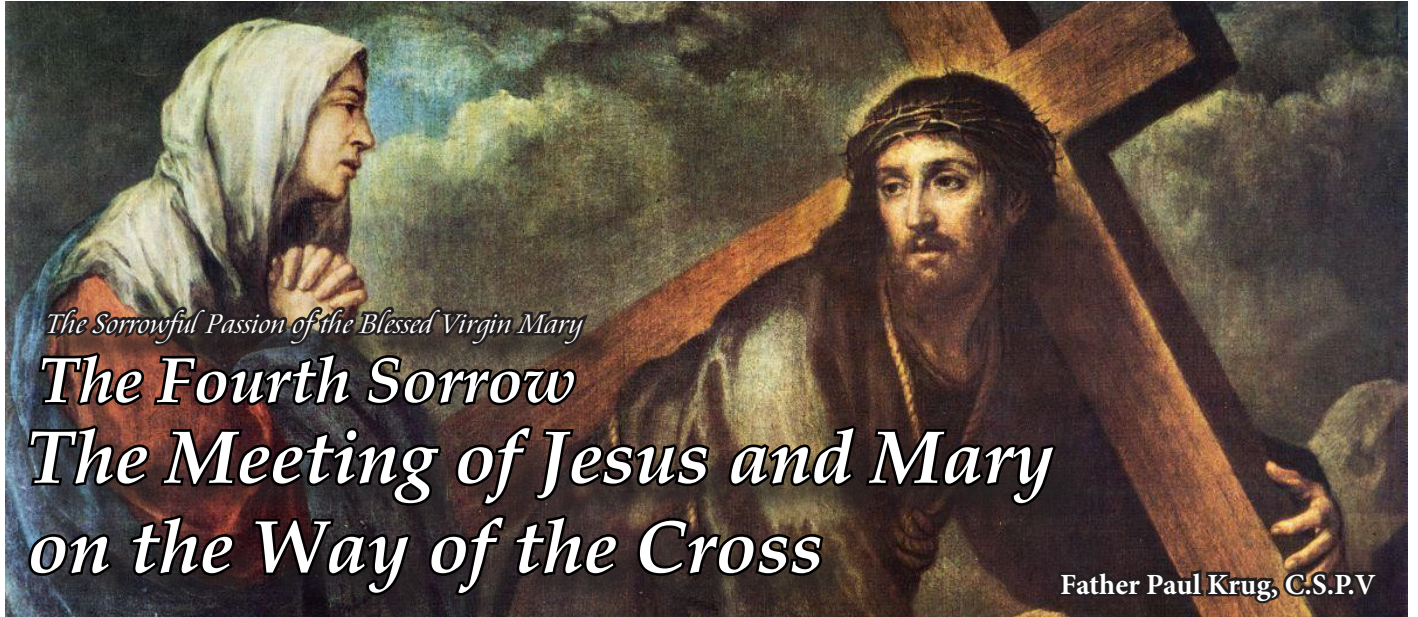




Dolorosa

THIRD WEEK OF LENT

MARCH 2017



The Sorrowful Passion of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Fourth Sorrow The Meeting of Jesus and Mary on the Way of the Cross

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—Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Road to Calvary*, 1660-1670. Museum Thomas Henry, Cherbourg.

Twenty-one years have passed since the loss of Our Lord in the temple. Eighteen of those years were spent by Jesus and Mary quietly and peacefully in the humble house at Nazareth. During that time, Jesus learned and grew proficient in the trade of carpentry, and Saint Joseph died the holiest of deaths in the presence of the Son of God and His Blessed Mother.

The last three of those twenty-one years were spent by Jesus in the public eye and are thus known as His public life. Our Lord spent those three years going about the Holy Land and the surrounding areas, preaching the Gospel and working miracles.

At length, Christ's hour came—the hour in which He would suffer more than anyone ever had or ever would suffer. The hour in which He would pay the price for man's sin was upon Him. "Behold, the appointed day at length came," writes Saint Alphonsus in *The Glories of Mary*, "and Jesus, in tears, went to take leave of His Mother, before going to death" (439). This meeting of the Son and His Mother cannot be described in words; it is something best left to the imagination. Both Jesus and Mary knew what was ahead. They both realized that this was the last time they would see each other before the dreadful events of the Passion

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unfolded. Saint Alphonsus relates that the Blessed Virgin revealed to Saint Bridget that when the time of the Passion was approaching, her eyes were always filled with tears as she thought of her beloved Son, whom she was about to lose on earth. Our Lady told Saint Bridget that the very prospect of Our Lord's fast-approaching suffering caused her heart often to be seized with fear and her whole body to be covered with a cold sweat (439).

This fear—this anguish of heart and mind—was realized at that very moment when the Mother of God looked into the unblemished face of her Divine Son for the last time; for the next time she would see Him, He would be nearly unrecognizable.

Among the most difficult things for a parent to bear—especially a mother—is to see her child suffer.

What makes it all the more painful is when that mother can do nothing to alleviate her child's suffering, but has to watch him endure his pain alone. The Blessed Virgin Mary was a firsthand witness for much of what her Divine Son experienced in His Passion, and she suffered with Him every step of the way. Each blow to the face of Christ was a blow to her heart. Every crack of the scourge as it tore the flesh of her Son, tore her heart to the core. The crown of thorns that pierced the sacred head of Christ pierced also her immaculate heart. Seeing

these outrages heaped upon her Son, Mary's heart broke inside. Yet, the mere sight of her Son suffering did not constitute the fullness of her anguish. The pain she felt seeing her Jesus suffer was considerably increased with the thought that there was nothing she could do to help Him. She had been there for Him throughout His entire life, and now she could only stand there and witness His agony. She could only stand by, as Saint Bridget relates in her *Revelations*, and watch as the brutal soldiers scourged her Divine Son until His shredded flesh hung from His bones (1:10). She could only stand by and listen as the mob cried out for His blood. She could only stand by and hear the pronouncement of the unjust sentence of death.

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Though her immaculate heart was breaking within her, Our Lady was determined to be with her beloved Son to the end. Thus, accompanied by Saint John the Apostle, Saint Mary Magdalene, and some of the other holy women, the Blessed Virgin followed Jesus as He carried His Cross through Jerusalem to Calvary. The streets were thronged with multitudes—some pitying the condemned Man, who, as Isaiah the prophet foretold, was “despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity” (53:3); the majority taking up the cry from the hall of Pilate: “Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!” So thick was the crowd that Our Lady lost sight of Jesus, but she was able to follow Him by the trail of blood, which saturated the ground. Saint Alphonsus relates that the Blessed Virgin revealed this to Saint Bridget: “By the footsteps of my Son,” Our Lady said, “I knew where He had passed, for along the way the ground was marked with blood” (440).

How the Mother longed to wipe the blood from the face of her Son, to part His tangled hair, to gently remove that cruel crown, to lift the cross off His bruised shoulders and carry it for Him! How she desired to see the face of her beloved Son! To secure this opportunity for the Blessed Mother, Saint John led her by a short way to a street corner which Christ had yet to pass. There, they stood, watching the procession to the place of execution. Our Lady saw the soldiers carrying the sentence of death. She saw the two thieves with their crosses. She beheld the executioners carrying the rough ropes, the large hammers, and the blunt, long nails. “[She then] raised



her eyes,” writes Saint Alphonsus, “and saw a young man covered with blood and wounds from head to foot, a wreath of thorns on His head, and two heavy beams on His shoulders” (440). She saw Him fall to the ground and heard the heavy thud of the cross as it dropped upon Him. She watched the soldiers kick Him like an animal and spit upon Him as they whipped and cursed Him to get up and move more quickly. She witnessed all of this, until at length Our Divine Savior reached the place where Our Lady stood. There, He stopped but for a moment. Raising His free hand, He wiped away the clotted blood from His eyes that He might see her. “The Son looked at His Mother,” writes Saint Alphonsus, “and the Mother looked at her Son” (441). Perhaps Our Lady spoke to her Divine Son; perhaps she said nothing, but looked lovingly and mournfully into His eyes—a look that would have said everything. “The Mother would have embraced Him,” relates Saint Alphonsus, “but the guards thrust her aside with insults, and urged forward the suffering Lord” (441). Our Lady, however, would not leave Him; rather, overwhelmed with sorrow, she slowly continued to follow Him to Mount Calvary.

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Throughout His public life, Our Divine Savior consoled distraught parents over and over again. He raised the widow of Naim's son from the dead. He brought back to life the daughter of Jairus. He cast out a devil both from the daughter of the Canaanite woman, and from the son of a poor man. Our Lord had compassion upon these and



—James Tissot. *Jesus Meets His Mother*. 1886-1894.

other parents and helped them in their sorrow. But there was one parent whom He could not console, one parent whom He could not help—and that was His own Mother. Our Lord could not console her because He came to this earth for one reason—to be about His heavenly Father's business, as He had told His Mother when He was only twelve. That is, He came to suffer and die for the salvation of mankind. It was the will of God, then, that Our Lady should suffer in her immaculate heart the very torments her Divine Son was suffering in His sacred body; it was the will of God that she, too, should walk the way of the cross, bearing her own cross in her heart.

The cross was the lot of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; it was the lot of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints; and it is our lot in this valley of tears. The road to heaven is indeed paved by the cross, and it is this road that we must take on our journey to heaven. We must, as Our Divine Savior said, take up our cross and follow Him. No other way leads to heaven except following in His footsteps, and His footsteps are always very bloody ones. They are footsteps marked by suffering and hardship. There is not one saint in heaven who has not followed in these footsteps; there is not one saint in heaven who has not suffered in some way.

Throughout the course of our lives, Our Divine Savior will approach us, as it were, and He will lay a cross—some suffering, trial, or sorrow—upon our shoulders. To some people this will happen very frequently; to others, not as often. Some crosses will be heavy, others will

not be. At times, we will be weighed down by sorrow, difficulty, contradiction, and even temptation. There will be days when we are tired of carrying our crosses, tired

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of bearing our burdens, tired of trial or of sorrow. There will be times when the cross of fear or of worry may wear us down, whether it be fear of this or that temptation, fear of the multitude or magnitude of our sins, or fear of something happening to us or to those we love. Then there will be times when we feel abandoned and lonely as we go through life, bearing our crosses. Yet, we must be ever mindful in the midst of our hardships that the cross is a sign of Christ's infinite love for us. He chooses the persons He loves most to carry the cross, and those most dear to His Sacred Heart are specially chosen to carry the heaviest of crosses. He does not ask us, however, to carry the cross alone; whenever He gives us a cross, He always carries it with us by giving us the grace we need to bear it. We are thus never closer to Christ than when we carry the cross beside Him with love and patience.

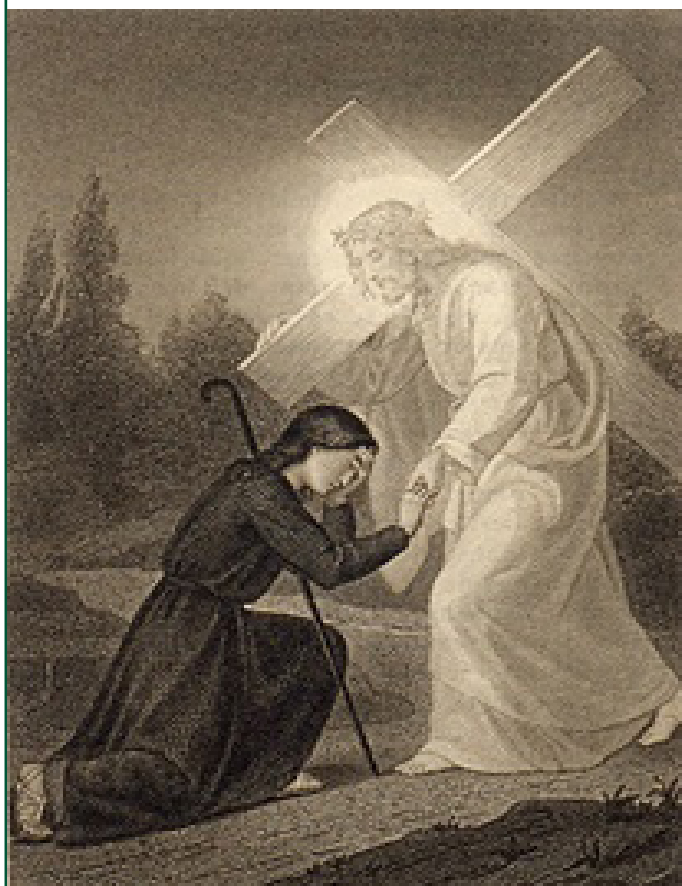
At times, we will struggle under the weight of our crosses, at times we will fall. Even the eternal Son of God fell beneath the weight of the cross, not once but three

times. Yet, what did He do after He fell? He stood back up, and He kept going. He persevered—He persevered through the difficulty and the pain—and we must do the same.

We must never forget that we are really and truly children of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and she is really and truly our Mother. Our Divine Savior, as He hung in agony upon the Cross, selflessly gave His Mother to be our own. He did this when He said to her: “Woman, behold thy son,” and when He said to Saint John: “Behold thy mother.” As it is with any good mother, so, too, it hurts Our Lady to see us suffer and struggle under the weight of our crosses. She shares in our sorrows and our trials, and she is ever ready to help us bear them. She would not leave her Divine Son as He walked the road to Calvary, and likewise she will not abandon us. From her throne in heaven, our heavenly Mother can do far more than just stand by and watch us struggle under the weight of our crosses. She can help us

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carry them by sending us the graces we need, that is, by sending us supernatural help which enlightens our minds and strengthens our wills. This she does without fail, provided we go to her and ask her for help.



Never forget that it is not the cross that breaks you down; it is the way you carry it. When it is difficult, then, whether it be the cross of physical suffering or some mental anguish, whether it be the cross of fear or worry

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or temptation, always have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let your confidence be in her and in her Divine Son. Go to her often and implore her help and protection in your own words. Say to her: “O Mary, my Mother, pray for me and help to carry my cross as you carried yours.”

May we be ever mindful of the words of Thomas à Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ*:

If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee and bring thee to thy desired end; namely, to that place where there will be an end of suffering, though here there will be no end. If thou carry it unwillingly, thou makest it a burden to thee and loadest thyself the more, and nevertheless thou must bear it. If thou fling away one cross, without doubt thou shalt find another and perhaps a heavier . . . (147)

For the sake of Jesus, let us persevere on the cross. Let us follow Him manfully; let no one shrink through fear; let us be ready to die valiantly in battle, and not stain our glory by flying from the standard of the cross. (362)



Prayer of Saint Alphonsus to the Sorrowful Mother for Patience in Bearing the Cross

My sorrowful Mother, by the merit of that grief which thou didst feel in seeing thy beloved Jesus led to death, obtain for me the grace, that I also may bear with patience the crosses which God sends me. Happy indeed shall I be, if I only know how to accompany thee with my cross until death. Thou with thy Jesus—and you were both innocent—hast carried a far heavier cross; and shall I, a sinner, who have deserved hell, refuse to carry mine? Ah, immaculate Virgin, from thee do I hope for help to bear all crosses with patience. Amen.

(*The Glories of Mary* 443)