Below The Cross



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TRANSLATED BY M. DE PAL

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by

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Below the Cross

BELOW the cross. There I stand by myself . . . in the spell of God's infinite love. My soul is seized with mercy and deep emotion of adoration. Tears spring to my eyes. I would bend my head but the cross draws me on and compels me to look upon it; for "they look upon me and weep" . . . is what He promises.

(a) What have we given Thee, Oh Lord, Thee Whom we ought to have loved and adored? Thou camest to earth and Thou wert confined in a cave. Hardly wert Thou born before Thou wert compelled to flee to Egypt. Thou then didst wear the guise of a carpenter. We once went to meet Thee with palm branches and Thou didst weep. Once didst Thou entrust Thyself to us and we chose Barabbas. Once we wished to wind Thee a wreath and we made it of thorns. One picture we took of Thee and it is the "Ecco Homo" which was left to us. Thy mother became the Sorrowful Mother. Once Thou asked a drink of us and we handed Thee vinegar. Oh, who would have believed that this should be Thy fate amongst us, and that such should be Thy way on earth?

And now Thou art hanging here like a statue of prayer. With outspread arms and open lips Thou criest for mercy. Thou hast prayed on many mountains but Thy prayer said on this Mount is the cry of eternal "Interpellation." In the night of the

infinite, great God the supplication froze upon Thy lips. Great and holy is the Lord Who did not pardon even His own Son . . .! In what terrible sublimity the cross announces this: Men, fear God and love Christ. This is what He cries out to you, cries it to final exhaustion. Oh, if ever, hear His word now, hear it today! He begs us to guard and treasure our soul.

(b) Upon this naked figure the only "ornament," the crown of thorns deeply touches us. He started out as betrothed, as hero, therefore crown and wreath befit Him. He struggled for the wreath and this is what He received. Instead of glory and love they crowned Him with the wreath of hatred . . .What a curse: this is the curse of sin, hell and hatred. And He took all this upon Himself so that no harm should come to us. Christ wound a wreath of all the curses meant for the world so as to take them upon His head. Crown of thorns, briar-bush burning in the wilderness, the fire of immensely sweet and strong love burns, flames, and darts up in Thee . . .

Here also we hear the words: Holy is the ground upon which Thou standest; take off the sandals of Thy feet! Oh how holy is this ground! And this our Moses does not shrink from the mission of redeeming His people, but He bends His thorn-crowned head below the holy will of

God and the holy law of sacrifice. Thou, oh crucified Lord Jesus, art our briar-bush, pale-red and sweet are Thy roses, Thy holy wounds, but upon the cross they are indeed full of thorns! Thorns as well as beauty are needed so that the soul should blossom forth.

(c) The blessing and strength of Jesus' blood is deep holy mystery, *'mysterium fidei."* It broke His heart and shed its last drop of blood and "the house was filled with perfume of balm," the heavens and the earth were filled with it and more especially the Church. Upon its altar stands the Grail Cup of His Holy Blood! One drop, oh Lord, give us only one drop! This fiery blood, this blood of fire burns out poison, agony, sin, death! Every drop of it induces eternal spring to break forth from our soul. This sweet blood quenches thirst! It shines upon our brow as kindly anointment which the angel of vengeance and massacre avoids. Upon the lips this blood is divine sweetness and eternal smile. In the heart it is the blood of heroes. What would we be without Thee, sweet, divine blood? What a curse would weigh upon us and overshadow us if Thy blood were not upon us and our brethren? When we go to confession, we wash our soul in this blood. This is what we receive when we communicate, and its fire glows upon our face.

Jesus Prays for His Enemies

And Jesus said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23, 34).

(a) This is the prayer of the interceding Jesus! He looks along the howling, ungrateful crowd, and the crowd appears to Him infinitely miserable. The shortsighted, dull-spirited mob whirls around like a serpent's nest, like worms in the dust and mud, and above them this soaring Seraph, Who begs for the mercy of God and says: "Father . . .!" Audacious word! The first word of Christ upon the cross. Surrounded by so much bitterness and cruelty His sweet, strong soul finds the appropriate word, "Father."

Thy Son am I, different am I. I take and receive my emotions from Thy heart and not from the mud of the earth. Thy soul, not the blood which demands vengeance and embitters itself, speaks out of me: Forgive them! They are in need of it, being unspeakably worthless. Forgive them! Grant that the greatness of my soul lift them out of their dwarfishness and that with my divine feelings they recover from their beast-like instincts!

(b) *"They know not what they do."* Below the cross this is clear to us. They

know not what they do, in what darkness of night they stand, and how far from God they are. They do not know it, although they have deserved it. They turned away from the sun and drew a manifold midnight after them by their coldness, indifference, prejudice, and hate. Oh Lord, forgive them and overwhelm them with pure, noble, bountiful emotions. Let Thy truth penetrate their heart. Through hate and strife the soul never finds the way to God, for it is a lowly, shallow, impetuous, vile one-sided soul. It tends to enmity in itself and does not comprehend the Sublime. When we sin and deny the Lord for passion and instinct, we also prove to be insane. To sin against the sublime God is wicked madness. This is what we want to keep before our eyes. Then we will know what we are doing.

(c) Jesus told us several times what God is to us. Glorified by Peter, He said in the circle of His disciples: Not flesh and blood have revealed this to thee that I am the Son of God, but "my Father." He taught them how to pray and said: Ye are to pray this way: Our Father. Glorified in the resurrection of Lazarus, He said: "Father, I give Thee thanks!" When bidding them farewell He disclosed to His disciples the vista of eternal glory with the words: "I go to my Father." In the Garden of Olives, down on His knees, and twice upon the

cross, He announces that God is His Father—here and now, in suffering and in death. He is His Father. Once He speaks for us "Father, forgive them" . . . Then He speaks for Himself: "My Father, into Thy hands do I offer my soul." When we suffer, when we are persecuted, then this is also our prayer and our joy: Father, Father!

The Sorrowful Mother

(a) Jesus trusts in His cross, He trusts that He will move man, for in His suffering deep sources of emotion open: one of these is His Mother. However we appraise the suffering of our Lord, the most astounding feature, which augments the tragedy to the infinite, is "His Mother." She goes on His Way of the Cross. This Way of the Cross is also a funeral procession; "His Mother" goes to this funeral. But it is also the procession of shame, disdain, and curse, and "His Mother," the woman He loved, goes too. Imagine what a darkness fell upon her soul in the night of hate and disdain! How blasphemy and curse rent her heart and how her lips kept repeating His sweet name in the bitter, cruel world: Jesus, my Son! The love of God did not shrink from leading this sweetest soul on this way of agony and shame. The love of God demands sacrifice

and perseverance to the end. This is hardly understood by those who imagine love to be only sweet. Let us love, let us make sacrifices!

(b) "And the people stood beholding, and . . . derided him . . ." (Luke 23, 35). But someone else also stood there, who was immersed in deep pain below the gallows of her Son—"His Mother," to whom all this mocking was a glorious, sharp dagger. There she stood . . . Oh, where has she come to since the time the Holy Ghost descended upon her, since she heard the Gloria in Bethlehem! Where are the holy kings who were led by the star of heaven to her Son resting in her lap, the kings who represented the homage of nations? Look, oh Mother, what homage, what a feast! Where is the house in which the Infant prayed, Nazareth, the realization of "God with us?" God with us, now also, here also, here too? Yes, the Lord leads "His Handmaiden" amidst joy and bitterness, and the Maiden faithfully follows the Lord, faithfully in shame, misery, doubt, and denial. She is faithful, she believes, she has faith, and she loves. Come here all of ye, learn to believe, learn to stand your ground in the midst of apostasy and decadence!

(c) ". . . Jesus . . . saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son" (John 19, 26). Jesus takes farewell: God be with thee, oh Mother! Thou, who hast laid me into the

crib, lay me in the grave. Thou, who hast put me into swaddling clothes, put me into funeral shrouds. Thou, who hast placed a kiss upon the shining eyes of the child, Thou shalt close my eyes. The world roars and rejoices. Receive my disciple to be thy son.

The Holy Virgin looks up to her Son: Farewell, God be with Thee My Son, the light of mine eyes; go into Thy kingdom!—is how she prays. Now it is our turn to console the Holy Virgin, for we love her and partake of her agonies; we belong to her. She turns to us in her pain. It is evening, spring evening below the gallows; the earth shines in April pomp, the perfume of the olive trees and the breath of the palms sways along the mount of the skulls, there the sorrowful Mother stands, the wife of the carpenter. Great as the ocean is her misery!

Holy well of love, Holy Virgin, let the sorrow of thy soul be also mine! I love thee, sorrowful mother of my soul. I trust thee, for with the pain of Good Friday I also am written into thy soul. If thou canst not forget that, thou wilt not forget me either! Oh Jesus, I trust! The faith with which we may trustingly approach Thy heart, we derive from Thy Mother!

The Agony of Love

(a) We often view the historical Christ. We go with Him, chiefly with the memories of His hard days, the dark Maunday Thursday and Good Friday strifes. We feel the same emotion; we comprehend His longing, His faintness, His worries and agony . . . opposite the heartless, cruel, dreadfully filthy and loathsome world. We understand the sorrow until death . . . and also these cruel words: "This your hour, is the power of darkness." We are deeply sorry for the striving, praying, sorrowful man! We best comprehend this deep sorrow if we imagine in what way He looks upon sinful, heartless, ungrateful souls . . . upon His perishing work . . . upon the ruins of His creation . . .

What else ought I have done? is His plaint. Behold, how He turns to me and begs for compassion: Remember my poverty . . . He is the *"pauper servus et humilis . . . "* in this cruel fate . . . in this night . . . in the clashing of these beast-like passions. That is why the *"tristis imago"* becomes carved into our soul. The kerchief of Veronica becomes the veil of our face; it is through that veil that we see the world.

Pity makes us approach Him; harmony collects the sum total of suffering into the temperament of faithfulness and zeal: I

comprehend Thee, Oh Lord, I am near Thee. *"Tecum usque cruciari, parva vis doloris est, malo mori quam foedari, major vis amoris est."* Thy poverty, Thy drink of gall, Thy bouquet of myrrh are mine also; the crown of thorns already entwines two hearts: Thine and mine. I might say: cruel fate; no matter; thus it has to be, thus in this way . . . this is the fate of the soul in which there is spirit; this is the soul's bridal dowry, this is its passionate communion, its sweet taint, and when we suffer together with Christ we whisper to ourselves: Behold, now I possess what I dreamt of that I wished to suffer with Him, this now is my sweet fate . . . let me enjoy it!

(b) Let us view Christ now . . . Oh, how sad storms and suffering rack me, how the horizon of my soul becomes overshadowed . . . how its churches and altars give way . . . how its life fades, when I see Christ here and now, here in His work, in this dying Christianity . . . when I view this sad, mourning Christly inheritance . . . when here and now I see that sorrowful anger . . . that bitter, cruel ocean, that eternal night . . . Here, here I stand now instead of Christ; here I strive and weep instead of Him, here I stand and break down and fall.

Great is my agony and longing for Thy love, Oh Lord Jesus! For—till I render the

sowing wind of the soul fresh with the breath of my heart, till I turn the dust of the road to fertile soil with my tears, till I change the polar frost of souls into spring, till then I shall have need of many prayers, supplications, and much enthusiasm. But this is my joy; it is joy to know that I suffer upon the same cross as Thou and that the same scourging tears me as Thou hast received. It is my bliss and joy to know that the bleeding lips which I adore are kissing my soul.

(c) Christ completely for me. The deeper I dive into my agony and the more intimately I experience the agony of Him Who is the hope of my soul: the more deeply He allows me to glance into His soul and into His psychology, and I feel as if the attention of my agony would slowly turn elsewhere; as if I would forget this ungrateful, ugly world . . . and forget the distress. It is as if the world would be wiped out from my consciousness and I were left alone with my cross, with my Christ, and as if I would not refer the agony to the world but to myself and see its cause not in others but in myself.

Jesus looks upon me and His glance opens the view for me in which view I see that it is I who am that world. What world? It is a collective name, a generalization . . . you, you, you, that I, I myself am this agony, the cause of this suffering. Not

for others but for me His blood is being shed . . . this stony way is my life's way, which is the Way of Christ's Cross; the calumny, blame, and mockery surged towards Him from out of my soul, the thorny thistles were gathered on the field of my misery . . . I hear it: He loved me and handed Himself over to me . . . it is for my sins that they wounded Him.

I, I, me, for me, for me . . . My sin has caused Christ's entire agonies, my infertile soul thirsted for the whole blood of Christ . . . it dreadfully cried after it. Oh, if I awake to the consciousness of this cry, this cruel God-murdering cry, which echoed from my soul . . . if I look into this abyss of evil for which God has placed the cross up there as a warning-post, then I become stunned . . . I am shaken. All the blood of Christ and all His agony is for me, for me; He gave it all for me, so that my sins should be forgiven, that I should be able to love, to become purified, that I should be able to rejoice and to hope, that I should be able to come towards Him with a crown of myrtle on my head, with palm branch in my hand, that He might embrace me and hold me to His Heart . . .

Oh, now I understand! But what will happen to the rest? *Quid ad te?* Let this not disturb me. The depth of love forgets everything and hands itself over complete-

ly; see, I have completely given myself to Thee. For Thyself alone. And the blessed Jesus comes towards me and bends over me; I cannot go out of His way. Where should I go to? I cannot ask anyone else to hold this trembling, sweet body . . . I cannot bend my head . . . I cannot lower mine eyes; it is in my soul that His last glance breaks and in His kiss He breathes His soul upon me; "It is for thee, for thee that I have lived and died," He says. Therefore, in return, we have to live for Christ and to die for Christ with love equal to that of martyrs.