesus will rise again to life. St. Paul tells us that our religion is vain, unless we have Faith in the mystery of our Lord’s Resurrection: where was this Faith on the day after Our Lord’s death? In one heart only—and that was Mary’s.

SORROW OVERCOMES SIN

Let Sorrow For Sin Help You Overcome Your Sins

“For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 50:5).

The more accurately we appraise God’s sanctity and the consequent completeness of His condemnation of evil, the more deeply shall we know the malice of sin, and hence, the more sincerely and enduringly shall we repent. But true repentance forces its way down to the soul’s profoundest consciousness very slowly. In the hardened sinner especially, the moral sense is only gradually quickened to anxious sensitiveness over the commission of his sin.

What uncertainty, what vacillation, what irresolution, what doubt, what dimness of vision, what partial hopes, what slow, fitful enlightenment, what conflicting struggles attend such a soul’s effort to rid itself of sin! God’s mercy works to free the soul from its slavery, and sin ever strives to keep it within the narrow confines of its deceitful captivity; God’s grace ever seeks to illumine it, and the darkness of sin ever deepens, to blind its eyes; the soul yearns to be released from its merciless thralldom, yet is so attached to sin, so mired in sin, as to fear that God will not release it.

But grace by degrees refines the soul’s moral sense, clarifies gradually its vision, until it beholds, to the full extent of its limited powers, the hideousness of sin and God’s ineffable mercy; and smiting the soul, as it did St. Paul, with the consciousness of its desolation, grace finally snaps asunder the chains of its degrading slavery.

What an experience was the sense of our first sin! Perhaps our dormant powers were awakened to the consideration of our diseased state by a sermon, by the death of a dear friend, by “the dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3, scene 1, line 56) by a sudden illumination of grace piercing the darkness, and causing the scales to fall from our souls’ eyes (Acts 9:18).

But what a change was effected in our spiritual lives! Even souls schooled in the art of self-discipline, insistently “mortifying by the Spirit the deeds of the flesh” (Romans 8:13), daily subjecting the natural to the supernatural, have experienced this ever-memorable smiting of their spiritual sensibilities over the commission of sin.

How lasting and how profitable is the undying remembrance of such a crisis! How eventful the change wrought by it in the soul’s life! What a complete conversion it worked in the

THE FOURTEENTH STATION JESUS IS PLACED IN THE TOMB

WAIT PATIENTLY IN TIMES OF DARKNESS

While it would be a mistake to think of man’s life as a drawn-out agony, there would be nothing wrong in thinking of it as reflecting the sequence of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Between the pain and death of Good Friday and the triumphant joy of Easter, there is the long, still period in the tomb. No phase of Our Lord’s life and no aspect of His death may be neglected: the time when His body remained in the darkness is not so much an interval that separates as a link that joins. If the Fourteenth Station were just an afterthought, it would have dropped off long ago. Certainly there is much to be learned from it—if only because, for most of us, the work of waiting has more of a place in our lives than that of either ministering, compassionating, or dying to self. The whole of man’s life is a waiting, and if we learn how to do that right, we will have found the answer to the problem of human existence.

Consciousness of being delayed on the way to eternal life differs in people according to temperament and grace. Even in the individual, it is stronger at some times than at others. But for some the homesickness for eternity is an abiding reality that, in its alternations of joyous hope and lonely longing, is all the time preparing them for the blissful moment of death.

To those who look forward in this way, the act of waiting may sometimes occasion more natural impatience than it does supernatural love. When this happens, the soul’s desire will have to be redirected toward the essential and away from the superficial. The superficial is shown up where there is a greater interest in the immediate means, which is death, than in the end, which is God.

Wherever the emphasis is on the detail and not on the whole, there is risk of neurosis: death, either the love of it or the dread of it, can become an obsession. If fear of death can be a severe trial, so also can the love of it. Of the two, the shrinking is more straightforward than the longing: the one is frankly natural and instinctive; the other is either a work of grace or a subtle temptation. It is important to get our attitude right as regards death, because so much of our attitude toward life depends on it. Life, the significant, can be colored by death, the accident. It is one of the few instances of having to ensure the primary by attending to the secondary. Death is secondary, but once it has been attended to, the soul sees life—with all its sufferings, happiness, loves, and contradictions—in perspective. Death is seen as secondary, and no longer as the final goal.

The man who inordinately desires death cannot, however firmly he acknowledges the primacy of life, give a perfect service to God on Earth. Nor can he find happiness. Life in this world, instead of being just a bore, as it is to most moderately unhappy people, will be to him a pain. He will be lonely with the loneliness of exile. It will be hard for him to settle. He will be only half alive, for his desire is elsewhere.

The man, on the other hand, who has made up his mind about death, whether to face it if he fears it or to endure delay if he hungers for it, is in a position to live for God and die for God. He will be able to say with Edith Stein, as she was halted for a few minutes on her way to the gas chambers of Germany, “*We are traveling toward the east, toward the dawn.*” (St. Edith Stein, 1891-1942, Jewish convert to the Catholic Faith who became a Carmelite nun and was martyred in Auschwitz).

To await the dawn of the Resurrection while struggling here with life and death is bound to involve darkness. While “*the night was in the midst of her course*” (Wisdom 18:14), Christ came to redeem the world, and again out of the darkness of night He rises from the dead. And so it must be for man: through the darkness and the cloud he must look for the light of the world. Always waiting, in darkness more or less, feeling unsure and unsafe, yet always trusting: such is the life on Earth of the follower of Christ.

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SORROW OVERCOMES SIN

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soul of the slave of sin, deciding for him, perhaps, his eternal salvation! What a renewal of fervor, what a stimulus to progress in virtue, now seizes the regenerated soul!

The crisis has instilled the spirit of self-reproach, which, in its sincerity—beholding the soul's sinfulness, and realizing that there is much more to be repented of and that to bring to light hidden sins is a positive sign of growth in holiness—broadens and deepens the penitential spirit.

The soul now realizes that its past sorrow has been without the depth that would enable it to atone for its sins, and it loves God all the more from the conviction born of the knowledge of the guilt of these lapses, and God's infinite patience with them. And as the soul's love of Him becomes purer from the consciousness of its guilt, so likewise does its repentance ever increase.

The touchstone of remorse is sorrow of soul inspired by the conviction of sin. It is a sorrow which beholds sin with a vivid and unchanging appreciation of its malice, which constantly contemplates the pain and anguish that sin caused the Redeemer, which gazes with fixed vision on the eternal consequences of sin.

This indispensable prerequisite of the true penitential spirit is ever active in the soul to deepen its detestation and sharpen its vision by associating it more closely with Christ's vision of sin, thereby increasing the soul's hatred of the guilt of sin; this hatred of sin grows with advancing years and becomes perfect only when the soul enters God's eternal court, where sorrow shall be no more.

Godly sorrow aroused by the power of grace working remorse in the soul may be transient or permanent. When the conscience of the sinner is first smitten with the sense of sin, he is impulsive, restless, morose, yearns for self-denial, and almost blinds himself to the mercy of God through a false idea of His justice. This unreasonable sorrow soon passes, under the powerful stimulus of grace, to sorrow that is rational and permanent. The soul foregoes its violence and grows calm; its fear of God is no longer servile but reverential; it becomes more patient with, but not indulgent of, itself; its grief is now silent rather than assertive, because it has penetrated beneath the surface.

Secure in the possession of Him who cannot change, the soul is not eager for fitful sensible fervor. Grounded in humility, it is more vigilant, but also not dejected when it falls. Wholly diffident of itself, it clothes itself with the very strength of God by its childlike trust in Him. Sorrow springing from remorse may,

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The Christian virtues are those that, like the plant called the Marvel of Peru, grow mostly in the dark. Here anyway, in the sealed tomb where the body of Christ has been laid, do we see the fulfillment of the words already quoted about the ways of the just man being shut up with square stones (Lamentations 3:9). If stones, shutting out the light, blocked the entry to Christ's sepulcher, those who claim to follow Christ should have nothing to complain about in the darkness that surrounds them and the blocking of their desires.

If we have mentioned the Christian virtues as flourishing in opposition — in what might be taken to be an alien element, but which in fact is the element most conducive to growth — we should note that even pagan writers admit the value of perseverance in darkness and of endeavors unrealized. Classical legend gives instances of heroes who have gained spiritual stature precisely in the pursuit of quests that were doomed to failure from the start.

We go wandering through life, muddling up our crosses and slopping through our pleasures, and have nothing to show for it before God. But if all along, in spite of having fallen so often for temptation, we have wanted virtue rather than vice, God rather than self, charity rather than uncharity, we shall be nearer to God at the end than when we began. We may feel no nearer than when we first started out on our voyage of discovery, and probably we feel farther away because we see in retrospect the risks we have run and the wrecks we have been responsible for; yet by the time we die, we shall be the wiser for our odyssey — wiser because more humble; wiser because we have suffered and experienced; wiser because we have been drawing nearer to Wisdom itself.

Once, while meditating at this Fourteenth Station, a man in whom the desire for eternity was mixed with a strong dislike of living prayed earnestly that the day of his release might be hastened. In the meantime (he said), he would be ready enough to endure the Cross and the darkness; it was this endless waiting (he told God) that he could not face. Before he knelt down for the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory Be, he was given interiorly to understand that the waiting was the darkness and the Cross.

But it takes Faith to see the Cross in the dark — particularly in the not-so-obviously-dark night of waiting. It takes Faith to see the point of that day and night in the tomb. Reason would suggest that, with all His gifts, it was a waste of time for Christ to be dead when He could have been living. He was the Lord of life; He had only to say the word, and He need never have seen death at all.

Always we are being driven back upon the truth that the seed must die if it is to live, that a man must lose his life if he is to find it. It takes Faith to see the fruit of futility. So important in the soul's development is suffering that, like prayer, it must mostly be exercised in the dark. If we could see our sufferings clearly, we would want to handle them ourselves — just as, if we could see our prayer clearly, we would want to handle it ourselves — so God must throw over them, over our sufferings and prayers, the covering of night. And in the night, we think of them only as rubbish, as waste material to be thrown away. But none of it is thrown away. God fortunately sees to that.

As well as darkness, in the tomb was silence. In the work of waiting, silence and darkness seem to go together. They heralded the act of creation, so it is not surprising that they should accompany the act of redemption. Before the Nativity there was silence with the darkness: "While all things were in quiet silence . . . Thy almighty Word leapt down" (Wisdom 18:14-15). Silence also plays its part with darkness before the Resurrection. "It is good to wait with silence," says Jeremias, "for the salvation of God" (Lamentations 3:26).

When we come to the deepest of our sufferings, we find we have nothing to say. God must know what we feel and man cannot — so why speak? For many, the inability to sort out and articulate is a silent suffering; for others, the desire to cry out is stunned to silence by the suffering itself. Either way, it is the Passion, not smothering or crushing, hut rather stilling and making ready. In silence and hope we spend our vigil until the light of the Resurrection breaks through the dark.

SORROW OVERCOMES SIN (continued from previous page)

in its twofold aspect, be likened to a river swelling and overflowing its banks, sweeping all before it in its fury, but by degrees subsiding as it sinks into the absorbent soil.

But permanent sorrow has its stages. Even in its advanced state, there is often a trace of the force and assertiveness of its first manifestation. As the soul becomes more keenly receptive to grace, its sense of sin grows, and bitter sorrow makes itself felt at the sight of even slight faults, as it formerly was convulsed by poignant grief for serious sins. The soul's consciousness of sin has been so quickened, its vision is now so sharp, its appreciation of the sanctity of God and the severity of His justice is now so true, that it is transfixed with fear at the least violation of His law.

In the warmth of growing faith, habitual, quieter, and deeper sorrow gradually gains the ascendancy, and, slowly but surely, it leads the soul to the heights of holiness.

To suppose that sorrow does not exist because it is not demonstrative is a fallacy. Sorrow is very much akin to love. In its first fervor, love is vehement, yearns to express itself, is urgent to prove its sincerity. When it grows calm and wholly possesses the soul, becoming an unflinching source of kindness, self-sacrifice, and inviolable fidelity to duty, love is then the soul's sublimest passion.

At first, it was only a fleeting emotion; now it is a fixed state following the dictates of reason, and thus befitting an intelligent creature. Likewise, sorrow for sin, which divests repentance of excitability and makes it conform to the stem law of duty, far from languishing, acquires a more secure hold on the principles of the higher life.

The striving of the soul to rid itself of sin is the best evidence of the progress of its remorse. We are more certain of our sin than of our penitence. We know our sin directly; only by inference from its practical results can we prove our penitence. Only when the conviction of our sin is so rooted that it touches with healing the very source of our sin — only then are we sincerely repentant.

True repentance is easily discerned. Mortification is its soul. When we repeatedly resist our ruling passion, when we remove the causes that stir it into action, when we lay the axe to the root of sin; when we are proof against the alluring voice of self-love, which ever seeks to discredit the claims of conscience; when we bridle the triple concupiscence of the world, the flesh, and the Devil; when the Cross is for us the test and measure of success — then and then only are we truly penitent.

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DAILY ROSARY MEDITATION They Are Still Crucifying Him!

It Never Stops!

We read in *The Secret of the Rosary*, by St. Louis de Montfort, that Our Lord Himself used the idea of being crucified again. Blessed Alan de la Roche, a Dominican, was saying Mass one day when he was given a special warning by Our Lord, Who spoke to him from the Sacred Host.

"How can you crucify Me again so soon?" Jesus said. "What did you say, Lord?" asked Blessed Alan, horrified. "You crucified Me once before by your sins," answered Jesus, "and I would willingly be crucified again rather than have My Father offended by the sins you used to commit. You are crucifying Me again now because you have all the learning and understanding that you need to preach My Mother's Rosary, and you are not doing it. If you only did that, you could teach many souls the right path and lead them away from sin. But you are not doing it, and so you yourself are guilty of the sins that they commit!" (St. Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*).

What Our Lord said to Blessed Alan de la Roche, Our Lady says at La Salette: *"The priests, ministers of my Son, the priests, by their wicked lives, by their irreverence and their impiety in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries, by their love of money, their love of honors and pleasures, the priests have become cesspools of impurity. Yes, the priests are asking for vengeance, and vengeance is hanging over their heads. Woe to the priests and to those dedicated to God, who are crucifying my Son again by their unfaithfulness and their wicked lives!"*

Our Lady similarly said to Sr. Lucia of Fatima that she was sad at the lack of response by mankind to her request for more prayers in general, more Rosaries in particular and more sacrifices. Sr. Lucia states: *"The Blessed Virgin is very sad, because no one heeds her message; neither the good nor the bad. The good continue on with their life of virtue and apostolate, but they do not unite their lives to the message of Fatima. Sinners keep following the road of evil because they do not see the terrible chastisement about to befall them"* (Sr. Lucia to Fr. Fuentes, Dec. 26th, 1957).

St. Louis takes this idea of crucifying Our Lord anew—still further. He states that many souls have a false devotion to God, Our Lord and Our Lady in particular, and that this is akin to crucifying Our Lord once again: *"Presumptuous and impenitent devotees, hiding under her mantle, with the Scapular round their necks and the Rosary in their hands, cry out, 'Blessed Virgin! Good Mother! Hail Mary!' and yet at the same time they are crucifying Jesus Christ and tearing His flesh anew by their sins. It is a great tragedy, but from the ranks of Our Lady's most holy confraternities souls are falling into the fires of Hell"* (St. Louis de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*, "Forty First Rose").

St. John Vianney takes the same attitude in many of his sermons. Here is but one example of many possible examples. *"Carry on, my good mother; you are only a blind hypocrite; you have only the appearance of virtue. You set your mind at rest with the thought that you make some visits to the Blessed Sacrament; without any doubt that is a good thing; but your daughter is at a dance; but your daughter is at the cabaret with libertines, and they will be spewing out nothing but one kind or another of indecency; but your daughter, tonight, is in a place where she should not be. Go away, blind and abandoned mother, go out and leave your prayers. Do you not see that you are doing as the Jews did, who bent the knee before Jesus Christ to make a semblance of adoring Him? So, then, you come to adore God, while your children are out to crucify Him. Poor blind creature, you do not know either what you say or what you do. Your prayers are only an insult which you offer to God. Begin by going to find your daughter, who is losing her soul; then you may return to God to ask Him for your conversion"* (St. John Vianney, Sermons, "Your Prayers Are Only An Insult To God").

St. Louis de Montfort, when speaking of what a true devotion to Our Lady has to be, shoots down a whole host of false devotions—one of being that of "Pre-

SEVEN LAST WORDS

SEVENTH PHRASE: *“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”* (Luke 23:46)

Our Lord called out His final words in a great voice; meeting death head-on. Rather than wait for death to come and take Him, He used His perfect freedom and chose to die. There are two kinds of freedom.

There is a freedom from something and freedom for something. Most people prefer the first kind of freedom because it is easier. Freedom from vegetables, freedom from oppression. The second kind of freedom is much more difficult because it implies a responsibility that can often be a burden. Freedom to choose, freedom to change. To understand the supreme nature of this kind of freedom we have to look at Christ on the cross.

There are only three things we can do with our freedom. We can direct it selfishly towards ourselves, we can scatter it among a thousand trivial things, and we can surrender it to God. The first option is by far the most damaging because when we believe we are free to act as badly as we choose, we become slaves to our addictions.

As Archbishop Fulton Sheen says, *“boundless liberty leads to boundless tyranny”*. Uncontrolled freedom will always lead a person into slavery. The second alternative can be found in people who have no direction. Their fleeting desires change without there ever being an internal change of the soul, and they are unable to choose between the many attractions and temptations in life. But there is hope because there is a searching. Those who are empty can be filled, but people who are intoxicated with their own egos have no room for God.

The final choice is to surrender yourself to God and His will. Only when you have displaced the “me” can you find the perfect freedom that Christ had as He breathed His last. It was His self-giving sacrifice that made possible the Resurrection.

Conclusion

What would your seven last words be? The Seven Last Words of Christ are filled with meaning and help to establish the relationship between Christians and the Church, Our Blessed Mother and all Christians, and Christ and His family. To see how these last words relate to Mary’s first words, I encourage you to read Seven Words of Jesus and Mary. Another excellent resource on the Seven Last Words from Fulton Sheen is The Cross and the Beatitudes. In a similar style, he compares the Last Words with the Beatitudes that Jesus preached during the Sermon on the Mount.

sumptuous Devotees” of whom he has this to say:

“Presumptuous devotees are sinners abandoned to their passions, or lovers of the world, who under the fair name of Christians and clients of our Blessed Lady conceal pride, avarice, impurity, drunkenness, anger, swearing, detraction, injustice or some other sin. They sleep in peace in the midst of their bad habits, without doing any violence to themselves to correct their faults, under the pretext that they are devout to the Blessed Virgin. They promise themselves that God will pardon them; that they will not be allowed to die without confession; and that they will not be lost eternally because they say the Rosary, because they fast on Saturdays, because they belong to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary, or wear the Scapular. They say that God is good and merciful; that He has not made us to condemn us everlastingly; that no man is without sin; that they shall not die without confession; that one good act of contrition at the hour of death is enough. Nothing in Christianity is more detestable than this diabolical presumption. For how can we truly say that we love and honor our Blessed Lady when by our sins we are pitilessly piercing, wounding, crucifying and outraging Jesus Christ, her Son?”

Our Lord told us that the Cross is an indispensable part of following Him: *“And He said to all: ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me!’”* (Luke 9:23) *“and he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me!”* (Matthew 10:38). However, it is not just the carrying of the Cross that Jesus wants of us—He wants us to be crucified with Him to that Cross, otherwise it is like making a meal but never eating it—as St. Paul says: *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer”* (Romans 6:6) ... *“They that are Christ’s, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences”* (Galatians 5:24). Which is why St. Paul cries out: *“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6:14).

Strictly speaking, the Crucifixion of Christ was not necessary. For though *“Christ loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it”* (Ephesians 5:25), He could have saved us with one drop of His Precious Blood—the Circumcision would have been more than enough. Yet He was ‘fanatical’ about proving His love for us, and even called Peter *“Satan”* for trying to prevent Him from proving that love through His Passion and Crucifixion: *“Jesus, turning, said to Peter: ‘Go behind me, Satan! Thou art a scandal unto Me: because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men!’”* (Matthew 16:23).

At the end of Peter’s life, we see him fleeing from the persecutions that were going on in Rome under Emperor Nero. As he is leaving Rome, through one of its gates, He encounters Our Lord (who miraculously appeared to him) coming into Rome. Peter asks Jesus where He is going—*“Quo vadis Domine?”* Our Lord replies that He is going to Rome to be crucified! Peter understands that his way is the wrong way! Peter turns around and goes back to be crucified!

St. Alphonsus Liguori tells us: *“Jesus Christ could save us without dying on the cross, and without suffering. One drop of his blood would be sufficient for our redemption. Even a prayer offered to his Eternal Father would be sufficient; because, on account of his divinity, his prayer would be of infinite value, and would therefore be sufficient for the salvation of the world, and of a thousand worlds. To show how much he loved us, he wished to shed not only a part of his blood, but the entire of it, by way of torments.”*

St. Alphonsus continues: *“Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends’* (John 15:13). *To show his love for us, what more could the Son of God do than die for us? What more can one man do for another than give his life for him? St. Francis of Assisi appeared to be unable to think of anything but the Passion of Jesus Christ; and, in thinking of it, he continually shed tears, so that by his constant weeping he became nearly blind. Being found one day weeping and groaning at the foot of the crucifix, he was asked the cause of his tears and lamentations. He replied: ‘I weep over the sorrows and ignominies of my Lord. And what makes me weep still more is, that the men for whom He has suffered so much live in forgetfulness of Him.’”*