



Dolorosa

FOURTH WEEK OF LENT

APRIL 2017

—Diego Velázquez. *Christ Crucified*. 1632. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

After Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden and were made to wander the earth for the rest of their days. Having handed down to his children God's promise of sending a Redeemer, Adam died at the age of nine hundred and thirty. According to a certain tradition, his remains were buried on a small mountain. This mountain was named "Golgotha" or "Calvary," which is translated as "the place of the skull." Writing of this tradition in *The Great Commentary*, Cornelius a Lapide relates the following:

Noe piously took the bones of Adam into the ark, and after the deluge distributed them among his sons, giving to Sem, his favorite son, Adam's skull, and [the land of] Judea with it. . . . Hence S. Ambrose declares (*in cap. 33 Lucae*) that Christ was crucified on Golgotha because "it was fitting that the first fruits of our life be laid to rest in the very spot from which our death had come." (2:669)

It was thus on Mount Calvary—the very place in which the bones of the man who doomed the human race were buried—that the God-Man would lay down His life to redeem mankind.

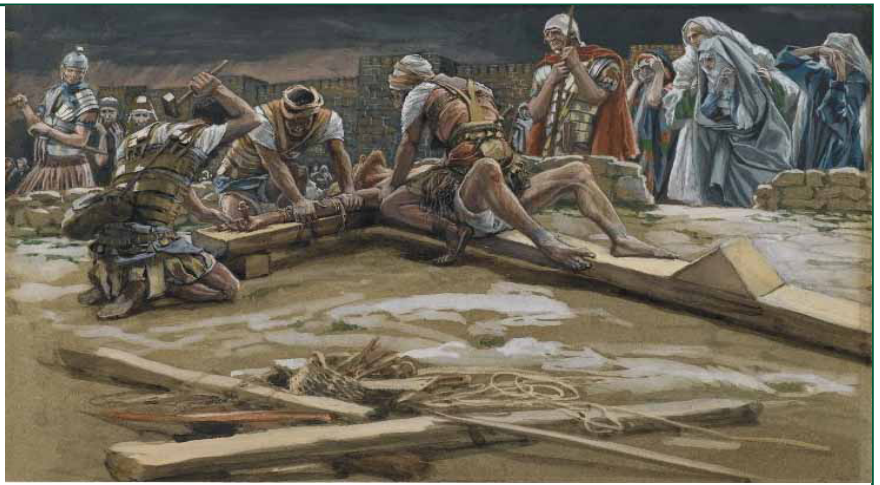
On Good Friday, when the soldiers reached Calvary, they set to work to make sure all was ready for crucifixion. At length, with Simon the Cyrenian at His side,

Our Suffering Savior arrived there with His Sorrowful Mother following closely. "When I reached the place of suffering with Him," Our Lady revealed to Saint Bridget, "I saw all the instruments of His death lying there ready" (*Revelations* 1:10). Indeed, the instruments of torment were prepared for both Our Suffering Savior and His Sorrowful Mother, as Saint Alphonsus relates in *The Glories of Mary*: "The cross and nails of the Son were also those of His Mother; with Christ crucified the Mother was also crucified" (445).

Crushed by pain and fatigue, Our Lord gave up His cross and awaited the next wave of torments that would be heaped upon Him. The ruthless executioners wasted no time in this endeavor. They brutally tore off His blood-soaked garments, which had adhered to the wounds on His body, causing the wounds to open wide and bleed anew. The barbarous soldiers then seized Our Divine Savior, Who willingly stretched Himself upon the cross. Grasping one of His hands, they pressed it to the wood. Then, applying the rough nail to the palm of His hand, they began the act of crucifixion. The first dull blow of the hammer certainly sent a shudder through the body of Jesus as His sacred flesh and nerves were pierced with the nail. Blow followed upon blow, clank upon clank, echo upon echo, as the hammer met with the iron nails. As each nail was driven through the flesh of the Son, a nail was driven, as it were, through

the heart of His Mother. As she stood there, witnessing this most horrific scene, how the Blessed Virgin must have shuddered at each strike of the hammer! How her own nerves and muscles must have quivered and seemed to be torn asunder as she watched each nail be driven through the trembling hands and feet of her Son!

Amid wild shouts of savage approval and satisfaction from the rabble that had gathered, the executioners, having finished fixing their Victim to the cross, slowly raised the heavy cross into the air and dropped its



—James Tissot. *The First Nail*. 1886-1894.

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base into the hole prepared for it. As the cross jolted into position, Our Lord was nearly ripped from it, and consequently, His blood began to flow more abundantly. The soldiers stepped back to admire their work and then left Our Divine Savior hanging there to die.

The Sorrowful Mother, together with her own sister Mary of Cleophas, Saint John the Evangelist, and Saint Mary Magdalene, drew nearer to the cross. “What a cruel sight,” writes Saint Alphonsus, “was it . . . to behold this Son in agony on the cross, and at its foot this Mother in agony, suffering all the torments endured by her Son!” (444)

Three hours of intense suffering followed the raising of the cross. No words can describe, no heart can experience the torment which Mary suffered in union with her dying Son during those three long hours. In her *Revelations*, Saint Bridget describes what Our Lady

revealed about the appearance of Christ on the cross:

His eyes appeared half-dead, His cheeks were sunken and His face mournful, His mouth open and His tongue bloody; so withered was He that His stomach was flattened against His back . . . His entire body was pale and languid from the loss of blood. His hands and feet were rigidly extended, drawn and conformed to the shape of the cross. His beard and hair were completely soaked with blood. And as my Son hung there, lacerated and bruised, only His heart was vigorous, because it was of an excellent and very strong nature. (1:10)

What a heartrending sight must this have been for the Blessed Virgin Mary—to see her beloved Son in such a pitiable state, to long to comfort Him and care for Him, to desire to wipe the blood from His adorable face, to quench the thirst of which He lovingly lamented! Yet, she was able to do nothing of the sort; she was helpless. It was this utter helplessness that plunged the fifth sword of sorrow so much the deeper into her heart. In his Gospel, Saint John does not even attempt to describe the grief he witnessed standing beside the Virgin Mary. That is how





—James Tissot. *Crucifixion, Seen from the Cross*. 1886-1894.

heartbreaking it was. Though Saint John deferred from describing the grief-filled scene, he nevertheless sums it up in one sentence—a sentence that is easily one of the most sorrowful written in the New Testament: “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother. . .” (19:25).

“I did not leave Him,” Our Lady revealed to Saint Bridget, “but stood nearer to the cross.” The Sorrowful Mother continued:

I was also the one closest to Him at His suffering and I was never separated from Him. I stood very near His cross, and just like that which is closest to the heart stings the worst, so His pain was heavier and worse for me than for others. When He looked at me from the cross and I saw Him, then tears flowed from my eyes like blood from veins. And when He saw me so stricken with pain and overwhelming sorrow, He felt such a sorrow over my pain that all the pain of His own wounds became as subsided and dead for the sake of the pain He saw in me. I can therefore boldly say that His pain was my pain since His heart was my heart. (*Revelations* 1:35)

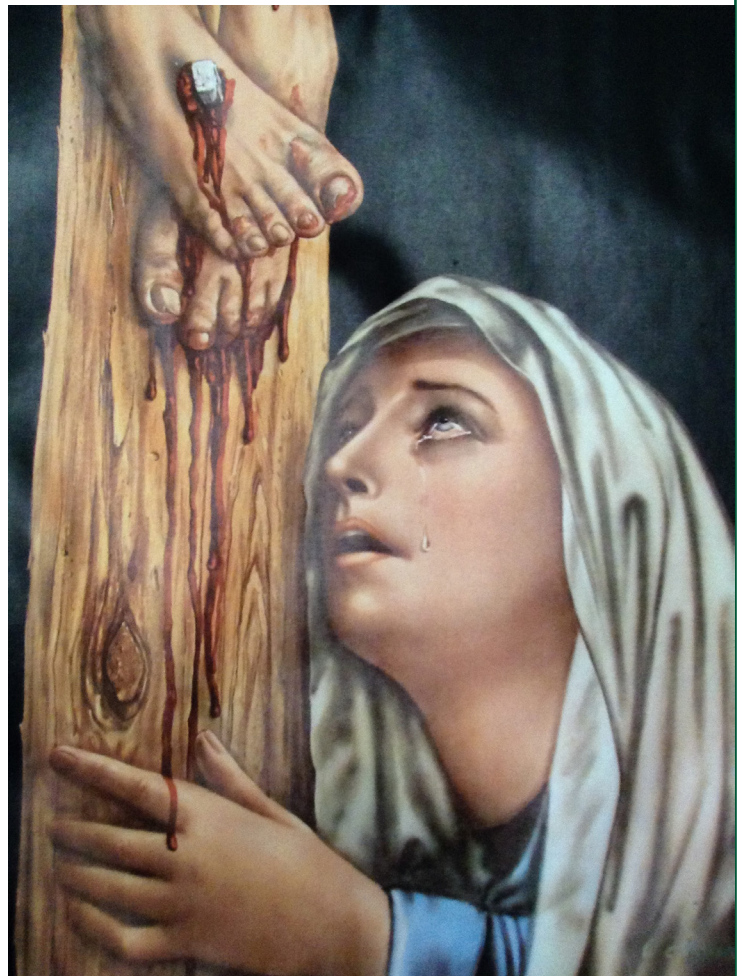
“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother.”

As if this excruciating agony were not enough for the Son and the Mother, it was vastly increased by the taunting and blasphemy of the mob. “And they that passed by,” records Saint Matthew, “blasphemed him, wagging their heads” (27:39). Some people antagonized Him, saying: “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Mt. 27:40). With the hatred of Satan burning within them, the chief priests and the scribes mocked Him thus: “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If

he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Mt. 27:42). Our Blessed Lady herself, as related by Saint Alphonsus, said to Saint Bridget: “I heard some say that my Son was a thief; others, that He was an imposter; others, that no one deserved death more than He did; and every word was a new sword of grief to my heart” (447).

“When He looked at me from the cross and I saw Him, then tears flowed from my eyes like blood from veins.”

Seven times did Our Divine Savior speak as He hung in agony upon the cross, and each time Our Lady heard His gentle voice, how much the greater was her sorrow. Every word spoken by her Divine Son was indeed impressed upon her heart and emblazoned in her memory. Perhaps, it was the first time He spoke that made the greatest impression; perhaps it was the last. In either case, what Our Lord said the first time must have made a deep impact on the heart of the Blessed Virgin, for despite all He had unjustly and cruelly suffered at the merciless hands of the executioners and at the demonic instigation of the Pharisees, Our Divine Savior’s first words from the cross were words of forgiveness. “Father, forgive them,”



He said, “for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:24).

At length, the completion of the work of mankind’s redemption had come. Our Suffering Savior spoke one last time to confirm this: “It is consummated” (Jn. 19:30). Then, with a loud voice, He cried out: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46). Saying this, Our Divine Redeemer bowed His head and died. The Blessed Virgin later revealed to Saint Bridget what she felt at this most solemn moment: “When I, His most sorrowful Mother heard His voice, my whole body trembled in the bitter pain of my heart. As often as I later thought on this cry, it was as if still present and fresh in my ears” (1:10).

In the midst of all that occurred immediately after her Divine Son’s death—the blackened sky, the earthquake, the piercing of her Son’s sacred side—the Sorrowful Mother stood in silent grief at the foot of the cross. Silently, she mourned the loss of her Jesus; silently, she prayed, as her Son had prayed, for mercy on those who had done this to Him; silently, she herself forgave them. Though she did so in silence, she was ready to look into the cold, hard eyes of the high priest Caiphas and the haughty Jews and say to them: “I forgive you. You took Someone most precious from me. You took my only Son—my God—but I forgive you, and may God have mercy on your souls.”

Forgiveness is a virtue that is very uncommon in our day and age. Today, forgiveness and charity in general are looked upon as either nonsense or as manifestations of weakness, while anger and vengeance are viewed as virtue and strength. In fact, revenge is often glorified in many modern movies and music, thus portraying vengeance as a virtuous and praiseworthy action. This, however, is not so. It actually takes more fortitude—sometimes even heroic strength—to forgive someone who has offended us, than it does to hold a grudge and seek vengeance.

We must forgive any and all injuries we receive; we must forgive these injuries from the heart. We must



—Bartolomé Murillo. *Crucifixion*. 1682. Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

forgive, not because it is the nice thing to do; rather we must forgive because Our Divine Savior requires this of us. In no uncertain terms, did Our Lord say: “If you will not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive you your sins” (Mk. 11:26). It is clear from these words, then, that Our Divine Savior has made our forgiveness of others the measure of His forgiveness of us.

On Mount Calvary, Our Lady witnessed one of the most sorrowful, heartbreaking tragedies that could ever befall a parent—she saw her Child die. She watched her innocent Son be savagely tortured and barbarically put to death. Yet, she harbored no anger—no vengeance towards those who did it to Him. She held no grudge in her heart; rather she forgave.

How much, then, should we, who are true children of the

Mother of Sorrows, be ready to pardon our enemies? How much should we, sons and daughters of Mary, be willing to forgive lesser offenses? Let us, then, be every ready to forgive—ever ready to excuse—those who have offended us. We cannot hold a grudge against anyone. No matter how harsh the word spoken to us, no matter how cruel the deed done to us or to those we love, we must forgive from our hearts.

Let us do this, as Saint Alphonsus says, by taking revenge, but let it be the revenge of the saints (*The True*

Spouse of Christ 375-376). That is, we must pray for our offenders and do good to them. This does not mean that we must treat our offenders as our best friends, but it does mean that we must forget about the injury and put it out of our minds. Forgiveness means we must not seek to reproach our neighbor at the first opportunity, nor should we go to the opposite extreme and give him the “silent treatment.” It means that we must refrain from gossiping about the person who has offended us,

for that is the very person about whom we will be most tempted to talk poorly.

This is the revenge the saints take; this is the revenge Catholics take; this is the revenge that will

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make us saints and save our souls. At times this will be tremendously difficult; at times forgiving another will seem almost impossible; at times we will be tempted to seek vengeance against those who have offended us. Yet, we must never forget that we are children of the Mother of Sorrows, and if she could forgive what happened on Calvary, then, with her help, we can forgive those who offend us or insult us.

As we strive to do this, may we find incentive and strength to persevere in Our Divine Savior's promise: "Forgive, and you shall be forgiven" (Lk. 6:37).



*If I can forgive THIS for YOU,
can you not forgive LESSER offenses for ME?*