



Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

April 8th, 1881¹

The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross

My dear Daughters,

It is not possible to place oneself at the foot of the Cross of Our Lord without being imbued with the last words He spoke. You have meditated on these words many times. They have been explained to you almost every year on Good Friday. However, it seems to me that we must consider them together, from a point of view that particularly affects us, as religious.

When we are at the bedside of a dying person, when we keep this last vigil with those dear to us, how we treasure in our hearts the last words spoken! If they bear a character of virtue, goodness, holiness, how they penetrate the soul and make a deep impression on it! How much more so when they are the very words of Our Lord!

Please note that what the first three express above all is the infinite goodness of Our Lord. Here he is surrounded by insults, in the midst of the most horrible sufferings. He is nailed to the Cross, He is about to die in the cruelest agony, and He is completely preoccupied with others, He says only words of excuse and consolation. The first of all is this: *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*².

Our Lord had already taught us to say in the Our Father: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*³. It seems that this is an elementary virtue, since every Christian is obliged to practice it. Well, it is not a virtue that is found full, entire, and complete in all religious souls. We sometimes find a trace, a memory of what has hurt, of what has been painful. This is what Our Lord wants to destroy in you when He says: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. He said this about His most cruel enemies, about hardened sinners who would not convert. This word applied to Pilate, to Judas who perhaps had not yet finished his sad life, to Herod, to those who evidently died in final impenitence, as it applied to those who were at the foot of the Cross and converted. *Father, forgive them, they know not what they do*.

I desire that, through this word, you learn to enter into the interior of the heart of Our Lord. He is only love, mercy, and, in the face of all the injuries, all the harm that is done to Him, responds only with desires for salvation.

I know well that during a person's lifetime, Our Lord silences divine justice, allowing only mercy to speak. Afterward, if a person hardens, his unhappiness is eternal. Our Lord asks nothing else of you, Sisters.

He asks that during your lifetime, your heart be filled with this word: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. Let this word be on your lips in the face of even the hardest things. They can happen to you, as they have happened to others. The martyrs shared this sentiment: they prayed for their persecutors and obtained the conversion of their executioners. We see it with the forty martyrs of

¹ Feast of the Compassion

² Lk 23, 34

³ Mt 6, 12

Sebaste: one of their guards converted and joined them in receiving the crown of martyrdom, because they had prayed for him.

The second word is for the thief. Our Lord gives here, for all penitent sinners, supreme consolation. Every penitent sinner who suffers with Jesus Christ, Who unites His sufferings with those of Jesus Christ—for one must suffer in order to make reparation and be forgiven—hears these words: *Today you will be with Me in Paradise*⁴. These are the words He addresses to this great sinner who has recourse to Him.

Is there a moment in your life, a moment of trouble, anguish, pain, or emotion, when you believe you are entitled to concern yourself only with yourself and to say: "I suffer so much... I am so unhappy..." Always look at what Our Lord is like on the Cross. He is not concerned with Himself in this supreme moment; He is concerned first with His executioners, and then with the penitent sinner. Immediately afterward, He took care of each of us, of you, of me, by taking care of the Most Holy Virgin. *Woman, He said to her, here is your son*⁵; then, addressing you, each of you: *Daughter, here is your Mother*. At that moment, He gave us what was most precious to Him, which, whatever state we are in, must ensure our salvation. He gave us a Mother in the Most Holy Virgin. She, who had such a great sacrifice to make, accepted us. Our Lord knew well that He was giving the Most Holy Virgin sons unworthy of her. *Indeed, says Saint Bernard, what a change! The servant in place of the Master, the son of Zebedee in place of the Son of God, the creature in place of Jesus*⁶—and not only a creature like Saint John, but a creature like you.

See yourself before the Most Holy Virgin and say to her: "Our Lord gave you to me as a Mother, he gave me to you to be your child. Such a cowardly, dissipated, frivolous girl, carrying within her the inclinations of original sin and all the deadly sins! But I am your daughter, and, as a Mother, you always want to take care of my soul." Until my last breath you will be my Mother, I will always be able to count on you and turn to you."

Saint Alphonsus Liguori does not hesitate to say that the frequency of sin, the abomination of sin, the misery of the child never distances the mother. Therefore, in whatever state we are, in whatever state we fall, we always have the resource of turning to Mary, because her role is one of mercy. She offers Jesus Christ; she offers Him for us. She becomes our Mother. At whatever moment in our lives we need her, we will always find in her help and support. If great sinners, amidst the shipwreck of everything else, maintained this trust in Mary, they would be saved, because the Blessed Virgin would obtain for them the graces necessary for their salvation.

Understand, Sisters, in the midst of what suffering these three great words of goodness, mercy, and love of Our Lord were spoken. When, in the sufferings of soul and body, a person thinks only of others, we are astonished and admired, as was done in recent times for our poor little Sister Marie-Clémentine. This is rare; it is a great virtue. It is the imitation of Our Lord Jesus Christ who did so on the Cross. The other words of Our Lord are all addressed to God. Our Lord had spoken to men in mercy and goodness. Then, turning to His Father, He said to Him: *I thirst!*⁷ This word is the most mysterious of all. Without doubt, Our Lord was extremely thirsty, and the final mockery of His enemies was to offer Him gall and vinegar, but he also thirsted for souls and He said to God: "Grant me souls; for them I give you my blood and my pains." It is in this sense that He says this word: Sitio, which has been the object of meditation of so many souls.

⁴ Lk 23, 43

⁵ Jn 19, 26

⁶ Homily on the 12 stars, 2nd nocturne of the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady

⁷ I thirst, Jn 19, 28

Then He said, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?*"⁸ This saying makes us penetrate the interior of our Lord's sorrows. At that moment, it was not only the pains of agony, but the pains of the soul that Jesus accepted and thus expressed. He was there, covered with our sins, stricken by God; He was there like a leper, become an object of abomination, He who was the beloved Son of the Father and the object of all divine delight.

His soul passed through anguish that holy souls have shared, albeit from afar. This word, between Jesus Christ and God, shows us the price He paid for our souls.

Then He said: *It is finished*⁹. I have paid for souls, I have done all that You asked, I have accomplished all that You had set for me. *It is finished*.

Finally, His last words were these: *Into your hands, Lord, I commend My spirit*¹⁰. You repeat this word every day at Compline. The Church has adopted it for evening prayer, and we must draw from it the conclusion that, every evening, we must be in a state to place our souls in God's hands. What is our life composed of? It is composed of days, Sisters. One will be the last, and no one knows which one. Let each day, then, be straightened out by God, so that in the evening we can place our souls in His hands in complete peace! There are faults during the day, that is why we make the examination of conscience and the act of contrition. Every night, we must place our soul in the hands of God, as if we were never to wake up again, uniting ourselves with our Lord saying His last words: *Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit!*

How pure and fervent our life should be, to unite itself to the dispositions of Our Lord, saying: *Into your hands I commend my soul!* How everything in our day must be turned toward the thought that in the evening we will have to commend our souls into the hands of God. If we are guilty, with true contrition for our faults; if we have been able to do God's will, with the consoling thought that we have been pleasing to Him. We always place ourselves in His hands, full of confidence in His mercy. We take each day as the last, while being ready to begin again the next day, being assured only of the day that begins and which, ending, might not begin again.

Each of these words of Our Lord was engraved in the heart of the Most Holy Virgin. She stood at the foot of the Cross. Mary is sometimes depicted with her heart pierced by seven swords, and we can say that these seven words were as many swords of love. Certainly she knew Jesus Christ better than we know Him. However, these last words, so full of mercy, forgiveness, and indulgence toward sinners, so full of God's goodness, seemed to pierce the heart of the Most Holy Virgin with love and compassion.

What pain for her when she heard these words: My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me! The Blessed Virgin accepted His sacrifice and, at the foot of the Cross, performed the office of the priest immolating the victim. How she must have suffered when she heard these words! She could have hoped that at least God was supporting His Son, so holy and so perfect, broken in body by men, and she saw that His soul was no less broken. What pain still when she heard these last words: Into your hands I commend My spirit! When she understood that all was finished and that He was leaving this world! Today we celebrate the Feast of the Compassion of the Most Holy Virgin. Place yourselves at the foot of the Cross with her, look at Jesus with her and like her. Look at that terrible crown of thorns, those pierced feet and hands, that Body bruised with pain, attached to the Cross, that cruel agony. Seek to understand all the tenderness, love, compassion Mary's heart felt, in each word that came from the lips of Jesus Christ, and finally in this last one which marks the consummation of the sacrifice.

We must seek there what the soul of religious life is: the love of Jesus and Mary, but a generous love that enters into all their dispositions. If, after having meditated on this for a long time, you harbor any resentment, if you are not willing to give yourselves, if you are not willing to seek to care for others

⁸ Mt 27, 46

⁹ Consummatum est. Jn 19,30

¹⁰ In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum. Lk 23, 46

more than for yourselves, if you are not willing to keep your soul pure enough to be able to place it every night in the hands of God, or to wash away with tears of contrition whatever might have soiled it, you will not be ready to bear the fruits that God expects of you.

Just as we have said that one can always have recourse to the Most Holy Virgin, in whatever state one is in, so too one can ask her for all these things. She can obtain them for you and she wants to obtain them for you. You are her daughters, she wants to raise you, she wants you to have feelings about all things that correspond to those of her immaculate heart, of her very pure soul, very holy and very united to our Lord.