

Good Friday Meditations on the 7 Last Words

Priests' Manual

For Use With The Booklet

“MASS OF THE PRESANCTIFIED SEVEN LAST WORDS”

Meditations and Prayers on the Seven Last Words

In Large Type—Corresponds with the small-type Booklet for Congregational Use, containing identical Meditations,
Prayers, Hymns and Short Way of the Cross.

The Meditations contained in this Manual can also be used instead of formal Discourses with our Booklet “Tre-Ora”

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STAND—All Sing— FAITHFUL CROSS

Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be:
Sweetest Wood, and sweetest Iron,
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.

Sing my tongue, the glorious battle
With completed victory rife:
And above the Cross's trophy
Tell the triumph of the strife:
How the world's Redeemer conquer'd
By the offering of His life.

Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be:

-OR--

STABAT MATER

At the cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last:

Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,
All His bitter anguish bearing,
Now at length the sword had passed.

THE PROPHECY IN THE OLD LAW

PRIEST— ALL KNEEL —I will pour out upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of Grace and Prayer, and they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for an only Son, and they shall grieve over Him as the manner is to grieve for the death of the First-born. And they shall say to Him: “What are those wounds in the midst of Thy hands?” And He shall say: “With these I was wounded in the house of them that loved Me.” (Zach. XIII. 6).

PEOPLE—Redeemer of the world, * have mercy on us.

PRIEST—We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee.

PEOPLE—Because by Thy holy cross * Thou hast redeemed the world. *

THE FULFILLMENT IN THE NEW LAW

PRIEST— — ALL KNEEL —

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. And so they took Jesus and led Him away.

And bearing the cross for himself, he went forth to the place called the Skull, in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side and Jesus in the center.

And Pilate also wrote an inscription and had it put on the cross. And there was written,

“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

Many of the Jews therefore read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Greek and in Latin. (St. John XIX. 16-20.)

PEOPLE—Redeemer of the world, * have mercy on us.

PRIEST—We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee. PEOPLE—Because by Thy holy cross * Thou hast redeemed the world. *

PRIEST—Let us pray: — PRIEST and PEOPLE—Look upon me, * good and gentle Jesus, * while before Thy face I humbly kneel, * and with burning soul pray and beseech Thee, * to fix deep in my heart * lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, * true contrition for my sins, * and a firm purpose of amendment, * the while contemplating with great love * and tender pity Thy five wounds, * pondering upon them within me, * while I call to mind the words which David * Thy Prophet said they have numbered all my bones.” *

INTRODUCTORY MEDITATION

PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

“And when they had come to the place called the Skull, they crucified Him there”. (St. Luke 23. 33.) With profound reverence and sincere contrition of heart, we gather here to meditate on the seven last words of our Saviour on the cross. That we may better dispose ourselves to derive choicest graces from this meditation, let us go back in spirit to the first Good Friday and in spirit take our position on the hill of Calvary, called the Skull. Here we become spectators of the world’s supreme drama—the crucifixion of our Lord. We are not alone. A large congregation has assembled, not to pray and worship, but to

blaspheme and persecute. The trial of Jesus had come to an end. Pontius Pilate, the cowardly Roman governor, had pronounced the death-sentence: "Take Him away and crucify Him". No time was lost. In anticipation of His certain doom, a ponderous cross had been selected for Him. Its crushing weight—symbol of the world's guilt—now bears heavily on His bruised shoulders, and we see a dismal procession now winding its cruel tortuous way up the steep and rocky road to the summit of the hill. No death-march ever had its equal. Crowned with thorns, covered with wounds, streaming with blood, and staggering under His burden, comes the Saviour, followed by the two condemned thieves, all three tightly bound and closely guarded. Pressing close upon them are the numerous enemies of Jesus, a jostling mob, rending the air with frightful yells, curses and blasphemies.

The procession comes to a halt. It has reached its appointed destination. A scene of unsurpassed brutality unfolds before our eyes. Spurred on by the gloating Scribes, Pharisees and high priests, the Roman soldiers lay hold of the cross and drop it to the ground. Shamelessly, they strip Jesus of His clothing and with it they tear the flesh that clings to His inner garments. Ghastly wounds are reopened and streams of blood flow afresh. Thus denuded, He is thrown upon the cross and made secure. One of the executioners places a large spike upon His right hand. The heavy hammer rises and falls with horrible precision and the iron nail crashes through flesh and bone, sinews and nerves. The left hand and then the feet of the sacred Victim undergo the same excruciating torture. Behold the innocent Lamb of God upon the altar of the cross! With no little effort, the unwieldy frame bearing its precious treasure is lifted on high. The lower beam is dropped with a dull thud into the hole prepared for it and fixed firmly in the ground. Thereupon, the two thieves are crucified: one on the cross to His right, and the other on a cross to His left.

It is midday. Jesus commences His appalling agony. Through Him surge all the throes of death ever experienced by mankind. For three seemingly interminable hours He endures inexpressible tortures of body and soul. Meanwhile with savage triumph, His enemies close in on Him to watch Him suffer and die. There too, beneath the cross are Mary of Cleophas, Mary Magdalen, John the beloved disciple and—Mary, the Mother of Jesus. With Mary as our guide and monitor, we also shall draw close to Jesus and lay our docile hearts at His feet, to consider some details of those last hours of His sacred agony and to carry home with us the lessons He teaches from His pulpit of pain and from the blood-stained altar of His undying love.

He speaks seven times. The words are few, the sermons are short. But the sweet strains of those divine utterances, like music from heaven, will echo and re-echo in grateful hearts until time will be no more. 1. He preaches and exemplifies the sublime duty of forgiving our enemies. 2. He promises paradise to the penitent thief and to all repentant sinners. 3. He commissions Mary to be our spiritual Mother. 4. He shows us the frightfulness of being deprived of the Beatific Vision. 5. He reveals His infinite thirst for our salvation. 6. He proclaims the consummation of the world's redemption. 7. He instructs us to commend our souls to His heavenly Father as we pass from this world into eternity. —May He grant us light and grace -to learn and put into practice these great lessons of His infinite love. Let us now pray and dispose our hearts to derive all possible graces from the consideration of the last words of our Saviour on the Cross.

PRAYER TO KNOW AND LOVE JESUS CRUCIFIED
PEOPLE—— ALL KNEEL ——

O my Crucified Saviour, * perfect Model and gentle Instructor * in the difficult art of suffering, * teach me to know the wise folly of the cross * and the foolish wisdom of the world. * Hitherto I have shunned Thy invitation * to mourn with Thee * and Thy sorrowful Mother. * I dreaded the road to Calvary. * I feared to follow in Thy footsteps. * But where I sought comfort, * I found only bitterness and vexation of spirit. * Where I looked for light, * I was plunged into darkness. * Where I hoped to find the fullness of joy, * I experienced most painful emptiness. * And now when I see Thee, * crucified and overwhelmed with sufferings * out of love for me, * my heart is filled with the most tender compassion for Thee * and with the most lively hatred of sin. * Because of my transgressions,

* Thy heavenly Father did not spare Thee, * although Thou art His beloved Son. * He demanded Thy sufferings and death * to satisfy His offended justice and holiness. * Sin, then, * in the eyes of Thy heavenly Father, * O my Jesus, * is a greater evil * than Thy Passion and death. * With most profound and heartfelt sorrow, * therefore, * I repent of the sins of my whole life * because they have caused Thee * Thy so bitter sufferings and so painful death. * I weep over those sins * because I have repaid Thy infinite love * with heinous ingratitude. * I weep over them * because they have so grievously offended Thee, * the Supreme Good, * who art so deserving of all my love. * I firmly resolve to die * rather than offend Thee again. * Nevertheless, * O my Jesus, * I tremble at my great weakness.

* My wicked passions and evil inclinations * tempt me violently to sin. * I am fearful of the future; * yet firmly do I hope for every good * when I reflect on Thy holy Passion * and place my confidence in Thy infinite merits. * Henceforth, * the constant memory of Thy Passion and Death * will be the unfailing source of power * to free me more and more * from the fatal dominion of my evil inclinations. * O Crucified Jesus, * grant me the grace to make every sacrifice * to please Thee * and to imitate the virtues * I see Thee practice on the cross. * Grant * that as I advance in age, * I may also grow in wisdom and virtue and grace * before God and man. * Grant that I may submit my will to Thy holy will, * in all I do and suffer. * That I may know no other freedom, * no other joy, no greater good, * than to live and die in union with Thy holy will. * In the past I have had so little time for Thee. * I repent of it. * I now resolve with Thy help * often to meditate with grateful heart, * on the wonders of Thy divine love, * manifested in the mysteries of Thy sacred Passion. * O Mary, Mother of Sorrows, my Mother, * obtain for me this grace, * that meditating on the sufferings of Thy divine Son * I may be ever more closely united with Him and Thee. Amen. *

STAND—All Sing—

God, his Maker, sorely grieving,
That the first-made Adam fell,
When he ate the fruit of sorrow,
Whose reward was death and hell,
Noted then this Wood, the ruin
Of the ancient wood to quell.

Sweetest Wood, and sweetest Iron,
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.

OR-

Oh, how sad and sore distressed
Was that Mother, highly blessed,
Of the sole begotten One'

Christ above in torment hangs
She beneath beholds the pangs
Of her dying glorious Son

THE FIRST WORD ON THE CROSS

“FATHER FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO”

PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

The love of our enemies and the full pardon of their offences is the supreme test of Christian charity. It is so essential for salvation and so indispensable for fellowship with Christ that He exemplifies it most perfectly and makes it the subject of His First Word on the cross. Surrounding Him on all sides were His enemies gloating over His humiliation and triumphing over His apparent defeat and destruction. They come forward to the cross and vomit forth the most hideous blasphemy and defiance: “If Thou art the

King of the Jews,” they say, “save Thyself.” “Thou that destroyest the temple and in three days buildest it up again; come down from the cross and save Thyself He saved others, if He be the Christ, let Him save Himself.” How does Jesus accept their challenge? Does He call upon the earth to open wide its chasms to engulf them? Does He command the mountains to leap from their foundations to annihilate them? No! He utters no reproach. He seems not to hear their execrations. He raises His compassionate eyes to heaven and says “Father, forgive them.” As supreme Judge He forbears all judgment and becomes their all-powerful Advocate.

“Father forgive them.” Forgive, I beseech you all my enemies and all their offences without exception. Forgive Pilate who condemned Me that he might retain the friendship of Caesar. Forgive Herod who treated Me as a fool. Forgive the Scribes and Pharisees and high priests who instigated Thy people to turn against Me, who plotted to destroy the work of My Redemption. Forgive the executioners who scourged and tortured Me and nailed Me to the cross. Forgive, oh Father, forgive all who ever committed a grievous sin and thereby took part in shedding My Blood and transfixing Me to this cross of infamy and pain.

Not only does Jesus plead for the unreserved pardon of His enemies, but He directs attention solely to the extenuating circumstances of their guilt. “Father”, He says, “forgive them, for they know not what they do.” “They know, indeed, that I am suffering and dying innocently; but they do not know that they are crucifying their Redeemer and the Lord of glory.” In this sublime prayer of Christ, we find not only the spoken word of pardon and the alleged reason for a merciful judgment in behalf of His sworn enemies, but we also clearly perceive in that cry for pardon a solemn avowal of His infinite love for them—the all - impelling motive why the heavenly Father should withhold no blessings from them. “It is true”, our Lord seems to say, “they are offering Thee a monstrous insult; but is not my love for Thee and for them infinitely greater than their immeasurable guilt? Therefore, punish Me in their stead and accept My Sacrifice of atonement that they may be reconciled with Thee. Convert their hearts from filthy dens of Satan into holy temples of the sanctifying Spirit. Snatch them from the road of perdition and lead them to the path of repentance and salvation. They have been created to Our Image; through My Redemption let them once more be partakers of Our divine Nature and regard them as Thy children and My beloved brethren.” What infinite generosity in this noble appeal of Jesus for His enemies!

Dear Christian, we cannot pretend that it is an easy matter to love our enemies according to the teaching and example of our Lord. But what the saints and all true followers of Christ have done, you also can do. Jesus forbids us to follow the ways of the world in seeking revenge, and demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He emphatically says: “Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who makes the sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Would you be a worthy child of your heavenly Father? Would you wish to have a sure pledge of your predilection to salvation? Then follow this high standard of perfection. Forgive, love and do good to your enemies. No small reward is attached to the fulfillment of this command Faith tells you that the evils which you suffer at the hands of your fellowmen are blessings in disguise, pearls of priceless worth, redeemable in eternity. Faith assures you that you need fear no punishment from God if you heed these words of our Lord who clearly says: “If you forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences.” How consoling for us who have so often offended! Charity covers a multitude of sins.

No Christian can credit himself with having reached the perfection of fraternal charity unless he is considerate and lenient in judging his enemies. Therefore let your sentiments be conformable to the generous sentiments of Jesus Christ. If you cannot excuse the evil action of your neighbor, excuse at least his intention. And if his intention cannot be looked upon as entirely free from blame, excuse him on the plea of violence of his temptation. And if you find absolutely nothing in him that speaks in his favor, then say to yourself: Though there seem to be nothing but evil in him, no doubt there is much good in him that I do not perceive. Who knows, he may one day be a great saint? To God alone belongs final judgment. “Do not judge, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.” Father, forgive them, for they know not

what they do! Henceforth may we merit full pardon of all our sins when we recite the Lord's Prayer and say: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive all who trespass against us! Amen.

PRAYER TO OBTAIN PARDON FOR OURSELVES AND ENEMIES

PEOPLE—— ALL KNEEL ——

O most amiable and merciful Jesus, * when Thou wast dying on the cross * amidst incredible sufferings; * when thou was mocked, * derided and blasphemed, * Thou didst say: * “Father forgive them, * for they know not what they do.” * This prayer, I know, was intended * not only for Thy contemptible enemies * who despised and tortured Thee, * but was intended * for all poor sinners. * Who has grieved Thee more than myself? * What would have been my fate * hadst Thou judged me * with all the rigor of Thy divine justice? * I deserved to be cast from Thee forever. * But in Thy infinite mercy, * Thou didst plead * and obtain pardon for me, * from Thy heavenly Father. * Would that I had the voice of an angel * that I might gratefully sing Thy praises * for all time and eternity. * O Lord Jesus, * do Thou in Thy boundless clemency, * continue to show me * Thy divine consideration and mercy, * until I am inseparably united with Thee in heaven. * In my weakness, * surrounded as I am * by so many temptations and dangers to salvation, * I turn to Thee who art my only strength, * my only hope, * my only security. * With Thy help I know I shall be victorious * and gain the crown of eternal life. * Grant me this help I beseech Thee * despite my great unworthiness. *

It is indeed just and proper, * O Lord, * that while I hope and beg for pardon for my sins, * I also appeal to Thee * to pardon my enemies. * Most ungrateful should I be, * if I should be unwilling * to forgive, from my heart, * all the offences of my fellowmen. * I should be like the unmerciful servant * mentioned in the Gospel, * to whom his lord * generously forgave a whole debt * of incredible size, * and then, * unmindful of the great goodness of his lord, * refused to forgive * even a trifling debt of his fellow servant. * By such conduct * I should be self-condemned to judgment without mercy. * I should thus renounce * the great blessing and high honor * of being Thy disciple. * I should fail to imitate Thy example and follow Thy Command. * Let no such misfortune befall me, * O merciful Saviour. * Henceforth * I will forgive from my heart * all who offend me. * I will strive to forget all injuries, * great or small. * In my thoughts and in my words and in my actions, * and in all my judgments * no matter how difficult it may seem to me, * I will endeavor to show * that I love my enemies. * I know that of myself, * I cannot succeed. * But with Thy ready grace, I know * that I can do this perfectly and joyfully. * Through Thy all-powerful intercession, * O my beloved Mother, Mary, * with thy help I will bring this firm resolve * to a happy conclusion. * Obtain this grace for me. Amen. *

STAND—All Sing—

For this work of our salvation
Needs must have its order so,
And the manifold deceiver's
Art by art would overthrow,
And from thence would bring the healing,
Whence the insult of the foe.

Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be:

-OR-

Is there one who would not weep,
Whelmed in miseries so deep,
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Can the human heart refrain
From partaking in her pain,
In that Mother's pain untold?

THE SECOND WORD ON THE CROSS

“AMEN, I SAY TO THEE, THIS DAY THOU SHALT BE WITH ME IN PARADISE”

PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

Consider the Second Word of Jesus on the cross. It is replete with hope and consolation for all truly repentant sinners. Two thieves were crucified with our Saviour; one to the right and the other to the left. Both were guilty of many heinous crimes; both deserving of capital punishment. Yet we designate the one a good thief and the other a bad thief, the one a saint and the other a reprobate. A striking example of the co-operation with grace on the one hand, and, the stubborn rejection of grace on the other.

Embittered over his unhappy lot, the bad thief fumed and cursed, and defied Jesus to prove His Divinity by working a miracle: “If Thou art the Christ”, he blasphemed, “save Thyself and us.” Jesus remained silent. It would have been of no avail to answer the wretched sinner. He had placed himself beyond the pale of redemption. But, Dismas, the good thief, rebuked him saying: “Dost thou not even fear God, seeing that thou art under the same sentence? And we indeed guilty, for we are receiving what our deeds deserved, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then addressing himself to Jesus, he says: “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.” Turning His thorn-crowned head to the converted robber, the Saviour answers: “Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.” The first fruits of the Redemption are accomplished! Dismas, the life-long sinner is now a saint. He was canonized by Christ Himself. His feast is celebrated by the Church, annually, April 24.

Grace is God's transcendent gift to man. It surpasses all other gifts we receive from our Creator. He lavishes it upon us in superabundance. Daily, in countless ways, it knocks at the door of our heart, seeking entrance. It is present to us when we are moved by an impulse to do good; it is offered to us in prayer, sermons, Holy Mass, Holy Communion, and in the good example of our neighbor. It is the unseen treasure concealed in sickness, poverty, death of a beloved one; in every trial sent us by an all-wise Providence. Like the good thief we can correspond with it and permit it to work great wonders in our soul.

How the first efficacious grace of conversion came to the good thief, we do not know. It may have been a single glance bestowed on him by our Saviour. But we do know that he placed no obstacle in its way. Once grace gained entrance into his soul, it worked a marvelous transformation within him and was succeeded by a host of added graces. We now see the one - time criminal exercise the most heroic virtues under the most trying conditions. He believes with the invincible faith of the martyrs. We see him recognizing Christ, confessing Christ, defending Christ. Although he beholds Christ crucified as a malefactor, he acknowledges Him to be the King of heaven. Hope is there: for with unshaken confidence he asks his Redeemer to remember him in His Kingdom. Love is there: for he reproaches his former companion because of his blasphemies and thus proclaims the innocence of Jesus before the Jews and His hostile executioners. He espouses the cause of Christ bravely and fearlessly when all others desert or rise up against the Lord. He becomes a model of deep humility and sincere contrition; for he says: “We are receiving the just punishment for our misdeeds.” Truly his is a miraculous conversion! What was his reward? Paradise! Possession of the Beatific Vision! When? Not on the Day of Judgment to come. Not in the distant future. Not after spending a long time in purgatory. But this very day! This very first Good Friday, he will enjoy the bliss of paradise with his Saviour! O blessed effects of grace! O blessed mercy and liberality of the compassionate Heart of Jesus!

When you study the image of our Saviour on the cross, you will observe that His sacred thorn-crowned head is turned away from the impenitent thief on His left and is inclined towards the repentant thief, Dismas, on His right. What an inspiration and encouragement in this gesture of our Lord for all who desire to abandon sin and the maxims and practices of the world! He seems to say: “In this penitent thief, O Christian soul, you have a powerful patron, an ideal model. Should the memory of your sins haunt and discourage you, learn from him how to trust in My infinite mercy. Invoke him with confidence and he who prized My boundless mercy so highly, will obtain mercy for you also. Endeavor earnestly to imitate

his fearless faith, his unwavering confidence, his deep humility, his ardent love, his generous profession of My Divinity, his sublime patience in suffering.

“In one point only you must not imitate him. You must not delay your conversion until the hour of death. In this respect the good thief can be excused—his life was spent amidst most unfavorable surroundings. You can have no such excuse. Do not postpone to a later date what your eternal welfare demands now. Do you perhaps feel the need of a general confession? Are certain restitutions to be made? Are there dangerous occasions of sin to be given up? Are you enslaved by some shameful habit of unchastity, immoderate indulgence in drink, undue frequentation of taverns, theaters and other indecent places of amusement? Are you unwilling to forgive injuries fully and with your whole heart? Are scandals to be repaired? Examine your conscience carefully to see if there be anything seriously wrong in your conduct. If so, repent now most sincerely and resolve this moment, here at the foot of the cross, to change your manner of life! Do so without delay! It is not within your power to choose the hour of your death. God alone is Creator of life and sole Master of death. Will your last hour come when you least expect it? Will you turn a deaf ear to My loving appeal, with the feeble excuse of numerous worldly cares and occupations? Only one thing is necessary—save your soul! “For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?”

PRAYER FOR TRUE CONVERSION AND HIGH ESTEEM OF GRACE
PEOPLE— ALL KNEEL —

O my Saviour, * Thou art truly the Good Shepherd * who goes in search of the lost sheep. * As I kneel before the cross and reflect * upon the wonderful conversion of the good thief, * I begin to understand the consoling words * which Thou didst speak in Thy public life: * “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, * will draw all things to Myself.” * From the earth and its sinful ways * Thou didst lift up the wayward criminal * to suffer and die with Thee upon the cross * and hast chosen him * to be the first fruits of Thy Redemption. * No sooner does he return to Thee, * by corresponding with Thy grace, * than Thou receivest him again, * as a loving Father * opening Thy arms to Thy prodigal son. * Neither dost Thou remember any more * the multitude or grievousness of his sins * when Thou seest in him * the good will and sincere desire to amend his life. * This repentant thief, * once an abominable example of evil to so many, * becomes through his wonderful conversion, * a most shining example for all. * What joy and happiness must now be his in paradise, * as he praises the boundless goodness of Thy Sacred Heart, * in union with all the heavenly court! *

Alas! * How this poor converted thief puts me to shame * when I recall Thy many graces * which I have boldly resisted or corresponded with so feebly. * Daily, hourly, Thou hast lavished them upon me. * Never on earth shall I know * their number, greatness and variety. * They should have made me a great saint. * Yet I see myself guilty of many sins * and ruled by unmortified passion. * Had the hapless thief been illumined * with an equal number of graces from his youth, * what glorious fruits of holiness * would he not have brought forth? * But no sinner, be he ever so abandoned * need be discouraged, * when he turns to Thee with contrite heart * and reflects upon Thy infinite mercy. * Neither will I be disheartened. * But trusting in Thy mercy * and in the powerful intercession of the good thief, * I resolve to make up for my mistakes in the past. * O my Crucified Saviour, * do Thou grant me, a miserable sinner, * a grace like to that * which Thou didst grant him. * Cast upon me but one of those gracious looks * which will convert me thoroughly! * Speak but one of those words of mercy and pardon! * Say but the word and my soul shall be healed! * Remember not the sins of my youth, * but wash them out, in Thy precious blood! * With my whole heart and soul I am sorry * for having offended Thee! * Create a new heart within me! * Give me strength, * nevermore, * to neglect or abuse Thy graces; * but in Thy liberality * continue to favor me with their riches. * I firmly resolve, * henceforth, * to use them most faithfully. * O Mary, * filled with the plentitude of grace; * assist me with thy powerful intercession, * Thou alone art worthy to be heard by thy divine Son. Amen. *

STAND—All Sing—

Wherefore when the appointed fullness
Of the holy time was come,
He was sent who maketh all things
From the eternal Father's home,
And proceedeth, God Incarnate,
Offspring of the Virgin's womb.
Sweetest Wood, and sweetest Iron,
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.

—OR—

Bruised, derided, cursed, defiled,
She beheld her tender Child,
All with bloody scourges rent:

For the sins of His own nation,
Saw Him hanging in desolation
Till His spirit forth He sent.

THE THIRD WORD ON THE CROSS

“WOMAN, BEHOLD THY SON”. THEN HE SAID TO THE DISCIPLE:
“BEHOLD THY MOTHER”.

PRIEST— — ALL SIT — -

Not for an instant did Jesus lose consciousness of the fact that His devoted Mother stood hard by the cross overwhelmed by an ocean of sorrow. The words of the prophet Jeremias applied to her centuries before, no doubt were in His mind: “To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee, O daughter of Jerusalem; for great as the sea is thy desolation.” Gladly would He have spared her the awful anguish of bearing witness to His barbarous execution. But such was not the decree of Providence. She was to be the co-Redemptrix to atone for the sins of the world and like the Redeemer she must go down into the deedpest and darkest valley of pain, grief and sorrow. We need only bear in mind that love is the measure of grief, and, as no mutual love was more intense than the love of Jesus and Mary for each other, so never was there a sorrow so immense to afflict two hearts so intimately one. Jesus is truly the Man of Sorrows; Mary, the Queen of Martyrs.

Of this world's goods He has nothing to bequeath. But His grateful Heart overflows at the memory of her solicitude for Him in the stable of Bethlehem, in their exile of Egypt, in their poverty of Nazareth, in their privations during His public life. Ignoring the ravages of His own tortures, He wishes now to provide for the remainder of her earthly life and confides her to the tender care of His favorite apostle. “Woman” He says, “behold thy son. Son, behold thy Mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her to his home. Sons and daughters, learn from your dying Saviour how to love, honor and obey your parents! After God you owe all to them. Bring joy to their hearts. Comfort them in sickness and affliction. Aid them in poverty and distress. Cheer them in the loneliness of their declining years. Pray for them during life. Be ever mindful of them in Mass and Communion when they sleep the last long sleep. And you, fathers and mothers, never lose sight of your parental obligations in this world and your reward in the next.

When Jesus said “Woman, behold thy son,” He referred to John not only as an individual but as the representative of the entire human race. It was as if Jesus said, “Thou art My true earthly Mother, I am thy true earthly Son. My life is drawing to a close. Thy work for Me is done. As I have received from thee My sacred Humanity, so do thou now receive from Me another humanity—every individual in the human race represented in the person of My most beloved disciple John. As I am King of heaven and earth, Father of all the faithful, so shalt thou be the Queen of heaven and earth and Mother of all the faithful. I am the Good shepherd, the Fountainhead of all mercy, but I am also Judge. If My children hesitate to throw

themselves on My mercy, they cannot hesitate to abandon themselves to thy maternal and all compassionate heart. Be their true Mother. Let no one call upon thee in vain.

“Through thy hands, I will pour out all the treasures of My grace.

‘Woman, behold thy children.’ To you dear Christian, Jesus addresses the words: ‘My son, My child, behold your Mother.’ What an ineffable consolation for us to know that just as Jesus Christ is by nature the eternal Son of God and the earthly Son of Mary, so we by adoption are the children of God and spiritual sons and daughters of Mary. Have you always been a devoted child of this good Mother? Have you always endeavored to love, to invoke and to imitate her? Have you counted that day lost in which you have not honored her? When you felt forsaken by all, depressed by mental and physical sufferings, assaulted by the devil, have you surrendered yourself unreservedly to her maternal care? If not, from this hour, here at the foot of the cross, be resolved to take her into your heart and to your home, now and always. Let your unceasing prayer be: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me now and at the hour of my death. Amen.”

PRAYER TO BE WORTHY CHILDREN OF MARY

PEOPLE— ALL Kneel —

O my dying Jesus, * what untold generosity hast Thou not shown * towards us, poor sinners! * Thy excessive love for us knows no bounds. * It was not enough for Thee, * to have offered Thyself for us on the cross * in the midst of unspeakable torments, * but Thou hast also wished to give us * Thy own dearly beloved Mother. * How wondrously wise, * how sweetly tender, * is this invention of Thy holy love! * What sinner, * though his sins be as numerous as the sands of the sea; * what criminal, * though his crime be as great as that of Judas, * can now become dejected or disheartened * when he reflects * that he has so merciful a Saviour * and so loving a Mother in heaven? * My Jesus, * I thank Thee for so great bounty. * But here on earth, * where I have so many miseries to encounter, * so much weakness to overcome, * I can thank Thee but feebly and imperfectly. * But when I reach heaven, * as I confidently hope to do, * through Thy infinite mercy * and the all-powerful intercession of Mary, * it will -be my joy and happiness, * to love Thee as much as I am able, * and, with my dear Mother Mary and all the Angels and Saints * to praise and thank Thee for all eternity. Amen. *

Remember, * O most sorrowful Mother, Mary, * that in His dying moments * thy divine Son has devised * that thou shouldst be my Mother. * Unmindful of thy own martyrdom at the foot of the cross, * thou didst accept me, * a great sinner, * as thy child. * Truly, * He that is mighty, * has done great things to thee, * not only in designing thee * to be the Mother of His divine Son * but also in making thee * the Mother of all men. * The mercy of the Lord is from generation to generation, * since in thee we have gained * so kind a mediatrix and intercessor. * All generations call thee blessed, * because all owe to thee * the life of grace and eternal salvation. * With most loving and grateful heart, * do I take thee for my Mother. * To thee I consecrate myself, * with all that I am and all that I have. * I love thee with my whole heart * and hope to love thee for all eternity. * But my enemies are so strong and I am so weak. * Thou knowest how often I have sinned and deserved hell. * Thou must obtain for me the grace * of sharing in the merits of the death of Jesus, * thy beloved Son, * whom thou didst see bow His head * and die on Calvary before thy eyes. * O Queen of Martyrs, * powerful Advocate of sinners, * help me always * and help me especially in the hour of my death. * And when I am in my last agony, * and the demons strive to make me despair * at the remembrance of my sins, * abandon me not in that dread hour. * But, be near me * and speak words of confidence in my soul * and obtain for me the grace of final perseverance. * And should my speech and senses fail me then * and I be unable to invoke thy name, * I call upon thee now; * Jesus and Mary * I recommend my soul to you. Amen. *

STAND—All Sing—

Weeps the Infant in the manger
That in Bethlehem's stable stands:
And His limbs the Virgin Mother
Doth compose in swaddling bands,

Meetly thus in linen folding
Of her God the feet and hands.

Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be:

— OR —

O thou Mother: fount of love!
Touch my spirit from above,
Make my heart with thine accord;

Make me feel as thou hast felt;
Make my soul to glow and melt
With the love of Christ my Lord.

THE FOURTH WORD ON THE CROSS

“MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?”

PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

For the three hours during which our Saviour was on the cross, the sun failed to give its light and a mysterious darkness enshrouded the whole earth. Thus did the powers of nature proclaim the identity of the Redeemer, symbolize His unearthly sufferings, and protest His innocence to the world. The ninth hour, three o'clock in the afternoon, was fast approaching. The death of Jesus was now imminent. But He has yet to endure the most agonizing of all the dreadful sufferings of His sacred Passion. For a brief spell, it seemed that the tender mercy of God—which is above all His works—must step aside and give full sway to the impartial demands of justice. The all-holy Creator must reject His sinful creatures forever, or, in some way visit that penalty upon the guiltless head of His own beloved Son. Mercy prevailed. And the loving Saviour met the full demands of divine justice when it reached its appalling climax in His endurance of the most awful sense of absolute loneliness and abandonment. How the very angels in heaven must have shuddered to witness it! No human being ever experienced its like. It beggars all description. Mary alone, came closest to it when Jesus was lost for three days in the temple. Yet that agonizing loss, which must be reckoned as her greatest dolor, was tempered with an abiding assurance that He had not gone out of her life entirely. But when Jesus, in His inferior nature, was totally abandoned by His heavenly Father, He sustained the full measure of His Passion without the slightest mitigation of any kind. His all-holy, most amiable Heart was plunged into a most horrible abyss of the blackest darkness, immersed in the extremest anguish of the most bitter desolation. It was then that He cried out in a loud voice: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Let us meditate upon the causes and reasons which wrung this frightful cry from the dying lips of our Saviour.

Jesus suffered the awful pain of abandonment to free us from sin and its consequence of everlasting separation from God: to profess to the world in a most striking manner how greatly He loves us and desires to be loved by us; to prove His infinite mercy by fully atoning for all our sins; to give us a perfect example of how we are to accept and bear our crosses.

Jesus cried out with a loud voice to prove His Divinity and at the same time to prove that He was human and undergoing the most excruciating tortures of body and soul. When other men are dying or suffering extreme pain, they lose consciousness or the senses are dulled. Not so our Saviour. His perfect mental faculties remained unimpaired and His sensitiveness to pain increased with each approaching instant of death. Who can conceive the ever increasing torments of that throbbing, thorn-crowned head; of those nail-pierced hands and feet, of that racking fever, of those countless gaping bleeding wounds exposed to the raw smarting air? Who but God Himself could make us apprehend the torturing anguish of His soul, made desolate with abysmal desolation. He is alone in unspeakable sorrow; betrayed by Judas,

deserted by His Apostles, rejected by His people, spurned by the Scribes and Pharisees and high priests. He looks into the future and finds Himself crucified anew by each and every mortal sin of all generations yet to come. He looks to His sorrowing Mother but her anguish only serves to increase His own. He looks to heaven for comfort and there is none. For a brief frightful space of time which seems like an eternity, He is also abandoned by His heavenly Father. Not even for Him with His infinite capacity for suffering can there be greater agony. No wonder, then, that He cries out with a loud and agonizing voice: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

All devout souls who strive to serve God faithfully must be prepared to drink deeply from this bitter chalice of desolation suffered by the Saviour on the cross. Observing the ten commandments most conscientiously, practicing the Christian virtues under all circumstances, actuated at all times by the purest of motives—these good - Christians will often find themselves alone, bereft of all sympathetic understanding, on the verge of utter hopelessness and despair. They are misunderstood by their closest relatives, they are deserted by their most intimate friends, they are persecuted by most relentless enemies, they are afflicted with chronic ailments, they are assailed by violent temptations and become a prey to mental tortures. They look to their heavenly Father for a sign of approval, for a word of consolation, but the heavens are seemingly obscured by the black clouds of despair and utter abandonment. No sign is given. No word is spoken.

In such trying moments they must not yield, but stand firmly with Mary at the foot of the cross and unite their desolation of spirit with that of Jesus. Even though you be spared such acid tests of holier souls, dear Christian, you will not escape the final test of desolation of spirit as you go down to the dark valley of death. In that dread hour, no human power can help you. The riches, pleasures and honors of this world—which, alas! We prize too highly, will mock you as they vanish from your fading sight and pass into the hands of others. With renewed assaults the evil spirits will make a final effort to win your soul and suggest thoughts of hopelessness and despair. But at your bedside will be One to aid and console you— Jesus, Who taught us how to die, Jesus Crucified who suffered the uttermost abandonment of spirit that we might not be alone in our death-struggle, Jesus who died that we might have life eternal. Oh, let us not forsake Him in the good day, that He may not forsake us in the evil day. Let this be our constant prayer: O good Jesus be near me when I close my eyes in death. O good Jesus, do not forsake me when I draw my parting breath. Amen.

PRAYER FOR SELF-RENUNCIATION AND RESIGNATION PEOPLE— — ALL KNEEL —

O Jesus, my beloved Saviour, * I am filled with confusion * when I see Thee so abandoned on the hard bed of the cross. * I know not what to say. * Fear and terror overwhelm me * when I reflect upon the multitude of my sins * for which I have deserved * to be rejected by Thee forever. * But in Thy Infinite goodness, * Thou hast spared me * and by Thy grace * I can now love Thee. * I do love Thee with my whole heart * and I desire to love Thee for all eternity. *

O most amiable Jesus, * who can look upon Thee * in Thy bitter abandonment * and refrain from shedding copious tears of sorrow and sympathy? * Who can resist the overpowering language of Thy divine Love? * By the merits of Thy abandonment, * I am firmly resolved * to abandon all self-love * that I may love only Thee; * to renounce all creatures * that I may serve only Thee; * to die to myself * that I may live only for Thee. * O Lord * Thou art the Way, ~ keep me in the path of salvation. * Thou art the Truth, * preserve me from all error, * and ignorance of Thee. * Thou art the Life, * give me the life of divine grace, * lest Thy precious Blood be shed for me in vain. * Thou hast suffered and died for me, * a poor sinner, * that through Thy poverty * I may share in the treasure of Thy infinite riches. * Thy grace is never wanting. * I beseech Thee therefore, * through Thy Mother and my Mother Mary, * to grant me Thy grace at all times * that I may so renounce myself * that I may be transformed entirely * in conformity with Thy own divine image. *

I will no longer complain * over any suffering * which Thou in Thy wisdom and goodness * art pleased to send me. * But I will grieve over the many sins * which I have committed * and which caused Thee such fearful torments. * I will deplore the precious time * I have lost in the service of the world, * and in the shameful indulgence * of sensuality and self-love. * I will weep over the priceless graces I have squandered, * the loss of which * has caused me to know Thee * so little and so late. * No, dear Jesus, * I will no longer complain of the cross Thou sendest me, * so insignificant * in comparison with Thine. * In

future * I will look upon all the trials, adversities, and misfortunes of this life, * not as evils * but as blessings in disguise, * as a merited chastisement for my sins, * as a pledge of Thy divine grace and Thy special love. * Do Thou, O Lord, help me * to be most faithful to this resolution. * Do Thou, O Lord, * by Thy all-powerful grace * strengthen me in my weakness * and sustain me in my misery. * O Mary, * most loving Mother, * Mediatrix of all graces, * do thou by thy intercession * obtain for me the fullness of divine grace * that I may remain always united with Jesus in life * and escape the dreadful punishment * of being abandoned by Him, * in death and eternity. Amen.

STAND—All Sing—

Thirty years among us dwelling,
His appointed time fulfilled,
Born for this, He meets His passion,
For that this He freely willed:
On the Cross the Lamb is lifted,
Where His life-blood shall be spilled.
Sweetest Wood, and sweetest Iron,
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.

- OR

Holy Mother, pierce me through;
In my heart each wound renew
Of my Saviour crucified;
Let me share with thee His pain,
Who for all my sins was slain,
Who for me in torment died.

THE FIFTH WORD ON THE CROSS

“I THIRST”

PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

The Fifth Word spoken by Jesus on the Cross, in the midst of unutterable torments, is found in the Gospel of St. John. It consists of a single word, “Sitio”, “I thirst.” The Evangelist writes: “Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: “I thirst”. Hearing this, the executioners soaked a sponge with vinegar and gall, fixed it to a point of a spear and put it to His mouth. The dying request of the Saviour is met with barbarous cruelty! With all due reverence let us consider the wholesome lessons to be derived from this painful and mysterious thirst of our Divine Saviour. It was twofold; a physical or bodily thirst, and, a spiritual thirst.

It is a well admitted fact that dying of thirst is far more painful and tormenting than dying of starvation. The hardest travelers in the desert and the most robust sailors at sea have been known to go stark mad from the frightful torture experienced from lack of water to quench their thirst. Nevertheless, the sufferings of these men are not to be compared with the extremely torturing thirst endured by our Saviour on the Cross. It was augmented immeasurably by His weakened physical condition and fast ebbing strength. He had passed the preceding night without sleep. He had lost a great quantity of blood in the Garden of Olives and in the brutal scourging. Blood now streamed from His pierced hands and feet. A consuming fever raged and burned within Him. Well, indeed, could He cry out, “I thirst.” “The pores of My body are closed. My veins are parched up, My tongue is parched, My throat is parched, all My members are parched. Have pity on Me! Relieve Me, and give Me to drink!”

There are various reasons why our amiable Saviour wished to undergo so grievous a torture. He did so, in the first place, in obedience to His heavenly Father, as St. John remarks, “that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.” Centuries previously, King David prophesied this thirst as one of the most terrible sufferings to be undergone by the Crucified Saviour: “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Here we find our Lord giving us a powerful example and incentive to bear all our sufferings in obedience to divine Providence. Mark well, dear Christian soul, that no trial or adversity comes to you which God has not appointed for you from all eternity. Will you rebel against them or bear them reluctantly? Or will you accept them with Christ-like patience and resignation, to atone for sin and acquire surpassing merits for heaven? Take up your cross without complaint and follow Jesus and often say with holy Job: “If we have received good things from the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?”

Furthermore, Jesus endured this extremely painful thirst to manifest to us His ardent longing to take upon Himself any suffering for the accomplishment of our salvation. He spared Himself in nothing. He desired that every member of His sacred Body, not excluding His tongue, was to experience every imaginable torture. —By this thirst Jesus also wished to make the most ample satisfaction to His heavenly Father for the many terrible sins which men commit by intemperance in eating and drinking, and from which so many detestable sins arise. Who can think of the awful thirst of Jesus on the cross and yet over-indulge the appetite for food and harmful drink?

“Terrible, indeed,” says St. Alphonsus, “was the bodily thirst which our Saviour suffered in His Passion; but far greater was His spiritual thirst, namely, His consuming desire for the Redemption of all men.” Yes, with ineffable longing our blessed Redeemer thirsts for the redemption and reconciliation of the human race, for the conversion of sinners, for the good works and the perseverance of the just. Most perfectly clear to Him is the supreme loveliness of His heavenly Father and the woeful condition of the children of Adam. “He thirsted,” says St. Gregory of Nazianzen, “in order that men might thirst after God, that is, that all men might love God with an insatiable love, and yearn with boundless yearning for Him who is the Supreme Good.” It fills Him with unspeakable sorrow to see men thirst instead for the perishable things of this life which lead to perdition in the next. In most ample atonement for this dreadful aversion to God, he offers to His heavenly Father the sacredness and merits of His spiritual thirst.

Dear Christian, is your love for the Crucified Saviour such that you would have promptly offered Him a refreshing drink to quench His thirst on the cross that first Good Friday? If so, you will not hesitate to quench the all-consuming thirst He now has in heaven for the salvation and sanctification of your soul and the souls of mankind. For His sake you will cultivate a spiritual thirst for the lasting treasures of eternity and you will shun every inordinate desire for the vain and fleeting things of this life. “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.” If you are laden with sin, you will offer Him the refreshing drink of a sincere repentance and amendment of life. If you habitually dread sin as the greatest of all evils, you will sanctify your soul, more and more, by the performance of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. For what you do to the least of your brethren you do to the Person of Christ. If you are earnestly striving after Christian perfection, you will offer Him joy and refreshment by your spirit of prayer and self-renunciation, by your sincere love and the faithful imitation of all His virtues. To you he appeals and says: “I thirst.” Will you offer Him the bitter mixture of vinegar and gall, or will you quench His thirst for time and eternity by surrendering yourself to Him unreservedly, with all that you are and all that you have? Surely you will do the latter! By the infinite merits of His Holy thirst may He inflame you with an unquenchable thirst for Him. Amen.

PRAYER FOR UNION WITH CHRIST CRUCIFIED

PEOPLE— — ALL KNEEL —

O my Jesus, * how little I understand * the eternal yearning Thou hast for the salvation of my soul. * Thou hast loved me with an everlasting love. * To win my love Thou hast humbled Thyself * taking the form of a servant. * Thou hast been obedient to Thy heavenly Father * in all things, even to Thy death on the cross. * Were I to sacrifice my life * a thousand times for Thee, * I should still be unable * to make a fitting return for Thy love * which impelled Thee * to drain the last drop of precious blood from Thy Sacred Heart * and to endure for me * such an agonizing thirst upon the cross. * By the infinite merits of Thy holy thirst, * create in me an insatiable thirst * to become conformable to Thee in all things. * Teach me, * O loving Redeemer, * to know the value of the cross, * to love the cross and not shun it; * for if there had been a shorter or easier road * to eternal glory and union with Thee, * Thou wouldst not have chosen the way to Calvary * and given us the command * to take up our cross and follow Thee. * With the help of Thy divine grace, * I am resolved to walk this way, * cost what it may. * I beseech Thee, most loving Saviour, * by the merits of Thy painful thirst, * quench within my soul * every taste and thirst * for the fleeting goods and pleasures of this life * and keep from my heart * every love that is not for Thee. * O Mary, * thou art my hope in life and in death; * obtain for me the grace * to have no other thought, * no other desire, * than to be united always with Jesus thy Son, * in time and in eternity. Amen. *

STAND—All Sing—

He endured the nails, the spitting,
Vinegar, and spear, and reed,
From that holy Body broken
Blood and water forth proceed:

Earth, and stars, and sky, and ocean,
By that flood from stain are freed.
Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be:

-OR--

Let me mingle tears with thee,
Mourning Him who mourned for me,
All the days that I may live:
By the cross with thee to stay;
There with thee to weep and pray
Is all I ask of thee to give.

THE SIXTH WORD ON THE CROSS

“IT IS CONSUMMATED”

PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

The supreme moment in the life of our Lord had come. The three hours of dreadful agony were about to end. Jesus speaks the sixth time. Having tasted the bitter mixture of vinegar and gall, he said, “It is consummated”. In these second last words of the Saviour on the cross, we listen to a cry of great joy and glorious triumph. They express the grand finale of the most useful life that has ever lived. They tell of a most perfect career that has measured up, in every detail, to the sole purpose of man’s existence on earth—the service of God and the service of one’s neighbor. Jesus looks back over the thirty-three years of His earthly life and on the sixth day, in His sixth word on the cross, proclaims that the work of Redemption is now consummated; just as His heavenly Father, the Creator, completed the work of Creation in six days and at the close of the sixth day saw that all that He called into being from non-existence was perfect.

Well indeed could the Saviour come to the end of His life in an ecstasy of peace and joy. Back of Him stretched the years of His earthly pilgrimage: years of poverty and humiliation, years of labor and suffering; years of perfect obedience to the will of His heavenly Father, years of the most heroic and unselfish sacrifice in behalf of others. It was a record of the sublimest achievements, despite its continuous martyrdom of heart-rending misunderstanding and ungrateful opposition on the part of those He came to save. But there were no regrets, no disappointments. He had failed in nothing. In Him the scriptures had their perfect fulfillment from the instant of His all-holy Conception by the Virgin Mary, to the instant that He tasted the nauseating drink of vinegar and gall. All had come to pass: His Nativity at Bethlehem; the apparition of the miraculous star, the adoration of the Magi, the preaching of the Gospel, the countless miracles He wrought in behalf of the blind, the deaf, the lame, the speechless; His exultant entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the graphic details of the Passion so clearly described by the prophets of old. His mission on earth is accomplished. The sins of the world are expiated; the barriers of heaven are removed; the powers of hell are conquered; the Redemption of the human race is achieved. Well, indeed, could He cry out in joyful triumph: “It is consummated!” “Father, I have glorified Thee on earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do”.

So, too, dear Christian, the hour will strike for you and for me when we shall be stretched out on a bed of suffering and death; when our hands, cold and trembling at the approach of dissolution, will be no longer able to clasp the crucifix; when our countenance will take on an ashy hue, our eyes grow dim and troubled, our lips fail to move in speech; when our ears will be closed forever to the discourses of men and the vain promises of earth; when friends and relatives and the mighty ones of this world will be impotent to help us. Yes, our life will then have run its full course. Our probation on earth will be ended. Oh, then, when we hover on the brink of eternity, when all else fades before our glassy eyes, we shall look back through the vista of years and read what has been written in our imperishable book of life!

How will the record read? What will have been accomplished? Looking back, will you have to admit that your life was a wretched failure? A record of virtues neglected, duties unfulfilled, obligations violated, sins multiplied and never repented of? And as you look back with horrified gaze across the wreckage of a mis-spent career, what will it profit you then, in that dread hour, to know that you have

shared abundantly in the world's achievements, and have gained its coveted prizes? O what will it profit you, if you have gathered all the treasures of earth, if you have been its most ardent advocate, if you have been its most honored citizen, if you have been its most admired and most feted idol? What will it profit you, if from the great waste of years, you can salvage no good deeds for the kingdom of heaven and to the eternal credit of your soul? With what a feeling of despair must such sinners cry out: "It is consummated! It is now the end and to no avail! Too late, then will the warning of the just Judge have a meaning for their ears: "Woe to you rich, for you have had your consolation! Woe to you that have had your fill of earthly things, for you shall hunger! Woe to you that have laughed in the unholy indulgence of passion, for you shall mourn and weep!"

Or, looking back over the span of life allotted to you, will you be able to say in the same peaceful, joyful, triumphant sense in which Christ did: "It is consummated!" Will you be able to say that you have been a true disciple of Him who is the Way, the Truth and the Life? Will you be able to say that you have most faithfully executed all His wishes and commands? That you have trodden under foot the poisoned pleasures of depraved passion; that you have never wandered from the narrow and rocky path that led to the heights of your own Calvary; that you have mastered the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity; that you loved justice, exercised prudence, observed temperance and practiced fortitude? Will you be able to say that you took firm hold of the standard of Christ and held it ever aloft in the unceasing struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil? If so, with what ecstasy you will cry out: "It is consummated!" With what supreme satisfaction you will recall to mind the promises of the Saviour: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek and humble of heart, the patient followers of the cross; blessed are they that mourn, blessed are they that suffer persecution and all manner of injustice for my sake—for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Well done thou good and faithful servant, receive the crown of everlasting life and enter into everlasting joys!"

May this, dear Christian, be your happy lot! May the Crucified Saviour lead you on to such a victory! May His precious blood trickling down upon the cross and lightening the burden of your cross, fill your heart with love and loyalty for him! May His sacrificial blood instill into your soul, a most intense sorrow for sin and a thirst for all justice. May that precious blood be your hope, your strength, your nourishment in life; your joy, your consolation, your reward in death! Then when the world, with its false show and fleeting pleasures will part from you forever, may you cry out, as Christ did: "It is consummated!" Jesus, for Thee I have lived, Jesus for Thee I die, Jesus, I am Thine in life and in death. Amen.

PRAYER FOR FIDELITY TO VOCATION

PEOPLE— — ALL KNEEL —

O my Crucified Saviour, * what peace, what joy, what consolation * filled Thy Sacred Heart, * when looking back * over the thirty-three years of Thy earthly pilgrimage, * Thou didst exultingly cry out: * "It is consummated!" * Thine has been a life * of perfect obedience to Thy heavenly Father; * a life of heroic service to Thy human brothers. * How justly thou couldst say: * "Father, * I have glorified Thee on earth, * I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do. * "Father, * I have fully restored Thy honor and glory; * I have atoned for all the sins of mankind; * I have accomplished the redemption of the world." * All is now happily consummated! *

O merciful Lord, * were I to be summoned before Thy judgment seat today, * how different would be the verdict * I should have to render on my past life * so sadly misspent. * But, with all my heart I thank Thee * for giving me time to amend. * It is now my ardent desire, * to be able to say, * on my deathbed, * in perfect truth: * "It is consummated!" * When my last hour comes, * may I be able to look back to this day of my conversion, * and with peaceful conscience * be able to say: * "I have done everything * that the divine Will required of me * here on earth. * I have fulfilled faithfully * all the duties proper to my state in life. * I have corresponded with all divine graces * according to my ability." * When this passing world fades from my sight, * may it be my happy lot * to repeat with St. Paul, * these consoling words: * "I have fought the good fight, * I have finished my course, * I have kept the faith. * As for the rest, * there is laid up for me a crown of justice, * which the Lord, * the just Judge, * will give to me in that day, * yet not to me only, * but also to those who love His coming."

* O divine Saviour, * may these sublime words of Thy faithful disciple * find their consummation in me. * Henceforth, with the help of Thy abundant grace, * I am resolved * to oppose all the deceits of the world, * all the demands of the flesh, * all the assaults of the devil. * Henceforth * I will make the teachings of Thy Gospel * the sole rule of my life. * I will arm myself with the sword of prayer. * In Thy sacrament of reconciliation, * I will cleanse my soul more and more, * I will daily strengthen my weakness * in the divine power of Thy sacred flesh and blood. * Each day, I will so strive to live * as if I were to render * my final account to Thee.

* And when I stand at the threshold of eternity * and breathe my last sigh, * may I say with holy joy and happy heart: * “It is consummated! * Consummated is the work * which Thy heavenly Father has given me to do. * Consummated is the sacrifice * which has been assigned to me. * Consummated are the days of labor, * gone are the days of sorrow, * tribulation, and temptation. * Nothing now remains for me * but to receive the glorious crown of justice. * Jesus, * be Thou my never-failing help in life, * be Thou my most consoling hope in death. * O most holy Mary, * my Mother, * thou who didst stand at the foot of the cross and see Thy Son and thy God expire * amidst so great anguish, * yet didst never waver in the firm hope of His resurrection; * I entreat Thee, * make me entirely His own, * that I may live for Him, * die for Him * and be with Him forever more. Amen. *

STAND—All Sing— Bend thy boughs, O Tree of glory!

Thy relaxing sinews bend;
For awhile the ancient rigour,
That thy birth bestowed, suspend;
And the King of heavenly beauty
On thy bosom gently tend!

Sweetest Wood, and sweetest Iron,
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.

-OR

Virgin of all Virgins best,
Listen to my fond request:
Let me share thy grief divine;
Let me to my latest breath
In my body bear the death
Of that dying Son of thine.

THE SEVENTH WORD ON THE CROSS

“FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT,
PRIEST— — ALL SIT —

In His magnificent farewell address, at the last supper, our Saviour reminded His disciples of His divine origin and His divine destiny. Most solemnly He declared: “I came forth from the Father and have come into this world. Again I leave the world and go forth to the Father.” The time of His “going forth” is now at hand. It is the ninth hour, or, according to our reckoning of time, three o’clock in the afternoon. Jesus is on the point of expiring. As He lifts His thorn-crowned head to heaven a violent throb of fearful agony convulses His tormented body, and, with a loud voice, He cries out: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” Having said this, He breathed forth His soul, and then slowly bowed His head until it rested low and motionless on His breast. Miraculous events instantly followed. The earth quaked, as if in terror; the great curtain in the temple was torn through the center by an invisible power; the rocks burst asunder; the graves opened and the dead came forth to mingle with the living. Thus did the Saviour impart emphasis to the power and significance of His seventh and last word upon the cross.

He uttered those dying words in a mighty voice as a final manifestation of His divinity; to make it obvious to all about Him that no human agency had power over His life and death except by His permission; to have us clearly understand that He gave up His life freely, since, being by nature sinless, He did not come under the decree of death which is the penalty of sin. He cried out with a loud voice to draw attention to the infinite love he bore us; for “greater love than this no man has, that one lay down his life for his friends.” But Jesus gave up His life not only for His friends, but also for us sinners who were His enemies! He spoke those words in a loud voice to encourage us to place our confidence in His power when we are afflicted with sorrow and tribulation, and that we might recognize how inconceivably painful for Him was the separation of His noble soul from His sacred body; far more painful than it can be for any human being. Finally, it was a loud cry of triumph. He died not in weakness but in power. His death was the last decisive act of victory over sin, Satan and hell.

Reflecting on the mystical power of that dying voice, can we refuse to believe that Christ on the cross is truly our God? Can we hesitate to dedicate and consecrate our lives to the service of such a good Master, who loved us with so boundless a love and voluntarily submitted to death that we might have life eternal?

Can any one doubt that He will support our weakness with omnipotence when we battle with violent temptation, when we stagger under the weight of our cross, and when we struggle in the throes of our death-agony from which He removed the bitter sling by His own death? Let us ever have in mind the consoling promise He made to St. Paul when that great apostle feared that all was lost: "Fear not; be of good cheer!" "My grace is sufficient for thee, for strength is made perfect in weakness."

Let us now consider His last words: "Father into Thy hands I commend My spirit." He addresses God by the loving title "Father" to teach us the sacred inviolability of truth and to instill into our hearts unwavering trust in God's Providence. Often in life, in the face of opposition and persecution, He asserted that God was His Father. This truth He proclaims with His last breath. So, too must we be ready to make every sacrifice in the practice and in the defense of our holy faith to the last moment of life. In every trying situation during His public life, Jesus called on the name of His heavenly Father, for courage and strength to execute His eternal decrees. So too must we lift our minds and hearts to our loving Father in heaven in every situation, convinced that whatever happens to us is foreordained by an all-wise and all-powerful Providence which arranges all things for our ultimate welfare.

To His heavenly Father, Jesus "commends His spirit." What an important lesson for us! Throughout life we worry and fret over our reputation, over the prosperity of our business, over the temporal welfare of our family, over the condition of our health, over the successful issue of this or that enterprise. But are we concerned about the salvation of our immortal souls? Do we make it the only business, the all-important and all-absorbing occupation of our lives? Seek first the kingdom of God!

It is "into the hands" of His heavenly Father that Jesus commends His spirit. How beautiful and inspiring is this act of submission and obedience of the Son to the Father! Jesus, as God, had no need of committing His soul to the care of the Father. He too was almighty! And we, poverty-stricken, impotent, tempted and sin-laden children of our heavenly Father, despise His inexhaustible treasures, blind ourselves to His unlimited power, disregard the all-loving protection of His extended hands!

Let it not be so in the future! In life and in death let us imitate the example of our dying Saviour, and never fail to entrust our souls entirely in the hands of God. How shall we do this? By fidelity to the duties of our state of life, by practicing the Christian virtues at all times, under all circumstances, cheerfully, and conscientiously. Catholics first, last and always! Always worthy children faithfully serving our heavenly Father! To whom have you committed your soul in the past? Were you the slave of the world, the flesh and the devil? If so, repent before it is too late; for, "it is a dreadful thing for an obstinate sinner to fall into the hands of the living God!"

On the other hand, how blessed are they who die in the Lord. They die peacefully in the Lord, who, following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, lead a penitential life. It is impossible to lead a penitential life unless we are ruled by our holy faith. In this brilliant light we shall see ever more clearly the infinite perfections of God and our absolute dependence on Him. In this lively faith, we shall grow strong in our love for God and in true detachment from the world; we shall relish prayer, receive the holy sacraments frequently, and bear our cross with cheerful resignation. They who live in this manner may rest assured that they will breathe forth their soul with sentiments in their hearts and words on their lips similar to those of Jesus when expiring: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." They will awaken in eternity to hear these consoling words of the Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things I will place thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord." Receive the crown of life. Amen.

PRAYER FOR A HAPPY DEATH

PEOPLE— — ALL KNEEL —

O most merciful Redeemer, * my conscience so often warns me ~ that nothing in life * is so certain as death, * and, that nothing is so uncertain * as the time, the place and the manner * in which it will occur. * Even now, the dreaded moment * may be close at hand for me. * Nevertheless, * I still cling so tenaciously, to the fleeting things of this life * and fail so seriously * to prepare for the next life. * But now, Thou givest me the grace * to realize my folly.

* No longer will I wait for death * in the vain hope * that all will be well with me then. * No longer will I live * as if there were no strict account to render to Thee. * No longer will I delay * recommending my soul to Thee * I do so now * and I will continue to recommend my soul * to Thy infinite mercy * at all times. * I am filled with misgivings * when I reflect * how remiss I have been in prayer, * how seldom I have given thought * to eternal truths; * how negligently I have served Thee; * how carelessly I have fulfilled * the daily duties of my state of life. * With all my heart, * I now repent of all these sins. * Through the infinite merits * of Thy sacred passion and bitter death, * enlighten my mind * so that I may know

what is necessary * to prepare fittingly for death, * and strengthen my will * with Thy divine grace, * so that with all diligence, * I may do whatever Thy divine will requires of me. * Be gracious to me for the remainder of my life, * so that I may have no terror of death * and may be acceptable to Thee * when I stand before Thy judgment seat. * If the saints trembled in their last moments * at the thought of the strict account * they were about to render to Thee, * I, a poor miserable sinner, * have still more reason to tremble * when I reflect on that all-decisive moment. * But I place all my hopes in the infinite merits * of Thy precious blood, * I confidently hope * for the full remission of all sins * and the eternal happiness in heaven. *

O lamb of God, * sacrificed on the cross, and dead for me, * as a Victim of love, * grant by the merits of Thy death, * that I may love Thee with my whole heart * while life remains. * Thou hast died for love of me, * I will also die glowing with love for Thee. * Thou hast given Thyself wholly to me, * I will give myself wholly to Thee: Into Thy hands O Lord, * I commend my spirit; * Thou hast redeemed me, * O Lord God of truth. * Thou hast shed Thy last drop of precious blood for me; * suffer not, that through my fault, * all should be lost unto me. * O Jesus, I love Thee * and with the help of Thy grace, * I hope to love Thee for all eternity. * In Thee, O Lord, I have hoped; * let me not be confounded forever. * O Virgin Mary, * patron of a happy death, * teach me how to recommend my spirit to the care of Thy Son * and always to say with great fervor: * “Holy Mary, * Mother of God, pray for me now * and at the hour of my death. Amen. *

Thou alone wast counted worthy This world’s ransom to uphold;
For a shipwrecked race preparing Harbor, like the Ark of old;
With the sacred Blood anointed from the smitten Lamb that rolled.

Faithful Cross! above all other, One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom, None in fruit thy peer may be:

To the Trinity be glory
Everlasting, as is meet:
Equal to the Father, equal
To the Son and Paraclete:
Trinal Unity, whose praises all created things repeat. Amen.

OR—

Wounded with His every wound,
Steep my soul till it hath swooned
In His very Blood away;

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
Lest in flames I burn, and die
In His awful judgment day.

Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,
Be Thy Mother my defense,
Be Thy Cross my victory:

While my body here decays,
May my soul thy goodness praise
Safe in Paradise with Thee. Amen.

SHORT WAY. OF THE CROSS ACT OF CONTRITION

My Lord Jesus Christ, * Thou hast made this journey to die for me * with love unutterable, * and I have so many times * unworthily abandoned Thee; * but now I love Thee with my whole heart, * and because I love Thee, * I repent sincerely for having ever offended Thee. * Pardon me, my God, * and permit me to accompany Thee on this journey. * Thou goest to die for love of me; * I wish also, * my beloved Redeemer, * to die for love of Thee. * My Jesus, I will live and die always united to Thee. *

FIRST STATION—Jesus is condemned to death.
REPEAT AT EACH STATION—

PRIEST—We adore Thee, O Christ and we bless Thee.

PEOPLE—Because by Thy holy cross * Thou hast redeemed the world. *

Pilate dares to condemn * the all-holy Saviour to death. * No, not Pilate; * but my sins * have condemned Jesus to be crucified. * O Jesus, * have mercy on me * and remember Thou didst choose to die * that I may have eternal life. * Let me so live * that when I come to die * I may find Thee a most merciful Judge, * an all-loving Redeemer. *

SECOND STATION—Jesus bears His Cross.

Most willingly Jesus accepts * and patiently bears His Cross for my sake. * Will I refuse * to bear my cross for His Sake? * No, * my loving Redeemer, I will no longer seek to evade my cross, * but with the help of Thy grace * I will bear it with Christian patience and resignation * and follow Thee always! *

THIRD STATION—Jesus falls the first time.

Weakened by torments and by loss of blood, * Jesus falls beneath His Cross. * Alas! * more truly was He crushed to earth * by the number and enormity of my sins! * Good Master! * I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee. * I love Thee, * infinite Goodness! * Help me to hate sin * as the only real evil! *

FOURTH STATION—Jesus meets His Mother.

Jesus, * the Man of Sorrows, meets Mary, the Queen of Martyrs. * Oceans of grief deluge their Hearts * as they face each other. * They suffer thus for my sins. * O Jesus, * ~ Mary, * bathe my sinful soul * in a sea of true sorrow for my past offences. * In all temptation I will say: * “Jesus, Mary, help me!” *

FIFTH STATION—Simon helps Jesus to carry the cross.

Although * Jesus seems about to expire, * He does not need, * yet accepts the help of Simon, * since He wills to die on the cross. * Thus does He teach me charity and perseverance. * O Jesus, * I too * will carry my cross patiently to the end * and strive to lighten the cross of my fellow men. *

SIXTH STATION—Veronica wipes the Face of Jesus.

Jesus accepts * and returns the towel to Veronica. * Upon it is left the * impress of His adorable Face! * Alas! * my sins have disfigured Thy holy Countenance. * O Jesus grant me efficacious sorrow * that all sin may be erased from my soul * and that Thy grace and Thy divine image * may be stamped upon it forever! *

SEVENTH STATION—Jesus falls a second time.

My feeble resolutions, * my oft-repeated sins * have crushed Jesus to earth a second time. * Such is the malice of habitual sin! * O Jesus grant me true repentance. * Let me die a thousand times * rather than have the misfortune * to fall again into mortal sin! * Help me to hate all sin! *

EIGHTH STATION—Jesus meets the Women of Jerusalem.

The Saviour * teaches the women not to weep for Him, * but for their own sins * and the sins of their children. * How generous is He! * O Jesus * grant that I may understand the true meaning of Thy Passion * and be so inflamed with love for Thee * that I may shed tears of blood * over my past transgressions! *

NINTH STATION—Jesus falls the third time.

Consternation fills my soul * when I behold the Saviour * fall a third time beneath the Cross! * What is the cause? * The incredible obstinacy of sinners * who refuse to amend their lives. * O Jesus * grant that I may be truly converted * and suffer every evil * rather than be numbered * among such ungrateful sinners! *

TENTH STATION—Jesus is stripped of His garments.

What a pitiable spectacle * is this shameful stripping of Jesus! * Ghastly wounds are re-opened. * Blood flows afresh. * What shame would be mine * if the veil were torn from my soul * and the world saw my hidden sins! * O Jesus, * help me to know all my sins * and confess them with deep sorrow * and true humility!

ELEVENTH STATION-Jesus is nailed to the Cross.

How can I behold the Saviour * ignominiously nailed to the Cross * and seek only comfort, wealth and honors * and even indulge in unlawful pleasures? * Jesus Crucified * Help me to esteem * and practice true Christian mortification * that I may love only Thee * and renounce the world, * the flesh and the devil. *

TWELFTH STATION-Jesus dies on the Cross.

Jesus, * my God, * dies on the Cross for me. * I have done nothing for Him. * I too must die! * O my Crucified Saviour! * Grant * that I may so live in the future * that I may have no cause to fear * a sudden and unprovided death. * Jesus for Thee I live! * Jesus, for Thee I die! *

THIRTEENTH STATION-Jesus is taken down from the Cross.

The lifeless Body of Jesus * now rests in the arms of Mary. * What anguish is hers * as she thinks of the many souls * for whom her Son shed His precious blood in vain. * What joy to know * that so many are redeemed. * O my Saviour * preserve me from perdition! * O sweet Heart of Mary be my salvation! *

FOURTEENTH STATION—Jesus is laid in the tomb.

Like Jesus, * I too must lie in the grave. * But Jesus * rises in triumph on the third day. * My buried Jesus grant eternal rest * to all who sleep in death! * Have mercy on me, * and grant me the grace to rise * to a new spiritual life, * that dying to myself now, * I may rise gloriously with Thee on the last day! *

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