

Dolorosa

PASSION WEEK

APRIL 2017



The Sorrowful Passion of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Sixth Sorrow The Body of Jesus is Removed from the Cross and Placed in the Arms of His Mother

Father Paul Krug, C.S.P.V

According to Jewish custom, the day began at sunset (typically about six o'clock) and ended at sunset the next evening. In other words, the Jews did not count their twenty-four hours from midnight to midnight as we do, rather from six p.m. to 6 p.m. Thus, for the Jews, six o'clock on Good Friday marked the beginning of their Sabbath—the day dedicated to the Lord—on which they could do work of no kind.

With the Sabbath rapidly approaching on Good Friday, the Jews grew worried that the crucified would not die before 6 p.m. Consequently, they feared that the bodies of the condemned would remain upon the crosses, thus profaning the Sabbath day. To prevent this, the Pharisees went to Pontius Pilate to beseech him to order his soldiers to break the legs of the victims so that they would die more quickly and then to dispose of their bodies. Pilate readily acceded to their request and ordered the legs of the crucified to be broken.

When the soldiers arrived to carry out this cruel order, the Sorrowful Mother was still standing at the foot of the cross, weeping over the death of her Son. She saw them approach both the good thief Dismas

and the bad thief. Armed with either a strong hammer or a heavy bar of iron, the soldiers fractured the limbs of the thieves. The dreadful sound of the crushing of bone, and the agonizing cries of the miserable suffers undoubtedly sent shivers through Our Lady.

As they approached Our Divine Savior, the grieving Mother trembled with fear, and, as Saint Alphonsus relates in *The Glories of Mary*, she implored them not to break His legs" (452). When the executioners came near the cross of Our Lord, they saw that He was already dead. To make sure of this, one of the soldiers raised his spear and drove it deeply through the side of Christ. "At the stroke of the spear," writes Saint Alphonsus, "the cross shook, and, as it was afterwards revealed to Saint Bridget, the heart of Jesus was divided in two" (452). From this gash in the side of Our Divine Savior, water and the last few drops of His blood flowed out. Our Lord truly shed every last drop of the blood in His body that man might realize how much He loves him, for He had no more blood to give.



—James Tissot, *A Soldier Pierces Jesus in His Side with a Spear*, 1886-1894.



—Rembrandt Workshop. *The Descent from the Cross*. 1650-1652. National Gallery of Art. Washington, D.C.

Although this last cruel insult was inflicted on the sacred body of Christ, it was Mary who endured its torment. Speaking to Saint Bridget, Our Lady revealed this: “When the spear was drawn out, the point appeared red with blood. Then, seeing the heart of my most dear Son pierced, it seemed to me as if my own heart was also pierced” (*Revelations* 1: 10). Pierced it was, indeed, not by the lance of the soldier, but by a sword of sorrow.

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Later that afternoon, two men advanced towards Mount Calvary. One, as Saint Matthew relates in his Gospel, was “a certain rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was a disciple of Jesus” (27:57); the other, named Nicodemus, was the man Our Lord had met secretly at the beginning of His public life. These men were disciples of Our Lord in secret for fear of the Jews. Yet, moved by grace and pity, they went to Mount Calvary to be with Our Lady and assist her.

Fearing the infliction of further outrages upon her Divine Son, Our Lady entreated Joseph of Arimathea to go to Pontius Pilate and obtain permission to take the

body of Jesus. At this gentle insistence of the Blessed Virgin, Joseph went to Pilate and laid his request before him. Writing of this in *The Great Commentary*, Cornelius a Lapide cites the opinion of Saint Anselm that Joseph represented to Pilate the grief and desires of the Sorrowful Mother. “. . . When Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the Body of Jesus,” says a Lapide, “he gave this reason, among others, that His mother was dying of grief. . .” (2: 722).

Having obtained permission from Pilate, Joseph returned to Calvary. There, with the help of Nicodemus, he reverently removed the body of Christ from the cross. Our Lady revealed to Saint Bridget that three ladders were placed against the cross to take down the sacred body. The holy disciples first removed the nails from the hands and feet and gave them to the Blessed Virgin. Then, one supported the upper part of the body of Jesus, and the other the lower as they slowly lowered Him to the ground (2: 21).

One author, as related by Saint Alphonus, describes the scene thus:

The afflicted Mother [stood at the foot of the cross], . . . extending her arms to meet her dear Son; she embraced Him, and then sat at the foot of the cross.



His mouth was open, His eyes were dim; she then examined His mangled flesh and uncovered bones; she took off the crown, and saw the sad injuries which the thorns had inflicted on that sacred head; she saw the holes in His hands and feet. . . . (454)

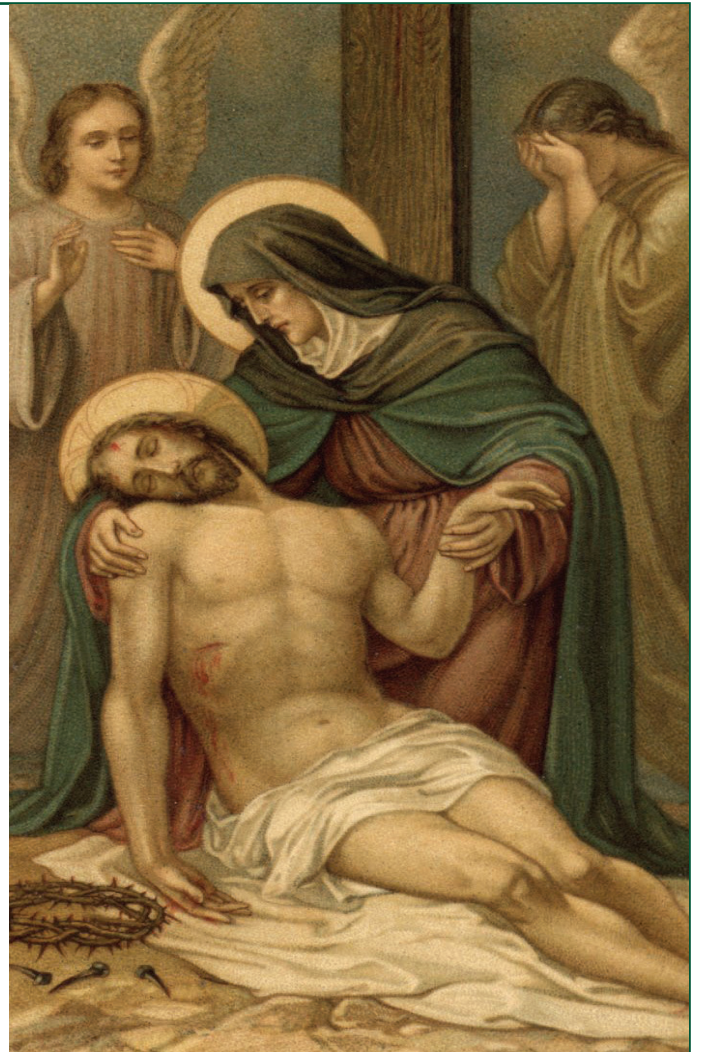
“I closed his mouth with my fingers,” Our Lady revealed to Saint Bridget, “and shut his eyes as well” (*Revelations* 4:70). How lovingly must Our Lady then have gazed at His gentle, but bruised and bloodied face! What tears must have fallen from her eyes!

On the first Christmas night, Our Lady gave her only-begotten Son to the world perfect and without blemish; on the first Good Friday afternoon, the world returned Him to her disfigured and covered with blood. Thus, when Holy Mother Church contemplates the Mother of Sorrows holding the body of her dead Son, she cries out: “O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow” (Lam. 1:12). Indeed, what greater sorrow can there be than the sorrow of a mother holding the dead body of her only son?

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Many times in the course of our lives, we will have the opportunity and the privilege to kneel, as it were, beside the Sorrowful Mother on Calvary. This opportunity and privilege we have each time we are present at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is astounding to think of such a thing, but it is nonetheless true. This is so because the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross. Bishop Louis LaRavoire Morrow, S.T.D., explains this in *My Catholic Faith*: “The Mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, because in the Mass the victim is the same, and the principal Priest is the same, Jesus Christ” (270). In other words, as the eminent theologian Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., writes in his work *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*:

The excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass . . . comes from the fact that it is the same sacrifice in substance as that of the cross, because it is the same Priest who continues to offer himself by His ministers [that is, His priests]; it is the same Victim, really present on the altar, who is really offered; only the manner of offering differs: whereas on the cross there was a bloody immolation, there is in the Mass, in virtue of the double consecration, a sacramental immolation through the separation, not physical but sacramental, of the body and blood of Christ. Thus the blood of Jesus, without being physically shed, is sacramentally shed. (1: 407)



The Mass, then, is not a mere remembrance or memorial of Calvary. It is not—as Protestants and some so-called “Catholics” in the New Church believe—a mere dinner service in honor of the Last Supper. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass actually renews the death of Our Lord, that is the separation of His body and blood, and it renews this in an unbloody manner through the separate consecrations of the bread and wine.

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What a privilege we have! What an honor it is for all Catholics to be present at so sublime an event as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass! We must be ever on guard, then, that we do not allow our attendance at Mass to become routine and to have little or no fervor. Because of fallen human nature, all too often what is most sublime



becomes so ordinary—so commonplace. As a result, how many there are who fail to appreciate the Mass, and, consequently, how many precious graces and blessings—graces and blessings so essential to leading a Catholic life today—are lost. It really is amazing how indifferent someone can become to the truths of the Faith if he is not careful. From this danger, we are not immune.

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On Mount Calvary, Our Lady received the lifeless body of her Jesus into her arms with the utmost love and tender devotion. At Mass, each time we receive Holy Communion, we too receive Him. We receive, however, not a lifeless body, but the living Christ into our hearts. We receive His body, blood, soul and divinity which are really, truly, and substantially present in the Holy Eucharist. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ really and truly abides within us after each Holy Communion. He told us this Himself

when He said: “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:57). When we receive the Holy Eucharist devoutly, then, we have, as it were, the power of God within us. We are thus never more powerful than when we are united to Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

The devil knows this. He knows the tremendous amount of grace and spiritual strength we receive from God when we receive Him with love and devotion in Holy Communion. This is why Satan—if he cannot prevent us from receiving altogether by convincing us to commit mortal sin—strives to influence us to receive Holy Communion out of routine and with little love and fervor. This he does by seeking to make us worldly. That is, he persuades us to be preoccupied with worldly and material things, pleasures, and news so that we will have a greater love and affection for these than for the things of God—and especially Holy Communion.

Do not fall for these deceptions. Instead, resolve to receive each Holy Communion with more love and fervor than the last. Do this by preparing to receive Our Divine Savior and by spending some time in thanksgiving after Holy Communion.

To prepare for Holy Communion, first, consider attentively—pause and think of—Whom you are about to receive, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; second, tell Our Lord how much you love Him, how sorry you are for ever having offended Him by sin, and how much you desire to receive Him; finally, ask Our Lady to prepare your heart and soul for her Divine Son, and to help you to receive Him with the holy dispositions with which she received Him in Holy Communion from the hands of Saint John.

Immediately after you have received Holy Communion, spend a few moments in silent adoration. Make silent acts of love and adoration for the Eucharistic Heart of Christ present within you.

After Mass remain a few extra minutes to thank Our Divine Savior for coming to you in Holy Communion and for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Speak to Him as you would a close friend. Thank Him for all the graces and blessings He has bestowed upon you and your family. Talk to Him about your troubles, your worries, and your concerns. Tell Him you are firmly resolved to avoid all sin and its occasions, and ask Him for the grace and strength to do so.

May the sight of the Mother of Sorrows, who, having witnessed the sacrifice of Calvary, held the body of Jesus beneath the cross, move us to a greater devotion to the Sacrifice of the Mass and a greater love for her Divine Son in the Holy Eucharist. May she, as we pray in the *Stabat Mater*, make our souls, like her own, “to glow and melt with the love of Christ our Lord.”