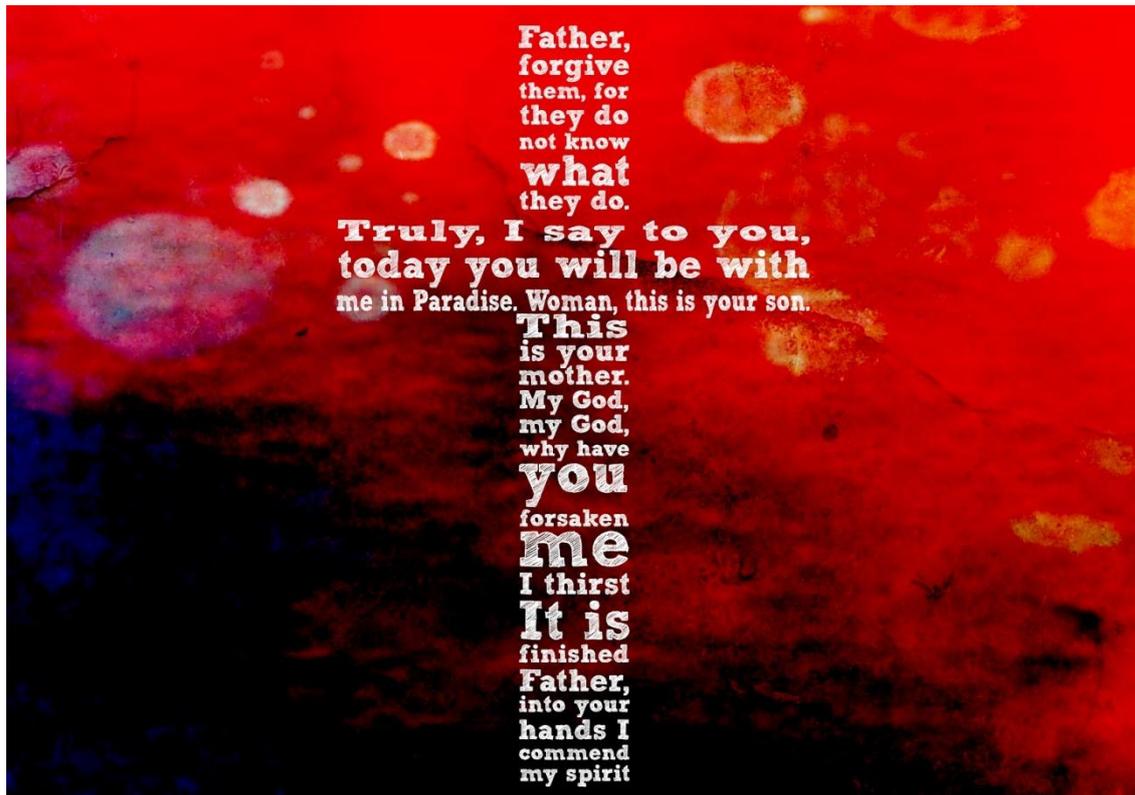


THE SEVEN WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS



Our Lord Jesus died on the Cross to redeem mankind, to save us from our sins because of his love for us. As recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ was mocked, scorned, and tortured in the praetorium. He carried his cross up the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem to Calvary, was nailed to the Cross and hung between two common criminals, and suffered an indescribable end, recalled by the Church on Good Friday of Holy Week.

One may meditate on the Passion of Christ by reflecting on his Seven Words on the Cross.

*Here are his **Seven Words**, the last seven expressions of Jesus Christ on the Cross recorded in Scripture.*

THE FIRST WORD

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Gospel of Luke 23:34

Our benevolent Lord Jesus Christ, in His deepest agony on the Cross, was not thinking about Himself, but was preoccupied by the interests of others. He was not thinking about His sufferings, His pain, His exhaustion or His wounds. He paid no heed to the painful gashes of the scourges on His back; He paid no heed to nails piercing His hands and feet, nor to the crown of thorns that pierced His head, neither did He care about His battered and exhausted body. All that He ignored because His sole concern was His love for mankind. The first thought to cross His mind was to save His adversaries and persecutors... Thus, His first words on the Cross were: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

"Father, forgive them....", (Luke 23:34) words He pronounced while undergoing the utmost physical pain... Truly, He was at the peak of torment and affliction at the hands of those for whom He was asking forgiveness! But His love for them was greater than their hostility towards Him; their hostility that was indescribably atrocious and wicked...

In spite of all that, He did not only pray that they might be forgiven but He gave them an excuse! Those, who would not have dared to even think about exonerating themselves; those who cried out loudly: "His blood be on us and on our children." (Matt. 27:25). The one who was scourged and crucified by them was the one to excuse them. He said: "For they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34). How wonderful is the Lord in His exhaustive love. He did not hasten to condemn them; He did not seek revenge, or even take to resignation and negatives. His love for them was positive; He sought forgiveness for them. He exonerated them; He defended their cause in the presence of the heavenly Father, declaring that their sin was only one of ignorance...

But, in our judgement as human beings, we consider them perpetrators of a chain of atrocious criminal acts. Among the ranks of the religious authorities or priesthood, there was covetousness, jealousy, enmity, slander and double-crossing. On the part of the ungrateful public, there were accounts of reckless wrongful rejection. As for the military and the priests' servants, they committed atrocities, calamities, cursing and assaults. Pontius Pilate showed cowardice, injustice and indifference. Above all, it was a crime of homicide, torture and fabricating false evidence. But the condemned in His loving-kindness did only consider it an offence committed in ignorance, "For they do not know what they do..!" (Luke 23:34) How wonderful is the loving-kindness of the crucified Lord the immenseness of His kindness is hard to grasp...

The Lord Christ in His forgiveness for His persecutors has put into practice, beyond doubt, one of His teachings. He has said before: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44) In this case He was performing exactly that what He had previously commanded humanity to do.

The Lord did not give to others Commandments that He did not observe. He put into practice His teaching: "Love your enemies" (Matt 5:44); and He accomplished that

with such a wonderful idealism and faithfulness. He forgave His persecutors and offenders...

Blessed brethren, what do you think of this verse: "Father, forgive them?" If you recall these words on Good Friday or at any time and say: "I will also do as you did my Lord for all those who harassed and hated me, who persecuted and mistreated me. I ask You to forgive them for they do not know what they do". In this way, you partake with Christ His work of benevolence and love.

What good is it for you if Christ has forgiven His enemies while you still hate your own or do not pardon them? What benefit do you gain? In other words, you take no part with Christ in His benevolence; you do not partake in His work and you do not follow His path...

Know then that Christ forgave us, so that we may forgive others, and enjoy the bliss of forgiveness.. as it is rendered unto us, and rendered by us.

THE SECOND WORD

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Gospel of Luke 23:43

The first person to whom the Lord spoke on the Cross, was that thief... He did not start his life in fear of God, and his sins led him to the cross. Whilst on the cross, he joined the other thief in reproving the Lord (Matt. 27:43). But suddenly he was transformed and began to have faith. He turned from a reviler to a defender and from a mocker into a man of faith and prayers.

How did he attain that faith and achieve that revival? In what way came he to believe in the Lord, not in His glory but in His torment; while He was being mocked by the people and not while being sought by the multitudes asking to be healed or blessed?

Probably the Lord's forgiveness to His persecutors influenced much that hard-hearted thief, thus God's loving kindness overpowered that man's ferocity. Perhaps Christ's very features, His countenance, His kindly look or His deep warm voice did influence that man! Perhaps the Lord looked at him and his heart fell due to this look! ... We have no way of knowing.

Or could it be that the thief had an inherent disposition to penitence, was a rich soil, which had waited for someone to cultivate it, to pluck its thorns and sow it with suitable seeds; so it might give a good harvest..

You will be with Me in Paradise, because your heart has been with Me on earth. For you commended your soul to Me on the cross, you had your future entrusted to Me and in as much as you suffered with Me, you will be glorified with Me also... You have been crucified and tormented together with Me, and you will also live with Me.

What a wonderful encounter on the Cross that was!

Many were those who encountered God in churches and temples, others encountered Him in their closed bedrooms at times of prayer, but the wonderful thing was to encounter God on the Cross! Did it ever occur to this thief that if he was to repent one day and encounter God that their meeting would be in that place!

We have no way of knowing who will be chosen. Who thought that this [thief] would be chosen! Who thought that within only one hour this person would achieve what took others tens of years of arduous striving to accomplish? We only go by appearances; We disdain some and pity others, whilst any of those may be far better than ourselves. However, we admit truly that this [thief] entered Paradise deservedly.

He was wonderful, amazingly wonderful in all that he did...

He acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Lord when he said: "Lord, remember me. "

He acknowledged Him as King by saying: "When You come to Your Kingdom... "

He acknowledged Him as Saviour capable of conveying him to Paradise.

While on the cross, this [thief] confessed his personal sins and admitted that he deserved death. He rebuked the other [thief] saying: "And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds." He reproached his companion for his abuse of the Lord Jesus Christ, saying: "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation... but this man has done nothing wrong." (Luke 23:40- 41). Thus, he admitted that Christ was righteous and free from sin.

It is really amazing that among all these multitudes, the only person who defended the Lord Jesus Christ was that [thief]! None among the twelve disciples did defend Him, none among the seventy apostles, none among those who were healed by Him, or those whose demons He exorcised... Nobody at all did defend Him... He had to stand trial alone. Now the only person who defended His cause and would not allow one word of abuse to be directed to Him was the [thief] on His right side! Could any of the disciples or the believers have imagined that the only person to champion the Lord's cause would be a thief! Truly the Lord said: "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones" (Matt. 18:10).

Brother, do not ever think vainly of your worthiness or that you are better than such persons. Never think that you are equal to any of the apostles or the close followers of the Lord. All of those stood aloof and came not to the defense of Christ. The only defender was the thief: a person least expected to [do] that, and totally unknown...

The Lord also demonstrated to us by the attention He offered the [thief] that the attention given to a single individual is as important as attention provided to a group. In addition to His sacrificial act offered to all the world and for every believer, and in addition to His forgiveness to His persecutors, He attended to the needs of an individual: the thief. For to the Lord Christ an individual has all the right to be attended to, as well as all the group. An individual still holds the same importance and significance as the multitude...

Thus, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ, while preaching the gospel was working individually and collectively. He attended to the multitudes in His Sermon on the Mount and among the five thousand whom He fed with five loaves and two fishes. Likewise He worked with individuals as He did with the twelve disciples or three of them: Peter, James and John; or with Nicodemus, with Mary and Martha at their home or with the Samaritan woman at the well...

God does not forget the individual among the group. The lost sheep would not be lost and forgotten overridden by the remaining ninety-nine... The [thief's] soul would not be lost only because the whole world's salvation is at stake!

THE THIRD WORD

***"Jesus said to his mother: "Woman, this is your son."
Then he said to the disciple: "This is your mother."
Gospel of John 19:26-27***

The Lord was preoccupied by the others while on the Cross. He was concerned about His persecutors, saying: "Father, forgive them." He cared for the thief on His right, promising him Paradise, saying: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." He also directed His attention to His mother, entrusting His beloved disciple, John with the task of taking care of her.

He entrusted His virgin disciple with His Virgin Mother. He entrusted His mother, who nursed and cherished Him dearly, to His beloved disciple who in many an instance lent back on His breast.

He entrusted His mother who stood beside His Cross, to the only disciple who followed Him to the Cross. He entrusted His mother who carried in her womb the smouldering ember of His divinity to His disciple who wrote the gospel to establish this Divinity.

He said to her: "Behold your son..." and said to him: "Behold your mother. And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:27).

Thus the Lord gave us an example of giving care to our kin, and our mothers in particular. He was concerned about that receptacle which held Him for nine months; the mother who cared for Him in His childhood and to whom He was obedient. (Luke 2:51).

Normally, a person in pain receives the attention of others, but the Lord Christ in His pain was the one caring for others... How much more can His care be for us now in His repose...

His first concern was to forgive the sins, then He turned to social care and the first one to receive His care was His mother.

The Virgin was a real blessing to St John and his household, a blessing that Christ gave him in return for his love. St John accepted her as a precious and a valuable gift and she remained in his home cared and attended to until her death. It is said that St John did not leave Jerusalem till the holy Virgin departed... St John so loved the Lord Christ that he followed Him to the Cross, remained at His side throughout His passions. He certainly deserved a reward, on earth as well as in Heaven. As for his reward on earth, he was blessed with sheltering the holy Virgin in his home. In fact all those who follow the Lord Christ will surely be rewarded and will have His bliss and grace.

The blessed Mother in turn accepted St John as a son to her. The Lord offered her the most faithful, sympathetic and loving one among His disciples.

St John was the most ardent exponent of love. It was he who said, "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and was also the disciple who "was leaning on Jesus' bosom" ". . .

whom Jesus loved. " He was the only one who offered the Virgin mother the image of her Son..

Christ on the Cross seemed not to possess anything; even His garment was taken away and torn, but He had, then, John, His disciple, and that He gave to His mother. John gave his heart to Christ. And Christ took that heart and gave it to His mother. Thus, the Lord brought together those who loved Him... He took care of His mother emotionally and at the same time He provided for her living...

The fact that the Lord Christ entrusted St John with His mother refutes undoubtedly the allegations made ... that Virgin Mary had other children besides Jesus Christ. If that was true any one of her sons would have been better qualified to take care of her. They would have had more of a right to that than any person outside their family circle. Virgin Mary was without kin at that time; she had no children and Joseph passed away a long time ago. For that reason Christ entrusted His disciple with His Mother. "Behold your son "... These words give us an idea about the spiritual relation of a son and his mother and demonstrate the honour given the Virgin even with respect to the father apostles.

THE FOURTH WORD

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34

This statement does not mean a separation of the divine nature of Jesus Christ from His human nature, nor does it mean that the Father has forsaken the Son. It means rather that the Father has allowed Him to be tormented.

His divine nature and His human nature were never separated for a single moment or a wink of the eye. That is what we firmly believe in and what we recite in the Holy Mass... If ever His divine nature deserted Him, His redemption could never have been considered as infinite, rendering infinite salvation, capable of atoning for the sins of all humanity throughout the ages. Thus, there was no rupture between His divine and human nature.

As for His relationship with the Father, the Father did not forsake Him. Let us only consider this verse: "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me" (John 14:11).

What is the meaning then of, "Why have You forsaken Me?"

It does not mean a separation; it indicates only that the Father did allow that He should suffer; that He should bear the blame and suffer God's wrath over sin. That goes for the emotional torment He underwent. As for the physical pain; God allowed that He should suffer physically, though God, in His omnipotence, could have made Him insensible to pain. But, if that had happened, the Crucifixion would have been null and void - for pain would never have been experienced and consequently, no penalty has been inflicted, no acquittal effected and no redemption accomplished...

Thus, the Father allowed that the Son should suffer, and the Son accepted that ordinance and was also afflicted by it. In fact Christ came to the world for that particular reason.. It was a [plan] that both parties preconceived and agreed to... for the sake of humanity, and the Divine Justice...

God allowed that Jesus should suffer, sacrifice Himself and be tortured but did not break away from Him... It was not a separation but rather a dispensation. God suffered that His Son should suffer but still loved Him fully, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him" (Is. 53:10).

An example that may make the meaning easy to grasp:

Suppose a parent accompanied his child to the hospital for an operation, let us say for the removal of an abscess; that the parent was holding the child's hand while the surgeon went on with his incision. The child would then start to cry and plead with his father not to let that happen to him saying to him, "Why did you forsake me?"

In fact, the father did not desert his child, he only allowed him to suffer since the operation was for his own good and he had only total care and love for his child. This incident, I would say, demonstrates how that could be considered abandonment without actual severance of ties.

A great number of theologians do believe that the Lord when saying, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" was reminding the Jews of the Twenty-second Psalm which starts with the same verse. They were referred to as those who, not knowing the Scriptures (Matt. 22:29) while those Scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39).

So the Lord Christ chose to remind them of this particular Psalm. Actually the system of numbering the Psalms was not known to the Jews. They used to identify each Psalm by its opening verse, as it is the custom among the Egyptian monks nowadays...

What does this Psalm tell us about Jesus Christ? "They have pierced My hands and My feet, I can count all My bones; they look and stare at Me; they divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." (Ps 22:16-18).

It is all evident that David the Prophet, who composed this Psalm, had nobody pierce his hands or feet. Nobody parted his garments or cast lots upon his vesture. This verse was actually an inspired prophecy about Jesus Christ - as if Christ on the Cross was telling the Jews: "Go ahead and read the Psalm, starting with: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and see what has been told about Me. You will see also that the following has been said about Me:

"A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they, that see Me, laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying: He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him." (Ps 22: 6, 8).

Then why did the Lord Christ say: "My God, My God?" He said that in His capacity as a representative of humanity.

He said that because He took the shape of a servant, and became similar to man. "But made Himself of no reputation. taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men " (Phil. 2:7, 8). He said these words because "He humbled Himself", "and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:9) He spoke as the Son of Man, who has taken over a human nature and taken man's position, and agreed to represent humanity before God, assumed all human sins and is paying off all their debts.

Christ represented humanity in so many things if not in all things! ! Christ did fast on our behalf: Adam and Eve were not able to abstain from the forbidden fruit and they plucked it and ate. As for Christ, He began His life by abstaining even from all edibles. He was in no need to fast, but He fasted forty days and forty nights as mentioned in the church hymns.

He represented us in observing God's law: "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who understand, and seek God. They have all gone aside, they have all together become corrupt" (Ps. 14:2,3).

When Christ came, He represented humanity in being obedient to God. He observed the Law, "To fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15) as He mentioned at the time of baptism. Thus, He acted the part of humanity in offering God a chaste and a gracious acceptable life...

He represented us in death, torment and the atonement of sin: "For He has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21). He suffered all God's wrath for the sinful with all the bitterness therein. And as a representative of humanity said:

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And He who helped everybody and has never forsaken any person, was forsaken by all, even by the Father. In that way He paid off our debt and suffered God's wrath and emerged triumphant, having been tried emotionally and physically...

The words: "why have You forsaken Me?" should be a source of consolation for us when we encounter any difficulty. Knowing that if the Lord has not "spared His Own Son" (Rom. 8:32), why should we grumble about whatever suffering God allows? God was pleased to put His own beloved Son to grief. And in spite of His saying "This is My Beloved, Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), why do we grumble at the moments of trial though we could never suffer as much as Christ suffered and though we deserve to be punished. The Son drank willingly the cup that the Father offered Him. He only said, "Your will be done" and was obedient until death on the Cross. His pronouncement: "why have You forsaken Me?" was not a complaint or protest, as we have said before but it was only an expression of the reality of His suffering and a declaration that the act of redemption is being realised...

THE FIFTH WORD

"I thirst."

Gospel of John 19:28

Because of my sins and yours, brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ said: "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws..." (Ps. 22:15).

All His body liquids had been drained for so many reasons: For all the sweat that His body bled while struggling for our salvation in the Garden in Gethsemane: "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground!" (Luke 22:44). For all His sweating as He carried the Cross along the way, under the scorching sun at noon. For all His exhaustion and fatigue resulting from extended court sessions and also the scourging. Add to that the extensive bleeding from the scourging, thorns on His head and nails piercing His flesh. For all that His tongue clung to His jaws, and His bodily resistance had gone and He said: "I thirst".

By this declaration, He indicated that the hot iron began to be struck or that the fire had begun to consume the sacrifice.. Divine Justice was being done, and His divinity refrained from alleviating the physical pain that His human body was suffering. His was pain in its absolute sense, pain that pleased the Father and made Him smell a soothing aroma, The Son expressed this by declaring: "I thirst." By this declaration, the heretics are put to shame; those who tried to under-rate the human nature of the Lord on the Cross. If He had not been fully human, He would not have said: "I thirst."...

However, one is apt to wonder how Jesus became thirsty, though He is the well and the source of the living water: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, and drink" (John 7:37). He said to the Samaritan woman: "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14).

What did He really mean by the words, "I thirst":

Certainly, He was thirsty in the physical sense. Also, that spiritually He was thirsty for the forthcoming salvation that He was offering to the world. He experienced an eager desire to the concluding statement: "It is finished".

There is an analogy between what He said now and what He said to the Samaritan: "Give Me a drink. " He was not then referring to water in the common sense, knowing that "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again," (John 4: 7,13). He was thirsty for her and for all the Samaritans; for her salvation and for theirs.

He did not say, "I thirst" to get water from the people around Him. He knew that they would offer Him vinegar (Matt. 27:44, 48). He knew that through His divine power that enables Him to predict what is going to happen, He knew that because of the prophecy: "And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Ps.69:21).

He did not say: "I thirst"; asking them to bring Him water, because He could not ask a human being for help and also because He intended to drink the cup of pains to its end. That is why He shunned the cup of vinegar mixed with gall that was offered Him to kill His pain, "They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall. And when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink" (Matt. 27:34).

However, the sinful human beings mocked Him at the time He struggled for their salvation, and offered Him vinegar instead of water, to double His pain.

I wonder, brethren, that perhaps we are still doing the same. The Lord thirsts for our salvation and for drinking of the product of the vine which sap flows within us, but we offer Him instead the vinegar of our trespasses, inadvertence and neglect.

Would you please, brethren, withdraw that spear that you are pointing at Christ's mouth and spare His lips from that sponge of vinegar? Would you regret hurting the feelings of the one Who loved you dearly, and do what you should do in penitence? And if you heard the Lord saying: "I thirst" you may tell Him: I am the one who made Your tongue cleave to Your jaws due to my sins and trespasses. I wish I could quench Your thirst by my tears. I wish You could strike my adamant soul and drink from its gushing waters...

THE SIXTH WORD

"It is finished;" *Gospel of John 19:30*

Our Lord Jesus Christ the righteous and perfect in everything; the holy and the one - and only one - who committed no sin; the one who lived on earth a whole life to the full satisfaction and pleasure of God the Father, was also perfect in His preaching and ministry. He was able to accomplish what the Father wanted Him to accomplish and then cry triumphantly: "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." (John 17:4).

He was able to accomplish every righteousness, that which the Law required. He was able deservedly to declare: "Which of you convicts Me of sin" (John 8:46). He realised all prophecies regarding His advent and the great act of redemption... all within the span of three years and a few months. He achieved things that nobody was able to achieve before. He was able to spread the Gospel and say to the Lord: "I have glorified You on the earth... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world... For I have given to them the words which You have given Me... those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost... And I have declared to them Your name and will declare it" (John 17:4-6).

Thus, He realised the prophecies, accomplished obedience and every righteousness, performed His ministry and gave His love in full to His own whom He loved to the end (John 13:1). Then He ascended the Cross to accomplish His sacrificial act, to bring about redemption, forgiveness and salvation to finish the act of reconciliation between Heaven and earth; between the spiritual and the carnal.

On that altar He carried on Himself the iniquities of us all ... all the sins of all people throughout the ages from Adam to eternity - outrageous sins as they are: profanity, [treachery], failing, adultery, dissipation, theft, murder, envy and arrogance. Then He was able to declare: "It is finished"... We, in turn, touch this pure offering, and confess our sins everyday and add them to His pains that He might forgive us, and that His blood may atone for our new trespasses...

As sins were accumulated to the ultimate upon His person, shame and disgrace were fully personified in Him as it is said: "I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting." (Is. 50:6), He said also: "All those that see Me, laugh Me to scorn... A reproach of men, and despised of the people". (Ps 22: 6,7).

In all that, He was subjected to scourging, humiliation and derision: "Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?" (Matt 26: 67,68). They dressed Him in the purple garment, crowned Him with thorns and crucified Him between two [thieves] so that the prophecy may come true "Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13, Deut 21:23).

Even on the Cross He was still a target of humiliation and derision so that He might realise all His disgrace and cry: "It is finished."

When our Lord realised that He had completed the act of redemption and atonement, and that He had satisfied the divine justice fully and nothing else could be done, He cried triumphantly: "It is finished."

The act of salvation for all has been accomplished, redemption has been fulfilled; the Son of Man was able to crush the serpent's head. God, by reigning over the Cross (Ps.96:10), was able to demolish the kingdom of the devil. The atonement now became all encompassing and adequate to liberate everybody. Now the veil of the temple could be rent in [two], and the way to the sanctuary could be opened; reconciliation is now accomplished and the hope of the deceased saints have been fulfilled. Nothing is left for You, God, but to, "gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty, with Your glory and Your Majesty" (Ps.45:3); the Lord cried in joy; "It is finished."

The words, "It is finished" is the cry of joy and triumph. He had fought and won. He was able to pay for us and establish His heavenly spiritual kingdom - to shutter the kingdom of the devil that was formerly called "The prince of the world." (John 24:30).

Could you, brethren, win what the Lord has won? Could you ascend the Cross and crush the head of the serpent? Could you look at the work God assigned to you and say: "It is finished"?

I wish you would always consider this maxim:

"I have finished the work which You, God, have given Me to do."

Put before you always the picture of the Lord perfecting His mission.

THE SEVENTH WORD

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Gospel of Luke 23:46

The Lord accomplished His work of the Cross in the same manner He accomplished His work before the Crucifixion.

There remained one more job for Him to do after His death on the Cross. There remains for Him to: "Lead captivity captive and gave gifts to men" (Eph 4:8). There remains for Him to descend to Hades and carry the good news to the faithful among the deceased, to transfer those deceased saints from Hades to Paradise, thus opening Paradise for the first time since the original sin...

Since the act of redemption had been accomplished, there was no reason for further delay. He had to depart from this body to accomplish the act of salvation for the deceased also. He had to entrust the Father with His soul in order to do what was designated to be done after death. Thus, He cried with a loud voice: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit"...

Into Your hands I commend My spirit and in no other hands..."For the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me." (John 14:30). "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." (John 16:28).

How desirous was the prince of this world to acquire this spirit; to arrest this spirit in the same manner as he arrested all other spirits that were imprisoned. But in no way could he do that with this particular spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was received by the Father Himself. This is My spirit, "No man takes it from Me I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again".

When Poor Lazarus died, his spirit was carried away by the angels (Luke 16:22). The spirit of the Virgin Mother Mary was carried by Christ but the spirit of Christ was carried by the Father.

St. Matthew the Apostle says that Jesus "Had cried with a loud voice" (Matt. 27:50), then yielded up [His spirit], what can we know from this phrase?

Undoubtedly Christ was greatly exhausted due to all the exertion of carrying the Cross to the extent of falling underneath it, and also, after being scourged, bruised and pierced with nails and having bled and perspired so much that He had His mouth all dry when He said: "I thirst".

How then is it to be expected that He could cry with a loud voice?

Crying with a loud voice at the hour of His death means that He had another power that surpassed His human power. In other words it demonstrates His divinity.

His crying aloud indicates His triumph for with death He defeated death. This loud cry shook the Devil and overthrew his kingdom. Truly, Christ's death was a triumph by which He saved the whole world and crushed the serpent...

The words, "Into Your hands I commend My spirit" affords us a great assurance of the immortality of the spirit. The spirit does not end with death... death for the spirit is only a change from one type of existence to another. The question is where would the spirit land after death. If man is assured about the answer, man will accept death with joy, saying with St Paul: "I have a desire to depart." Brother, are you sure about the destination of your spirit? Is it that when you give up your spirit after a lengthy life, you will commend it into the hands of Christ or that the angels would carry your spirit as it did to that of Lazarus? Or is it that the devil will claim it saying, "It is mine, it was one of my soldiers under my command.. so I will take it to be with me?" How awful would that be! ! Would you, brother, make sure then about the destination of your spirit!

Be sure, my beloved, to remember always this beautiful chant: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his." (Num 23:10).

Commend your spirit from now on into His hands by shunning all evil and by living in unison with God. Be like the angels of the Seven Churches whom God was carrying in His right hand. Commend yourself also into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Be sure that you will hear His beautiful voice chanting: "And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My Father's hand." (John 10:28, 29).

Whenever you feel tempted by a sin or lust, ask yourself this question: Is my spirit now in the hands of the Lord?...