

Holy week Meditations by Fr.Jonathan Moore

Fr.Jonathan is a friend of Fr.Frank's – they spent 6 years together in the seminary and he was ordained the day before Fr.Frank nearly 45 years ago. Fr.Jonathan has been poorly for many years with a variety of problems that have often left him bed-bound for long periods of time. He has managed to say a Sunday Mass in one of the parishes in the High Peak (where Fr.Daniel now is and some of the priests have been quite ill) for some months now but this is a great effort for him. In the meantime he has used his prayer and talents to write the following meditations for Holy Week which are very inspiring for all of us.

The Scourging at the Pillar – we pray for Mortification

The Roman “flagrum” was a leather whip studded with metal hooks. The soldiers nicknamed it “The Scorpion”. It was not merely an instrument of torture, it was also a means of execution; many victims did not survive the trauma and loss of blood, literally flayed alive. A few strokes were enough to lay bare the vertebrae of the spine. Pilate mistakenly believed that, if Jesus survived the scourging, he would be such a pitiful sight that the mob would be moved to compassion. They weren't. Isaiah prophesied “On him was laid the punishment which makes us whole. By his wounds we are healed”. Jesus was brutally beaten for our sins. In meditation, I sometimes try to put myself in the sandals of the Roman Legionary who wielded the “Scorpion” that day. I pray for forgiveness for my sins, the sins that contributed to the torture of my Lord.

One “Our Father”
Ten “Hail Marys”
“Glory be to the Father”

The Scourging - A Soldier's Remembrance

I've been a soldier ten years now, I joined up as a lad,
The comradeship is really good, and the pay's not all that bad.
Of course, I could have stayed at home and worked the family farm,
But by the time I reached fourteen, the plough had lost its charm.

The Roman Army's known to be the best of all by far,
We hardly ever lose a skirmish, let alone a war.
The Empire now has conquered every country you could name,
Our Emperor's himself divine, no wonder we've found fame.

Nearly everywhere we're stationed, people treat us with respect,
Except in this foul country with its strange religious sect.
Most here just hate our innards, and there's never any doubt
If you don't keep a careful watch, they'll cut your innards out!

It very hard for us out here to keep the natives quiet,

They're always on the edge of breaking out into a riot.
I guess that's why the Governor gave me the lousy job
Of scourging some poor, harmless chap, to pacify the mob.

Why had they turned against him? I never knew the score.
I'd heard he spoke of peace and pardon, not of hate and war.
Most times they'd all go crazy if a Rabbi went to jail,
But this poor bloke they wanted dead - how did he come to fail?

A soldier's got to do his duty, orders he'll obey
The ins and outs, and rights and wrongs must not get in his way.
The Tribune says "Now flog that man", and if you say "Not me!",
You'll end up being flogged yourself - that's discipline, you see.

He grimly said: "Lay on my lad, I'll tell you when you're done",
And so I scourged that gentle bloke, and flayed him to the bone.
His back became a livid mess of raw and bleeding meat.
At length the Tribune said "Enough", and my job was complete.

They dragged him off, half-dead, into the guardroom at the end
And said "Come along with us now, and have fun with your friend",
I didn't go in with them though, I couldn't think of "fun",
But only of the vile, revolting thing that I'd just done.

That afternoon, one of my mates stood guard beside his cross.
He told me that this Jesus prayed for every one of us:
"Father forgive them" He had said "they know not what they do."
Ye gods! I only hope his loving pardon heals me too.

The Crowning with Thorns

Reading

"The soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and their comrades gathered round. Stripping him, they made him wear a scarlet cloak. They put a crown of thorns they had made on his head, and placed a reed in his right hand. Bowing before Jesus, they mocked him, saying: "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then, spitting on him, they hit his head with the reed. When their game was finished, they took off his scarlet cloak put his own clothes back on him and led him off to the place of execution

Meditation

His back stripped bare of skin and bleeding profusely, Jesus is now mocked by Roman soldiers. They were playing a game with him. They called it the "Basileus" ("King"). A circular segmented board, surrounding the letter "B" was written into the sand, or carved into a prison floor. The game was played using prisoners on death row, forced to stand while the soldiers threw dice and moved stone counters around the board. Particular segments would determine whether the unfortunate man was to be mocked or treated with respect, hence the beating, the blindfold, the insults, the

cloak of imperial purple, the mock crown of thorns and the reed sceptre. One such board may still be seen, carved into the floor of the Lithostratos, the paved area of the Citadel where Jesus suffered. The thought that this suffering was caused in the name of sport is both distressing and disgusting. Picture Jesus, used and abused as a human Aunt Sally, a living Guy Fawkes effigy, "all in fun". In response to this scene, there can be no better words than those of Saint Alphonsus: "Have compassion on your Saviour, thus cruelly treated!"

One "Our Father"
Ten "Hail Marys"
"Glory be to the Father"

The Crown of Thorns

Two men were seen on Gabbatha
Before the restless crowd,
A mighty Roman Governor
And a beaten prisoner bowed.
The Roman proud in Purple,
Golden circlet on his head,
The Other wore a blood-stained cloak
And a Crown of Thorns instead.

The Roman knew his Victim there
Did not deserve to die,
The charges laid against him
Were nothing but a lie.
So Pilate tried to find a way
To set his prisoner free,
And hoped this scourged pathetic sight
Might rouse their sympathy.

"Ecce Homo" - "See the Man"
He shouted to the throng,
But in his hope for sympathy
Poor Pilate had it wrong.
Stirred up by Pharisees and Priests,
They were not pacified,
But shouted back in bitter hate:
"Let him be crucified!"

Then sensing that the angry mob
Would soon get out of hand,
And knowing the small garrison
He had at his command,
The Roman gave his judgement,
Albeit against his will,
And sent Our Lord to bear His cross
Up Calvary's hellish hill.

Before that sad procession
Started out along the road,
He tried to ease his conscience
Of its heavy, shameful load.
For he had water brought
Before he quit his Judgement Chair,
As though he hoped to wash away
The guilt he now must bear.

Two thousand years have passed since then,
Rome's Empire's now long gone,
Though many know that Pontius Pilate
Crucified God's Son.
The mighty Caesars with their pomp
Were long years past thrown down,
While Christ, the humble Shepherd King
Now wears the victor's crown.

The Carrying of the Cross – We pray for Patience in Adversity.

His cruel humiliation is now compounded as he is forced to carry the heavy wooden crossbeam to Golgotha, the city rubbish tip, where criminals are executed. He is subject to more mockery, more violence. Try to imagine the pain of the rough wood against His flayed back, chafing the open wounds, the heat, his parched throat clogged by dust from the road. He meets his Mother Mary on the way, what a terrible moment for both of them - as Saint Alphonsus said "Their looks became as arrows, wounding those two hearts that so loved one another." Imagine the kindness of Simon of Cyrene and Veronica, the compassion of those women of Jerusalem who wept for pity of Him. But there were others, the grim and brutal execution squad, the mob hurling stones and insult at Him. Throughout the whole hellish journey, Jesus goes patiently onward, somehow or other summoning up the strength for one more step, then another, then another. I am conscious that my own sins too increased the weight of that Cross. May I carry my own crosses with patient endurance, and may I have generous strength to help any suffering fellow human being bear the weight of their own crosses.

One "Our Father"
Ten "Hail Marys"
One "Glory be..."

The Way of the Cross

The Via Dolorosa is a narrow little lane,
The very paving stones of which are soaked with fear and pain,
For countless, nameless miscreants that street trod to their fate
At the place of execution outwith the city gate.

A milling mass had solid blocked the little lane that day
When Jesus Christ Himself was led along the woeful way.

A heavy cross was on his back, already flayed to bone,
Abandoned by his closest friends, he walked his path alone.

The seething crowd that barred the way were parted by the guard
Of rugged Roman soldiers, with fierce faces, harsh and hard.
He stumbled, fell - the cross crashed down! He shouted out in pain,
The soldiers kicked him where he lay, and dragged him up again.

His Mother stood there in the crowd, her face an ashen grey,
They met for just a moment as he walked his bitter way.
Poor Mary looked in horror at her tortured, suffering Son,
And struggled in her broken heart to say "God's will be done".

Simon from Cyrene was just newly come to town,
But a burly sergeant picked on him when the Lord had fallen down.
"You look a handy chap," he said "so help him with his load,
It's more than my job's worth to let him die along the road."

So Simon took the cross behind Him at the heavy end,
And Jesus in a weary voice said: "God bless you, my friend."
The jeers and catcalls of the people echoed to the sky
Some even spat upon Him as He blindly staggered by.

Veronica ran from the crowd, ignoring stern commands,
And darted past the soldiers' spears, a towel in her hands.
Quite heedless of all others, and with tender, courteous grace,
She cleaned the sweat, the blood and spittle from His holy face.

Arrived at length at Golgotha, they took His clothing there,
And gambled for His tunic, which they didn't want to tear.
To rend a seamless garment would, they feared, be such a loss,
But they weren't afraid to tear His flesh when they nailed him to the cross.

Lord, may I see your face in those who struggle on their road,
And try to do the best I can to help them bear their load.
Veronica or Simon let me be for such this day
And know that I too helped my Lord as He walked on sorrow's way.

The Crucifixion – We pray for Love of our Enemies

Arrived at the Place of the Skull, not "A Green Hill", but a stinking rubbish tip in a disused stone quarry. Here were hewn the gigantic stone blocks for Herod's Temple. One partly hewn stone remains. It was found to be flawed, and abandoned there. Now it is the execution platform. Jesus is nailed to the cross, the nails passing, not through the palms of His hands, where the flesh could not support the weight of a hanging body, but through the wrist, the junction box of all the nerves in the fingers and hand. The pain would have exploded like molten lava in His nervous system! Now the cross is jerked upright - more pain! It is also hard now for Him even to draw breath. He hangs there for three hours. He gasps out a prayer that his torturers will be forgiven. No-one, whatever they have done to us, has ever caused us so much

pain. Jesus said "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you". May he give us the grace to do just that.

O Jesus, who for love of me didn't bear Thy cross to Calvary, in thy sweet mercy grant to me, to suffer and to die with thee.

Mary at the Cross

Beneath the cross His loving Mother stood
And wept as He poured forth His precious blood,
That our world's debt of sin might be forgiven,
And each of us might gain the hope of Heaven.

He begged forgiveness for all wretches who
Have sinned, not really knowing what they do.
That day He promised Paradise to one
Who, at life's end, knew well the wrong he'd done.

He saw young John stood by His Mother there,
And gently gave each to the other's care.
And Christians from that day have known it true
That Mary is our loving Mother too.

At the ninth hour, he cried in agony:
"My God, O why have You abandoned me?"
As in the Psalmist's well-remembered prayer
He voiced the emptiness of utter desolation there.

Then thirsting, bleeding neath a darkened sun,
He spoke again to say "Now it is done!"
Then yielded to his Father's warm embrace
His spirit, the one Perfect Sacrifice.

A soldier stabbed a spear into His side,
And out flowed blood and water in a tide
To wash our foulest human sin away,
And for each priceless soul a ransom pay.

His lifeless body, freed at last from pain
Now rested in His Mother's arms again.
And, as bereavement's pain within her grew,
The seventh sword of sorrow pierced her through.