

# THE ROSARY

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Voice of the Rosary Confraternity

# LIGHT & LIFE

FATHER REGINALD MARTIN, O.P., *DIRECTOR*

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## LOURDES PREPARES FOR JUBILEE

Fr. Reginald Martin, Dominican director of the Rosary Confraternity, and editor of Light and Life, describes himself as a hopeless dunce when faced with any task involving the Internet. Nevertheless, the other day he was delighted to receive a note from one of his Dominican brothers, urging him to seek out an Internet link that describes preparations for a Jubilee Year at Lourdes, in 2008.

“We read of Jubilee years in the Old Testament,” Fr. Reginald says, “special events every fifty years, during which God’s people offered prayers and sacrifices to thank God for His ongoing generosity and care. The plans underway at Lourdes follow this custom, and 2008 will commemorate the 150th anniversary of Our Lady’s appearance to Bernadette Soubirous.”

Throughout Christian history, the Blessed Virgin has appeared to countless individuals on nearly every continent. Some of these apparition sites have become places of well-known pilgrimages; others have remained places of quiet, local devotion. Lourdes combines both characteristics. Its shrines draw the faithful from around the world, but public devotions at Lourdes have sacrificed none of the modesty that has distinguished them for nearly one and a half centuries.

From February 11 to July 18, 1858, the Blessed Mother appeared eighteen times to Bernadette Soubirous, the fourteen year-old daughter of a poverty-stricken miller. Mary introduced herself as the Immaculate Conception, and revealed the location of a hidden spring that has been the source of miraculous healings.

The spring has never been a mighty torrent; today it produces the same 27,000 gallons of water a day that flowed in 1858. Bernadette was not one to benefit from its healing properties. Instead, she died of a painful illness, in the convent she entered, a short distance from Lourdes.

Bernadette left Lourdes and never returned, not even for the ceremonies to dedicate the site. She seems to have kept the joy of her experience of Lourdes to herself,



OUR LADY OF LOURDES  
*Silhouette by Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P.*

allowing others to celebrate and publicize the signs of God’s mercy that the site became. Her example is an invitation to us all, calling us to lose ourselves in the mystery of God’s love.

Those who wish more information on the Jubilee festivities planned at Lourdes in 2008 may find them at [www.lourdes2008.com](http://www.lourdes2008.com)

## MARY AND LENT

The example of Mary calls the Christian to many things, but one of the most obvious is often overlooked. This is her silence. We often think of silence as an absence – perhaps a welcome absence – of noise; we seldom consider it something to be sought. In the great Catholic novel, *The Cypresses Believe in God*, a priest counsels his young penitent,

*Manage to go a few days, a couple of weeks, talking as little as possible...Almost at once you will feel a greater serenity. You will find that you...see things much more clearly... Above all... pay*  
*(Continued on page 4)*

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## The Creed, Part IV

### He Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified, Died and Was Buried

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

#### CALVARY: THE IMMENSITY OF GOD'S LOVE

The life of our Savior is a pilgrimage; it pauses briefly at Bethlehem, but we must allow it, at last, to lead us to Calvary. St. Augustine reminds us, *"His birth would have profited us nothing had we not profited by His Redemption."*

St. Thomas Aquinas acknowledges that the very idea of Christ's death is beyond our understanding. The crucifixion, he says, is one more example – the supreme example – of God's love for us, and the magnitude of that love is always beyond our comprehension. But we must understand that the crucifixion put to death only the humanity of Christ. Just as our human soul survives our death, Christ's divinity was not wounded by His Cross.

#### THE MAGNITUDE OF HUMAN GUILT

Our Savior's divinity, which is immeasurably greater than His humanity, was not touched by the crucifixion. However, we may not, on this account, excuse ourselves from responsibility for Jesus' death. St. Thomas argues that an individual who spatters a king's clothing is as guilty as if he had spattered the king himself. Our sinful nature could not kill God, but by killing the human nature with which God clothed Himself, we are as guilty as if we had done so.

#### THE WHY OF THE CROSS

In his sermon on the crucifixion, St. Thomas asks, *"but what need was there for the Word of God to suffer for us?"* Undoubtedly, Jesus died to show us His love. But this manifestation of God's love on Calvary is a response to the human need we experience as a result of our sin. St. Thomas identifies five evils we suffer as a result of sin; we shall consider each of them briefly. And because sin weakens our ability to do good, the cross also provides an example of how we ought to live.

##### 1. The Evil of Sin: its Stain

The first evil we suffer through sin is the corruption of the soul's beauty. In one of the Old Testament readings for the Easter Vigil, the Prophet Baruch asks, *"Why is it, O Israel, why is it that you are in the land of your enemies, that you are growing old in a foreign country, that you are defiled with the dead?"*

Our ancestors suffered for breaking the Law they received through Moses. How much greater, St. Thomas asks, is our guilt, since we have been cleansed by Christ's

blood in the sacrament of Baptism? The Letter to the Hebrews describes our guilt in painfully vivid terms:

*A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy... How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified?*  
(Heb 10. 28, 29)

##### 2. The Anger of God

Human beings find beauty in the created world, and especially in other human beings; God finds, and loves, beauty in the soul. When we sin we not only misuse the gifts God has given us, we mar this beauty. God has the right to be angry if we turn away from Him and blur His image in our soul. But Christ's passion and death restore us to God's love because His love for us is greater than our love for sin, and because His obedience is greater than our disobedience.

##### 3. Weakness

We may believe that we can sin once and not, perhaps, sin again. However, St. Thomas Aquinas warns us that the opposite is the case. The Angelic Doctor uses a frightening analogy to describe the power of sin. He says,

*...by the first sin [the individual] is weakened and is more inclined to sin again; also sin has a greater power over him. Moreover, so far as he is concerned, he puts himself in a state from which there is no escape – like a man who jumps into a well....*

Christ's Passion diminishes the power of sin and strengthens us to resist its allure. Sin will always be attractive, but the Sacraments (which derive their power from the power of Christ's sacrifice on the cross) reduce its power and enable us to seek and choose healthier alternatives. St. Paul reminds us, *"Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed"* (Rom 6.6), and St. Thomas provides a powerfully consoling image of human life strengthened and ennobled by grace. He says, *"...before Christ's Passion there were few who lived without falling into mortal sin, whereas afterwards, many have lived and are living without mortal sin."*

##### 4. The Debt of Punishment

Justice is the virtue by which we give each individual what is due him. In justice, we owe God our worship and holiness of life. If we fail to offer God these gifts, justice demands that we pay a debt for our sins. By

suffering and dying for us, the human Jesus delivers us from the punishment due human sin. But His sacrifice accomplishes something more. Sin is an offence against God, and mere human beings cannot atone for this offence. However, by His obedience to the Father, the Son (who is God) pays a debt that we cannot pay.

Lest we fail to grasp the immensity of Christ's sacrifice, St. Thomas tells us,

*...His Passion was so efficacious that it suffices to atone for all the sins of the whole world, even of a hundred thousand worlds. For this reason when a man is baptized he is released from all his sins; so also it is that a priest forgives sins; and again that the more a man conforms to the Passion of Christ, the more is he pardoned and the more grace he merits.*

## 5. Exile from God's Kingdom

The words of the prophet Baruch that we considered earlier are a vivid reminder of our fallen state. When our First Parents sinned, the gates of Paradise were closed, and every exile since then is a sign of just how much we turn our backs on when we sin. Our Savior's death reverses this sentence of banishment, St. Thomas says,

*for when Christ's side was pierced, the gates of paradise were opened. And by the shedding of His blood, the stain of sin was wiped away, God was appeased, man's weakness was removed, his punishment was expiated, and the exiles were called back to the kingdom.*

At any time, this would be good news; it is especially welcome as we approach Ash Wednesday and the days of Lent that invite us to follow Our Savior to Calvary. There we encounter the Good Thief, to whom Christ promises, "*This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise*" (Lk 23.43).

If we seek an example to follow during the holy days of Lent, we need look no further than this man. He was condemned to die for his crimes, but his faith gave him not only the privilege of dying with God's Son, but of being the first to benefit from the ransom Christ paid on the cross. St. Thomas tells us,

*This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. This had not been said of old – not to Adam, not to Abraham, not to David. But 'this day' (i.e., as soon as the gates were opened) the thief having sought pardon, found it....*

## THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST'S PASSION

One of the early Church Fathers wrote that Jesus saved us by going through every moment of our lives, teaching us by His example. When our First Parents taught us to sin, through disobedience, Our Savior, through His example of obedience, taught us the ways of virtue. But the lesson is not complete until we allow Jesus to show us how to die.

Christ's passion offers a remedy for all the weaknesses and ills we suffer as a result of sin, but it is equally

availing as an example of virtue. St. Augustine teaches us that the Passion is a model in every circumstance, and

*anyone who wishes to lead a perfect life needs only to despise what Christ despised on the cross, and to desire what He desired. There is no virtue an example of which we do not find on the Cross.*

## 1. The Example of Charity

St. John records Jesus' words to His disciples, "*Greater love hath no man than that he lays down his life for his friends*" (Jn 15.13), and St. Thomas reflects, "*...this Christ did on the cross. If He laid down His life for us, we should not deem it a hardship to endure any hardship whatever for His sake.*"

## 2. The Example of Patience

St. Thomas reminds us that patience may be proven in two ways: when an individual endures great evils, or when he endures something he might legitimately avoid. No one will deny that Jesus suffered greatly on the cross. His agony embodies the pain expressed by all God's suffering servants in the Old Testament. "*O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow*" (Lam 1:12). "*He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before His shearer*" (Isa 53.7).

At the same time, Jesus surrenders voluntarily to suffering on which He might reasonably have turned His back. He asks Pilate, "*do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*" This demonstrates that Jesus is no one's passive victim. He offers His life for our salvation; no one takes it from Him. At some point, each of us will be called to endure illness, loss, family disappointment and, eventually, the aches, pains, and increasing inconvenience of our advancing age. Each offers us a choice. We can "*beweep [our] outcast state,*" or we can allow the experience of weakness and disappointment to teach us a lesson in the imitation of Christ.

The Church confers its highest honor on martyrs. At the same time, the Church promises no reward to those who risk their lives unnecessarily, or who tempt fate by a reckless disregard for safety. Jesus shows us an example of patience precisely because he did not go out of His way to find the road to Calvary. Individuals and circumstances conspired to act against Him, and Jesus chose not to resist. His example teaches us to discern the difference between what must be accepted because it cannot be avoided, and what may be a shameful exercise in self-glorification.

## 3. The Example of Humility

The Savior's entire human existence is a lesson in humility. By emptying Himself to take on our human nature, by going through all the stages of our human life, and, finally, by accepting a most shameful form of death, Jesus shows us what it means to abandon ourselves entirely to God's will. Humility is the virtue by which we acknowledge God as the source of everything



we have and everything we are. On the one hand this demands that we take responsibility for what God's gifts enable us to do; on the other, humility gives us the freedom to abandon ourselves, as Jesus did, entirely to God's will.

#### 4. The Example of Obedience

The Letter to the Romans gives a succinct picture of our fallen humanity, and of Christ's effort to remedy the imbalance. *"As by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners, so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just"* (Rom 5.19). Few of us will be called to make the same sacrifice Christ made on the cross. But each of us, at least occasionally, finds our life choices burdensome. When we are tempted to turn our backs on responsibility, God calls us to find strength and courage in the example of His Son.

#### 5. Contempt for Earthly Things

In nearly every one of his sermons, St. John Chrysostom calls his listeners to turn aside from the possessions and honors by which worldly success are measured. In his sermon on Jesus' appearance before Pilate he says,

*O man, when thou hearest these things, and seest thy Lord bound and led about, deem present things to be nought. For how can it be otherwise than strange, if Christ bore such things for thy sake, and thou often canst not endure even words? He is spit upon, and dost thou deck thyself with garments and rings, and, if thou gain not good reports from all, think life unbearable. He is insulted, beareth mockings, and scornful blows upon the cheek; and dost thou wish everywhere to be honored...* (Homily lxxxiii, on John).

St. Thomas Aquinas is no less direct.

*If you seek an example of contempt for earthly things, follow Him, the King of kings and Lord of lords, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom; and see Him on the Cross, despoiled, derided, spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, served with gall and hyssop, dead.*

God created the material world for our support, education and delight, but we must never lose sight of the Kingdom of Heaven, where He calls us to find our true home. The everlasting treasures we long for, but cannot see, will often pale in comparison to the goods and distinctions that crown the rich, the famous, and even the true heroes in our midst. Christ's Sermon on the Mount reminds us that these things can impede our progress toward heaven, so He encourages a poverty of spirit that allows us to evaluate the world's goods at their true worth.

St. Augustine adds, *"Christ the man despised all earthly things in order to teach us to despise them."* These words remind us that Jesus came not just to deliver us from the debt of our sin, but to instruct us, by His example, in the ways of virtue.

## MARY, THE MIRROR OF VIRTUE

All of the evangelists record the presence of women at the death of Jesus; St. John specifically identifies Mary, the Mother of Our Savior, among them. Of the individuals mentioned in the gospel, Mary is the only person present at all the important events in the life of Christ and the early Church. She presents Jesus to us with love at Bethlehem; at Calvary she accepts us – and with the same love – when she embraces Jesus' Beloved Disciple.

Whenever we encounter Mary in the gospel, the evangelists want us to see ourselves, witnesses to the saving deeds of her Son. Like us, she must have found the events of Good Friday baffling. In our liturgy, the Preface for the Mass that honors martyrs reminds us that death reveals God's love *"shining through our human weakness."* The Mother of God is aptly named *"Queen of Martyrs;"* like her, we are called to wait, and to see what blessing God will reveal in human suffering. ■

## MARY AND LENT (Continued from page 1)

*attention. Give your full attention to everything you do, everything you hear. You will discover new worlds.*

The Blessed Mother says very little in the gospel, but her silence is a personal choice, not a poverty of ideas or words. The season of Lent calls us to prayer, self-denial, and works of charity. Let us determine to include silence among our Lenten resolutions, and let us see whether this choice does not provide increased energy for whatever else we embrace during these holy days. ■

## FR. DUFFNER PRAISED

Fr. Duffner's collection of theological reflections, *To Know Him*, recently received high praise from Robert Vasa, bishop of Baker, Oregon. In the November 9 issue of *The Catholic Sentinel*, Bishop Vasa wrote, *"...I read his wonderful treatment and explanation of the Sacrament of Confession and realized anew that the truth is very consoling."*

He continues, *"Father Duffner writes: 'those who neglect this sacrament gradually grow insensitive to the little failures each day that offend God and interfere with the life of grace....'"* These words are a powerful call to accept Christ's invitation, *"Repent and believe the Good News,"* the message of the upcoming season of Lent.

Fr. Duffner's book remains a "best seller" among the Rosary Center's offerings, and makes ideal reading for Lent. We offer the volume for \$19.95.

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