



# Dolorosa

HOLY WEEK

APRIL 2017



*The Sorrowful Passion of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

## The Seventh Sorrow The Burial of Jesus

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—Herbert Gustave Schmalz. *The Return from Calvary*. 1856-1935.

In the days of Our Lord, it was a common practice among the Romans to dispose of the bodies of executed criminals in a pit. The soldiers would simply dig a large hole in which they would deposit the bodies of the disgraced criminals where they would soon be forgotten by all. This, however, was not to be the case with the eternal Son of God. He was no criminal; He had never been guilty of a crime; and, though He had been put to death between two thieves, He would not be buried with them.

After the sacred body of Our Divine Savior had been detached from the cross, it rested in the arms of His Mother. As she held Him at His birth, so she held Him at His death, with one exception: at Bethlehem, she held Him in joy; on Calvary, she held Him in sorrow. Yet, she embraced Him now as she did then, that is, with all the strength of her arms and all the love of her maternal heart. “Thus was Mary,” writes Saint Alphonsus in *The Glories of Mary*, “with her Son locked in her arms, absorbed in grief” (458).

At length, what little light was in the sky began to glow dark orange as evening approached. There was thus not much time to grieve on Calvary. The great Sabbath and Passover were fast approaching, and it was forbidden by the Law of Moses to bury the dead on the Sabbath day. The body of Jesus, then, had to be placed in the tomb, and the tomb had to be sealed by six o’clock.

Still, the sight of the Mother holding the body of her Son broke the hearts of the disciples. They could not bring themselves to disturb her until the very last moment. At that moment, then, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus approached the Blessed Virgin. With tears in their eyes, they told her that there was not much time and that they must take the body to bury it. Our Lady mournfully agreed. With great reluctance and the utmost gentleness, the disciples took the body of Jesus from her arms. How it must have pained them to do this—to separate the grieving Mother from her Son! They then reverently laid the sacred body a linen cloth. Our Lady revealed to Saint Bridget that she cleansed Our

### Shroud of Turin

Natural Linen

X-Ray Negative



Lord's body of the blood and dirt that covered it before Joseph and Nicodemus embalmed it with sweet spices and wrapped it in the linen cloth (*Revelations* 1: 10). It was on this linen cloth that Our Divine Savior left to the world an impression of His sacred body. It is commonly known as the *Shroud of Turin*, and it is preserved in the the royal chapel of the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist in Turin, Italy, to this very day.

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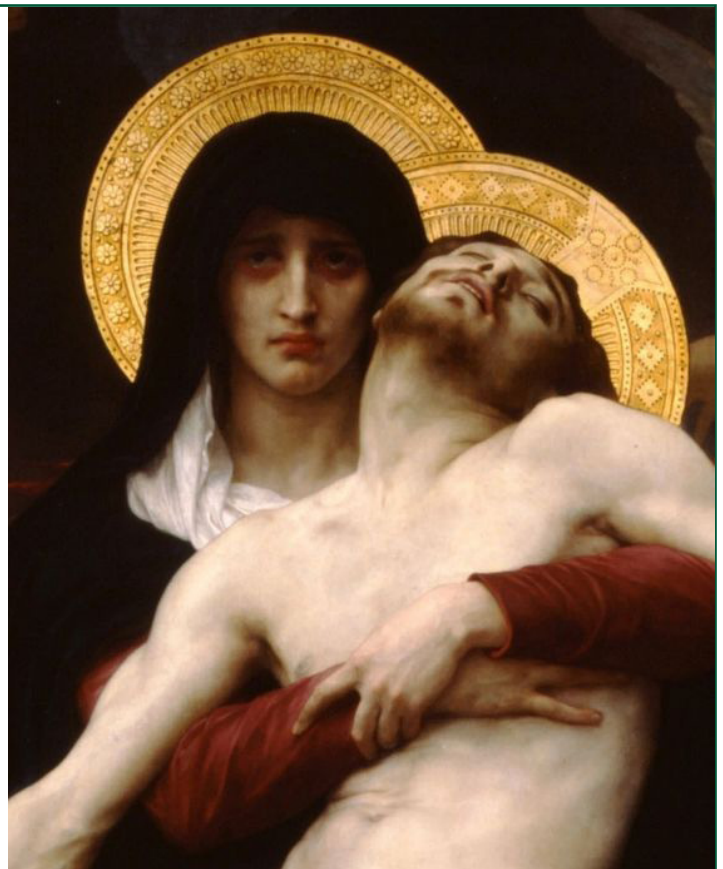
*“Thus was Mary, with her Son locked in her arms, absorbed in grief.”*

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According to Jewish custom, as related by Father James L. Meagher in *The Tragedy of Calvary*: “Each [disciple] approached, knelt down, and kissed the face of the Dead, thinking they were taking a last farewell of Him they loved. Then His Mother again covered His face with a linen cloth” (447). This solemn ceremony having been finished, the funeral procession to the Holy Sepulcher began. It was truly the most simple, yet the most sacred and sublime funeral procession that had ever taken place or will ever take place to the end of time. Saint Alphonsus describes the scene thus:

[The disciples] . . . raised the sacred body on their shoulders, and then the mournful train set forth;

—James Tissot. *Jesus Carried to the Tomb*. 1886-1894.



—William Adolphe Bouguereau. *Pieta*. 1876.

choirs of angels from heaven accompanied it; the holy women followed, and with them the afflicted Mother also followed her Son to the place of burial. (458)

Like the widow of Naim, whose son Our Lord had raised from the dead, the Sorrowful Mother walked behind the funeral bier—her entire being imbued with unspeakable sorrow. Joseph, Nicodemus, and their servants were the pallbearers. There was but one priest present—the newly-consecrated bishop and beloved disciple Saint John, who walked beside Our Lady. However, Father Meagher cites an ancient tradition that after the Pharisees and soldiers had departed, some of the other apostles, who had fled in fear Holy Thursday night, came to Calvary and took part in the mournful procession to the Holy Sepulcher (448). Mary Magdalen and the other holy women, whose courage and fidelity were greater than that of the men, were also present.

At length, the grieving cortège arrived at the place of burial. It was a sepulcher, belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, not far from Mount Calvary. Preceded by servants lighting the way with torches, the disciples carried the sacred body into the tomb and reverently laid it on a stone slab. The disciples and the holy women again approached the lifeless body of Christ one final time. With teary eyes and trembling hands, one by one the disciples knelt before the body of their Redeemer; one by one they reluctantly took leave of it. With Saint John and



Saint Mary Magdalene at her side, the Sorrowful Mother was the last to gaze upon the shrouded body of her Divine Son. Though she knew with certainty that He would rise from the dead in but a few days, she nevertheless was overwhelmed with anguish, seeing her Jesus—her God—in such a state.

Saint Alphonsus relates that the disciples approached Our Lady as she silently gazed upon Jesus. With tears in their eyes, they reluctantly told her that evening had come, that the Sabbath was beginning, and that they must close the tomb (458). They explained that since time was so short, the preparation of the body according to the manner of Jewish burial could not be completed; it would have to be completed after the Sabbath. The Blessed Virgin understood, and rising to her feet, she withdrew from the tomb, accompanied by some of the disciples. An immense, circular stone was then rolled into a groove at the mouth of the sepulcher.

With the piercing of this final sword of sorrow, the suffering of the Mother of Sorrows was complete. The body of her Divine Son lay in the tomb; the sword was driven through her soul. Indeed, it was the same sword which the holy man Simeon had foretold thirty-three years before: “And thy own soul a sword shall pierce” (Lk. 2:35).

From the very moment of His birth, Our Divine Savior was destined for the grave. He lived His entire life with this end always in His mind—that He was going to die

for the redemption of mankind. As it was with the eternal Son of God, so it is with us. From the very moment of our birth, we, too, are destined for the grave. This, of course, is one of the consequences of original sin.

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When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image and likeness and in the state of sanctifying grace. In addition to sanctifying grace, God bestowed upon them what theologians call preternatural gifts. *Preternatural* simply refers to what is above the natural but below the supernatural. The preternatural gifts which God gave to Adam and Eve—which, in turn, were to be passed down to their descendants—were immunity from concupiscence, impassibility, and bodily immortality. Thus, before the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind was not destined to die. However, by eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve lost sanctifying grace and the preternatural gifts both for themselves and their children. So it was that death entered the world. “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into this world,” Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in

whom all have sinned” (5:12).

By dying on the cross, Our Lord and Savior redeemed us and restored unto us sanctifying grace and thus the right to enter heaven. Yet, in His infinite wisdom He did not restore unto us the preternatural gifts. Thus, as Saint Paul tell us, “it is appointed unto men once to die . . .” (Heb. 9:27).

While it is true, naturally speaking, that death can be a frightening thing, it is nevertheless equally true that those who truly love Our Divine Savior have nothing whatsoever to fear at that hour. We must thus prepare ourselves for that day which is both certain and uncertain. The certainty is that we shall one day die; the uncertainty is when that day will be. We must be, therefore, be prepared.

We prepare by striving to love Our Divine Savior more and more each day. Love seeks to do the most, not the least for the one loved; it unselfishly wishes the best for the beloved. Thus, if we truly love Our Divine Savior, we must show Him not only in word, but by deed. That is, we must seek to do the most for Him—to do what He desires from us.

In a word, we must strive to emulate, as far as we are able, the tender love of the Blessed Virgin Mary for her Divine Son. To put it plainly, we must strive to imitate the heroic example of self-sacrifice, exhibited by her in the First Sorrow, by uncomplainingly bearing up under our sufferings and by uniting them with her sufferings for the conversion of sinners. We must replicate the detachment from the world she showed in her Second Sorrow by loving Our Divine Savior above all else. In other words, we are to enjoy worldly pleasures and use material things without becoming engrossed in them, even as we are to strive diligently to avoid the occasions of sin—the persons, places, and things that can lead us into sin.

Furthermore, difficult as it may be, we must, as Our Lady did in her Third Sorrow, unite our wills with the will of God. That is, we must resign ourselves to what we cannot control and we must trust Him—trust that He will always do what is best for us even if it does not seem so at the moment. We must, moreover, strive to carry our crosses with love, patience, and resignation as the Sorrowful Mother carried hers—the love, patience, and resignation which she especially demonstrated in her Fourth Sorrow.

We must endeavor to carry our crosses; not drag them.

Just as the Blessed Virgin practiced virtue to a heroic degree throughout her life, especially during the Passion and Death of her Divine Son and notably in her Fifth Sorrow, we, too, must commit ourselves to grow daily in virtue—particularly charity, patience, and meekness. Finally, if we would imitate, though imperfectly, the love of the Mother of God for her Divine Son, we must make it a point to attend each Mass with more fervor than the last. As Our Lady, in her Sixth Sorrow, received the lifeless body of her Divine Son in her arms, let us also strive to receive Our Divine Savior in Holy Communion with a greater love and devotion each time,

These are the means by which we will learn to love

Our Suffering Savior to a greater degree than we do now. These are the ways that will bring us closer to Mary, our heavenly Mother, and make us more and more like her. These are thus the methods that will prepare us for a happy and holy death—a death devoid of fear; a death filled with the peace that only heaven can give.

Let us always remember these beautiful words of Saint Rose of Viterbo: “Live so as not to fear death. For those who live well in the world, death is not frightening but sweet and precious.”

May we bear ever in our minds the truth that if we live as true children of Mary, we will die as true children of Mary, for as she was ever at the side of her Divine Son throughout His sufferings, death, and burial, she will be with us throughout ours. Indeed, she

will be our defense at the hour of death as we pray in the *Stabat Mater*:

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.



—Celine Martin. *Mother of Sorrows and Mary Magdalene*. 1888.