



Dolorosa

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A STEP BACK IN TIME

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE



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On December 17, 1995, the *New York Times* published an article titled “Geologists Zero In on Sodom and Lot’s Wife.” The article relates that British geologists performed an analysis on some soil and rock along the Dead Sea. The results of this study led these particular geologists to trace the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrha to a specific peninsula on the Dead Sea. The geologists, however, attributed the destruction of the cities to a natural cause, such as an earthquake. “Saturated soil and highly flammable bitumen, rather than God’s wrath,” they say, “was apparently behind the demise of the cities. . . . [For,] fire would have been a constant hazard in what was an earthquake zone.” Nothing, however, is further from the truth. Such a statement is yet another feeble attempt by godless men to discount Sacred Scripture and to move further away from God and the truth by concocting some purely natural explanation, no matter how outlandish.

In fact, this seems to be the agenda of unbelieving men today. These people are on a mission to rid the world, and especially the youth, of any notion of God. They do this because if one takes away God, there are no longer any consequences for one’s actions. If there are no consequences for one’s actions, then one can do whatever his heart desires without any fear of punishment. In short, such a person can, as Martin Luther once declared, “sin boldly.”

God’s punishment of Sodom and Gomorrha for their unspeakable sins of impurity is a testament to how

much He detests such abominable sins. The fire and brimstone that fell from heaven and that destroyed those cities is thus a warning for people of our time—a warning that modern man tries to wish away and pretend never happened. For, the same sins for which God punished Sodom and Gomorrha plague society today and will meet with His all-just punishment in one way or another. We must, therefore, pray for the conversion of these poor sinners!



A view of the Dead Sea from Mt. Sodom. Mt. Sodom is located on the southern basin of the Dead Sea and is an extraordinary geological phenomenon. Aside from a few thin layers of silt and marl, it is formed entirely of salt. The pillar on the right of the picture is referred to as Lot’s Wife.

After the Lord had informed Abraham that his wife Sara would bear a son, He and the two angels that accompanied Him prepared to depart. They graciously thanked Abraham and Sara for their hospitality and then set out in the direction of Sodom. Abraham offered to accompany them part of the way, and they accepted.

As the small group walked along, the Lord turned to Abraham and said, “The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied, and their sin is become exceedingly grievous” (Gen. 18:20). He then informed Abraham that on account of the heinous sins of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha—sins that cry to Heaven for vengeance—He would destroy those cities.

Hearing this, Abraham trembled with fear. He was afraid for his nephew Lot and Lot’s family who dwelt in Sodom. He thus humbly pleaded with Almighty God to spare the cities. “Lord,” Abraham said, “will You destroy the just with the wicked?” He then asked, “If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish with the rest? And will You not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just, if they be therein?”

The Lord looked upon Abraham with pity, and He said to him, “If I find in Sodom fifty just men, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

“What if there be forty-five just persons,” Abraham then respectfully asked, “will You still destroy the city?”

“I will not destroy it if I find forty-five just men,” the Lord answered.

Again, Abraham asked: “What if forty be found there, what will You do?”

And, again, the Lord responded: “I will not destroy it.”

Abraham persevered in his plea on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrha. He then asked the Lord if he would destroy the cities if there were thirty or even twenty

just men. The Lord said He would not destroy the cities for their sake.

Sadly, Abraham knew how wicked the people of Sodom and Gomorrha had become and how few good people there were, so he made one final petition. “Lord,” Abraham said, “be not angry if I speak yet once more: what if ten just men should be found there?”

The Lord said, “I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.”

But, there were not even ten just men in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha. Thus, as we read in the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis: “The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrha brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And He destroyed these cities, and all the country about, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and all things that spring from the earth” (24-25).

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However, Almighty God did look out for the relatives of Abraham. Before unleashing His fiery wrath, He sent His two angels to warn Lot, his wife, and his daughters. That evening the two angels, disguised in the form of men, arrived in Sodom. Lot, who was sitting at the city gates, saw them and, not knowing they were angels, went out to greet them. He invited them to dine with him and be his guests for the evening. At first, the





angels graciously declined his invitation, but Lot insisted. In the end they accepted Lot's hospitality and dined with him that evening.

After dinner a mob with evil intentions gathered in front of Lot's house. Hearing the noise outside, Lot went out and attempted, unsuccessfully, to send them away. Instead, his words started an uproar. We read in Genesis that the mob "pressed very violently upon Lot" (19:9). It was at that moment that the door of his house opened and the angels pulled him inside. They then struck every member of the mob blind and proceeded to give this warning to Lot: "If you have anyone here that is dear to you, son-in-law, or sons, or daughters, take them out of this city. For we will destroy this place, because their cry is grown loud before the Lord, who hath sent us to destroy them" (Gen. 19:12-13).

Lot had two daughters whom he had promised in marriage to two young men in the city. He approached his future sons-in-law and told them to get out of Sodom because the Lord was about to destroy it. Thinking that Lot was joking, the young men refused to leave. And so, Lot simply returned home.

The next morning, the angels again said to Lot, "Arise, take your wife, and your two daughters: lest you also perish in the wickedness of the city" (Gen. 19:15). Still, Lot lingered. For whatever reason, he was hesitant to leave. But, this was no time to delay. God's just vengeance was fast approaching. And so, forcibly grabbing the hands of Lot, Lot's wife, and his two daughters, the angels ushered them out of the city.

Once outside the city gates, the angels said to Lot and his family, "Save thy life: look not back, neither stay thou in all the country about: but save thyself in the mountain, lest thou be also consumed" (Gen. 19:17). Lot, however, protested. "I cannot escape to the mountain," he said, "lest some evil seize me, and I die" (Gen. 19:19). He then asked if it were possible for God to spare a little nearby

city, called Segor, so that he might seek refuge there. The angels acceded to his wishes and told him to make haste to that city. Lot, his wife, and his daughters thus hurried off. By the time morning came and the sun was risen, they had arrived. It was then that Almighty God rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrha.

As the destruction of the cities began, Lot's wife looked back and was punished on the spot for disobeying the command not to look back to the cities. "And his wife looking behind her," writes Moses in Genesis, "was turned into a statue of salt" (19:26).

Commenting on this incident, the renowned first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, in chapter eleven of his work *The Antiquities of the Jews*, writes:

Lot's wife continually turning back to view the city as she went from it, and being too inquisitive what would become of it, although God had forbidden her so to do, was changed into a pillar of salt; for I have seen it, and it remains at this day.

Interestingly, the fourth pope, Clement I, in chapter eleven of his Epistle to the Corinthians, also states that the pillar of salt into which Lot's wife was transformed existed in his time.

"And his wife looking behind her, was turned into a statue of salt."

What happened to Lot's wife because of her disobedience is one of the most unique punishments that Almighty God has ever dealt out. What is perhaps even more interesting is that we know absolutely nothing about her other than that she was Lot's wife and that she was turned into a pillar of salt. Sacred Scripture makes no mention of who she was, of what race and family she was from, or even what her name was. All we have is a handful of Old Testament words written about this woman. Yet, careful attention must be given to her and to the lesson she teaches us, for the eternal Son of God made an example of her.



While speaking about the end of the world and about how one should not return to his house to retrieve his goods, Our Divine Savior referred to Lot's wife as an example of not turning back. "In that hour," Christ said, "he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away: and he that shall be in the field, in like manner, let him not return back. Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:31-32). Our Divine Savior was speaking about not turning back at the end of the world, it is true. However, these three words uttered by the God-Man may be considered as a warning to all of us. We have the same fallen human nature that Lot's wife had. We are therefore subject to the same vice that accounts, according to certain Scripture scholars, for her disobeying the express command of the angels and looking back to Sodom: curiosity. We must, then, remember Lot's wife.

In his commentary on the Pentateuch, the eminent scholar of Sacred Scripture Cornelius à Lapidé relates that one of the reasons Lot and his family were told not to look back towards Sodom was because "God wished to teach Lot and us that we ought to mortify our curiosity" (191). Continuing, he writes:

[Lot's wife] looked back, stirred by the noise of the rain of fire and brimstone, and the cry of those who were perishing; partly out of fear that she herself might be snatched by the flames, partly out of curiosity, partly out of sorrow at the loss of her city and possessions to the conflagration. (193)

Citing the words of Saint Prosper, Cornelius à Lapidé then tell us that "Lot's wife was made a statue of salt . . . that we might learn not to look back with a noxious curiosity" (194). In other words, we are to learn not to yield to idle curiosity.



Curiosity is defined as a disposition to inquire after knowledge, to investigate, to discover hidden or unknown things. There is a praiseworthy curiosity in which one is driven to learn his duties and obligations and to discover the means of performing them well. However, there is also a shameful curiosity which stirs one to inquire after what does not concern him, to learn what is not useful, and even to seek things that may prove dangerous or harmful. This we call *idle curiosity*.

"Idle or vain curiosity," writes Father Ferreol Girardey in *Conference Matter For Religious*, "is a very general vice" (333). He then enumerates the evils of this vice. He writes:

It is so much the more deplorable, because but few only scruple it, although it is productive of great injury, especially in the spiritual life. It dissipates the mind, fills it with vain and useless thoughts and prevents application to serious matters. It occasions much uneasiness, divides the heart, agitates and worries the mind, leaves a void in our interior, deprives us of all attention to and relish for spiritual things, and of unction in our prayers and other spiritual exercises. It is a great obstacle to the interior life, to recollection of mind and mental prayer, and, consequently, to perfection and even salvation. Moreover, it is apt to be contagious, and, therefore, disedifying, and not unfrequently even scandalous. (333)

In a word, idle curiosity is destructive of our pursuit of holiness and, ultimately, an obstacle to the attainment of eternal life.

The constant urge to learn news that is of no concern to us takes away our peace of mind and dashes our prayer life to pieces, or we are driven to such a preoccupation with such news and information that it is hard to think of anything else, let alone God. In other words, we allow ourselves to become so distracted with





worldly news and knowledge that we leave little or no time for spiritual things. Even if we do leave some time for our prayers, they are riddled with curious thoughts.

As if this were not enough, those who give free rein to their vain curiosity are often the disseminators of gossip and uncharitableness. “They meddle with the business of their companions,” Father Girardey writes, “and with the rights and duties of [those in positions of authority].” Continuing, he says, “Although blind to their own manifold shortcomings, they know well the faults of [their neighbor], . . . and they censure all without restraint” (336).

Furthermore, idle curiosity has been the cause of the ruination of countless souls. How many, in one way or another, have been punished in this world for delving into business that was of no concern to them? How many are currently suffering in purgatory for searching into things that led to the commission of sin? How many, at this very moment, are burning in the fires of hell for yielding to their curiosity and thereby falling into mortal sin?

“Lot’s wife was made a statue of salt . . . that we might learn not to look back with a noxious curiosity.”

How we must strive against vice! How we must carefully guard against falling into the bad habit of yielding to idle curiosity! “Remember Lot’s wife,” Our Divine Savior said. Remember the consequences of idle curiosity. It is not likely that we will be punished by being turned into a pillar of salt for giving into this vice, but

we will certainly harm our spiritual life and turn it, so to speak, into a lifeless pillar of salt. I say “lifeless” because by frequently yielding to vain curiosity and thereby becoming so absorbed in the things of the world, we will leave ourselves devoid of true devotion and love for God.

Let us combat fallen human nature’s tendency to this curiosity by employing these remedies given us by Father Girardey:

- Avoid all idle gossip, criticism, fault-finding, and detraction;
- Limit the seeking of the news of the world;
- Shun idleness and try to keep busy;
- Mind oneself and one’s own faults;
- Keep a careful guard over one’s eyes and the desire to know things that are not necessary;
- Strive to acquire the habit of walking in the presence of God, realizing that He is everywhere and that He observes all that we do.

Let us ever remember Lot’s wife and be not curious about things that are of no concern or use to us. For, as the English poet Alexander Pope once wrote, “One who is too wise an observer of the business of others, like one who is too curious in observing the labor of bees, will often be stung for his curiosity.” With God’s grace and Our Lady’s assistance, let us rather mind the things that pertain to us and to our duties, and in so doing, possess that peace of soul which is the reward of those who seek God alone.