



Dolorosa

PASCHALTIDE

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THE PERFECT EFFORT

The Sword Removed

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After the holy sepulcher had been sealed on that first Good Friday, the Blessed Virgin Mary, accompanied by the Holy Women, retired for the evening. Joseph of Arimathea owned a house in the garden where the tomb was located. It is said by certain authors that Joseph loaned the house to Our Lady so that she could rest there for the night. Thus, after bidding farewell to her Divine Son at the sepulcher, she left it and went to the house of Joseph. Saint Bernard says, as related by Saint Alphonsus in *The Glories of Mary*, that “this Mother went away [from the tomb] so afflicted and sad, that she moved many to tears . . . and wherever she passed, all who met her wept, and could not restrain their tears” (460-461).

For the next couple of days, Our Lady remained in seclusion. Although she willed what was happening because her will was so united to Almighty God’s, still the death of her beloved Son had cast her into a state of desolation. In her solitude and sorrow she prayed. Her only consolation was in her lively faith and firm hope that her Son would rise again. She was confident that He would rise as He said He would. Thus, she did not go to the tomb with the other Holy Women to anoint the Body of Our Divine Savior.

On the morning of the third day, the profound sorrow of Our Lady was turned to unbounded joy when Our Risen Savior appeared to her. She was the first one to

whom He showed Himself after gloriously rising from the grave.

The four Evangelists, Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are silent on this point. Sacred Scripture gives no account of Our Lord’s appearance to His Mother. Yet, could such a meeting be put into words? Could so sublime an occasion be expressed in writing? In truth, Our Risen Savior’s apparition to the Blessed Virgin Mary is something that cannot be accurately portrayed in words.

Writing of the meeting of the Son and the Mother after the Resurrection, Father John Janssen, S.V.D., relates the following in his *Meditations for Religious*. He writes:

St. Augustine, St. Anselm, St. Gregory, and other saints teach that Christ first appeared to His Blessed Mother after the Resurrection. St. Brigid tell us the same. “When I was deeply grieved after the death of Jesus,” Mary told her in a vision, “my Son appeared to me and consoled me, saying that He would ascend to Heaven in a visible manner. And although this has not been recorded, because of my humility, it is true that He appeared to me first.” (379)

Our Divine Savior Himself revealed to Saint Teresa of Avila that He first appeared to His Sorrowful

Mother. Saint Teresa related this in her autobiography. She wrote:

[Our Lord] told me that immediately after His resurrection, He went to see Our Lady because she then had great need and that the pain she experienced so absorbed and transpierced her soul that she did not return immediately to herself to rejoice in that joy. . . . what must have been that transpiercing of the Blessed Virgin's soul! He also said that He had remained a long time with her because it was necessary in order to console her. (*The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Avila* 1: 390-391)

What unspeakable joy must Our Lady have felt in her Immaculate Heart when she saw her Divine Son! How lovingly she must have embraced Him! How tightly she must have pressed Him to her as she had done thirty-three years before at Bethlehem!



“Our Blessed Lady sees her Son in all the splendor of His glory,” writes Mother Marie de Saint Jean Martin, O.S.U., in volume 2 of *Meditations on the Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. Continuing, she says:

[Our Lady] is not surprised, for her faith has never wavered. She is not frightened, for she understands His love and she was awaiting Him. . . . She prostrates before Him and adores; she embraces Him for she is His Mother. Perhaps she places her fingers in the wounds of the nails; perhaps she puts her hand into the wound of His side; it is not because she has any doubts but because she loves. . . . Our Lord remained with His Mother for a long time; He instructed her in the deepest mysteries of our faith, promised to visit her often, then He left her, filled with the greatest possible consolation which she kept to herself. . . . (323-324)

On that first Easter Sunday, Our Risen Savior appeared to His Mother, and He removed the sword of sorrow which Simeon had prophesied over thirty years before would pierce her soul. “And thy own soul,” Simeon had said, “a sword shall pierce” (Lk. 2:35). With each word that Jesus spoke to His Mother on this joyous occasion, He removed the sword of sorrow ever so gently from her immaculate soul. He dispelled the sorrow from her Immaculate Heart and He flooded it with immense joy.

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As Our Lord did for His Mother, so will He do for us. He will remove the sword of sorrow, the sword of suffering, the sword of hardship from our heart and soul. In some cases, Our Savior will remove it immediately; in others, He will do it slowly. At times, it will take a number of days; at others, a number of years; at still others, a lifetime. However, we must, like the Blessed Virgin, never lose our confidence in Him. No matter what sorrow, no matter what suffering, no matter what difficulty, we must always have a firm confidence, a resolute trust, that in the end the struggle will pass—that in the end Our Lord will relieve us of the burden. It may not be in this life, but if we persevere through the struggle, Our Lord will lift the burden in heaven where He will reward us without measure for our patience and our confidence.

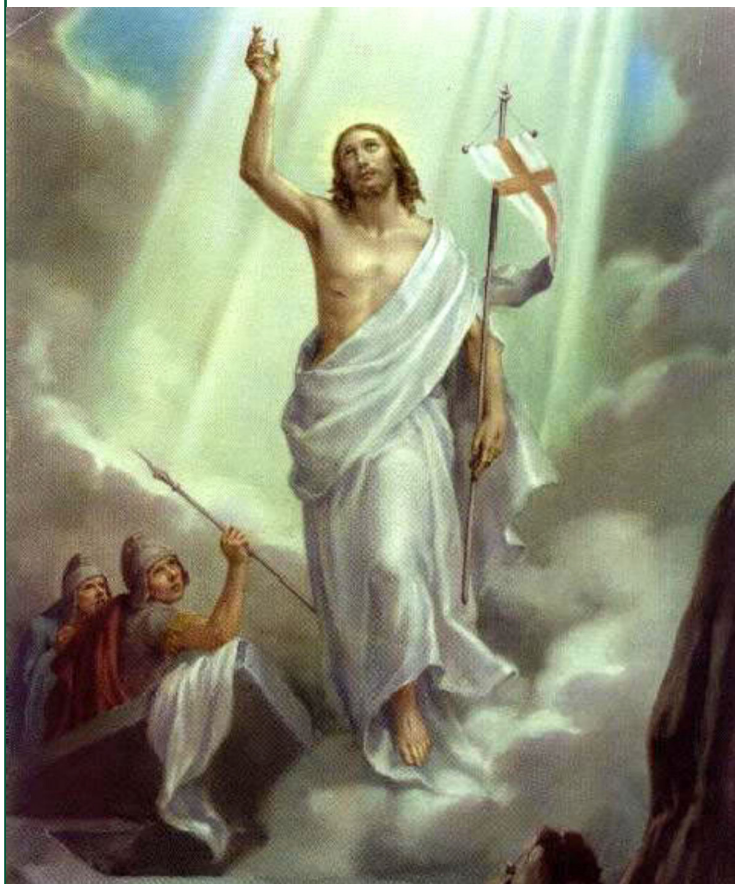
Confidence, as defined in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, is “faith or belief that one will act in a right, proper, or effective way.” Confidence in God, then, is faith or belief that God will act in a right, proper, or effective

way with regard to our well-being. In other words, it is a solid conviction that God will always do or permit what is best for us in the grand scheme of things; it is a firm belief that God is in control of all events and circumstances in our lives.

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In the course of our lives, we are going to experience many highs and lows, ups and downs. At times, it may seem that everything around us is shaking. Days may come when we ourselves may be shaken—shaken by grief or fear, wounded by misunderstanding or slander, overwhelmed by hardship or temptation. When such things happen, when our world is shaken, when our plans and dreams are seemingly torn down, when our lives begin to go in a particularly unwanted direction, what do we do? What do we have to hold on to? How do we steady ourselves? The answer lies in confidence—confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

By virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism, we are the adopted children of God. We are the children of a God Who loves us with an infinite, an incomprehensible and



unmeasurable, love. Almighty God loves us so much that He died to redeem us and thereby give us a chance to be happy with Him for all eternity. He loves us so much that He would shed every last drop of His Precious Blood again to save us. Even if it were to save only one of us, He would do it again. How blessed we are to be the children of such a God! How blessed we are to be the sons and daughters of a God Who loves us and cares about us and Who is genuinely concerned about what happens to us!

What trust, what confidence should we have, then, in our loving God! How we should strive to imitate the confidence of Our Blessed Mother—the confidence she had at that darkest of hours when her only-begotten Son died before her very eyes, the faith she had that He would rise again.

Confidence in God, however, does not mean that we will not feel sorrow or discouragement or any of the movements of the passions under certain adverse circumstances. We will, at times, feel sad, angry, discouraged, and so on, but it is not the feelings that matter. What matters is how we act; what matters is what we do when we are affected by these feelings.

When we become the object of dislike, slander, or gossip; when death strikes our family; when our children

begin leading wayward lives; when we struggle with temptation; when it seems that nothing is going our way and that we are seemingly down and out, we must confidently place our trust in Almighty God. No matter what happens in life, we must be confident that God has a plan for us. We must trust that He will lead us in the right direction whether it seems so or not, for God always gets us to where He wants us if we let Him.

All too often, when the winds of adversity strike, we become like Saint Peter when he walked on water, as related in Saint Matthew's Gospel. Saint Peter walked onto the sea towards Our Lord, but quickly lost his confidence in Him and began sinking. "Seeing the wind strong," Saint Matthew writes of Peter, "he was afraid" (14:30). Like Saint Peter, whom Our Lord afterwards rebuked as having "little faith," we often begin to fear and to sink in the midst of adversity. This happens because we start thinking about ourselves and, consequently, take our eyes off Christ. When we examine our trials, for instance, or when we attempt to find a human solution to our problems, we turn our eyes from Christ. We then tend to begin doubting divine providence, we lose confidence in Our Blessed Savior, and we start sinking in the waves of discouragement, sadness, and even, at times, anger.

In the midst of life's storms, we must remember that everything happens for a reason and that God does not usually venture to share that reason with us. And so, rather than allowing ourselves to yield to discouragement,

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sadness, and anger, we must say with the Psalmist, "I set the Lord always in my sight: for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved" (Ps. 15:8). In other words, we must keep our eyes fixed firmly on Christ, knowing that since He is at our right hand and that we are in His care, we will not be shaken by adversity.

With this in mind, then, let us make it a point to strengthen our trust in God by frequently making acts of confidence in Him. This can be done by saying a little invocation such as, "O Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in Thee." Then, let us form a holy habit of turning to Our Divine Savior when things go wrong. Yes, we must do what is humanly possible, but after we have done so, we must leave the rest in God's hands. He will take care of our problems, He will take care of our families, He will take care of us.

Never forget that Easter Sunday always follows Good Friday, that the joy of Easter always comes after the sorrow of Good Friday. So it was for Our Lady, and so it is in the course our lives. We must only persevere with Our Lady in enduring the sorrow and hardship of our "Good Fridays," confident that "Easter Sundays" will follow.

In the end, Our Blessed Savior will remove the sword of sorrow from our hearts as He removed it from His Mother. He will fill our wounds with a joy that nothing can take from us. Through all life's struggles, then, continue to fight, continue to trust, continue to have confidence. For confidence is the key that unlocks the treasures and graces of the Sacred Heart.

