

# Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the N.Z. Tablet.)

## XVII.—THE SEVEN LAST WORDS.

In our last meditation we were considering how Our Lord's death was our salvation and our life; but He was Teacher as well as Doer, Light-bearer as well as Life-giver. We naturally, therefore, turn to His sermon from the Cross to learn its lessons. It contains only seven brief sentences.

**First Word**—"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It is the Victim that speaks, the Victim of the evil deeds of men, of their ill-will and hatred and secret craft; yet not a word of reproach, not a breath of complaint, only a plea for pardon. Jesus is still persecuted and crucified in His Mystical Body; the Church and its members must be conformed to Christ, the Head; and must endure suffering. How shall we treat our enemies? The sermon from the Cross teaches us that if we would have fellowship with Christ, we must treat our enemies as He treated His executioners. The world will not listen to such preaching; it pins its faith to revenge, veiling it under the semblance of justice, deceiving its own self. Vengeance, reprisals, the brandishing of swords, the smoke of powder and of poison-gas hide God's Heaven from its view, and it can see only human beasts where faith points out the brethren of the Crucified. "Woes to the vanquished" preaches the world. "No, no, My Father," says the dying Jesus, "let My blood outpouring usher in the reign of mercy."

**Second Word**—"This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Here is hope for every sinner, no matter how weighed down by sin; a hope he will foster if he be wise. Jesus was crucified between two thieves or murderers. One of these continued in his course of evil to the end, he joined in the blasphemies of the executioners and died impenitent. The other spoke up for Jesus and rebuked his fellow criminal: "We receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man hath done no evil." A small favor, yet it touched the heart of Christ; see in which, the penitent said: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom." Jesus said to him: "This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Put yourselves in the place of this pardoned thief and think of your sins. Have you ever robbed any man of his due, have you ever robbed God of His due, have you ever robbed a Christian child of his right to a Christian education, have you ever by a criminal vote put men in political power who glory in this form of soul-murder and thus become an abettor of assassins? Your day of death will come, as his came to the penitent thief; do not lose hope on that day no matter what your sins may have been! The great enemy will parade them to fill you with despair, but turn to Jesus and say: "Lord, I am justly suffering for my sins, I have ruined my own soul, I have missed Mass and made little of Thy Sacraments, but pardon me and remember me in Thy Kingdom." Your hope of pardon that day will be all the stronger

if now, while you have the opportunity, you have courage to stand up for Jesus and speak a word for Him.

**Third Word**—Now, there stood beneath the Cross Mary, watching the agony of her Son, and John the Beloved Disciple. To these He said: "Woman, behold thy Son; Son, behold Thy Mother." This word, which reveals to us the tenderness of the heart of Christ, deserves a whole chapter. Here I shall only say that, since Christ left her to us as Mother, to cast her out or neglect her would be to make little of His redeeming love.

**Fourth Word**—For nearly three hours Christ is silent; He is listening to the mockeries His persecutors are flinging at Him, and one of His greatest sorrows is that He finds no one to defend Him. His bodily sufferings are almost forgotten before this more bitter anguish of mind. The Divinity too seems to have withdrawn from Him; in His human nature He is suffering for our sins, and the influence of His Divinity is shrouded that His humanity might suffer to the last extremity. In this extreme dereliction He utters His fourth word: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This word is too deep for us to search into here, but let us mark this point: In His mental anguish in the Garden He prayed for help to His Father, to the same Father He now prays in His greater mental anguish of the Cross. Shall we not in our turn cry to God in earnest prayer in our hours of trial and seek sovereign aid where alone it can be found? When the world oppresses us and makes us suffer, as it assuredly will if we be conformed to Christ, shall we not turn to Him Who gave succor and strength for the greatest suffering the world has known? Woe to us, if deserted, mocked, and scorned by men, we are deserted by God also. But He will desert none who cry to Him.

**Fifth Word**—"I thirst." At the beginning the soldiers offered Him vinegar and gall, they offer it now again and He tastes it. The soldiers dying from loss of blood on the fields of France cried to their comrades for water. Thirst is the most imperious of appetites, and when it comes from loss of blood is greater than all other pains. But a greater thirst was consuming the life of Jesus—the thirst for human souls; it is for these He cries, for these He is dying. Let us be moved to gather souls to Him. He looks upon your town wherever it may be, He knows the number of its unbelievers, the number of those who, outside the true Church, are seeking a way towards Him, He knows the names of the Catholics who are growing cold in His service, He knows others who easily miss Mass and show no great love for the Sacraments—for all these He thirsts. Let us at least show the humanity of the soldier who raised a wet sponge to His lips.

**Sixth Word**—Immediately after the fifth word He spoke the sixth, with a loud voice that filled all with wonder—"It is finished." It is finished, that is, I have glorified Thee,

My Father; I have done the work Thou gavest Me to do, I have taught the truth to men, I have given them an example of virtue, by giving up life I have taught that rest comes to God's people only after toil. "It became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, Who had brought many children into glory, to perfect the Author of their salvation by His passion." It is finished; this word should be our law of life, we should be able to pronounce when death calls. If our lives are spent in idleness, if the hands we hold out for the last anointing are empty so far as works for God are concerned, then assuredly we shall not be able to utter them. If ignorance kills humanity, what witness have we given for the truth? If vice ruins the soul of man, what model of virtue have our lives set us? If mortification is necessary to save from spiritual corruption, have we by our own spirit of mortification kept the Cross of Jesus planted on the highways of life for the healing of human souls?

**Last Word**—After His loud cry Jesus said: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit." This word teaches us how to die. If men only practised during life to make this their dying prayer, there would be more consolation for those who kneel by deathbeds. But most men live for the world, and take pains to die out of the hands of God. His enemies leave the Cross, beating their breasts. Let us strike our breasts and cry: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner; let us take up the Cross and reproduce its beloved marks in our lives; let us cry with St. Paul: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord. . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death." This conformity must be in all who would be saved. "Crucifixion," writes Bishop Hedley, "is Christ's attitude towards the world, His greeting to it, His defiance of it—that He refuses either to enjoy it, or to covet it, or to be defrauded by it, as thou also must refuse." How beautiful is the cry of St. Paul: "I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body." This is to suffer with Christ, this is to profit by His sermon from the Cross, this is to understand that the true science of death is identical with the true science of life: "always bearing about in our bodies the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies."

### HOW YOU MAY HELP

The writer of the historical notes on the Church in New Zealand, now running through the *Tablet*, having in mind the added interest imparted by illustrations, would be very grateful if those possessing photographs of priests who formerly labored in the Dominion—the early missionaries especially—would forward such (with name, etc., attached) to the *Tablet* office. After being reproduced, these would be carefully returned to the owners.

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